



Learning to Live With The Guilt of Sin

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Long before Microsoft Word and laser printers, there was the typewriter. Have you ever had and used a typewriter? Back in the eighties, I had a typewriter. I actually wrote my sermons and church bulletins each week on a typewriter. Do you remember a product called "whiteout?" I kept a bottle of whiteout in my desk drawer. It seemed that no matter what you did, there always seemed to be some residue of the whiteout that remained, and you could still faintly see the mistake underneath.

A lot of us are like that with life. God forgives us, but we can't seem to forgive ourselves. We still think about our past sins. He takes away the guilt, but we are still haunted by our past mistakes. We still feel guilty.

My favorite key on the keyboard is the one that is on the upper right part of the keyboard, and I go there often. On your keyboard, it may be called the backspace key. On my keyboard, it is the delete key. It doesn't matter how often you use the delete key. When you are done making all the corrections, misspelled words, and adjusting the alignment, your document looks perfect. There isn't even a trace of evidence that a mistake had been made. It is perfect, and there is nothing there to remind you that you ever made a mistake. Wouldn't it be nice if life worked that way?

Let's think about God's willingness to forgive us, and let's treat it as a challenge to forgive ourselves. Let's think about those feelings of guilt and think of forgiveness more like the delete key than typewriter whiteout. As we think about these things, consider two observations.

1. The things we do to try to address our feelings of guilt and make ourselves feel better.
2. The things we should do to help erase the feelings of guilt.

What We Do To Erase Feelings of Guilt



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1. WE DENY THAT WE MADE A MISTAKE

This is when we take those memories of our past mistakes, and we shove them all the way back into our subconscious, and we choose not to think about what we did. We pretend that it never happened. Because we don't think about what we did, we don't have to deal with the feelings of guilt over what we did. We try to repress our feelings.

Psychologists tell us that this is extremely dangerous to do. It can result in the mind becoming fragmented. Taken to the extreme, it can result in multiple personalities because we are playing games with our past as we try to live with our feelings.

Think about what the Bible says about denying sin.

1 JOHN 1.8: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

We don't think about what we have done. We pretend that it never happened. We block it out of our minds in repression. The Bible tells us that this is not the way to deal with sin.

There's a man in the Bible who tried to do pretend that he never sinned. His name is David. He did some terrible things in reference to Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. He then denied that it ever happened. Later, in Psalm 32, David wrote about what he did in trying to repress the thoughts of his past mistakes.

PSALM 32.3-5: *"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer."*

David writes that he tried to hide his sin and pretend that he did nothing wrong, but it didn't work. It kept gnawing at him. But like David, repression is one of the things that we do to avoid feeling guilty about our past mistakes, and it is not very healthy or effective.



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2. WE JUSTIFY OUR MISTAKES

Some deal with the guilt of their past sins by convincing themselves that what they did was justified. We refuse to accept the fact that we have done something that would cause us to feel guilty. We claim that there was nothing wrong with what we did, and reject the idea that we have sinned.

Think about some Bible passages about rejecting the idea that we have sinned.

1 JOHN 1.10: *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*

Notice the difference between 1 John 1.8 and 1 John 1.10. In verse 8, we deny or pretend that we have not done anything wrong. In verse 10, we think about what we have done, but we have labeled it as being okay.

There is a group of people in the Bible who tried to justify their sin. They were the Israelites. If you turn to the Old Testament book of Jeremiah and read chapter 2, you would find that God sends a man to the nation of Israel with a message. God condemns Israel for their idolatry and worship of false gods called "Baals." Notice how Israel viewed their sin.

JEREMIAH 2.23: *"How can you say, 'I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals'? See your way in the valley; know what you have done: You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways"*

They looked at their idolatry as something for which they should have no feelings of guilt. They said, "I am not polluted." They rejected the idea of their sin.

3. WE BLAME SOMEONE ELSE FOR OUR MISTAKES

This is when we try to deal with the sins of our past by blaming someone else. Some will say that they can live with what they did because it was not their fault. It was the fault of someone else.



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Who was the first one to try that? It was Adam and Eve.

