

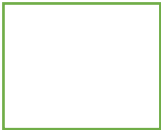
LESSON 6

Dealing with Sin and Guilt

*On the difference between being forgiven and being healed —
and the two places each happens.*

Guilt is forgiven at the cross. Shame is healed in the light, among people who know the whole truth about you.

WATCH BEFORE YOU BEGIN



Scan to watch the Lesson 6 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.

CORE SCRIPTURES

If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

—1 John 1:7

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.

—James 5:16

When the Verdict Isn't Enough

Lesson 2 settled the verdict. Romans 8:1 — *There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.* The case is closed. The slate is clean. You learned that the verdict doesn't get reopened every time you fail, and you took it home and tried to live as if it were true.

And most of you have found that it is almost enough. The verdict explains your standing. It steadies the ground under your feet on a Monday morning when the sin has shown up again. You can return to Romans 8:1, and the spiral quiets some.

But many Christians find that even after they believe the verdict, *something still lingers*. The sin is confessed. The forgiveness is real. Cognitively, you know the slate is clean — and yet, walking out the door, you can't quite look up. There's a weight that the verdict doesn't seem to address. A part of you that still flinches when you remember. You start to wonder whether something is wrong with you that the gospel hasn't reached.

Nothing is wrong with you. You've simply run into the difference between being *forgiven* and being *healed*. Those are two different problems, and they're handled in two different places. This lesson is about both.

DISCUSSION: Lesson 2 named the voice that shows up after you sin — the spiral that says, "you never really changed." Even after you've come to believe the verdict doesn't move, what tends to linger? What does the feeling of "I should be over this by now" sound like in your own life?

Forgiveness Isn't the Same as Healed

Lesson 2 named the distinction between guilt, which points you somewhere useful, and shame, which just spirals. Hold onto that. This lesson takes the next step: what to do with what's left over.

FIGURE 6.1	Forgiven vs. Healed	
WHAT THE CROSS DOES	WHAT THE CHURCH DOES	
<p style="text-align: center;">Forgiven</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About guilt — the act • Settled vertically, between you and God • The blood does the cleansing 	<p style="text-align: center;">Healed</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Confess your sins to one another...so that you may be healed."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About shame — the wound • Healed horizontally, in trustworthy company • Honest hearers do the un-hiding 	
<p>Forgiven once. Healed in the light, over time.</p>		

Lesson 6 · 1 John 1:7 · James 5:16

Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 7:10. *For godly grief produces a repentance not to be regretted and leading to salvation, but worldly grief produces death.* He's distinguishing two kinds of sorrow over sin — the kind that puts you in motion toward repentance, and the kind that just crushes you. But notice what godly grief produces: *repentance*. It deals with the act. It does not necessarily, by itself, deal with the wound the act left in you.

That's the gap many new Christians fall into. They confess; they repent; the act is genuinely handled. And the wound is still there. The part that still believes, despite the forgiveness, that you're the kind of person who does this. The part that's still hiding. The cross handles the verdict. Something else must handle the wound.

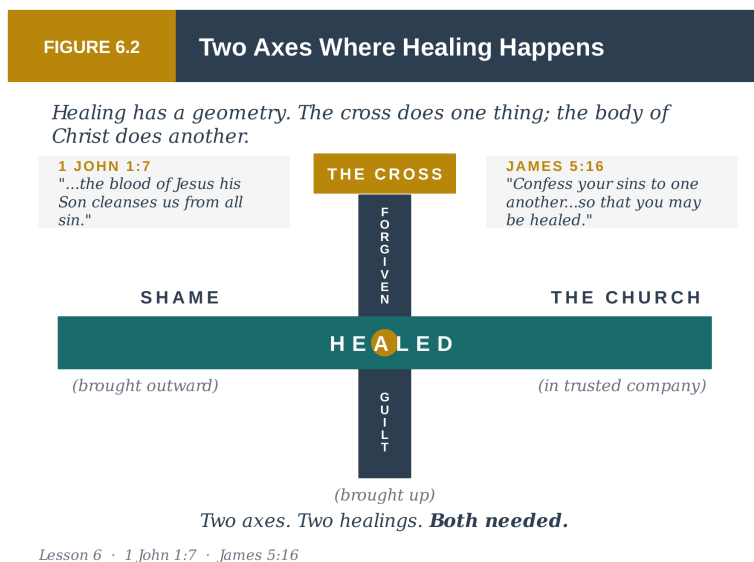
Scripture points to two places where that handling happens. One is vertical — between you and God, where guilt is cleansed. The other is horizontal — between you and a small circle of people who know the truth and don't flinch, where shame loses its grip. Most new Christians know about the first. The second is where this lesson does its real work.

DISCUSSION: Has there been a sin you confessed, believed God had forgiven you for, and yet found yourself still carrying — still flinching when you remembered? Where do you think that leftover weight comes from?

What the Cross Does to Guilt

For guilt, the answer is settled.

If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).



Walking in the light, first of all, is vertical. It's honesty with God. It's the refusal to pretend. It's not arguing yourself out of having done wrong, not minimizing it, not waiting until you feel sorry enough to bring it. It's just bringing it. Plainly. Now.

