

# Biblical Living(6) – The Past – Pain, Guilt, Grief, Calamity, Abuse

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Two wrong views of the past:

1. A person's past *determines* how he or she acts in the present.
  2. Since a person's past does not determine the present, it is *irrelevant* to *biblical* counselling.
- Biblical thinking:

1) A person's past does not determine his or her present behaviour. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11  
Romans 6:13-14, 17-18

Comment: Christ can change any person, regardless of his or her past.

Key point: The past does not exist.

The consequences of the past exist. Thoughts about the past exist. Behaviours and attitudes in regard to the past exist. The past itself, however, does not exist. Comment: Understanding this moves a person from being the *victim* of her unchangeable past to *responsible* for dealing with her present thoughts and actions regarding the past.

2) The past is influential, but not determinative:

Six ways a person's past might influence his present thinking and behaviour:

1. The types of sin one is tempted to do.

1 Peter 4:3-4. *For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you.*

Pre-conversion relationships, entertainment, and worship habits can influence which sins a believer is tempted by in the present.

2. Long-term sin habits.

Jer 13:23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

3. Bitterness toward people.

Heb 12:15. *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*

4. Bitterness toward God.

Job 30:26-27a. *When I expected good, then evil came; when I waited for light, then darkness came. I am seething within and cannot relax.*

Job 3:20. *Why is light given to him who suffers, and life to the bitter of soul?*

Job 7:20 *Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself?*

5. Disruptive consequences of bad decisions in the past.

*Scripture teaches the cumulative nature of life.* (Steve Viars, *Putting Your Past in Its Place*, 38)

Gal 6:7. *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*

Prov 1:30-31. *They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way ...*

Example: Marrying an unbeliever will have long-term disruptive consequences for a believer.

6. The consequences of unconfessed sin.

2 Cor 12:21. *I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.*

Prov 28:13. *He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.*

Ps 32:3-4. *When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.*

The need to break the past into distinct categories:

1. Was it a situation in which you **suffered**?

- because someone sinned against you

- because of a painful trial

2. Was it a situation in which you **sinned**?

3. How did you **respond** to the situation, rightly or wrongly?

Those questions divide a person's past into four possible categories (Viars, 65-66)

Type of Past	Examples	Right Responses	Wrong Responses
Innocent Past (You Suffered)	Abuse	Forgiveness	Bitterness
	Calamity	Right view of man	Revenge

	Slander Crime (victim) Disease	Hope Right view of God Gratitude	Covering it up Cynical of all Fearful Guilt Escapism Wrong view of self Unbelief
Guilty Past (Sinned)	Pre-marital sex Adultery in marriage Cheating Negligence Crime (offender)	Confession Restitution Acceptance of God's forgiveness	Depression Covering up Guilt Blaming Self-destructive responses Fear

### 1) The innocent past when the person responded well.

1. Ask questions to determine if the counselee did, in fact, handle the situation rightly.

Six questions to determine "innocence" (Viars, 147-8):

1. *Did you return evil for evil?*

2. *Did you develop bitterness toward God?*

3. *Did you develop an unbiblical view of people?*

Examples: • A woman who, after being abused as a child, nurtures a hatred for men.

• A pastor who refuses to build close friendships with church members after having been betrayed in a previous church.

• Fear of *all* members of another race after you have experienced an injustice or crime at the hands of *one* person of that race.

4. *Have you developed an unbiblical view of yourself?*

Inferiority judgments:

*I'm nobody. I'm worthless. Nobody—including God—could ever love me because I have been sexually abused.*

Point: In many cases when a person has been severely sinned against especially with some form of sexual sin, you will have to help the counselee overcome his or her feelings of false guilt: *I am guilty or unclean because of what the sinning person did to me.* God does not hold us guilty for evil done against us.

5. *Should you confront the person who sinned against you, and if so, have you done it?*

Examples: • sexual abuse (Has it been reported to the parents and/or police?) • other sin (following Matt 18:15-17)

6. *If you confronted the person who sinned against you and he asked forgiveness, have you granted it?*

Luke 17:3-4

Observation: These six questions might reveal the fact that the person has not been as innocent as he or she thinks.

2. Commend the person for depending on God's grace.

3. Identify the key truths, practices, or attitudes that helped him respond correctly. Do this so that the counselee can consciously keep those right responses rolling and so that he will know how to respond rightly to similar situations in the future.

Note: Most often the person has responded rightly because he has been thinking rightly about God. Illustration—Joseph in Gen 50:20.

## **2) The guilty past when the person has responded rightly.**

Biblical examples:

Simon Peter:

*Jesus graciously allow[ed] Peter to affirm his love for His Savior three times, matching the number of times he had denied Him ....*

Paul: 1 Timothy 1:13-16

Rather than focus on his sin, Paul focused on God's mercy, grace, patience, and the fact that Christ came to deal with hopeless cases just like him (Romans 7:24-25a).

Five ways to help someone who has handled his guilty past correctly:

1. Commend the Christian for depending on God's grace and for asking God's forgiveness.
2. Make sure that the Christian has asked the forgiveness of all the people who were affected by his sin.
3. Ascertain if there are any lingering consequences of his sin that he needs help to deal with rightly.

4. Does restitution need to be made?

5. Ask, *What do you do when your sin comes to mind?*