

Christian, Lay down Your Guilt



David Wilkerson May 1, 1978

Christians are strange creatures. They travel the world, preaching the love of Jesus and His forgiveness for any and all sin. They tell the heathen, the addict, the alcoholic, the prostitute - "Come to Christ and be forgiven. He forgave your sins at the Cross - so come and receive forgiveness and healing for all your hurts. You can have peace and be free of guilt." As a result sinners, who have been guilty of every conceivable kind of dark and evil deed, gladly come to Christ and are instantly forgiven and delivered from their guilt.

But the hardest thing in the world for the Christian to do is receive for himself the same kind of love and forgiveness he preaches to sinners. We Christians find it so very difficult to allow ourselves the same freedom from guilt we offer through Christ to harlots and drunkards.

Christians sin against the Lord, then proceed to carry about an excruciating load of guilt. They want to pay for their failure. They want to be punished. They want to do penance or suffer some kind of hurt before they are forgiven. "But Lord," argues the Christian, "I sinned with my eyes wide open; I knew better. I knew before I did it that I was breaking a commandment. How can I be forgiven for grieving my Savior by such insolence? I shook off the conviction of the Holy Spirit and went ahead stubbornly and committed sin."

The Danger of Guilt

Guilt is dangerous in that it destroys faith. The enemy of our soul is not at all interested in making Christians into adulterers, addicts or prostitutes. He is interested in one thing only - turning Christians into unbelievers. He uses the lusts of the body to bind the mind.

Satan did not want Job to become an adulterer, or an addict to pain pills or a wine guzzler. No! Satan wanted one thing of Job - TO CURSE GOD! He wanted to destroy his faith in God. So it is today. Your real battle and mine is really not with sex, alcohol, drugs or lust. It is with our faith! Do we believe God is a deliverer? Is He there to help in the hour of temptation?

Are His promises true? Is there freedom from sin? Is God really answering prayer today? Will He bring us out of the battle victorious? Will joy follow weeping?

Satan wants you to be so crushed with guilt, you let go of your faith. He wants you to doubt God's faithfulness. He wants you to think nobody really cares. That you will live in misery and heartbreak. That you will always be a slave to your lust. That god's holiness is unreachable. That you are left alone to work out your own problems. That God no longer cares about your needs and feelings. If he can get you to the point of despair, he can flood you with unbelief - then he has succeeded in his mission. The three simple steps toward atheism are - guilt, doubt and unbelief.

Guilt can eat away at the spiritual vitality of a Christian like a raging cancer. It causes a person to lose control of life; it leads to a desire to quit or retire from spiritual activity; and finally, it brings on physical pain and disease. Like cancer, guilt feeds upon itself until all spiritual life is gone. Weakness and a sense of shame and failure is the end result.

I meet Christians across this nation who go about continually burdened down by an overwhelming load of guilt. They have made themselves believe they are traitors to the Lord. They live in spiritual agony and grief every waking hour, because of some hidden sin or weakness. They cannot appropriate divine forgiveness for themselves, and they live in dreaded fear of God's judgment upon themselves or their families.

The Causes of Guilt

Who are these guilt-ridden, sad souls? It is often that married individual, who for years has been a captive in a loveless marriage, who finds someone else to light up their boring life. Somewhere along the way, their marriage lost its romance. Hurts would no longer heal; the lines of communication were cut. Then one day, without even seeking it, someone else enters the picture. A tender word, a tender touch, and there is a new kind of awakening. Someone else ignites those dying embers - and the secret love affair is born. They take comfort in the words of the song that says, "It can't be wrong, when it seems so right."

But often there are children to consider; a reputation; a job or a ministry. But the one thing, above all else, that brings on the guilt is the knowledge that God's laws are being broken. God won't smile on it. He won't put His blessing on it. Then the war begins. Torn between a conviction of having finally found the "one true love of life" - and the innate desire to stay true to God and marriage vows - guilt keeps piling up. They want out of a hopeless marriage, but without displeasing God.

There are multiplied thousands caught in this kind of trap - even ministers. The more they love God, the worse their guilt. A few are able to shake off the guilt and go about indulging their secret affairs, having justified their actions with elaborate excuses. But most cannot be dishonest with their own hearts, so they go on living with accumulating guilt.

