

How to Overcome Guilt

by Dwight Pentecost

Dwight Pentecost's sermon emphasizes the power of Christ's sacrifice to free believers from the burden of guilt and assure them of their forgiveness and identity in God.

Duration: 43:13

Scripture: Hebrews 8:12, Hebrews 10:7, Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 10:17, 1 Peter 5:8-9

Topics: "Guilt And Shame", "Blood Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the doctrine of the blood of Christ and its power to dismiss all sins from God's memory. He explains that while humans cannot dismiss guilt from their minds, God can and does dismiss the memory of sins covered by the blood of Christ. The preacher then discusses the practical response to this doctrine, highlighting the need to be vigilant against Satan, who is the accuser of the brethren. He encourages believers to resist Satan and his accusations by relying on the blood of Christ, which silences the accuser and brings joy and assurance to the believer.

Transcript

It seems to be one of the major problems, one of the perplexing problems that God's children face day by day. Even though we have been saved by the blood of Christ, have been brought into the family of God, it seems as though many are plagued by the knowledge, the remembrance of past sins, past failures, perhaps of wasted life or wasted years, and they consequently know little of the peace of God as their daily portion. I had a call in my office the day before yesterday when a stranger spoke when I answered the phone, and evidently this one had dialed a seminary number and asked to talk with someone there, because I had made a call through a switchboard a few minutes earlier.

They knew I was in my office, and so rang my office, and they called her, asked to whom she was speaking, and I identified myself, or I should say I gave my name. It obviously didn't mean anything, and she hesitated a moment and said, Do you know anything about the Bible? And I said, I've studied it some. She said, I'd like to ask you a question.

If a person has accepted Jesus as her Savior and commits a sin, can she still go to heaven? Several scriptures came to my mind, and I quoted the scriptures, and I said, Let the Bible answer your question, not me. She said, Yes, but you don't know the sin that has been committed. And she said, If a person is guilty of such and such a sin, is it still possible for them to go to heaven? It was my joy, once again, to point out that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

And the caller dissolved in tears and hung up the phone. Two weeks ago, I had a letter from California, shortly after returning from a ministry in the West Coast, and the writer wrote a letter that brought tears to my eyes as I read it. The writer had notified herself as being in her late fifties, as a young girl had walked in paths of sin as a young woman, and went through an extended period of distress and turmoil, seeking some knowledge of God and forgiveness of sin.

She told me that about 25 years ago, somebody had told her that Christ died for our sins, and that she had at that time accepted him as her personal Savior. She said, I heard you preach one night this past week. You indicated that you believed that a person who had accepted Christ could be certain that sins were forgiven and that the guilt of past sin was gone.

And she said, I've lived 25 years since I accepted Christ in constant fear and dread. Lest, perchance, what I did in my youth would exclude me finally from heaven. And it was my joy to write to her and point her to passages of scripture like these, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

A good part of my ministry outside of the public teaching or preaching ministry is in the ministry of counseling, and it has come to my consciousness that the one problem people have come to me to get help with more than any other is the problem of guilt. These are not unbelievers who are coming, but believers, people who have been saved and know that they have been saved, but whose lives are plagued by the past. I cannot help but notice the great difference between my present ministry and ministries that I had in former pastor.

For a good while, I could not understand this different type of ministry in which I was more and more becoming involved in counseling with people individually. It came to my realization that those to whom I was ministering in former pastorate were people who had been born in at nominally Christian homes, who had been brought up in Sunday school and in church, whose lives had been molded by the word of God, at least as far as external things were concerned. Oh, true, many of them were not saved and knew Christianity and not Churchianity, but their lives had been guarded because of that early exposure to the word of God and to the truth concerning Christ.

But I would say that the majority to whom I minister from week to week are individuals who have come to know Christ when they were of adult age, who did not come from Christian backgrounds, whose lives were not molded by the truth of the word, and consequently wandered in darkness and then came to know the light that is in the face of Jesus Christ and were saved, may I say it bluntly, out of heathenism. Without the benefits of the application of the word of God to the earlier years in their college and young adult years, they were involved in all sorts of things of which they are now ashamed. But that life has left an indelible mark upon them, and they wrestle with the problems of guilt.

