

Being Free From Guilt

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Some things in life are certain; we all face into temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13), and we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In James we're told about the nature of temptation and sin, and how the former begets the latter: *"each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death"* (James 1:14-15).

Even for the godly person, sin brings guilt. When the wrong in one's life is rectified, that guilty feeling should cease. The sacrifice and intercession of Jesus makes this possible. He frees us from the guilt and penalty of sin.

The apostle Paul calls this to the memory of the church at Corinth in his first letter to them. In chapter 6:9-10, he records a kind of grocery list of sins, some of the vilest nature. He concludes by saying in verse 11, *"such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God..."* Those who had been homosexuals, were homosexuals no longer, and so forth. Not only was Paul warning them against relapsing into their former sins, but he was also telling them to move forward.

After all, Paul himself was no stranger to a guilt-ridden past. He was party to the stoning of Steven, watching the coats of those who killed him (Acts 22:20), and as a Jew, he heartily persecuted the early church. As a Christian, Paul did not allow guilt about his past to hinder his service to God in the present. In Philippians 3:13-14 he writes, *"forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* You can't drive forward looking in the rearview mirror, and neither can you grow fixated on the past. We must trust in God's forgiveness, and with it, forgive ourselves as well. Just think how ineffective Paul would have been if his boldness as a Christian were compromised by insecurities about his former life. Aside from attacks on his apostleship, he also faced initial hostility and distrust by the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26), and while he uses a hyperbole in calling himself the *"foremost of sinners"* (1 Timothy 1:15), he was always *"pressing on,"* not dwelling on what lay behind.

Returning once more to 1 Corinthians 6:11, we must also realize that temptations do not define us. Someone has to fornicate to be a fornicator, not simply be tempted. The Hebrew writer states in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus can sympathize with us in our temptations because as a man He was tempted Himself, yet without sin.

Therefore, we must not let temptations discourage us or allow Satan to convince us that a temptation is our destiny. Although he brings us the seeds, we are the ones who decide

whether we plant them or discard them. Remember, *“no temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

While some things in life are certain, our temptations and past sins as determinants of what we become are not. We, too, then must be found daily pressing on, waiting until that day our hope is realized and we dwell with God in glory forever.

By the Ladies

God Sent Me Here!

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I want you to be honest with yourself. How many times have you been wronged by someone you are close to - maybe a family member or friend? And then, you thought, "How could they have done that to me" or "I'm sure they wouldn't have done this if something bad had happened to them first." While these might be normal reactions for people in the world today, this is not how God would have His children react.

In the Bible, Joseph is a perfect example of a follower of God who stood his course no matter what. Think about it. When he lived with his father, Joseph seemed to have everything going for him. He was one of his father's favorite sons, and God had already begun to send him dreams about his future. Then, when he shared these dreams with his brothers, instead of being glad for him, they became extremely jealous. Not only did the brothers sell Joseph into slavery, but they faked Joseph's death and deceived their own father.

How sad and lonely Joseph must have felt being separated from his family and having no way to get back to them. One would think that if he ever saw his brothers again Joseph would want to get even with them. But no. When the brothers came to Egypt for help, they had no idea that Joseph would be the one holding their fate in his hands. After testing his brothers to see if their hearts had changed, Joseph revealed himself to them. Understandably, the brothers become dismayed at this news. After all, Joseph now had the power to do whatever he wanted to them. However, Joseph did not blame his brothers for sending him to Egypt.

In Genesis 45:8, Joseph's reply to them was *"So it was not you who sent me here, but God..."* Joseph realized that even though his road to power in Egypt began rough, ultimately, this had been God's plan for him. Obviously, he had forgiven his brothers for their wrongdoing toward him.

We should have this same attitude for those who sin against us. Colossians 3:13 *"...if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."* So, the next time you are a victim of wrongdoing, think of Jo-

seph's example and be quick to forgive, realizing that this event may be a part of God's wonderful plan for you!