Then, too, what about all those other secret lusts of the flesh that haunt the soul? The Christian who overindulges in drink on the sly? Or, too many prescription drugs that have caused a dependency? What about the thousands of Christian men caught up in porno binges? A strange attraction sends them back into the X-rated movie houses or to the newstands for nudie magazines. Not just once or twice - but nearly every time he is alone - especially when on the road. Yes - I'm talking about Christians.

Secret affairs, drinking prescription drugs, pornography, homosexuality, lesbianism and many other human weaknesses - are all prime causes of guilt. The sinners can indulge in any or all of these sins and not battle with guilt. Not so, the true child of God.

Saints That Ain't

Sadly, many pious Christians hide behind puritan masks and go about like the publican of Christ's time, who boasted, "Thank God, I'm not like such sinners." To hear them tell it, their marriage is flawless and their morals are saintlike. Don't believe it! We have all sinned and come short of God's holiness. There are none righteous in their own strength. Show me the saintliest soul on earth, and I'll show you one who battles temptation as much as any other Christian alive. And if a Christian would like to cure himself of being judgmental, all he has to do is look inside himself and be honest about his own inner struggles. That should keep us all from worrying about another's spiritual condition.

One of the good things that should come out of a Christian's inner struggle with the flesh is that he learns to quit throwing stones; that is, if he is honest about himself. The Word instructs, "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:13).

Perhaps out of all the terrible struggles Christians are now enduring, we will discover a new spirit of tolerance and love for others. Perhaps being forgiven so much ourselves, we will, in turn, forgive others their shortcomings.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Tested by the Word

Is there freedom from guilt? Can Christians deal with infatuations, addictions, weaknesses - in an honest and godly way - and find true freedom from sin's power? Will God keep on forgiving, while the struggle goes on? If that besetting sin keeps on overcoming the believer, will God continue to forgive until the victory comes?

There have been some very godly people who have confessed to me that God's Word tried them severely. The

promises sound like they should work almost automatically, but they don't. The commandment says don't; but our weak flesh can't seem to obey. Then we go ahead and do what we know to be positively sinful. The Word says, "...sin hath no more dominion over you" (Romans 6:9). Yet, it doesn't seem to work in everyday life.

"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:24-25).

The question is, where do I get the power to resist the lust of my heart? Is it sheer willpower? Do I grit my teeth and say, "I'll simply walk away from it - never to let it hold me in its power"? Does God expect me to resist with what I have? Can I win over my besetting sin in one moment of finality?

Others say glibly, "Just stop it! Quit it! Walk away from it! You know better - what's so difficult?" Oh, yes - but those same people, who find it so easy to walk away from all the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the world, find it nearly impossible to walk away from their own loneliness, their sorrows, their fears, their struggles with health. Every Christian on this earth fights inner battles - not one is immune!

The way to get rid of guilt is to get rid of sin. It sounds simple, but it is not. You don't just make up your mind to "drop" that third party who has centered your life. Many have tried that and found it didn't work. You don't just walk away from things that bind. The Scripture haunts you. It says, "Put off the old man...lay aside the besetting sin...flee the appearance of evil...walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." That is exactly what you want - freedom from the sin that so easily besets you - to walk in the Spirit completely and live a life totally pleasing to God. But you seem helpless in putting off those desires.

When you can't seem to overcome and you keep falling flat on your face, failure after failure - then you begin to think, "Something is terribly wrong with me. I am a sensuous, wicked, weak child. God must be fed up with all my failures. I've made Him mad." that is when guilt floods in like a tidal wave.

We All Face the Same Struggles

Take heart, child of God - everybody is in the same boat. Not all of us battle a secret affair or an addiction of the flesh. Some of us struggle with a more insidious enemy - doubt. To doubt God's concern and daily involvement in our lives can cause terrible guilt. But there is no temptation befallen you that is not common to all men. You are not going through some strange trial, unique only to you. Thousands more are going through the very same struggle.

The most important move you will ever make in your life is the move you make right after you fail God. Will you believe the accuser's lies and give up in despair, or will you allow yourself to receive the forgiving flow of God's love you preach so much to others?

Do you fear asking His forgiveness because you are not really sure you want to be free from that thing that holds you? Do you want the Lord, yet, secretly long for something or someone not lawfully yours? God is able to answer to sincere prayer, to make you want to do His perfect will. Ask Him to make you want to fulfill His will.

