

## Guilt and Repentance

This morning we are going to be looking at the topics of Guilt and Repentance. Last weekend I was able to teach a class with a good friend of mine on these topics at a Biblical Counseling Conference in Denver, Colorado. To introduce the topic, please open your Bible to Genesis 3:1–7 (NASB95) — *1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’ ” 4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.*

“The eyes of both of them” were opened.” It was not in the way they expected. They experienced for the first time guilt and shame. Everything from that moment on had suddenly changed. Sin might promise enlightenment and peace, but in reality, it brings shame, fear and blame as well as death. My prayer for us this morning is that we would understand guilt and know how to deal with it biblically through genuine repentance. Our outline this morning is simple. It is **1) Understanding Christ’s Substitutionary Atonement; 2) Understanding Guilt; and 3) Understanding Repentance.**

### I. Understanding Christ’s Substitutionary Atonement

Before we move on to understanding guilt, we must understand Christ’s Substitutionary Atonement. Christ’s Substitutionary Atonement is “The view of the atonement that Christ’s death is a sacrifice offered in payment of the penalty for

our sins. It is accepted by God the Father as satisfaction in place of the penalty due to believers in Christ.” I was reading a Biblical Doctrine book that further says, “That is to say, on the cross, Jesus suffered the penalty for the sins of His people as a substitute for them. When man sinned against God, his sin erected a legal and relational barrier between him and God. The divine law was broken; man thus incurred guilt and is required to pay the penalty of spiritual death. The holiness of God was offended, and thus God’s wrath was aroused against sin. This leaves man alienated from God; broken fellowship and even hostility mark the relationship between God and man, who is in bondage to sin and death. If there is to be any redemption from sin and reconciliation to God, man’s sin must be atoned for. And yet man’s spiritual death and depravity leave him unable to pay the penalty for his sin.”

## **1. The cause of the atonement**

So, what is the cause of the atonement? Many of you have probably memorized John 3:16 (NASB95) — 16 *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

### **a. The love of God**

The cause of the atonement is the Love of God. That is why He sent His Son. “God in His love has appointed Jesus Christ to stand in the place of sinners to bear their sin, guilt and punishment...” That’s the first cause of the atonement.

### **b. The justice of God**

The second cause is the justice of God. Look at Romans 3:25–26 (NASB95) — 25 *whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” “...Jesus’ death satisfied God’s wrath on behalf of sinners.” Now let’s look at the necessity of the atonement.*

## **2. The necessity of the atonement**

Was the atonement necessary? Did God have to save anyone?

### **a. It was not necessary for God to save anyone?**

Look at 2 Peter 2:4 (NASB95) — *4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;*

If it was not necessary, why did God provide the atonement?

### **b. It was a result of God's loving decision to save.**

It goes back to the cause of the atonement. It was God's love.

## **3. The nature of the atonement.**

Third, to understand the atonement we need to understand the nature of the atonement. We need to understand first...

### **a. Christ's obedience for us**

This is called active obedience. Active obedience is when one obeys the commands of someone else. It is "a term referring to Christ's perfect obedience to God during His earthly life that earned the righteousness that God credits to those who place their faith in Christ." "Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God in order to earn righteousness for us." Look at Philippians 3:8–9 (NASB95) — The apostle Paul writes, *8 "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,"* And 1 Corinthians 1:30 (NASB95) — *30 "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,"* "By His doing you are in Christ. Because of Christ's perfect obedience. Look at Romans 5:19 (NASB95) — *19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.* Through the obedience of the One. That's Christ's obedience for us.

### **b. Christ's suffering for us**

This is called passive obedience. Passive obedience is “a term referring to Christ’s sufferings for us in which He took the penalty due for our sins and as a result died for our sins.” So, in addition to obeying the law perfectly for his entire life on our behalf, Christ also took on Himself the sufferings necessary to pay the penalty for our sins. Look at Isaiah 53:6 (NASB95) — 6 *“All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.”* The Lord cause the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Look at Isaiah 53:12 (NASB95) — 12 *“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.”* He Himself bore the sins of many. Look at 1 Peter 2:24 (NASB95) — 24 *“and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”* Christ Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross. Several other verses talk about Christ’s suffering for us—Matthew 26:38; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 9:28 and more.