After all, God has told his children in 1 Peter 5:7 that they should "*cast all their anxieties on Him because He cares for them.*" And, He promises to "*supply all their needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). How wonderful it is to have a heavenly Father who cares so much for His children!

(All scripture is taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible)

Why Be Spiritually Minded?

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Who among us hasn't heard "you need to be more spiritually minded?" We all have heard it at some point but do we fully understand what's being said? When people want us to be spiritually minded they're not saying to be a religious nut, or a superhuman Christian, they are wanting us to focus on spiritual things. This is a good intention, but many times we might not understand the specifics of being spiritually minded.

Being spiritually minded is the one thing we have to be able to understand and have down in our lives as Christians. Romans 12:1-2 reads "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*" In this text Paul tells us about a transformation that comes from being spiritually minded. The word conformed reminds me of watching my mom make Jello. She would prepare the Jello, and then pour it into a mold. After a few hours, out would come a Jello race car. The Jello was conformed to the shape of the mold. Paul is saying not to allow yourself to be put into the mold of the world, but rather be changed by renewing your mind. The word transformed goes back to the word metamorphosis. Just as a caterpillar undergoes a complete transformation when it becomes a butterfly, sinful man can become what God wants by renewing his mind. When Paul speaks of renewing our minds, he is saying we are to adjust our will to match God's. Paul gives us everything we want as Christians, and it's through a change in mindset.

In order to renew our minds and become transformed by the word of God, we must first know and understand it. The reason we study is so that we can understand what God's desires are for our lives. But, the cost of being spiritually minded is paid in the amount of reading, study, and application we do. In Psalm 119:104 it reads, "*Through your precepts I get understanding, Therefore I hate every false way.*" The writer tells us that we get understanding from knowing God's law. When God shows His will in scripture we can understand what He wants. Also, it is not enough to only understand the will of God. We must also transform our lives. The psalmist says that we get understanding from God's will. This understanding leads us to hate every false way. Through knowing God's will, then we are compelled to obey it.

In Genesis 39 is the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Here is a situation in which many young people could find themselves. Joseph is seduced, but Joseph does not give

into the temptation - why? Genesis 39:9 reads *“There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* How did Joseph know it was a sin against God? Joseph knew it was sin because he knew God’s will, and because of that he resisted the temptation. He would not conform to the world, but He was transformed by adjusting his thoughts and will to those of God’s.

As Christians we must have a change of focus and we change it through obedience to God’s word. Having a change of thought will lead to a change in attitude and result in a changed life. Knowing God’s will, Joseph had an attitude of obedience. This allowed him to react in a godly way, thus transforming his will to that of God. May we always keep in mind the powerful thoughts of Psalm 119:11: *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.”*

Changing the World Begins in Your Mind

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How does one change the world? Where does one begin? When setting out to make a difference in the world, one has to go no further than their own mind. The first step to changing others around us is making sure that we are living the changes we would like to see in others. As Jesus phrased it, *“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matthew 7:4-5).

It all begins in the mind. The writer of Proverbs informs us, *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7). One cannot do anything without first deciding to in his mind/heart. This may seem elementary to some. You might actually be thinking, “Wow, that’s profound. Of course I can’t do anything without thinking it in my mind first.” What is one of the most popular things to do when your caught doing something wrong? “I didn’t mean to!” “I don’t know why I said that, I didn’t mean it!” And on the story goes. This does not limit itself to the young but adults do the same. “I was caught in the moment and lost my head.” With no exception to situation, you must first think of something before you can do it. In the New Testament we live under today, Christ explained why thinking about adultery is condemned and not just the act or saying you hate your brother is the same as killing him (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28). *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”* (Luke 6:45).

By controlling our thoughts, we can control our attitude and our actions. The man that does not covet will never steal. The man that never lusts after a woman will not commit fornication. It all comes down to controlling our thoughts. Job made a covenant with his eyes that he would not look upon young women (Job 31:1). By avoiding the temptation all together, he avoided the sin. If you have a problem drinking, don’t go around alcohol. If you have a problem with saying things you shouldn’t, stay away from those subjects or the group that brings those things out of you.