I believe that the word of God has an answer to this problem. We recognize, to begin with, that guilt is the individual's response to his consciousness of a violation of God's holiness, an individual's response to his own consciousness of having violated the holiness of God. Paul says in Romans 3.23, "...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And that in which God glories above all else is his ineffable holiness, his unalterable righteousness. And God sets as his standard his own holiness, and anything that falls short of the holiness of God is classified by scripture as sin. And when an individual falls short of God's standard, that individual suffers the pangs of guilt.

Now, there is no man so depraved that he does not have a conscience, and a conscience is the voice of God that convicts an individual of his failure to attain the standards of God's holiness and God's righteousness. I repeat it, there is no people on the face of the earth so depraved that they are without this inner convicting voice that points them to their failure to attain the standards of the holiness and righteousness of God. Therefore, men apart from the work of Jesus Christ are guilt-ridden.

This is true in a sophisticated city such as Dallas, or in the jungles of Peru or Africa." The Apostles testify to the existence of this convicting work of God in the second chapter of Romans, verses 14 and 15. The Apostle is showing that the Jews fall short of God's standard of holiness because they have violated the written law of God. The Mosaic law was given to Israel, and Israel had the requirements of divine holiness spelled out line upon line and precept upon precept.

When Israel sinned, they were guilty because they transgressed a known law. Then the question arises in the mind of the reader, since the law was given to Israel and the Gentiles did not receive a written law, are Gentiles guilty before God? Do Gentiles suffer the pangs of guilt the same way the Jews suffer the pangs of guilt? The Apostle Paul's answer is in the affirmative. Yes, Gentiles, even without the law, suffer from guilt.

Now, how can you explain that? Paul explains it in verse 14 of Romans 2, when the Gentiles, which have not the law, that is, the law of Moses, do by nature the things contained in the law. These Gentiles, having not the law, are a law unto themselves which showeth the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness. Now, what does the conscience bear witness to? The same thing that the written law of Moses bears witness to, the demands of divine holiness and righteousness.

So, Paul says that God has written the law in the hearts of men so that that written law, or the conscience, convicts man when they fall short of God's holiness and they are guilty before God, and a man who is guilty before God suffers the pangs of guilt. Now, when a man is guilty, or when a man suffers the pangs of guilt, he may try to cover that guilt in a number of ways, and I am not talking just about unbelievers, but I am talking principally about believers now. We must reckon and recognize that guilt is one of the greatest drives that an individual has, one of the greatest drives that he has.

Guilt may drive one man in a mad pursuit of pleasure, and he goes from round to round of pleasure, seeking to cover his guilt in that which he feels, appreciates, or satisfies himself. The pleasure may take one form or another form. It may be a dope or alcohol to deaden his senses and to give him a false feeling of placidity or of contentment or of joy, but that mad pursuit of pleasure is only an attempt to cover the guilt of the conscience within.

Or, in another individual, it may lead to a reckless abandonment to a life of sin. This energizes the criminal who goes from one crime to another crime, seeking through some thrill in breaking the law to cover up the guilt of the broken law that is within him. With another individual, guilt may take more acceptably social forms of drive, and the man may become totally immersed in his work or in some hobby in which he gives himself to this restless activity constantly.

He's not working just for the job or to build a business, but he's working in order that he can work off some of the frustration that the guilt produces. Or, in another individual, it may produce a restlessness in which the individual must occupy himself with something or other. A magazine, of course they're old-fashioned now, but the TV takes its place on a telephone conversation, on running out to see this one or that one.

This constant restlessness that will not let, or guilt, will not let a man be quiet with himself for two minutes because that guilt raises up an accusing finger and makes the man miserable. What I'm trying to show you is that a child of God may react to this thing of guilt as well as an unsinged man may react to it, and it may produce a feverish activity or a pursuit of pleasure that puts God out of the picture that seeks to deaden the conviction of the Word of God and the accusation of the Spirit of God that dwells within. The child of God may manifest this restlessness in what seem to be perfectly good ways, and he may want to go from one public service to another public service, neglecting that which is responsibility at home or at business, but he is covering up that guilt by frequent attendance at this place, or that place, or this meeting, or that committee, or this activity, or that Bible class.