### **4. Jesus willingly and successfully bore the wrath in our place**

When I think about all that God did in the atonement, I think about the song “All I have is Christ”. In verse 2 it says “But as I ran my hell-bound race indifferent to the cost, You looked upon my helpless state and led me to the cross. And I beheld God’s love displayed. You suffered in my place. You bore the wrath reserved for me. Now all I know is grace.” And then the chorus goes, “Hallelujah! All I have is Christ. Hallelujah! Jesus is my life.” So many great verses talk about Jesus willingly and successfully bearing the wrath in our place. Romans 3:25-26, Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10; Mark 15:34; 1 Corinthians 11:24; John 19:30; Luke 23:46; and John 10:17–18 (NASB95) — Jesus said, 17 *“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”* Jesus bore the wrath in our place. He did it of His own initiative. He was willing. He was successful.

Do you understand the atonement of Christ?

## **II. Understanding Guilt**

### **A. Definition of guilt and shame**

Guilt is a legal or judicial term that implies criminal responsibility in the eyes of the court of law, whether human or divine. Guilt is used in the Bible as the exposure of someone's actions, identification of the reason(s) and assessment of an appropriate punishment to restore the guilty party to God and/or to others.

Biblical Counselor Edward Welch says "Shame and guilt are close companions but not identical. Shame is the more common and broader of the two. In Scripture you will find shame (nakedness, dishonor, disgrace, defilement) about ten times more often than you find guilt. Guilt lives in the courtroom where you stand alone before the judge. It says, "You are responsible for wrongdoing and legally answerable." "You are wrong." "You have sinned." The guilty person expects punishment and needs forgiveness. Shame lives in the community, though the community can feel like a courtroom. It says, "You don't belong – you are unacceptable, unclean, and disgraced" because "You are wrong, you have sinned" (guilt), or "Wrong has been done to you" or "You are associated with those who are disgraced or outcast." The shamed person feels worthless, expects rejection, and needs cleansing, fellowship, love and acceptance. Guilt and shame intersect when a particular sin is regarded, by yourself or others to be worse than most sins. For example, get caught with child pornography and you will experience both guilt and shame. Same-sex attraction finds itself here too. But what if your anger briefly flares at a reckless driver, you might feel a little guilt but, most likely, no shame because everyone else has done similar things. Don't forget that your sensors for guilt and shame are fallible. They can be silent when they should say something, and they can also sound false alarms, but, false alarm or not, when we hear them we must do something. They don't turn off automatically." (Shame Interrupted)

When looking at guilt, we need to recognize that ....B. Guilt is good for our souls.

### **B. Guilt is good for our souls**

Good for our souls? Yes. There are several things that guilt does in our lives that ultimately is good for our souls. And when I say it's good for your souls, I mean it helps us to understand why we are feeling guilt so we can deal with it biblically. One pastor has said, "Our culture has treated guilt as a really bad thing. In reality, God created us in such a way to feel guilt so we will do something about it." Here are some ways we see God use guilt in our lives for our good.

**1. The Holy Spirit using the Word of God through the conscience is responsible to convict and cause us to see our guilt.**

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come. John 16:8 says, "*And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*" And when Peter finished his sermon, Acts 2:37 says, "*Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'*" The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. The Word of God convicts us of sin. Our conscience convicts us of our sin. It causes us to ask, "what shall we do?" This conviction is a work of God. It is good for the soul.

**2. God uses His Word through God's people to expose others' sins with the sole purpose of restoration**

Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*" Brothers and sisters, God wants you to restore the person caught in sin. It is to be done in a spirit of gentleness. Point them to God's Word. God will use you to expose other's sins. Again, it is a work of God. It is good for the soul.

**3. Guilt is a direct result of sinful actions**

Psalm 32:5 says, "*I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.*" Our guilt is a direct result of sinful actions. It is either the actions of you or someone else. If your guilt is a result of your own sin, acknowledge it. Take responsibility. Don't hide it. Confess your sins to God. And what does Psalm 32:5 say happens when we confess? "God forgave the guilt of the Psalmists sin. This is good for the soul.

#### **4. Guilt must be acknowledged before God grants forgiveness**

1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* What a great verse. God is faithful. God is righteous. He tells us to confess our sins. He tells us that when we do, he forgives us of our sins. He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. This is good for the soul.

#### **5. Some bear the burden of guilt unnecessarily for lack of faith**

Matthew 11:28–30 says, 28 *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* It is not necessary for you to bear the burden of guilt. Trust God. Come to Jesus. The verse says, *“All who are weary and heavy-laden.”* Not some. All. Let Him give you rest. This is good for your soul.