When your mind is right, everything else will fall into place. Consider the words of Paul: *“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind”* (Philippians 3:15-16). In verse 15, Paul says the key to being of the same mind is having a mature mindset as he did and in verse 16 it comes by walking by the same rule. These two are the same. You cannot think like a mature Christian and practice evil. You cannot think evil and be a true Christian. It is impossible.

This is extremely important to evangelism. People watch and observe Christians all the time. Many are looking for a disciple of Christ to sin and then they feel that they can justify their own sinful life. Some are watching to see if we “practice what we preach.” Hypocrites can ruin a church faster than anything else. We cannot tell others what they should or shouldn’t do until we are living the Christian life. This does not mean one has to be perfect before setting off to take the gospel to others. What this means is that if we are going to hold others to the standard of the Bible, we have to hold ourselves to it first. Everyone knows that Christ alone was perfect. By avoiding evil situations, thinking maturely, living right before God, and preparing ourselves first to get to heaven, we can truly begin to seek and save the lost.

The Voice of Experience

The Truth About Sin

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Several years ago, the title of a book that was published asked the question, *Whatever Became of Sin?* Well, I must confess in a world where evil men and impostors proceed from bad to worse (2 Tim. 3:13), it does seem as if the word “sin” has disappeared from the human vocabulary. Sadly, even today, sin seems to be finding its way into the church.

Our responsibility as Christians is to walk as children of light; trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:8-10). Solomon says it this way, *“Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on”* (Prov. 4:14-15). Simply put ... *“avoid every form of evil”* (1 Thess. 5:22) and resist the devil (Jam. 4:7). Reverence for a holy God demands such an attitude and action (Prov. 8:13). And yet at times even the people of God forget the truth about sin. Just what does sin do?

Sin hurts God. Too often when people sin they begin by mourning over the consequences of their sin, such as disgrace, poverty, disease, and emotional discomfort, rather than shedding tears because they realize they’ve sinned against a holy God. When David had been confronted with his sin, he confessed to God, *“Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight”* (Psa. 51:4). David declared later in (verse

17), *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."* David's heart was broken because he realized he had broken the very heart of God. Sin hurts God!

Sin hurts others. In my estimation it's selfish to the core when people argue that their sins only bring headache and heartache to themselves. What utter foolishness. Try such immature and selfish reasoning with a parent who sheds tears at the funeral of their fourteen-year-old son whose life was taken suddenly and prematurely because some teenager thought it was cool to get drunk at a party and then drive home. Try such reasoning with the woman whose world is devastated by the adultery of her husband, and now is forced to explain to her three children why daddy left her for another woman. Be not deceived. Sin hurts others!

Sin is expensive. How much pain and heartache could be avoided if only people would recognize the high price of sin. Sin is so costly. Sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you ever intended to pay. *"He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow..."* (Prov. 22:8). Sin is expensive!

Sin will be dealt with by God. Too many ignore sin and its wages (Rom. 6:23) and think that somehow their sins will go unnoticed or be overlooked by God. Too many want to sow their "wild oats," and then pray for crop failure. God's spiritual law of sowing and reaping doesn't work that way. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life"* (Gal. 6:7-8). God will deal with sin and the sinner who refuses to repent. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10). Don't kid yourself, your sins will be brought into judgment; even those things that others don't know about. *"For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil"* (Eccl. 12:14). Sin will be dealt with by God!

Sin can be forgiven. What good news -- not that we have sinned, but that God in His grace will abundantly pardon any and all sins if we will truly confess them and forsake them! *"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon You"* (Psa. 86:5). Is there any message that brings hope like the good news that God forgives? If we will repent, our sin can be forgiven!

When all is said and done, the tragedy of sin is best seen in the price God was willing to pay for its removal. If sin is trivial, Christ's death is trivial. *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ..."* (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Only Jesus is the answer to our sin problem, and that's the truth about sin!