Driven by guilt, they may seek to cover up the accusing function by activities of which the children of God would approve. Now, when we come to handle this problem of guilt, I believe that there are two different facets of the truth that we want to present. There is the doctrinal, and then the practical.

The practical must always be based on the doctrinal, and so we begin with that, and I want you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 10, where the apostle is writing concerning God's answer to guilt, or to a guilty conscience. You'll notice in verse 2 he begins the chapter by telling us that under the Old Testament sacrificial system, there was no final solution to the problem of guilt. For he tells us, we better read verse 1 and 2, the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can never with those sacrifices which they offer under the law year by year, continually make their comers thereunto perfect, for then would they not have feat to the offerer, because that the worshipers once heard should have no more conscience of sins." No more conscience of sins if there were a perfect, final, and completed covering for sin under the old order.

Now, the old order, or the Old Testament sacrificial system, was not designed to give peace of conscience. It was designed to remind men that they were guilty. That was the design of the whole system.

On the day of atonement, the high priest took one goat, he sacrificed it, he took the blood of that goat, and he sprinkled the mercy seat. God dwelt above the mercy seat in the cloud of glory, and that blood was put between the visible manifestation of the presence of God and the broken law that was in the eye. See, blood was put between God and the broken law.

And then the priest took the second animal, he put his hands on the head of that animal, and confessed the sins of Israel over the head of that animal, and then that gate goat was led out into the wilderness to die. Blood was put between a holy God and broken law, and then by confession sin was removed from the camp of Israel. But how long did that last? Permanently? No, 12 months.

And as the painful Israelite went through the first month, and the second month, and the third month, he could say, that blood is covering my sin. And he had a feeling of peace, but as it got along to the ninth month, and the tenth month, and the eleventh month, he got the feeling that that blood was wearing pretty thin, and there wasn't much between him and a holy God. And by the time it got down to the twelfth month, he was so miserable with his guilt, he was feeling, why doesn't the day of atonement hurry up and come so the priest can put blood between a holy God and the broken law, and sin can be confessed on the head of the priest and they can be removed from the camp? You see, every year Israel was forced by God to renew a note of indebtedness.

That's an unpleasant thing, isn't it? I hope you've never had that experience of having something half paid off, and then not being able to keep up payments, and so you go back and refinance that whole note and have to start all over again and sign a new note of indebtedness. Think of what it would be like every 12 months to have to come to God and sign a new note of obligation, a new note of indebtedness, but God purposed it that way. Why? Because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin.

It could make only a temporary covering, and since Israel was covered by a temporary covering, God gave them a conscience concerning sin so that that note would be renewed year by year. You see the first point, then? If they had been once and for all purged, they would have had no more conscience about sin. But they did have a conscience about sin.

Now, drop down to verse 22. "Since we have such a high priest, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith.' Now, notice these glorious words, "having our heart sprinkled from an evil conscience." Having our heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, there's cleansing, there's forgiveness, there's restoration, and there is no more an annual remembrance about sin. Guilt is gone.

So he starts off in verse 2 with a remembrance of guilt, and in verse 22 there is no more remembrance of guilt. Something has happened in between so that there is no more conscience about sin. What is it? Well, I realize in due time we're going to come to the tenth chapter of Hebrew, but I can foresee that that's a long way down the road yet, and so you following the normal pattern will have long since forgotten anything I say tonight about Hebrews 10 when we come to it in our studies in the morning.

So I'm going ahead and outlining what the apostle is trying to get across here as he goes from a conscience about sin to no more conscience about sin. You'll notice that he tells us in verse 7 and again in verse 9 that Christ has made a voluntary sacrifice. "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.' Then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book to do thy will, O God.' Verse 9, I come to do thy will, O God." And here Christ is contrasted with the Old Testament sacrifices.

The sacrifices of the Old Testament were animal sacrifices, because of that fact their blood had limited value, and he is coming as the infinite Son of God to give himself as a sacrifice for sin. But there's something more. Every animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was an involuntary sacrifice.

Involuntary. It went to sacrifice against its will. A sheep or a goat can sense the presence of death or the presence of blood, and that goat or that sheep will instinctively turn and flee from the place where blood has been shed.

