

Are you Living with Guilt

that doesn't belong to you?

By Dave Batty

Have you ever had someone say to you—“What kind of Christian are you?!? I thought Christians are supposed to help people in a crisis.” These words of condemnation can pierce the heart of one who has a desire to please God.

Sometimes parents put guilt on their children. One young girl told her mom that dad was sexually abusing her. Mother's response—“Don't you dare tell anyone about this! Do you want to be the one to send your daddy to prison and leave

us with no food and no place to live?”

Living with guilt that doesn't belong to us is a problem that robs Christians of the joy and freedom Jesus offers. Romans 8:1 states – “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” But this simple promise seems like an illusive dream to those living with guilt.

Guilt from others

Beth grew up in an alcoholic home—even the dog drank beer. Her parents gave her beer when she was only six years old. All through her teen years, alcohol was her constant companion.

After high school she joined the Air Force. Then, her mom met Christ—a commitment that grew deeper each year.

Beth came back home a drug addict, and soon became a mother with two small boys. She used guilt to get money from her mother—“Look at the way you raised me! The way I am today is your fault!”

Guilt pierced the mother's heart—and she often gave Beth whatever she asked for—money,

assistance for the two small grandchildren, bailing her daughter out of jail.

Many times those we love the most are placing guilt on us that

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doesn't belong to us. Some are experts at making you feel guilty if you don't rescue them in their times of crisis.

Guilt from your past

Some of us don't need any help from others to be flooded with feelings of guilt and condemnation. We look at our past failures and condemn ourselves.

We have men and women coming to Teen Challenge who remember how they got other young people hooked on drugs. That guilt is multiplied when they see those young

- ❖ **Why do so many Christians live with guilt?**
- ❖ **How do you determine whether the guilt you are feeling is from God, the devil, or yourself?**
- ❖ **What are God's conditions to living without guilt?**
- ❖ **If I am still feeling guilt after I have confessed my sin, is that sign from God that my confession was not sincere?**

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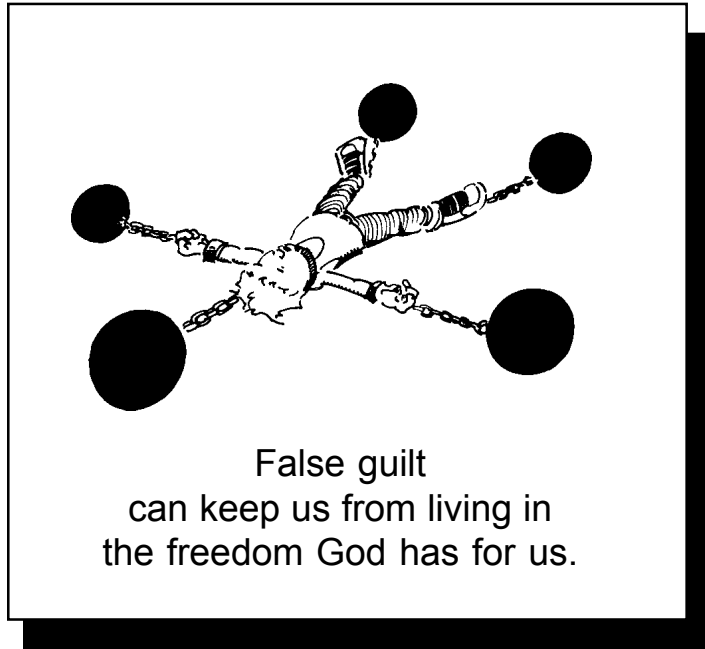
people die because of their addiction or become infected with the AIDS virus.

Ralph came to Teen Challenge after twenty years of drug addiction. He made several attempts to get his girlfriend into Teen Challenge. He felt tremendous guilt because he got

recent sins or for sins of the past.

What does God say about this guilt? Romans 8:1 makes a simple declaration—"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

So why the confusion?



her hooked on drugs. His newfound freedom in Christ was smothered in depression as he recalled the days of his past.

Does the guilt grow stronger the more you try to grow closer to God? You may face the repeating memory of past sins, and each time the movies play in your mind, waves of guilt and condemnation flood your heart.

But are you living with guilt that doesn't belong to you?

You say, "Look at what I did! I deserve to feel guilty. I knew better, but I did it anyway." So you pound yourself with guilt and condemnation. It may be guilt for

How terrible!"

