

Guilt & Regret: How to Overcome

Part 1: Time to be Justified!

(preached 7/14/24)

Please turn to *Genesis 3, Romans 2*.

My dad was around my age when I was in my late teens and I remember one evening being angry with him and finally working up the courage to say something. Every night that Dad got home from work he'd immediately fix himself a strong gin & tonic, drink it, and then a second one. I confronted him as to why he felt the need to drink so much and expected an angry response from him. Instead, he seemed sad, looked at something far away, then answered ***“when you get older you start to look back on your life and regret things you did and didn't do.”***

I had no idea what he was talking about until I got older and started doing exactly what he said. On one level a person can look back and wish they'd traveled more, taken time to “smell the roses,” or what have you but do these things truly produce “guilt”?

What results in guilt and regret for me is:

- When I see pictures of my kids when they were young and I spent too much time working or just doing things for myself vs. spending time with them.
- I regret judging my children and reacting too harshly, damaging our relationship in the here and now or seeing the long-term consequences it's had on them.
- Realizing how much I've mistreated my wife, fought over things that seemed to so important at the time, and how much I was truly out for my own interests.
- How much time I've wasted on personal desires, goals, and pursuits when I know that I became born again to live for God, obey Him, and do His will.
- I picture myself at the Judgment Seat and seeing all of my blown opportunities to be His shining Light.
- Last but not least is **sometimes I feel helpless to change** things even now. I'm still married and can do better with my wife. I still have 2 kids living at home and make some more time with them.

The problem with guilt is that it's like a massive ball and chain

that we drag around. It doesn't just slow us down, ***it trains us to give in more quickly.*** If any of us had an actual ball and chain around our ankles, we might start out applying our full strength to be free of it or at least to try and live normal lives with it.

Truth is guilt is heavy and even when we apply our strength it drains us and we're eventually rained to just never try in the first place. When a person is struggling with this regret and shame, *it's easier to just keep doing the same things* that got them there in the first place than it is to try and overcome. They may even say to others who confront them *"do you really think I want to be like this?!"*

So let me ask you:

- Do you struggle with guilt?
- Do you spend time looking at your past and regretting things you did and didn't do?
- Do you condemn yourself, even to the point of calling yourself names like "stupid," "worthless," "broken," and concluding that you just "mess everything up" whether relationships, parenting, or what have you?

WE DO NOT HAVE TO LIVE THIS WAY!

The good news is that the Lord **enables and empowers us to overcome** a life of guilt, shame, regret, and self-condemnation.

FIRST WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT GUILT IS AND WHY WE FEEL GUILTY, have regrets, and self-condemn.

[Gen 3:1-5 ESV] 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, **knowing good and evil.**"

The moment Adam & Eve ate, they went from complete innocence to the way we are today:
KNOWING good and evil.

The word "knowing" is "yada" and you've heard Kim speak on this before: it goes beyond mere understanding or instruction, **it means intimacy**. In other words, we're born intimately knowing both good and bad.

The part of us that was created in that fateful moment is what we now call the CONSCIENCE.

Look what happens as soon as Adam & Eve's consciences were activated:

[Gen 3:6-8 ESV] 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and **they knew that they were naked**. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God** among the trees of the garden.

As soon as they had a conscience, **they realized they were naked and that that was bad**. They were ashamed at being exposed so they did the fig leaf thing. Then when God showed up they were afraid of Him and hid—out of guilt, shame, and self-condemnation. *They didn't want to face the Lord fearing His response.*

A Christian with a guilty conscience is afraid of God in the bad way: that they avoid Him.

The reason you and I feel guilt is when our conscience tells us we did something wrong—sinned—whether by commission or inaction.

- COMMISSION is an action, something I did that was wrong. I overreacted to one of my kids, I cussed, etc.
- INACTION means I should have done something but didn't. Should have spent more time with my kids, should have stood up for the truth, should have treated my wife better.

Every human being on the planet is made in the image of God and therefore has a conscience, knowing both good and evil. There's no other life form on the planet which has one...if they did, they would need Jesus Christ as their Savior. Animals, no matter how "smart" they are, do not have one and therefore don't sin. Even when a dog bites or a cat knocks over a vase, it's not indulging in evil and doesn't know the difference.

Our conscience is now an alert system for all us, telling us:

- When we're about to do something wrong.
- When we've done something wrong.
- After we've done something wrong, it urges us to make it right.

