

GOD, "I FEEL GUILTY"

Have you ever said, "I feel so guilty because I -----" Of course you have. We all face the problem of guilt.

Because we have a conscience, guilt is a problem. Conscience has been balled by many "the voice of God within us--the knowing part of man which agrees with God's revelations of right and wrong. "It was created in us by God to operate according to divine law. Since the testimony of conscience rests upon divine law, it's beyond our control.

The dictionary defines conscience as "a knowledge or feeling of right or wrong, with compulsions to do right; of moral judgment that prohibits or opposes the violations of a previously recognized ethical principle.'" Human conscience is that inner awareness and feeling of responsibility for wrong actions.

When the alternator light on the dash panel of my car glows, it tells me something is wrong and needs immediate attention. And everytime we violate a basic principle of right or wrong, a little "conscience light" glows inside to tell us something is morally wrong and needs immediate attention. Its our early warning system that lets us know immediately when we have stepped out of bounds. Like the light on the car, the light of conscience will continue to glow until the problem has been solved.

While conscience reminds us when we have done wrong, it is not sufficient to make us do right. The Bible tells us the condition of our conscience is determined by our conduct. We can have a "good conscience" (clear) by doing what is in harmony with God's standard. • Hebrews: _Book- said; "Pray- for us, for we are sure that we have a good; conscience, desiring to conduct', ourselves honorably in all things." (Heb. 13:18) 'Good' conscience was dependent upon honorable conduct.

When we do wrong, we have what Scripture calls a "defiled conscience." "Defiled" comes from an old Greek verb MIANINE meaning to dye with another color or to stain. Corrupt conduct "stains" our conscience, making us feel guilty. Paul told Titus, "to the pure all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled". (Titus 1:15)

When a man continues in error and corrupt living, he reaches the point where his conscience no longer responds to right or wrong. Paul's says, "By means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron" (I Tim. 4:2) When the hot iron of persistent wrong conduct is applied, one's conscience is seared and becomes desensitized to wrong. Ignoring the warning light of conscience will gradually reduce its effectiveness until it eventually ceases to function ---the bulb or our "conscience light" burns out.

If you run a red light and are like most, you immediately look to see if the police are coming. If not, you sigh inwardly and say, "I got away with it." But did you? On the surface it may appear

that you didn't get caught. But just because no one saw you doesn't mean you got away with it. Your conscience will bring you to court and return the verdict ---**GUILTY!**

Sin is the culprit in a guilty conscience. Paul's tells us, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Man was created in the image of God and designed to be a reflector of His holiness. When man rebelled he was no longer able to live up to God's standard of holiness. Since then whenever we do something that violates the holiness of God, our "conscience light" glows.

Few days go by that our conscience doesn't inform us that we've violated God's standard of holiness. Unless we are able to deal with it, we will gather a load of unresolved guilt which in turn will cause many problems and prevent us from being the kind of free people God designed us to be.

The human is a delicate mechanism. Small problems can cause emotional, physical, and spiritual upsets. Of all the problems that plague people today, guilt is one of the most pernicious and persistent. The main problem prompting people to go to see a minister for help is the problem of guilt.

What a handful of sand will do to a piece of machinery, unresolved guilt will do to us ---make a mess of our lives and constrict our usefulness: Unresolved guilt causes emotional tension and saps our happiness. True contentment and joy results only when there is no inner conflict.

Guilt demolishes our confidence, and since confidence is based in part on concealment of our past failures, many people live in constant fear of someone will find out about their past. Like an escaped criminal, they fear the discovery of skeletons in their closet.

Unresolved guilt can cause great emotional stress and physical problems. And to escape the pressure of a guilty conscience some drown their guilt in drink, food and dull its sting by drugs and other things.

Guilt may also drive a person to a life of reckless abandon in a frantic effort to escape the condemning finger of conscience. Many live such a high pace they need tranquilizers for sleep and a roll of antacids to soothe the upset stomach.

Unresolved guilt will cause spiritual tensions, rob us of our fellowship with God, and make us afraid of Him. After Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they tried to hide from His presence because they didn't want to be confronted with their failure. Guilt deadens the desire for the Word of God and fellowship with other believers, because they serve only to aid conscience in accusing us.

Guilt will rob us of spiritual joy. We may go through the motions of being a "happy little soldier of Jesus," yet at the same time feel like there's a rock in the pit of our stomach. Going through the motions of Christianity with a guilty conscience compounds our misery.

Remember David ? he poured out his heart to God in his great psalm of confession. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit." (Ps. 51:12) Sin had ripped away his joy, but once David experienced the forgiveness of God, he could rejoice and say, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Ps 32:1)

Since guilt is basically a spirit problem, it requires a spiritual solution. Human attempts to resolve guilt only magnify the problem.

