

# Getting the Best of Guilt

If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Guilt is a twofold personal consciousness of having done wrong and deserving punishment for such wrongdoing. Guilt results from wrong acts, words, thoughts, or attitudes, or from a refusal to God's will. Consciousness of guilt is the realization of having sinned against God, of being guilty in His sight. I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight (Luke 15:21).

A study of Psalm 51 reveals David's personal consciousness of guilt after committing grievous sin. Listen as he cries out in confession of his sin and in prayer for forgiveness: Have mercy upon me.... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation." (Psalm 51:1-4, 9, 14).

## The Effects of Guilt

A sense of personal guilt carries with it devastating effects. It brings an immediate sense of despair and depression. If repressed, guilt results in mental distress and may even cause physical illness. A sense of guilt is the enemy of personal efficiency. It distracts the attention. It hinders concentration. It blocks memory. It greatly hampers a person's creative powers. It lies like a blight upon the whole personality. Just so, guilt hinders fellowship with God. It makes true prayer impossible. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Psalm 66:18).

## Pagan "Solutions" to Guilt

There are many wrong ways of trying to get rid of guilt. Psychiatrists often employ a pagan way. Although they admit that guilt is dangerous to the personality, they try to get rid of it by saying there is no necessary basis for the guilt feeling, that conscience and the moral universe are but humanly created concepts. These advisers declare that when such created concepts are done away with, guilt will vanish automatically.

Some guilt-conscious individuals "bottle it up" and try to keep it to themselves. Others believe if they just wait long enough, guilt will go. Some surrender to their consciousness of guilt and confine themselves to its merciless bondage.

But none of these attempts really get rid of guilt. Guilt must be dealt with! This is a moral universe. God is holy! When God's laws are broken, the soul finds itself confronted by inevitable judgment. To be free of guilt, sin will have to be confessed and forgiveness sought. Otherwise the unresolved guilt will manifest itself in "condemned" individuals, who in final judgment experience death which is the wages of sin.

## God's Solutions to Guilt

How, then, are we to get the best of guilt? There is no human solution. We must discover God's way. Only Jesus Christ can redeem us from our sin. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse from all unrighteousness. Only the grace of Christ can erase guilt.

Do not despair that you are sensitive to feelings of guilt; rather, bemoan your fate when you find any symptoms of guilt-immunity setting in. Remember that a sense of personal guilt is really an evidence that God is working to redeem us. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body — a warning of danger.

To really get the best of guilt, take the following steps:

1. Examine your soul and life in the light of God's Word. What is wrong within me? What wrong am I doing? What wrong am I saying? What wrong am I thinking?
2. Do not try to heal yourself. You are not the physician. You are the patient. Jesus Christ is the Great Physician of the soul, and He alone can cure you.
3. Repent, and confess the cause of your guilt to God. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 51:17).
4. Accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The only ground on which God forgives is the finished work of Christ upon the cross. (The Innocent died for the guilty.) When we confess our sinfulness and guilt, pleading for mercy through the blood of Jesus, God freely and fully forgives us.
5. Make restitution for past wrongs. Though not easy to do, righting the past replaces guilt with peace and indescribable joy.
6. Obey Jesus as Lord of your life, and right feelings will follow.
7. Become a living channel of divine forgiveness. When God forgives, He forgets.

Therefore, when you are forgiven, you must leave the past behind you. Since God for Christ's sake has forgiven you, you must forgive yourself and all others who may have wronged you. The Christian world will be thrilled by the poetic words of Charles Wesley in which he describes his own experience of receiving the forgiveness of his sins and getting the best of guilt:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

—Dr. Frank Bateman

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