

# Guilt & Regret: How to Overcome

## *Part 2: Our Conscience: How to Give it What it Wants.*

(preached 7/21/24)

Please turn to *Matthew 5:25-26*.

### LAST WEEK:

- Do you struggle with guilt, shame, and self-condemnation?
- Do you call yourself names like stupid, fat, ugly, worthless, a screw-up, and broken?
- Do you look backwards with regret for things you did, and things you didn't do?
- As Christians we do not have to live this way!
- When Adam & Eve sinned, the CONSCIENCE was created, enabling us to know both good and evil.
- It's programmed by God with His moral commands like don't steal, don't lie, etc.
- It acts as a watchman to warn us that sin lies at the door—don't open it.
- It acts like an accountant that when we DO sin we must PAY in order to balance the scales of justice.
- It's the voice 1) accusing us of sin and 2) urging us to make things right.
- A pure and GOOD conscience does this using only God's commands.
- If we ignore it and don't make payment our conscience becomes "defiled" or GUILTY.
- It begins calling us horrible names like stupid, no-good, a glutton, a screw-up, ugly, etc.
- It's not Satan! Rebuking and binding the devil does not make this voice go away.
- Listening to edifying & encouraging messages and prayers does not make this voice go away.
- What makes this voice go away is PAYMENT.
- The only payment that will satisfy it is the Blood of Jesus Christ.
- Sometimes Christians will say "you need to forgive yourself" and this is that.
- We must tell our conscience that we've been JUSTIFIED by the blood of Jesus which made full payment for ALL of our sins. That it must accept this payment and be cleansed.

TODAY we're going to talk more about how:

- **Our conscience can become defiled** and hinder walking in the righteousness that Jesus bought for us at the Cross.
- **How its purpose is to be our adversary** and watchman, not our friend who agrees with, encourages, and builds us up.
- **How to give it what it wants** so that it will stop calling us names, making us feel guilty, and can operate the way God designed it to.

**Our conscience was programmed with God's moral commands** but there's a problem: for our entire lives *other things, people, and ourselves have added to what God said is right and wrong.*

Let me ask you this: **IS IT SHAMEFUL TO BE NAKED IN PUBLIC?** When we were kids it was called "streaking" and we used to play a game called "Truth or Dare." The one dare no one would take is "go streaking!" So I ask you: if you saw someone streaking through the neighborhood in nothing but their birthday suit, would you think it wrong?

**Other cultures have less of a taboo about it.** My mom was born and raised in Vietnam and she said that, at the beach, it was common for someone to be swimming naked and walking around the beach the same way...in public. She said that when American soldiers showed up at their beaches they were embarrassed and the Vietnamese girls laughed at them. Consider this: nakedness being taboo isn't written on the consciences of some yet it is taboo to others.

**Some think eating meat is a sin** and they feel badly if they do. Others feel guilty when they discipline their children, so they don't. One person's version of "fat" is vastly different than another's.

*Truth is the way we were raised, our culture, our experiences, other people & influences both physical and spiritual have added to God's commandments to make up our conscience.* Its "programming" has gone further than what the Lord intended.

**This is why it's important to read and know our Bibles and to realize, when it comes to sin, what the Lord has decided.**

We must also remember what covenant we're in. As Christians we're under the new covenant: *righteousness apart from obedience to the Law.*

**This was a big problem in the first century** and still today. Open worship of other gods were more prevalent in ancient Middle Eastern society than it is in modern American culture where most everything is secular. In the first century ME, temples and idols to pagan gods were common...and so were sacrifices being made to said idols.

**Worshippers would often bring food and drink**—sometimes really high quality stuff—and leave it at the foot of a pagan idol as their offering. Since idols don't eat, the food would sit there and spoil. And sometimes others would come and eat it before it did.

## **IF YOU WERE RAISED JEWISH THIS WAS A SIN, A SELF-**

**DEFILEMENT** of Biblical proportions. They considered food given to idols to be “unclean” spiritually and that any God-fearing Jew who ate the same would become *defiled*. Please understand this was a BIG deal to them even if you’re shrugging your shoulders. It was such a issue the Apostles had to address it and doing so became part of the Bible. I’m going to read it to you so that you’ll understand what we’re dealing with here:

**[1Co 8:7-8 ESV]** 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

In other words, **all foods have been made spiritually clean by Christ**. Jesus said it too: there’s nothing we can eat that spiritually defiles us and separates us from God.

Paul is talking about Christians in these verses and he’s saying that *any who truly understand the Gospel no longer sees eating previously forbidden foods as sin*.

If he still does, **HE’S SPIRITUALLY WEAK AND NOT STRONG**.

**#1: Anything outside of God’s MORAL commands that we consider to be sin makes us spiritually weaker and not stronger.**

**#2: “Legalistic” people are weaker spiritually because they’re trying to obtain and maintain righteousness through obedience.**

**#3: We must remember we’re in the NC where righteousness is obtained and maintained through faith in Christ’s obedience and work on the Cross.**

**Where we need to focus is HOW and WHEN to make the payment so that our conscience is satisfied.**

**[Mat 5:25-26 NKJV]** 25 “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

## **Who is the Adversary and what is the method of payment Jesus refers to?**

The Adversary is God's moral commandments (the Law): not the devil, not sin, and not another person.

**The method of payment is blood:** w/o the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

As we read last week in Romans 2 and Hebrews 8, **God wrote His laws into the human heart** and mind so that we know both good and evil and that part of us became our conscience.