Does God use guilt?

Oh yes. Guilt from God is a consequence of unconfessed sin. He uses it as a loud warning signal in our heart that we have a sin problem.

The solution is simple—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NIV) The words of Jesus reinforce this, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36 NIV)

Once we have confessed our sin, God will no longer use guilt or condemnation to remind us of our

past. He wants us to enter His freedom, His peace—completely free of condemnation.

The familiar and much loved promise of John 3:16 is followed by this powerful declaration. Jesus said, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned." (John 3:17-18a NIV)

True guilt is designed to lead us to repentance which leads us to God's peace in our hearts.

So why do I still feel guilty?

The enemy—Satan—wants to rob you of God's peace and joy. He comes with false guilt, which feels exactly the same as true guilt from God.

So how can I know if I'm feeling true guilt from God or false guilt? How do I know if I'm living with guilt that doesn't belong to me?

You must use God's truth to evaluate your feelings of guilt. You must examine your heart and ask, "Have I truly repented of my sins?" You may want to write down the specific memory that is flooding you with guilt. Then put it to the truth test.

1. Have I already confessed this sin?
2. When did I confess it?
3. Was I truly sincere?
Have I been completely honest with God?

If the answer to all these is "yes," then you can stand on the promises of 1 John 1:9 and

Are you punishing yourself with guilt?

Do you look at problems in your life today as God's punishment for past sins? When sickness or a financial setback comes into your life, do you see this as God's way of making you pay?

Or perhaps you have heard someone say, "God, what did I do to deserve this?"

Not all your problems are the result of your sins. When Saul (later called Paul) had his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, God sent Ananias to pray for him and give him a message from God: "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:16 NIV)

Paul could have lived with guilt for the rest of his life as he remembered the Christians he persecuted. The vivid memories of Stephen being stoned to death could have haunted him as he reminded himself that he did nothing but watch and approve of that death.

But Paul chose to look at life from a new point of view—God's. He said, "I have learned to be content in whatever state I am in." (Philippians 4:11-13) He recognized he had been a sinner—in fact, he described himself as the worst of sinners. (1 Timothy 1:16) But he walked in the freedom Christ provided.

Paul speaks with bold confidence that God's power would see him through every difficult circumstance he faced.

John 8:36. If you confess your sins, He promises to forgive and cleanse you—not 2 months from now—immediately.

If you have any doubt about the sincerity of your previous confession—confess it again and then instantly claim God's peace and forgiveness.

When I was a teenager, I committed a sin one day. Before I went to sleep that night I prayed and confessed my sin. In the weeks and months that followed, the memory of that sin would come back, and with it, waves of guilt and condemnation.

Four or five times in the weeks that followed, I confessed that sin again. But every time the memory returned, the guilt came too.

Finally one day it dawned on me, "I have confessed this sin as sincerely as I know how. I have turned my back on this sin—I'm living in obedience to Jesus. I've got to accept the reality of God's forgiveness and recognize this guilt is not from God. Then it must be from the enemy."

Don't ignore the guilt

When I came to this point of accepting God's truth, I didn't ignore the guilt and condemnation—I faced it. "Yes, Satan, I did sin in the past, but God has forgiven me. And I choose to live in His forgiveness and peace. So thanks for reminding me of God's mercy in my life."

The power of that old

memory was broken. Every time it returned I didn't try to ignore it, I repeated God's truth in relation to it—reminding myself and the devil of God's response to my past sin. The power of guilt was broken. Today the memory of that sin no longer robs me of God's peace.

So why not just ignore the guilt? Because it may be from God. I need to say as David did in Psalms 51, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Psalm 51:1-2 NIV)

If I can identify a sin that I have not confessed, then I need to use that very moment to specifically confess that sin and make a commitment to turn from that activity and follow Jesus. I need to repeat God's promise of 1 John 1:9 and stand on His promise to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

God does not use guilt to punish His children

You may find it easy to pound yourself with guilt as you recall past failures or sins. But God only uses guilt to motivate us to come to Him and confess our sins.

Once those sins are forgiven, He does not use guilt to punish us, no matter how serious the sin. See Romans 8:1.

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If the memory of that sin returns, and with it waves of guilt and condemnation, I need to reject those feelings—they are not from God.