GENESIS 3.12,13: *"Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' And the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"*

Notice the blame game that they played.

- Adam blamed Eve. "...*she gave me of the tree, and I ate.*" He tried to say that if Eve had not offered him the fruit, he would not have eaten. It was her fault.
- Adam blamed God. *"The woman whom You gave to be with me..."* Adam not only blamed his wife, but he blamed God for giving him his wife.
- Even blamed the serpent. *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

Did blaming someone else work with God? Both of them tried to deflect their guilt and redirect it onto someone else. Neither one of them would take responsibility for what they did. They both tried to blame someone else.

There is another one who tried to play the blame game. We can read about Aaron in Exodus 32. There you read about Moses as he is up on the mountain talking with God. Joshua says to Moses that there is the sound of war in the camp. Moses realizes that it is not the sound of war but the sound of a party with singing and dancing. Moses came down to the camp and was so angry at what he saw that he threw down the tablets of the Ten Commandments and broke them in pieces. He went to Aaron and asked for an explanation for this golden calf. Notice what Aaron said.

EXODUS 32.24: *"And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."*

Listen to what Aaron is saying. He says that he asked everyone for gold. He took the gold they gave him and threw it into the fire, and this gold calf just happened to come out. That was Aaron's way of saying that it wasn't his fault. He tried to deflect the guilt of sin.

What about King Saul? In 1 Samuel 15, Saul was told to completely destroy all the Amalekites, including women, children, and livestock. Saul comes back with the king of Amalekites and all the best of the livestock. He did exactly what he was told not to do.



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Samuel comes onto the scene and asks for an explanation. Saul says that he did everything that he was supposed to do. Samuel then asks why he hears the sound of livestock. Notice how Saul answered.

1 SAMUEL 15.21: *"But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."*

Saul tried to blame the people and say that they were the ones who took the plunder and livestock. God took the kingdom away from Saul because of that sin, and Samuel. From that moment on, Saul went into an emotional tailspin. He was plagued with chronic depression. He tried to kill David, and he ended up losing his own life. It all began with Saul sinning, and then trying to deflect blame away from himself.

4. WE PUNISH OURSELVES

Another way we deal with the guilt of our past mistakes is by trying to punish ourselves. We acknowledge that we have sinned, and we feel guilty about it. In order to feel better about what we have done, we punish ourselves by depriving ourselves of something.

There are some that will literally beat themselves by banging their head against the wall. Some will deprive themselves of food. They will hurt themselves as a way of absolving themselves of guilt. Some believe that this is what was behind the practice of putting on sackcloth and sitting in ashes like Job did (Job 16.15).

So there are a variety of methods we will employ to try to deal with the guilt of the mistakes we have made in the past. May I suggest a better way?

What Should We Do To Erase Feelings Of Guilt?



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We can learn how to live successfully with the guilt of our past by looking at the example of the apostle Paul. In Acts 26, we read an account of Paul standing before King Agrippa and reflecting back on his life. Notice specifically verses 9-11.

ACTS 26.9-11: *"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."*

As Paul reflected back on his life, he thought about how he would go all over the place looking for Christians. When he found them, he would throw them in prison. When the Jewish court took a vote as to whether or not to sentence these Christians to death, he always voted for death.

Now let's let Paul tell us how he learned to successfully deal with the guilt of what he had done in the past. Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy.

1 TIMOTHY 1.12-16: *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."*

Did you see how Paul refers to himself as a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man? Did you notice how he calls himself the chief of sinners? The apostle Paul struggled with his past much like we do. When you read through all the writings of Paul, he is constantly reminded about his past. He is constantly writing to churches and individuals about what he did. He was haunted by his past, but he learned to live with it.

Here is the bottom line about our past sin. When God forgive us, He forgets. He treats us as if we have never done those things. God does that, but we don't do that. We are



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constantly bringing those things back to our minds. We have to learn to live with what we have done. Paul did as well. Watch what he did, and let's learn from Paul's example.

1. BE SOMEONE WHO LIVES TO HELP OTHERS.

How do you learn to live with the sins of my past? See yourself as a servant that Jesus uses to help others.