Some of today's modern thinkers try to relieve guilt by excusing our actions. It's become popular to say we are the product of our environment; therefore, we have no reason to feel guilty. Some existential philosophers may proclaim our innocence for our sins: but the man in the street knows by experience he's responsible, guilt would not be the problem it is.

A popular cliché suggests: "Time heals all wounds." Time may heal all wounds except a wounded conscience!

There was a story I read about many years ago, it happened in Scotland, where sheep stealing was a capital offense, a farmer reported the loss of several of his flock. To catch the thief the authorities placed two officers on surveillance. Late one night they spotted a man approaching. Then just as he reached the spot where the officers were hidden, he turned and ran: but they caught him. He was subsequently brought to trial and condemned to hang. But the judge felt uneasy about the verdict and penalty, and visited the man prior to his hanging. After explaining why he had come, the judge asked, "Why did you run if you were innocent?" The man broke down and sobbed, "Twenty years ago, I killed a man at that spot. I don't know why but I feel compelled to return there often. But everytime I near the spot, I break and run. My conscience has haunted me for two decades. I deserve to die. Maybe if I'm hanged, I'll find peace."

Time does not heal a wounded conscience. Paying the penalty demanded by society will not heal the wounded conscience. A man may satisfy the demands of the State for a given crime, but that will not deliver him from the scourge of a condemning conscience.

If you have tried all the solutions and panaceas but are still plagued by guilt, perhaps you are ready for God's remedy.

Hebrews Chapter 10, has some practical helps for those who want to be freed from a guilty conscience. Actually, the solution on paper is easier than putting it into practice.

Three things are necessary.

First: You must **accept that complete forgiveness is possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Hebrews reminds us the Israelites knew nothing of the complete forgiveness that is possible for us today.

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the

worshippers once purged should have had to more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Or as the Living Bible says: Verse three, "But just the opposite happened! those yearly sacrifices reminded them of their disobedience and guilt instead of relieving their minds."

What a difference we have now through Christ.

Their sacrifices did not bring forgiveness, but rather served as an annual reminder that they were guilty before God. "But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year." Israel was not permitted to forget that they were guilty of violating God's holiness. Each year as the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, they were reminded that the sacrifices covered their sins without bringing complete forgiveness.

But that system of reminders ended with the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come to remind us of sin; He came to forgive! He offered Himself once as a sacrifice to take away the sin of this world (all past sins covered previously by animal sacrifices, were carried away by His death.)

"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but He having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down at the right hand of God." (Heb. 10:10-12)

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb. 10:14)

By His sacrifice, He made provision for the complete forgiveness of sins. The Bible declares that His death satisfied God, and the penalty for sin was paid in full. You can have complete forgiveness for every sin you have ever committed.

Second: You must accept that God forgets when He forgives.

"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. When God grants remission of sin there can be no question of making further atonement. (Heb. 10:17-18)

How long do you remember a paid bill once you have paid it, we forget it, God says the death of Christ paid our bill for sin. Once its paid He forgets it and never again, reminds, us of it!

Paul declared a new day for the believer "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Christ bore the guilt of sin when He paid the penalty on the cross. Because Jesus Christ come to make us whole, He forgave and then forgot!

In practice, this means the death of Christ took care of all the sins we have committed before we trusted Him as Saviour and Lord. It also means His death will take care of any sins we

commit after trusting Christ. When we sin, we can experience instant forgiveness by confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

When you sin and then confess to God, He forgives you. His forgiveness assures us He has forgotten and will never remember it again. Accept that fact.

If God forgets our sins as soon as we confess them, why is it that we continue to be tormented by a guilty conscience? Any reminder of sins already confessed is from Satan. He is the one who causes people to, "God couldn't forgive the horrible thing I did," and may prompt them to consider suicide. Once we accept God's forgiveness and believe He forgets when He forgives we can stand tall and call Satan the liar he is when he suggests God couldn't or wouldn't forgive us.

Third: You must accept yourself as God does. Quit torturing yourself with a past sin. God had forgiven you now accepts you as though you had never sinned.

You may say, "But you don't know the terrible thing I've done. I can't forgive myself." It doesn't matter how small or great your failing, God forgives and forgets. He took your sin and mine and laid it on Jesus Christ. Now He accepts you in Him. For your own mental and spiritual health, forgive yourself, drop that load of guilt, and accept yourself as God does.

If after confessing your sins to God you pick up your bundle of guilt and take it home with you, you are worse off than before, because now you have rejected God's forgiveness and carrying your guilt alone. Jesus invited us to come unto Him for rest. Part of that rest is rest from the torture of a guilty conscience. God has taken care of the problem, so, quit torturing yourself. Accept yourself as God does, and you will have genuine peace of mind.

Go ahead, unload your guilt on Christ and enjoy the blessings of a clear conscience.

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