

# Biblical Living (8) – The Past – Guilt (Part 3)

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The guilty past responded to poorly.

## A. Six wrong responses to a guilty past:

### 1. Hiding sin.

Example: David tried to cover his adultery, rather than repenting (2 Sam 11-12).

Note: Hiding sin might include faking repentance when the person has no intention of forsaking a favourite sin.

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

Num 32:23. *You have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.*

### 2. Adding one sin to another.

Example: 15 David trying to cover his adultery by ordering Uriah's abandonment in battle. (2 Sam 11-12)

### 3. Bizarre or self-destructive behaviour due to overwhelming guilt feelings.

Jack Winslow (head of a large British mental institution) *I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness.* (quoted in Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 185)

Biblical example: Judas hung himself due to his overwhelming sense of guilt (Matt 27:3-5).

### 4. Fear of what people might think of me because of my sinful past.

Prov 29:25. *The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.*

### 5. Refusal to accept the legitimate consequences of past sins.

Moses repeatedly asked God to allow him to enter Canaan in spite of his rebellion at Meribah (Num 20:12; Deut 3:25-26). Moses did this even though God had told him that he would not be allowed to lead the people into the promised land. Deut 3:25-26. *"Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon." But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, "Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter."*

### 6. Refusal to accept the full forgiveness of God or other people.

Joseph's brothers failed to understand Joseph's forgiveness, fearing that Joseph would take revenge by ordering their execution after their father died (Gen 50:15-19).

Observation: A reluctance or refusal to accept the full forgiveness of God is a *major* problem for people who are trying to handle a guilty past. You will often have to help those who doubt God's forgiveness.

## **B. The problem of doubting God's forgiveness**

### **C. The solution**

#### **1. Teach the biblical doctrine of *justification*:**

People who have a hard time accepting that God can (and has in Christ) completely forgiven them for their guilty pasts need to be taught the biblical doctrine of justification (resource: *The Cross Centered Life*, by CJ Mahaney) Definition of justification:

Some key texts:

- ❖ Romans 5:1. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...*
- ❖ Romans 8:1. *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*
- ❖ John 3:18a. *He who believes in Him is not judged.*
- ❖ 1 John 4:17-18. *By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment .... There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.*

N.B. - Justification cannot be merely an initial standing that then gives us conditional salvation. If justification is God merely 'cleaning up your sins to that point', then most of us would need several more justifications through our lives. We have a low view of sin to think that we need justification to clean us up, but then our own sanctification will see us through to Heaven.

In fact, there is little reason to rejoice, or have peace, if justification merely cleans up your past sins, but has no bearing on your present and future.

Justification means two things:

God cannot love you less – disfavour and disdain you. He has chosen to tie your status to His Son's human righteousness. As long as Christ remains before the Father, so does your righteousness.

God cannot love you more – no actions on your part will improve your standing. He has chosen to love you in His Son.

We can please God, and displease God, within the context of a fatherly relationship.

What about the person who can't "forgive himself"?

The idea of "forgiving yourself" is not mentioned in the Bible and reflects two kinds of pride:

1. They have put the wrong person in the Judge's chair:

The Bible never so much as mentions the idea of forgiving yourself. Primarily this is because God is Judge—His forgiveness is what matters. People who talk about forgiving themselves are trying to take God's role upon themselves, and they need to acknowledge that if God forgives something, it is fully and completely forgiven.

2. *I can't believe I did that!:*

This is really just an expression of pride. The counselee must face up to the fact that he did the evil deed. Admitting how sinful he is eradicates the false notion he has to forgive himself.

He needs to lose himself in the wonder of God's grace, not the wonder of his own sinfulness.

❖ Psalm 103:10-14.

Why does God forgive? Because He knows how He made you. He knows that He didn't design your spiritual and emotional frame to carry the burden called *guilt*.

❖ Psalm 32:1-5.

2. A deep-seated confidence in the truths of justification is based on the truthful character of God. However, an experiential confidence of this cleansing comes through changed living (2 Pet 1:10). Here we must live with some tension. On the hand, our assurance that God has accepted us cannot be tied to our works (1 John 3:20). At the same time, our works are valuable verification that our faith is real, and that God has therefore accepted us (James 2:14-27). Do not look to your works for God's favour, but look for evidences that support the truth that God has indeed granted you a new nature. Inspect, but do not permanently introspect. Have times of serious study of your heart, but spend most of your time perfecting obedience.

3. The conscience must be rightly set. Conscience is that part of man which alerts him to wrong-doing. It is moral knowledge in every man (Ro 2:15). It can be corrupted (1 Tim 4:2, Tit 1:15, Eph 4:19). It can also be trained properly (Heb 5:13-14).

If the devil cannot succeed in destroying the conscience he will settle for making it sick. I know Christians who live in a state of constant distress, fearing that they may displease God. Their world of permitted acts becomes narrower year by year until at last they fear to engage in the common pursuits of life. They believe this self-torture to be a proof of godliness, but how wrong they are.—A.W. Tozer *That Incredible Christian*

1. All things being equal, we should not ignore our consciences (Ro 14)
2. We should be humbly teachable, to allow the Word of God and the sound judgement of others to shape our conscience – to adjust it accordingly.

3. Confess genuine sin as sin.
4. When you have not sinned – learned to despise the shame (Heb 12:2). He despised it. The word for *despise* in the original means to think little of, to think down upon. It is used when Jesus says of children, “Take care that you do not despise these little ones”. Do not think little of them. This is what Jesus did with shame that was not due to his own sin. He chose to think little of it. He dismissed it. He treated it like something of very little consequence, while enduring for the joy set before Him. Recognise that the shame is misplaced, and has no claim or place, so regard that shame as contemptible.