Notice what does the cleansing. *The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.* Not your remorse. Not your renewed effort. Not the eloquence of your confession. The blood. Your part is the bringing; his part is the cleansing. The moment a Christian

brings a sin into the light, it's already been dealt with at the cross — and what's left is simply to receive it.

Many new Christians don't believe this in the way they think they do. Cognitively, you know forgiveness is real. Experientially, you find yourself trying to *feel* forgiven for the rest of the day, performing a kind of low-grade penance, refusing to let yourself off the hook too quickly because something in you suspects that quick forgiveness must be cheap forgiveness. It isn't. It's paid forgiveness. The cost was absorbed by someone else.

Think of a wound. A wound covered up doesn't heal; it festers in the dark. A wound brought into the light, cleaned, dressed honestly — that's the one that heals. Guilt works the same way. Brought into the light before God, it's cleansed. Hidden, it spreads.

That's the vertical axis. It's solid ground. Stand on it.

DISCUSSION: When you become aware of having sinned, what's your first move? Notice whether you go toward God with it or away from him before you do anything else.

Where Shame Loses its Grip

The vertical axis takes care of guilt. But many find that even after they've brought a sin to God and received forgiveness, something still lingers. The act is dealt with. The self-condemnation isn't.

That's shame. And shame is harder to kill, because shame doesn't believe what the cross says about you. Shame's whole strategy is isolation: *if they knew, they wouldn't love you*. As long as the secret stays inside, shame keeps its grip.

That's why James 5:16 is so radical:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

Look closely at the word James uses. He doesn't say *so that you may be forgiven*. Forgiveness was already settled vertically, at the cross. He says *healed*. He's pointing at something else — the wound that's still there after the guilt has been dealt with. The part of you that still flinches at the memory. The part that's still afraid to be seen. That part is healed in the company of people who know the worst and don't pull away.

This is not a command to public disclosure. James isn't asking you to stand up in front of the whole church and itemize. He's pointing at a practice — one person, two people, a small circle — who know what you carry and who pray with you through the hurt. The first time someone hears the thing you were sure would make them leave, and they don't leave, something in you that shame had been gripping for years lets go.

Paul tells us what kind of person to bring it to. *Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:1–2). Spiritual people. Gentle people. Restorers. Someone like the person of Romans 12:8: a person who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Not the ones who flinch, not the ones who lecture, not the ones who store it away to use against you later. The right hearer matters as much as the act of telling.

If you don't have a person like that yet, that's not a failure on your part — but it's a need to name. A Christian without one person on earth who knows the whole truth is a Christian whose shame has more room to operate than it should. Killing isolation, not exposing yourself, is the goal.

DISCUSSION: Is there one person in your life right now to whom you could say something hard about yourself, knowing they wouldn't flinch? If yes, what's that person's name? If no, what would it take to begin building that?

Coming Back into the Light

The shape of a maturing Christian's life isn't sinlessness. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something.

FIGURE 6.3	Walking Back into the Light
WHAT TO DO <i>when sin shows up Monday morning</i>	
1	BRING IT "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light..." Plainly. Now. No performance. Just bring it.
2	RECEIVE "...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." Your part is the bringing. His part is the cleansing.
3	NAME IT "Confess your sins to one another...so that you may be healed." When shame lingers, take it to one trustworthy hearer.
4	KEEP WALKING "The shape of a maturing life is a shorter return trip." Maturity isn't sinlessness — just a faster way back.

Shorter return trips, every time. *That's the rhythm.*

Lesson 6 · 1 John 1:7 · James 5:16

what's already true: that the blood has done what it does, and that you're not standing on your own performance.

Monday morning, when the thing happens again — and it will — the path is already laid out. Bring it into the light. Receive what's been done at the cross. If shame is still there afterward, find the one who can pray with you. That's the rhythm.

Guilt is forgiven at the cross.

Shame is healed in the light, among people who know the whole truth about you.

The shape of a maturing Christian's life is a shorter return trip. Sin still happens; the difference is what happens next. Where you used to stay out in the dark for days — hiding, performing, hoping it would pass — you start to come back faster. The light becomes the place you head toward, not the place you avoid.

Walking in the light isn't an event. It's a way of living. Quick to bring it back to God. Quick, when shame lingers, to find the person who can hear it and pray you through it. Quick to receive

That's enough to walk on for the rest of your life.

DISCUSSION: What's one small, concrete step toward "walking in the light" you could take this week? Naming a sin honestly to God? Reaching out to one trustworthy person? Stopping a pattern of self-condemnation that doesn't belong to you?

Bring it into the light. Receive what's been done at the cross. If shame is still there afterward, find the one who can pray with you. That's the rhythm.

Guilt is forgiven at the cross.

Shame is healed in the light, among people who know the whole truth about you.

That's enough to walk on for the rest of your life.

That's where we're going. Lesson by lesson, one walk back into the light at a time.

DISCUSSION: What's one small, concrete step toward "walking in the light" you could take this week? Naming a sin honestly to God? Reaching out to one trustworthy person? Stopping a pattern of self-condemnation that doesn't belong to you?

DON'T FORGET

Scan to watch the Lesson 5 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.