You start out by changing the way that you see yourself. Don't see yourself through the eyes of the person you used to be. Change the way you see yourself, and see yourself as someone Jesus uses to help others.

1 TIMOTHY 1.12: *"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry"*

The word "enabled" is translated from a Greek word (the original language of the New Testament). The Greek word is "endunimoo." Let's break this word down.

- En: This is a prefix that means "inside."
- Dunimos: This is the root word that means "power."
- Put it together and you have a word that refers to having power on the inside.

Paul writes that he is thankful to Jesus because He has empowered him. Jesus Christ our Lord has given him an ability, and He has led him and has placed him into a position where he helps people. Paul says that he is going to deal with his past by thinking of himself as someone Jesus uses to help people.

If you want to learn how to live with your past, change the way you think of yourself and start thinking of yourself as a servant.

2. REFLECT BACK ON YOUR CONVERSION

That's what Paul did.



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1 TIMOTHY 1.13: *“although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”*

The phrase *“obtained mercy”* is written in a form that refers to a specific point in time. It doesn't mean that he received and then continued to receive mercy. It says that in his past, he was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man. Then there came a specific point in his life where he obtained mercy. In other words, he is thinking about his conversion. He used to be one way, but he was changed into something else.

You heard the gospel because someone shared the gospel with you. You believed in Jesus as the Son of God. You reflected back on your life and changed the way you think that resulted in a change in the way you live. You confessed the name of Jesus. You were immersed in water, and the blood of Jesus Christ washed away all your sins.

If you want to learn how to deal with the guilt of your past sins, reflect back on the day you were converted, and remember that on that day, a bold line was drawn. On one side of the line was the life of sin you once lived. On the other side of the line is the life of purity you now live. You don't have to feel guilty about that person of the past. That person doesn't exist anymore. This is the person you are now.

3. TRUST IN WHAT GOD DID FOR YOU.

1 TIMOTHY 1.14: *“And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant”*

Grace is defined as a gift that God gives to us that we do not deserve (Eph. 2.8). This gift was given to us because God showed us mercy, love, and kindness (Eph. 2.4-7).

When Paul refers to the grace of God, he is referring to God showing him mercy, love, and kindness that moved God to give him the gift of salvation that he did not deserve.

Watch how Paul described this grace. He says that God's grace was *“exceedingly abundant.”* In the original Greek language, this translates just one word: Huperpleonazo

- Huper is a word that means “above.”



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- Pleonazo is a word that means “overflowing.”
- Take a cup and fill it with water, and it gets to the point where it is about to overflow. Then keep on filling it so that it overflows the cup. That’s the word translated as “exceedingly abundant.”

The mercy, kindness, and love of God is so abundant that it is overflowing. It is pouring out of the seams. This is how God feels about us. So when you are down on yourself, stop thinking about how you feel and start thinking about how God feels. That ought to help alleviate the guilt.

4. THINK ABOUT THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

1 TIMOTHY 1.15: *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”*

There is an observation in this verse that are very interesting. It is of interest that Paul uses the present tense to describe himself. He writes, *“I am chief.”* Paul still saw himself as the chief of sinners. He still knew what he did, and he still wrestled with it. But he learned to live with himself in spite of what he did because of Jesus.

But Jesus came to save sinners. He did not come so that I can live my life and hope that I am saved. He did not come so that I do the best that I can and maybe if I am lucky, I will be saved. Jesus came to save sinners, and I am one of them. Jesus saved me in spite of my past. So when you are feeling guilty because of the sins of your past, remember that you are in a saved condition.

5. TELL OTHERS WHAT JESUS DID FOR YOU.

1 TIMOTHY 1.16: *“However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”*



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Paul says that he had been saved so others could see what Jesus can do even to the worst of sinners. Paul is saying that there is no one as bad as him. This means that Jesus can point to Paul as an example of what He can do.

If you see yourself as a slave to your past, it is could be because you still are a slave to your past and have not resolved the problem of sin in your life. But if you see yourself as a slave to your past but the shackles are no longer there because you have been forgiven, then it is time to change the way you see yourself, and start seeing yourself the way God sees you.