How does it know good and evil? Because the Lord programmed His moral commands into it:

[Heb 8:10 ESV] 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts,** and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

[Rom 2:14-15 ESV] 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 **They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their CONSCIENCE also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.**

I've said this before but it bears repeating: **IT ISN'T THE DEVIL WHOSE ACCUSING US**, telling us that we did wrong, and trying to get us to make it right: it's our conscience. *We must stop shifting the blame because by doing so, we won't overcome.*

GOD WROTE THE ORIGINAL CODE FOR IT: HIS MORAL LAWS. Think of the 10 commandments as your base. *Our conscience is our accountant: he keeps tabs on all the spiritual "debt" we owe both to God and others.*

- We accrue this spiritual debt every time we sin by commission and inaction. Remember the older version of the Lord's Prayer: *"forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."*

The reason we bear more guilt, regret, and shame as we get older is that we've done more wrong and our internal accountant is keeping strict record of all the UNRESOLVED bad we've done.

It starts out reminding us of this debt constantly, telling us we need to make payment. *When we don't, it becomes more insistent even to the point of ACCUSATION and CONDEMNATION.*

- It will tell us that we're bad husbands and wives when we mistreat our spouse.
- It will accuse us of gluttony when we overeat, it will point out that covetousness is a sin when we're jealous of what someone else has.
- Mine in particular quotes verses that I've memorized against me!
- The longer this goes on unresolved, the more "mean" it can become...and its not the devil.

There are those who don't have a conscience: they're called

"reprobates" in the Bible and we tend to call them "sociopaths" in the modern world.

They're people who no longer discern between good and evil and feel no "guilt" when they do evil.

There's another condition, though, that many more people suffer with including Christians: **a corrupted or "guilty" conscience**. What does that look like?

A pure and good conscience operates from God's Law as an alert system against wrongdoing. *It's a good thing and designed by God* to be an additional witness against sin and temptation. God Himself compares it to a **watchman** on a wall, sounding the alarm when the enemy approaches:

[Isa 21:6-7 ESV] 6 For thus the Lord said to me: "Go, **set a watchman; let him announce what he sees**. 7 When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, **let him listen diligently, very diligently**."

Imagine this: **the watchman tries telling us over and over that the enemy is at the door and not to open it**. We open it anyway and, over and over, pay the price. After awhile the *watchmen gets angry and frustrated* with us and instead of just warning us, begins to call us names like "idiot, stupid, worthless, fat, ugly, and tells us we ***DESERVE an enemy invasion...that we have it coming***.

What's happened is our conscience has gone from doing the job God designed it for to becoming our judge and jury. IT'S NOT SATAN even if it sounds like him.

A guilty conscience has become corrupted, or to use an older word: defiled.

IT GOES FROM BEING THE CHECK GOD INTENDED TO BEING AN ACCUSER AND A CONDEMNER.

We're additionally "triggered" when another person agrees with our conscience and 1) makes an accusation or 2) condemns us often using the same language our guilty conscience uses. Our reaction is to become defensive and deny. More on that next week.

The solution is threefold: 1) make the payment so that your conscience is satisfied that all debts are clear. 2) Make things right with people you've offended. 3) Strive to live a Godly life and not make the same mistakes.

Doing the first one inspires the last two, so it must come first.

It's important to come back next week so I can fill this out more fully! I couldn't get it all in this week.

HOW DO WE MAKE PAYMENT?

We call upon the Blood of Jesus Christ on our own behalf.

[Rom 3:21-26 ESV] 21 But now the **righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and **are justified by his grace** as a gift, through the **redemption that is in Christ Jesus**, 25 whom **God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith**. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the **justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

Our conscience only concern is JUSTICE and please note the words “just” and “justified” in the above verses.

When God “justifies” someone He's declared the justice demanded by His Commandments to be fulfilled. Satisfied.

Our conscience is programmed with the same laws. When we violate those laws, our conscience holds it against us like a prosecuting attorney. When we don't make things right, the prosecutor wants to “take us to court” and have us declared GUILTY! It then wants us tossed into “jail.”

More on this next week, **but for now if you're dealing with guilt, shame, and you condemn yourself (beat yourself up) then you've already been taken to court.**

Your first of several steps is to stand up in **SAID COURTROOM AND CALL UPON THE BLOOD OF CHRIST AS YOUR WITNESS** to everyone present (inside YOU!) that you have been justified. Forgiven of all! That the scales have been balanced and there is no accusation or condemnation for you.

[Rom 5:9 ESV] 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.