#### **6. Forgiveness is available for all sin and the associated guilt**

We already mentioned 1 John 1:9 and Psalm 32:5. Acknowledge and confess your sin. God is faithful. Trust Him. Obey Him. He will forgive you. Knowing this is good for your soul.

#### **7. God has graciously provided the appropriate sacrifice for our guilt**

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* And Colossians 2:14 says, *“having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”* God sent His Son Jesus as the appropriate sacrifice for our guilt. Do you believe that? Trust Him. It is good for your soul.

#### **8. Through Christ, we can live with a clear conscience before God and man**

Hebrews 9:14 says, *“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* Through Christ, you can live with a clear conscience. That is good for your soul.

### **C. Guilt is not false**

If you or someone you know has a sense or feeling of guilt, do not minimize it. There is a reason why someone is guilty or thinks he is guilty. Sometimes people may think they are guilty through the manipulative tactics of others in order to control them. People with a sensitive conscience or strong fear of man are most vulnerable to this. Sometimes some may believe they are guilty because of wrong standards—they may have an untrained or ill-informed conscience.

### **D. Guilt and the Conscience**

How many of you remember the story of the puppet who wanted to become a real boy. The puppet had a fairy godmother who appointed a cricket to be the young puppet's conscience. In the story the cricket becomes very prideful of his new appointed position and wants a gold medal. He then instructs the young puppet in song. He sang, "when you get in trouble and you don't know right from wrong, give a little whistle! When you meet temptation and the urge is very strong, give a little whistle! Not just a little squeak, pucker up and blow. And if your whistle's weak, yell, "Jiminy Cricket!" Take the straight and narrow path and if you start to slide, give a little whistle! And always let your conscience be your guide. At the end of the song, the young puppet accidentally stumbles and knocks a bunch of stuff over making a loud noise. The noise wakes the puppet maker and his cat. At that moment, what does the cricket do? He runs and hides. That is not the conscience we are going to be talking about. Conscience refers to someone's self-awareness to judge whether or not a desire, thought or action is in harmony with their moral standards. Conscience is a gift of God to provide light in matters of good and evil, but someone's conscience is not the final judge – it must be instructed and trained. 1 Corinthians 4:4 says, *"For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."* The conscience may respond to various issues differently because of the facts informing it.

#### **1. The seared conscience**

Someone may have a seared conscience that is no longer activated by biblical criteria. 1 Timothy 4:2 calls this a seared conscience. Titus 1:15 calls this a defiled conscience. And Ephesians 4:19 describes the person with this type of conscience saying, “and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” For a time, believers can actually have a seared conscience. They will eventually confess and deal with it, but that kind of conscience has been silenced through repeated sin.

## **2. The untrained conscience**

Second someone may have an untrained conscience that has never been taught by biblical truth. Leviticus 4:22-24 talks about a leader unintentionally sinning and then realizing his guilt. In 1 Timothy 1:13, the Apostle Paul describes his life before coming to Christ. He says that he received mercy because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief. Hebrews 5:14 speaks of the conscience as being something that is trained. Our conscience needs to be continually trained to understand God’s Word.

## **3. The overactive conscience**

Third, someone may have an overactive or weak conscience that is activated by unbiblical criteria. Romans 14:1-5 and verse 23 describe such a person. One pastor writes, “sometimes you believe that a desire, a thought or an action is morally wrong when the Bible does not actually condemn it. In those cases, you are required to act according to your conscience, but you should also seek to retrain your conscience according to biblical standards. A lot of people will say your conscience should be your guide, but that is not true from a biblical perspective. It should be your guard, not your guide. The truth should be your guide.”

## **4. The biblical conscience**

Fourth, we want to develop a biblical conscience that is activated by biblical truth. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*”

## **E. Unbiblical ways of dealing with our guilt**

First, people try to cover up the problem. We read Genesis 3:7 earlier, *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”* Some ways people try to cover up the problem is by sinning more. They might deceive and lie to cover their sin. Another way is that they might try to do enough good so that people would not think they are capable of sinning in the way they did. They try to cover up the problem.

Second, people seek to hide from the problem. Remember Genesis 3:8–10, *8 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. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.”* Some ways people hide today is 1) by staying away from church. 2) by staying away from believers; 3) by not reading the Bible and 4) by finding churches that don’t preach the “whole counsel” of God’s Word, emphasizing the love and grace and acceptance of God, believing that the word “sin” is a dirty word. These people are all seeking to hide from the problem.

