

GUILT AND FORGIVENESS

One serious problem that plagues Christians is guilt. Whether the guilt is genuine or imagined, it has a real and devastating effect on those who are troubled by it. Guilty feelings can immobilize a child of God to such an extent that he becomes ineffective as a witness for Him. Cecil Osborne wrote, "Guilt is probably the most destructive of all emotions: It is a form of self-hate. The virtuous part of the personality accuses the guilty portion. This accusation is hurled by the conscience with such vehemence, in some instances, that the entire organism suffers. The usual result is that an all-pervasive, generalized anxiety is felt."

What is true guilt? Paul Tournier describes it as "that which results from divine judgment, coming from the things with which men are reproached by God." J. Dwight Pentecost describes it as "the individual's response to his consciousness of having violated God's holiness." Such Scripture portions as Matthew 5:19,20; Romans 3:19,23; Galatians 3:10; and James 2:10 leave no doubt that all men stand guilty before God for breaking His laws.

Dealing with the Fact of Guilt

The solution to this problem of guilt is found in the full and free forgiveness that God provides in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He graciously forgives all the transgressions of those who come to Him as guilty sinners - turning from their sins, confessing them, and receiving His salvation as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9). The one who receives Christ can be assured that "the blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanseth us from *all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Why is it, then, that so many of God's children suffer from the memory of past sins? Why are they burdened and depressed by regrets and remorse over their failures? Why are they robbed of the perfect peace which is the rightful heritage of God's people?

I believe it's because we do not understand the real nature of God's forgiveness. Hyder wrote, "Only forgiveness can give peace. Forgiveness from the man who has been wronged can help greatly; forgiveness from God can eradicate guilt feelings completely." Why is this? Read Hebrews 10:1-18 and you will find that the one-time sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary's cross was sufficient to forgive all the sins of all men once and for all. No further sacrifice or punishment need ever be paid.

That's not all. God forgets. He actually blots from His memory, every sin covered by the blood of Christ (v.17). At least seven Scripture verses verify this amazing and wonderful fact: Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 38:17; 43:25; 44:22; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; Hebrews 8:12. Look them up in your Bible, and thank God for each promise!

Coping with Guilt Feelings

You might say, "All right, I believe all this, and yet I cannot get away from this gnawing feeling of guilt. I feel so condemned!" The answer for you is in 1 John 3:20. You see, even though your heart may condemn you, God is greater than your heart. He knows that the blood of His Son was shed for the sins you cannot seem to forget, and that you are truly forgiven. Agree with

God and tell yourself, “I am forgiven!” Don’t remind the Lord about what He has already forgotten. Stop acting as if He hasn’t really forgiven your sins. Accept as fact that which He so clearly promises in His Word. Believe it because God says it, even though at times you may not “feel” forgiven. Romans 8:1 should help to convince you: “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.”

“Well, then,” you reply, “why does God keep reminding me of my past life and make me feel so guilty?” Wait a minute, friend. Who is doing the reminding? We just saw that God has not only forgiven but *forgotten* all of your sins. Therefore, He cannot be the one bringing them to your mind.

Then who is? From Job 1:6,12 and from Revelation 12:10, where he is described as “the accuser of our brethren,” I frankly believe we can blame Satan when we are being harassed by the memory of past sins.

And if he is responsible, then how do we deal with him? “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” advises James 4:7.

Defeating Satan

If we are going to defeat Satan’s attempts to crush us with a burden of guilt over past sins, we must recognize the authority God has given us over him because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We must never forget that “greater is He [the Lord Jesus Christ] that is in you, than he that is in the

world [Satan]” (1 John 4:4). By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus proved His absolute authority over Satan. And this Victor over our adversary dwells within us (Colossians 1:27) and we in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When God gave Christ authority over the realm of Satan, He gave us that same authority because we are in Him. In that authority we can “resist steadfast in the faith” this “roaring lion [who] walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8,9).

The next time Satan bothers you with reminders of your sins, put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13) and go on the offensive. He will turn and flee when you resist him in the name of Jesus Christ. Exercise your prerogative and, by faith in the promises of God, remind Satan that he is a defeated foe. Tell him that you are resisting him on the authority of Christ and by His sacrifice. Remind him that all the sins which he keeps calling to your attention are under the blood of Christ. Quote 1 John 1:7 to him. Claim the victory that you have in the Lord Jesus. Then have a little prayer meeting with the Lord. Thank Him for this victory and for the assurance that all of your sins have been forgiven. Praise Him that they have been removed “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12).

Yes, Christ can set you free from your guilt!

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