That was why the law said that the sacrifice had to be bound with cords to the horns of the altar, because it was an involuntary sacrifice. That which was sacrificed against its will had little value in the sight of God. When Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God, he differed from all Old Testament sacrifices.

He was a voluntary sacrifice. He said, not my will, but thine be done. That's the first thing that gives the guilty sinner a clear conscience.

Then the next thing, in verse 12, that Christ's sacrifice was a sufficient sacrifice. This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of God. Did you notice the one sacrifice in contrast to the tens of thousands of sacrifices of the Old Testament? One sacrifice.

Even the blood of the goat on the Day of Atonement could avail for only 12 months. But his blood availed for how long? Forever. For how long? Forever.

And he has given a sufficient sacrifice for sin. Then the next thing that the Apostle points out in verse 10 is that, through this willing sacrifice, we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. We are sanctified, and the word sanctified doesn't mean made holy.

It means set apart. To whom were we set apart by the sacrifice of Christ? We were set apart to God. We belonged to him.

We became sons in his family. His name was put upon us. We are his.

We are set apart to God by the sacrifice of Christ. Then again, in verse 14, the Apostle tells us that not only are we set apart, but by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified. He has perfected.

Why does God have to separate a sinner from himself? Because he sees the sin in the sinner. But when the blood of Christ perfects us, removes every sin, what is there that God can find in us as a basis of condemnation? Not a sin. The glorious truth is that when we are covered with the blood of Christ, God looks upon us just as he looks upon his own beloved son.

And there is no more reason for God to reject the one who is covered by the blood of Christ than there is for God to reject the Lord Jesus Christ himself. You see, by this sacrifice we are perfected forever. Then there's something else in verse 15.

The Holy Ghost also is a witness to us. What is the Spirit's ministry? It is ministry to assure us that we who have received Christ and believed in him are the sons of God. What does John say? He that believeth hath the witness in himself.

The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children, the sons of God. And it is the Spirit's witness that thanks to the one who is ridden with guilt that Christ has voluntarily made a satisfactory sacrifice, that we have been set apart to God, we have been perfected so that in God's sight we are flawless, and the Spirit convinces us of that truth. Then, in verse 17, the Apostle concludes his argument here by telling us that the Father dismisses from his mind the memory of every sin that is covered by the blood of Christ.

The Apostle here is quoting Jeremiah, and Jeremiah, in the ranguage of the Hebrew, gives us this most glorious truth that I know in all the word of God, for God said, their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. The Apostle was so impressed with that and wanted to impress it upon his hearers that he referred to it back in Hebrews 8 and verse 12, I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. And in dealing with the question of a guilty conscience, he affirms it again in chapter 10 and verse 17, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Now, what I have been trying to trace is the doctrinal argument of the Apostle here in chapter 10, whereby he shows us how one passes from a guilt about sin to a guiltlessness about sin. That guiltlessness, or that clear conscience, is the result of appropriating by faith the work of Jesus Christ on the sinner's behalf. Now, freedom from guilt is not the result of sinless perfection.

It does not depend upon abstinence from all sin, it depends on the value of the blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin. Do you have that doctrine straight? Do you know that all your sin was under the blood of Christ? It has been dismissed from God's memory, and it is treated as though it had never been committed. Would God that we have the gift of dismissing from our minds that which brings guilt to our

conscience, we've not been given that power.

But God, by a sovereign act of his will, can and does dismiss from his mind the memory of everything that has been covered with the blood of Christ. That's the doctrine of a good conscience. Now, I believe we have to come to the practical side.

How are we to respond to this doctrine? I want you to turn with me in this connection to 1 Peter, chapter 5, verses 8 and 9. 1 Peter 5, where Peter says, "'Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, teaching whom he may devour, soon resists headfast in the face.' Now, Satan is called by the Apostle John the accuser of the brethren. We know from, for instance, a passage in Zechariah, or a passage in 1 John 2, 1 and 2, that when a child of God commits a sin, Satan can take the occasion to appear in the presence of God and accuse that believer before God. One of the tactics of our adversary, since he cannot take away our salvation, is to take away the joy of our salvation.

Since our sonship is settled, he seeks to keep us from the enjoyment of our sonship. And what is one of his subtle and clever methods of doing this? He comes to remind us of some tactic. It may be something years and years ago that he delights to torment us about.