A third unbiblical way of dealing with guilt is seeking to avoid, blame others or circumstances for the problem. Remember Genesis 3:11–13, *11 And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”* Do you see the blame in this scenario? Who did Eve blame? Who did Adam blame? Today, people blame sickness for their sin. Others blame genetics. Some just try to rebuild their self-esteem, believing that their guilt is “false” and they really are a good person. And some hide by self-pleasure. They seek to mask the effects of guilt by gratifying the flesh.

A fourth unbiblical way of dealing with guilt is seeking to forgive ourselves. Some believe that “forgiving self” is the key to peace and joy. People have never nor shall we ever sin against ourselves or offend ourselves or transgress against

ourselves necessitating forgiveness of ourselves—we are not the judge of ourselves. Psalm 51:4 says, *“Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.”* When God says that He forgives people and cleanses them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), there is absolutely nothing anyone can or needs to do to complete His work. We need to recognize that God is God and we are not. We need to trust Him and obey Him in this. He alone can forgive sins. “Forgiving self” has no biblical support.

Scripture supports two perspectives on forgiveness. **First**, people need to and can be forgiven by God. Colossians 1:13–14 (NASB95) — *13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” And we have already looked at 1 John 1:9. God forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness if we confess our sins. **Second**, people must sincerely forgive others, following the example of God’s forgiveness of them. Ephesians 4:32 says, *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”* Colossians 3:13 says, *“bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”* We need to forgive others.

People who dredge up, hold onto, and beat themselves up over their sin show a misunderstanding of the gospel and often reveal a desire to earn their righteousness. Behavior like this does not glorify God and depreciates the truth of the cross of Christ.

## **F. Biblical Ways of Dealing with our Guilt**

**First**, don’t minimize guilt. There is a reason for it. **Second**, don’t underestimate the effects of guilt; guilt is behind much of people’s unbiblical behavior, thinking and desires. **Third**, Identify what we are guilty of—is our conscience informed and educated biblically? **Fourth**, confess our sins to God. In Psalm 51:3–5, David prays, *3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified*

when You speak And blameless when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” **Fifth**, we need to confess our sins to the appropriate people. Who have I sinned against? Who has been affected by my sin? James 5:16a reminds us, “confess your sins one to another and pray for one another...” **Sixth**, make any necessary restitution. Exodus 22:1 says, “*If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.*” Numbers 5:7 says, “*then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged.*” Luke 19:8 says, *Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”* **Seventh**, repent and forsake the sin. Proverbs 28:13 says, “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.*” 2 Corinthians 7:9–11 says, *9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.* Those are the seven ways of dealing with our guilt biblically.

### III. Understanding Repentance

Repentance can be defined as godly sorrow for one’s sin and a resolve to turn from it. To understand it more fully we need to look at the three components of repentance. **First**, genuine repentance involves the mind. It begins with a recognition of sin. It is to humbly confess one’s need for grace and mercy and to ask for forgiveness. 2 Samuel 12:13 says, “Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.” In Psalm 51:1–4, David prays, *1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your*

*compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.*

**Second**, genuine repentance involves the heart. It is marked by a sincere sorrow, remorse and even mourning over one's sin. In Psalm 51:12 and 17, David prays, *12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.* Genuine repentance is different than "worldly grief". "Worldly grief" is sorry that one got caught. It is sad because one has to suffer consequences. "Worldly grief" is not repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, *"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."*

**Third**, genuine repentance involves the will. It involves a change of direction, a transformation of the will. It is more than a change of mind. It is a determination to abandon stubborn disobedience and surrender to the will of Christ. It is not to be strictly defined as a change in behavior. Behavior can change even if the heart doesn't. Genuine repentance is a changed life that produces fruit. Matthew 3:8 says, *"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;"* John MacArthur says, Repentance itself is not a work, but works are its inevitable fruit."

As we close this morning, I want to remind you of the main point of the message: God's Word helps the believer to understand guilt and know how to deal with it biblically through genuine repentance. Do you understand the Atonement of Christ? Do you understand guilt? Do you have a better understanding of how to deal with guilt through genuine repentance?

**Let's pray**

Cornerstone Community Church

Associate Pastor Dan Burleson

**Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB95) — 14** *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*