**OUR CONSCIENCE IS OUR ADVERSARY** in the same way as someone holding us accountable, calling us out, rebuking, and correcting us.

**It's not our friend in the sense that a friend encourages us** and builds us up, says nice things, and can be a good shoulder to cry on.

Now look at verse 25: **OUR CONSCIENCE IS SUING US AND WE'RE ALREADY ON THE WAY TO COURT** where it will accuse us to the judge.

**If we don't pay the fine we'll be "arrested," "sentence" will be passed, and we'll end up in spiritual "jail."**

**Spiritual "jail" is when we feel guilty, ashamed, and self-condemning.**

We're already in "jail" there if we're calling ourselves fat, ugly, worthless, used goods, broken, bad spouses or parents, drunks, addicts, stupid, etc.

Fortunately, Jesus tells us how to avoid this in verse 25: **AGREE WITH YOUR ADVERSARY.**

*"What?! I have to agree with my conscience calling me ugly and stupid?!"*

**NO. We don't agree with that part. We don't assent to condemnation—NEVER.** More on that next week!

**WE DO AGREE WHEN IT TELLS US WE'VE VIOLATED ONE OF GOD'S COMMANDS**, whether by commission or inaction.

**And it's best to agree QUICKLY.**

*In human relationships wouldn't things be better if a person would just admit when they do wrong and apologize vs defending and denying?*

**THE SAME APPLIES IN OUR ADVERSARIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR CONSCIENCE**--when we deny or defend against its accusation, or call it the devil, it takes us to court and we end up in jail.

**When it tells us we just stole**, lied, lusted, cursed, neglected, lost our temper, drank too much, was selfish, impatient, or what have you...**we must unconditionally agree.**

*Is stealing wrong?* When I was 18 I stole. It was my freshman year in college and there was a guy in my hall named Johnny that I couldn't stand. He was a bully and obnoxious, a testosterone-laden confrontational tough guy who loved to get in your face. He was bigger than most and used his size to intimidate others. His parents sent him these care packages that the rest of us envied: boxes of Ho-ho's, Doritos, Slim Jims, and other snacks. He kept them all in a box on the floor next to his bed.

One night a couple guys and I broke into his room and cleared out his box: we took all his stuff and ate it—I got the Ho-ho's because they were my favorite...and his! I stuffed every one of those down my gullet as fast as I could. Since I was 18, I could get away with that back then!

**While we were planning this, while doing this, and especially after it was done my conscience was screaming at me.**

- While planning the theft, it kept telling me to back out.
- While doing the theft, it kept telling me stop.
- After the theft was done, it told me I'd done wrong, that I needed to confess everything, and make restitution.

My conscience was taking me to court just like Jesus said and my problem went further than the commission of the sin: **I was arguing with it along the way.** I wasn't denying that stealing was wrong, but I was justifying my actions under the "eye for an eye" philosophy.

**WHILE PLANNING THE ACT, MY CONSCIENCE GRABBED ME AND STARTED DRAGGING ME TO COURT.** It was telling me that stealing was wrong to stop planning to do it. I argued! I JUSTIFIED my intention so I could get back at this guy for the wrong he'd done to me and others.

*In the act of stealing my conscience told me to stop,* put everything back, and go back to my room. I continued to argue and say this fellow was getting what was coming to him for being such a jerk.

**We were “outside the courthouse” when the act was done,** my conscience now openly accusing me of thievery and me continuing to say it was ok because this fellow had finally gotten his well-deserved “karma.” Since I refused to agree and admit my wrongdoing, we finally entered “court” where I was judged, found guilty, and condemned.

*What did that look like?* For weeks I could hardly sleep, my stomach churned, I was irritable, and more. Every time I looked at Johnny from whom I'd stolen from, I felt sick. I was in torment!

**NOW LET'S APPLY WHAT JESUS SAID.** Imagine if, in the planning stages of my revenge-motivated theft, I had listened to and agreed with my conscience...that would have fulfilled Jesus command to “agree quickly.” If I'd done so, we would never have reached “court” and most certainly not “jail.” And the other fellow would still have had his Ho-ho's!

**Supposed that during the act I agreed with my conscience,** put the Ho-ho's back in Johnny's box, and left. I would never have been tormented later.

Just in case you're wondering **I ended up confessing everything to Johnny,** apologizing, and replacing his stolen goods.

When our conscience is telling us we're about to do wrong, to stop what we're doing, or that we've already done wrong, let's **listen and agree.** Let's take the time to let this “conversation” happen where we admit that yes, this is a sin and that yes, it matters.

**No arguing, denying, or justifying.** No excuses or claiming that we “need” to do this. No blaming someone else, our circumstances, or anything. Not trying to say that indulgence in this sin is “who we are.” Certainly no self-righteous claims that we're actually doing justice and balancing scales.

**We agree with our conscience, we remind it and ourselves of the Blood of Jesus, then pray and ask God to help us overcome temptation.**

- If we haven't already done the deed yet, let's stop immediately.
- If we've already done it then we make things right physically and both of these are after what I just said.

Before he came to Christ **PAUL PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS** and was directly responsible for several of them—starting with Stephen—to be murdered. When the scales finally fell from his eyes, one might think that the first thing to happen was that his conscience would crush him under the weight of the murders he was responsible for. But instead, he tells us this:

**[Act 24:16 ESV]** “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”

The writer of Hebrews tells us we can draw near to God this way:

**[Heb 10:22 KJV]** 22 Let us draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, ***having our hearts sprinkled [by the blood of Jesus] from an evil conscience***, and our bodies washed with pure water.