

Set Free

5 week study

January 11 - February 8, 2022

Set Free From Guilt

January 18, 2022



*"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*

Living with Guilt

Life under a load of guilt is not the abundant life that Jesus came to give us. Guilt steals our joy, hinders our productivity, interrupts our peace, harms our relationships, and worst of all, makes us self-focused. When I'm feeling guilty, I'm thinking about myself; and when I think about myself very much, it always leads to dissatisfaction and discontent.

Little wonder that the enemy of our souls, Satan himself, wields this weapon of guilt so broadly and with such effectiveness. While he may not be able to trip us up with some addiction or impurity or disgraceful public sin, it's not that difficult to bombard our minds with guilt.

What is guilt?

Guilt is both a fact and a feeling.

- It is possible to be guilty without feeling guilty.
- It is possible to feel guilty without being guilty.
- It is possible to be guilty and feel guilty.

Being guilty without feeling guilty can be due to ignorance. I may be guilty of breaking a law because I am ignorant of the law.

It is also quite possible to have a hardened heart that feels no guilt even when guilty. Hebrews 3:13 admonishes us not to be "hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

Feeling guilty even when we are not guilty is a more common struggle for most of us. This false guilt is caused by wrong thinking.

Feeling guilty when we are guilty is a good thing! Hopefully that true guilt will cause us to repent and make needed changes.

What Is True Guilt?

True guilt is what we feel when God is convicting us of some area in our lives that needs to be changed, and we are resisting that change.

Psalm 38:1-10:

LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down on me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.

What physical and mental problems did David experience because of this true guilt?

Getting Rid of True Guilt

King David eventually confessed his sin and found forgiveness.

Psalm 32:1 – 5:

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

God uses true guilt to pressure us into action, not to be cruel to us, but to be kind to us.

Getting Rid of False Guilt

False guilt feels pretty much like true guilt, so we can easily be fooled, but we must learn to discern the difference.

Here's are some distinguishing differences between false and true guilt:

True Guilt

- You know exactly what the cause is.
- You know you are at fault and you need to make some changes in your life.
- You try to rationalize away your culpability and shift the blame.
- As soon as you do what you know you need to do, the feelings of guilt go away.

False Guilt

- You're not sure why you feel guilty.
- Because you're not sure why you feel guilty, you don't know what you need to do.
- You keep condemning yourself and assuming you are guilty.
- No matter what you do, you still feel guilty.

Here are some illustrations of both true and false guilt. Indicate which classification you think each of these should have, true or false:

True Guilt or False Guilt?

_____ *My daughter said to me, "But all the other mothers will be there. Why can't you be there?" I feel guilty because I can't be at her cub scout meeting.*

_____ *My boss said, "You don't have that report finished yet?" I feel guilty, but I haven't had time to breath. My boss keeps interrupting me with other priorities, then doesn't understand why everything doesn't get done on time!*

_____ *A good friend asked me if I would meet her for prayer. She's very worried about her mother who is ill. I had made plans to go shopping, and told her I couldn't meet her tonight. I feel guilty.*

_____ *The Committee Chairperson at church called me at work to talk about an upcoming meeting. I told her I couldn't talk with her at that moment and would call her later in the evening. She sounded irritated. I feel guilty.*

_____ *Before I became a Christian, I had an abortion, which I now deeply regret. Many nights I lie sleepless in bed, feeling so guilty about the baby I destroyed.*

_____ *My father died before becoming a believer. I think of the times I might have talked to him and didn't. Maybe it's my fault he never accepted Christ. I feel very guilty about it.*

Looking at some of these examples, you'll notice that much of our false guilt is from people who indicate their lack of satisfaction with us in some way. It is natural to feel guilty, but we need to check it out mentally every time it happens.

Men, Women and Guilt

It's clear that men and women typically handle guilt quite differently. It's not difficult to see why women struggle more with guilt than men do. Guilt is a feeling. We women feel first and reason later. So we take on this feeling of guilt, assuming it is deserved because we feel it. Men isolate those feelings, rationalize the guilt more quickly, and assess whether it is deserved or not. If not, they are much more adept at dismissing it than we are. All of this usually happens instinctively, with little recognition of the process.