A freshman in Bible college had guilt dumped on him by a friend. This difficult relationship continued for weeks. He said, “I have to keep rehearsing the facts because if I listen to my feelings, I just get confused.”

You may ask—“Why can't I shake these feelings of guilt?” Past failures still haunt you with guilt. You've confessed your sins, perhaps many times, still the guilt persists. Keep repeating God's truth—the enemy will not quit just because you win one battle—he will come again and again. He will whisper in your ear — “If your sin was truly forgiven, you wouldn't feel any guilt today.”

You must stand on the words of Jesus, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then

you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32 NIV) False guilt loses its power when we understand God's truth and apply it.

Not just for sins

Satan can pound us with guilt for things that are not even sin. I once went into a bank to cash a check and deposit part of it in my bank account. After the teller had completed the transaction, I realized I wanted a little more deposited, so I asked him to change it. He did.

Driving away from the bank I felt condemnation and guilt.

Why?

The enemy doesn't need a good or logical reason to pound us with guilt. He will use anything!

Several times in the next few days the memory of that bank transaction flooded me with guilt.

Finally I said to myself, “Wait a minute Dave, you did not lie, or steal, or cheat the bank. All you asked was a change in your deposit.” It took less than twenty seconds to make the change! “This guilt is not from God—recognize its source! Respond with God's truth.”

The power of that guilt was instantly broken. Not by rebuking the guilt or Satan, but by focusing on God's truth as it related to this specific situation.

James offers practical advice on responding to the devil's attacks. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:7-8 NIV) The most powerful way to resist the devil is to come close to

God—close to His truth, His promises, His forgiveness, His peace.

We can't change our past, but we can use our past to meditate on God's truth. The promise of Romans 8:1 to be free from condemnation is for each child of God, not just the super saints!

We have a young lady at Teen Challenge whose mom died when she was 16 years old. Since that

As your memory plays vivid scenes of movies of past horrible sins, you can respond with God's truth and refuse to give room to guilt and condemnation.

tragedy, she has carried guilt—she felt responsible for her mom's death. Many children feel responsible for the divorce of their parents. This guilt is not from God.

Don't let the power of other people's condemnation rob you of God's peace. Fix your eyes on Jesus—He is not a condemning God.

When the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus (John 8) her accusers verbally pounded her with guilt. Jesus—slow to respond—said “If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7 NIV) When Jesus stood to face her, he asked, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Jesus responded, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave

The truth test for guilt feelings

“Have I truly repented of my sins?” You may want to take a close look at a specific memory that is flooding you with guilt. Then put it to this test.

1. Have I already confessed this sin?
2. When did I confess it?
3. Was I truly sincere? Have I been completely honest with God?

If the answer to all these is yes, then you can stand on the promises of 1 John 1:9, John 8:36, and Romans 8:1.

your life of sin.” (John 8:11 NIV)

When another woman quietly reached out through a noisy crowd and touched His garment, she experienced miraculous healing. (Luke 8:42-48) “Who touched me?” Jesus asked and then repeated His question.

The woman came forward trembling, admitting that she was one. He tells her “Go in peace!” Jesus doesn't send us away with guilt or condemnation, He sends us out in peace.

As your memory movies play uninvited scenes of horrible sins, you can respond with God's truth and refuse to give room to condemnation. No matter how often the reruns play, you can still go in peace.

Put God's sound track to these old reruns. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!”

Romans 8:1 offers a simple promise for each child of God— “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We can live free of guilt.

The only legitimate place guilt has in our life is from the moment we sin until we confess that sin. Guilt can be a very temporary part of our lives.

What can be a permanent part of our lives is God's peace—His love, His mercy, His kindness, His loving, encouraging presence. We are not perfect, but we are forgiven.

Are you Living with Guilt that doesn't belong to you? Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. What are the things in your past that cause you to feel guilty when you recall these events?
2. How do you respond when people try to put guilt on you?
3. Read 1 John 1:9. Describe how this verse relates to the specific memories that bring guilt into your life.
4. How easy or difficult is it for you to face the memories of your past sins or failures?
5. Read John 8:38. What sins or past failures are hardest for you to apply this verse?
6. Read James 5:16. How easy or difficult is it for you to use this process in your daily living?
7. What is one area of your life where you need to change your response so you can stop living with guilt that does not belong to you?



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