"For it is God which worketh in to both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

When a Christian sins, he feels shut out of God's presence, just as did Adam. God is always there, waiting to talk, but sin causes man to withdraw. God never withdraws - only man does. Actually, the person living in sin is afraid to open up to God for fear He will ask a commitment to holiness before the sin is ready to be surrendered. The sinning Christian knows, "If I get close to Jesus, the Holy Spirit will put His finger on my secret sin, and I'll have to give it up - and I'm not ready for that, yet."

It does no good to ask yourself, "How did I get into this mess? Why do I have to be tempted along these lines? Why such a trial when I didn't ask for it or want it? Why me, Lord?" Don't blame the devil, either. We sin when we are drawn away by the lust of our own hearts and enticed.

Don't Justify Your Weaknesses

Never justify your wrongdoing! There is only one way to become "hardened" by sin, and that is to justify it. Christians who learn to hate their sin will never "give themselves over" to its power. As Christians, we must never lose sight of the "exceeding sinfulness" of sin. Stay uncomfortable with your sin.

I heard it said of an evangelist who lives in open, shameless adultery, "Well, at least he is honest about it. He's not

trying to hide his adultery like some ministers who do it on the sly." But I see nothing honest in that at all. That adulterous evangelist has been totally blinded by a multiplicity of justifications. He has no guilt, because he has given himself over to a lie and has become the victim of a reprobate mind. On the other hand, the person who continues to struggle, hating a garment spotted, despising all sin against God - has all heaven standing by to help. Until the victory comes, continue to despise all your wrongdoing.
Never Limit God's Forgiveness

My dear Christian friend - never limit God's forgiveness to you! His forgiveness and longsuffering has no limit. Jesus told His disciples, "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:4).

Can you believe such a thing? Seven times a day this person willfully sins before my very eyes, then says, "I'm sorry." And I am to forgive him - continuously! How much more will our Heavenly Father forgive His children who come in repentance to Him? Don't stop to reason it out! Don't ask how or why He forgives so freely. Simply accept it!

Jesus did not say, "Forgive your brother once or twice, then tell him to go and sin no more. Tell him that if he ever does it again, he will be cut off. Tell him he is an habitual, hopeless sinner." No! Jesus called for unlimited, no-strings-attached forgiveness!

It is God's nature to forgive. David said, "For thou Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon thee" (Psalm 86:5). God is waiting right now to flood your being with the joy of forgiveness. You need only to open up all the doors and windows of your soul and allow His Spirit to flood you with forgiveness.

John, speaking as a Christian, wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

According to John, the goal of every christian is to "sin not." That means, the Christian is not bent toward sin, but stead, leans toward God. But what happens when that God-leaning child sins?

"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 2:1, 1:9).
Lay Down Your Guilt - Now!

You don't just lay down your guilt, your sin, your inner struggle - as if it were a jacket you strip from your back. You lay it all down through a super-natural operation of God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit responds to the broken heart that reaches out in faith to lay hold of God's promises. He then imparts His divine nature to that hungry vessel. A miraculous series of events begins to unfold. Suddenly, there comes to the saint of God a renewed desire to confess, to yield to God's will, to become more like Jesus, to see things in the light of eternity, to experience a rush of surrender.

The Holy Spirit brings the yielded vessel around to God's way of thinking. We go after things we believe are good for us. We covet what is not ours. But God looks way down the road, and He knows what is best. Our ways and thoughts are not His ways or His thoughts. God will give His surrendered child something even better, if he lays down his own plan.

What is it that stands between you and God? Is it a secret sin? Lust? Doubt? Fear? Anxiety? That is the cause of your guilt. Be willing to lay it down in surrender at the foot of the Cross. Have a funeral, right there - do your hurting and dying - then rise up in obedience and walk in the Spirit. God will not let you down. He will replace that empty place with something far better. something pleasing to His own heart - and providing more joy to you than what you gave up.

Lay down your guilt - my friend! You don't need to carry that load another minute. Open up all the doors and windows of your heart, and let God's love in! He forgives you - over and again! He will give you the power to see your struggle through to victory. If you ask - if you repent - you are forgiven! Accept it - now!

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