Girlish Guilt

Girlish guilts usually come in the form of saying "I'm sorry" and feeling responsible for events and situations that are not our fault. Here are some examples of girlish guilts to which a woman's first response will most likely be, "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

☹ A coworker says that while you were on vacation last week, the place fell apart and she had to work late every night. You feel guilty for taking a vacation.

☹ Your child says she got in trouble with her teacher because she left her homework at home, trying to shift the blame to you for not reminding her to take her homework. You feel guilty for not making sure your child took her homework.

☹ Your husband complains that the dry cleaners put too much starch in his shirt collars, looking at you as though you should have corrected the problem. You feel guilty for not noticing it before he did.

☹ Your sister says she tried to reach you three times yesterday and kept getting your voice mail. She didn't leave a message but still seems irritated that you were not there for her when she needed you. You feel like you've failed your sister.

☹ Your boss asks you where you put a certain file, and you are quite certain you have not touched that file, yet because he/she accuses you, you assume guilt.

☹ You report to your friend that you won't be able to attend the committee meeting on Saturday, which she scheduled at the last minute, because of other family plans, and her facial expression is close to a frown. You read into it her disapproval and keep explaining why you can't make it so she won't be mad at you.

☹ You promised to help decorate the church for an upcoming women's luncheon, and then you came down with a bad cough and cold the night before. The tone in your friend's voice was anything but sympathetic when you called to say you couldn't make it, and you feel very guilty.

☹ Your mom says, “You mean you’re not coming over for dinner on Sunday?” You have other important commitments—or maybe you just need some down time—and yet Mom expects you every Sunday. You feel like you’ve ruined the day for your mom.

Remember, if others are in the habit of using you as a dumping ground for their guilt, it’s because you have allowed it to happen.

Getting Rid of False Guilt

The first and most important step in getting rid of false guilt is to recognize it. If false guilt has become a regular pattern in your thought life, this will be a battle for you, because your enemy will not quickly relinquish control of your thought life.

James 4:7b: *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

Romans 8:33-34, from Phillips's The New Testament in Modern English:

Who would dare to accuse us, whom God has chosen? The judge himself has declared us free from sin. Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us!

Allowing ourselves to wallow in false guilt is living in condemnation. Remember, if God is not condemning you, you have no right to let anyone else condemn you, not even yourself.

Romans 8:1: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Isaiah 43:25: *I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

Suggested Exercise

Notate below your most common feelings of guilt:

I often feel guilty about or because:

Put a "T" by the one(s) you feel you are truly to blame. But if you believe a guilt to be false and undeserved, then write an "F" by it.

Look at each one of these guilts you've identified as true, and ask yourself the following questions about each one of them:

1. Is this an area of disobedience, where I know am I not obeying what God has clearly shown me?
2. If so, why have I refused to obey God? What fears or stubbornness on my part is keeping me from doing what I know God wants me to do?
3. What exact steps will I have to take to get rid of this "true" guilt?
4. Do I want to get rid of it?
5. Have I tried in the past to obey God in this area and failed? Why?
6. Have I gone to God for forgiveness and known that I have been forgiven?
7. Have I been forgiven and changed in this area, yet the guilt seems to linger on? If so, then cross it off your list and write beside it, "Forgiven; no more guilt."

If you conclude your guilt is deserved, you will not have any peace until you allow God to deal with it, confess it, and obey.

Now, ask yourself these questions about those guilts you identified as false:

1. Why have I taken on this false guilt?
2. Have I called it a false guilt, and reminded myself that it is false?
3. How long have I been struggling with this false guilt?

Depending on how long you've allowed those false guilts to stay around, it may take a while to get rid of them. But every time one of them comes to mind, you stand right up to it, call it what it is - false guilt - and refuse to accept it.