

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS FOR CONQUERING GUILT

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Guilt is a recurring theme in every person's life, whether believer or not. All of us suffer from guilt from time to time. But God's Word is clear: God does not want His children to suffer guilt! Let's look at guilt from His point of view.

What Is Guilt?

Guilt is a self-judgment of wrong doing or wrong being. We talk much about guilt, but often our way of discussing it is very different from how God talks about it. God's Word says very little about the idea of feeling guilty, but see Psalm 51:7.

The Word never says that God makes His children feel guilty! It speaks often of the conscience, but not of a guilty conscience. John 3:16-18 defines two kinds of people regarding guilt: the "condemned" and the "not condemned." We are those who are not condemned. Hebrews 9:14 says that the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience. 1 John 1:7 says that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Two Types of Guilt

1. True Guilt.

This is an objective state, in which God judges us guilty. It is a fact, based on sin. True guilt is not necessarily related to feelings. You can be guilty and not feel guilty! 1 Timothy 4:2 says that our conscience can be seared as with a hot iron. Hebrews 3:13 says that we can be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

2. False Guilt.

This is purely subjective, and not the result of present sin in God's eyes. It is not related to fact, but to feelings. You can feel guilty and not be guilty. In fact, guilt feelings are often stronger with false guilt. It can come from breaking internal standards or others' rules and

expectations, failure to accept God's forgiveness, failure to forgive one's self, perfectionism, and especially from the Accuser himself. Both kinds of guilt are potentially damaging, but God has the answers!

Handling True Guilt

Failure to handle true guilt not only keeps us from fellowship with God, but it causes great spiritual, emotional and physical harm also (Psalm 32:1-5). But the solutions are clear. We often need more than just confession. The following steps are important.

1. Experience godly sorrow or grief. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10.
2. Confess our sin. 1 John 1:9, Psalm 32:5.
3. Repent. Revelation 2:5,16.
4. Be reconciled to others if needed. Matthew 5:23,24.
5. Give thanks for God's forgiveness. Psalm 51:14,15.

Mishandling True Guilt

There are two main ways of mishandling true guilt:

1. Failure to acknowledge it and deal scripturally with it

...in our thoughts and attitudes. 1 John 1:8,10, Psalm 139:23,24.

...in our interpersonal relationships. Hebrews 12:15, Ephesians 4:29-32.

2. Failure to accept and internalize all God has done for us through Christ's death. When we refuse to accept God's work on the cross, we tend to engage in "worldly sorrow" or wallow in a guilty conscience. 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

Biblical Concepts for Conquering Guilt

shows clear differences between godly and worldly sorrow over sin. Study that passage for a clear understanding of these two kinds of guilt feelings over sin.

Understanding False Guilt

False guilt is never from God! It destroys the joy and peace that God provided for us through Christ's death. It is one of Satan's fiery darts. In I Peter 5:8 the word for "devil" is "accuser". He delights in making us feel condemned! But Christ died to save us from false guilt also. According to Hebrews 9:12-14 and Titus 3:4-7 the whole Trinity is involved. There are two types of false guilt. You might ask yourself which type you tend to have most.

1. Doing Guilt.

This is a feeling of guilt for what was done or not done (it may or may not have been sin). It is Satan's emotional blackmail. See I Peter 1:18,19.

2. Being Guilt.

This is a feeling of guilt for who we are or are not. This runs deeper and often represents a rejection of self, or of our humanness. It can be a rejection of weaknesses and feelings. Some people feel guilty unless they are always doing something "worthwhile."

Both kinds of false guilt are damaging and contrary to God's will. He has provided the solution for false guilt! He wants us free! "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1).

Some Steps for Conquering False Guilt

You must do something about false guilt. You can't just think your way out of it. Here are

some steps. You may know others that are helpful also.

1. Identify and describe your guilt. Ask yourself these questions:

What is it? Something I've done or haven't done? Is it being guilt?

Why do I feel this way? Was I taught to feel guilty in this situation?

What is the source of this guilt? Is it Satan's attack in a weak area?

How do I feel about myself? About God? About others?

2. Ask yourself: Is this judgment of guilt in accord with God's Word? If it is sin, deal with it as true guilt. Check with someone whose judgment you trust if you can't decide.

3. Reject your self-condemnation as contrary to God's view, and claim Scripture that declares you not guilty, e.g. Romans 8:1. Claim it, personalize it, and meditate on it. Exercise your faith in the power of Christ's death on the cross. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..." (I Peter 2:24).

We must realize that this is spiritual warfare with Satan, who wants to discredit Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. So we must take on the whole armor of God to defend ourselves and fight back in Christ's power. See Ephesians 6:10-18 and I Peter 5:8,9.

Make a list of your own favorite Scriptures that speak to your freedom from guilt. Memorize and meditate on them. Use them as the Spirit's sword when feelings of false guilt assault you.

4. Decide to forgive yourself. God did and you must also, if your judgment is to come into agreement with His. Free yourself from guilt,

with no grudges or self-punishment. Remember that this does not free you from the consequences of your actions.

5. Don't forget to thank God for His forgiveness, and that He does not hold you guilty. This helps seal His forgiveness in your heart, so that you can better experience freedom from guilt.

6. When the feelings of guilt return (and they probably will), patiently go through the steps again. Try to be as patient with yourself as God is with you. Meditate on Psalm 103:8-14.

Conclusion

Remember, God wants us to be completely free from guilt, both true and false. That is why He sent His Son to die for us! Make Romans 8:31-34 a daily part of your life, so that the enemy of your soul will be defeated when he seeks to destroy your joy through guilt. Lay up in your heart passages that give assurance of our freedom from guilt through Christ's sacrifice, and claim these when you are struggling with guilt.

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" ...yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:7,10,11)

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5: 21)

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." (Ephesians 1:4-8)

"...we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:13,14)

"...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ...for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. ... because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made hol." (Hebrews 10: 10,12,14)

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (I Peter 1:18,19)