

Living Guilt-Free



May 6, 2025

Led by Mary Lowman

Living with Guilt

Guilt steals our joy, hinders our productivity, interrupts our peace, harms our relationships, and worst of all, makes us self-focused. Little wonder that the enemy of our souls, Satan himself, wields this weapon of guilt so broadly and with such effectiveness.

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. And obviously, it is possible to be guilty *and* feel guilty.

Being guilty without feeling guilty can be due to ignorance. It is also quite possible to have a hardened heart that feels no guilt even when we are guilty. Hebrews 3:13 admonishes us not to be “*hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.*”

Feeling guilty even when you are not guilty is a more common struggle. 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.

Living Guilt-Free

If you are a Christian, it is not God’s will for you to live in guilt.

Galatians 5:1: *It is for freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, then, and do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

To live with a constant feeling of guilt is to live with a yoke of slavery. It is to allow the feelings of guilt to choke the joy of life out of you. And Jesus came to set you free from this yoke.

True Guilt Vs. False Guilt

If you ever hope to manage your guilt, you’ll need to learn to recognize the difference in true guilt and false guilt. In one sense, it’s easier to deal with true guilt than with false guilt. That’s because we can put our finger on the cause of true guilt, and there’s usually little doubt about what we need to do.

True Guilt’s Long History

True guilt goes back to the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:6 – 13:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹²The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”
The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

How did this new feeling called “guilt” affect their behavior?

The Effects of True Guilt

True guilt not only affects our feelings, but can affect our physical health, too.

Psalms 38:1 – 10:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness 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, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.

How does David describe the pain of true guilt?

God’s Remedy for True Guilt

The incredibly good news of the gospel is that we now have a way to deal with true guilt because through his sacrifice on Calvary for us, Jesus has provided the way of escape from our true guilt.

Recognizing True Guilt

For each of us, guilt will have varying effects and symptoms. But here are some distinguishing characteristics—telltale signs—of true guilt that are generally true for all of us:

- You know exactly what the cause is.
- You know what you should do.
- You may try to rationalize the sin away, or shift the blame, but it doesn’t work.

Freedom from True Guilt

If you recognize some true guilt in your life, the first step is to acknowledge to God why you feel guilty and then to accept God’s forgiveness. If you continue to harbor that sin and refuse to obey, God will press his case with you, convicting you, in order to get you to move quickly and not stay in that unforgiven condition any longer.

The same King David who was tortured with true guilt eventually confessed his sin and found forgiveness. And he describes the great relief that comes through such surrender:

Psalms 32:1 – 5:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him 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 upon 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.

Psalms 32:1 – 2 (Living Bible)

What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven!

What joys when sins are covered over!

What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.