It may be something of which we were guilty before we ever came to know Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. Some alliance, some involvement, something that, when we accepted Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, was put under the blood. But Satan hasn't forgotten.

Now, remember this. If God has dismissed from his memory every sin covered by the blood of Christ, that feeling of guilt cannot come from God, God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. Isn't that self-evident? If God has dismissed from his mind, God cannot be the one who makes us miserable over guilt.

Well, now we have an alternative. He's the only other one who can. By a process of elimination, we see the subtlety and craft of the accuser of the brethren who accuses us not only before God, but he accuses us to our own conscience.

And the conscience that has been cleansed from the defilement of sin is now aroused to consciousness over sins that are already dismissed from the mind of God. And the child of God breaks emotionally or mentally or physically because he keeps on listening to Satan's accusation, throwing up a conscience about guilt. How do we dismiss this? James says, I'm sorry, 1 Peter says, chapter 5 and verse 9, resist this one head fast in the face.

Resisting. This word means to withstand. The same word used by the Apostle in writing to the Ephesians concerning the honor of God, that we might be able to stand an evil day in having done all to stand.

What the Apostle is saying here is that we have the right and the authority as the sons of God, when Satan accuses us, to forbid him to keep on accusing because we believe what the word of God says about our sins, that they are under the blood, that they're dismissed, that there's no remembrance of them in heaven. How far does Satan get when he accuses the brethren before God? He doesn't get anywhere. Why? Because we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteousness, who frees his blood, and Christ offers his blood to the Father as that which keeps on cleansing us from all sins.

Now, if Satan can't get anywhere with God because Christ frees his blood, what is our defense? The blood of Christ. And we can stop and silence the accuser of the brethren when he accuses our conscience and

stirs up guilt over forgiven sins by pleasing the efficacy of the blood of Christ. You see, he says we resist him head fast in the face.

We believe that these sins are covered, that there is no remembrance of them with God, and if God has forgotten them, what right does Satan have to make us miserable about them? Then I believe there's another word in 1 John, in chapter 3, verses 20 and 21. If our heart condemns us, this is the very problem about which we're talking. For here we are, children of God, who have some guilt about something in the past.

Our heart condemns us, and what does he say? God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. What does John mean? That God knows that the blood of Christ has already been applied to that sin. God knows, 1 John 1 and verse 7, that the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

You see, Peter said, resist him head fast in the face, believing what God says. You don't have to exhort God to believe what he knows is already true, because God knows that those sins are under the blood. If our heart condemns us, we have this joy that God is greater than our heart and knows all things, knows that those sins are under the blood.

But then there's often this disquieting fact that comes up. We say, suppose I've done something, and I'm not conscious of it. Suppose I have dreamed of spirits, and maybe I don't know about them.

There are some people who are living with a morbid introspection, afraid that they've done something, and are miserable because they can't pinpoint what it is they may have done. That's a problem John is meeting when he says, if our heart condemns us not, then don't get worried about it. We have confidence toward God.

Why? Because it is the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, to convince us of anything that displeases him, and he'll do his work perfectly. Isn't it strange? Some people get all upset if they have guilt feelings, and other people get upset if they don't have them. One is as wrong as the other.

The answer to either one is the same. Trust God to do his work. Jesus Christ will keep on applying the benefits of his death to the experience, to the life, to the path of the child of God, so that he is acceptable to God the Father.

And God the Holy Spirit will keep on his work of convincing, reproving, rebuking, rejoicing to deal with anything in the present experience that may grieve the heart of God. If we are guilty, then we trust God. If we are not guilty, then we trust God's spirit to do the work which the Holy Spirit has come to do.

Much has been written about this problem of guilt, but I believe for the child of God it is relatively simple. I realize there's danger in oversimplification, but I believe it's just simple. The child of God, first of all, must know and accept the facts of the doctrine of the Word of God that God has dismissed from his mind because of the work of Christ.

Everything the one who's accepted Jesus Christ to save is found in the facts that he believes. It's the basis of our sin. If guilt arises, it does not arise from God, it arises from Satan who is seeking to destroy our joy.

And Satan, on the basis of the blood of Christ, is to be resisted or rejected, and the blood of Christ will silence the accuser of the breath. Don't listen to him. Don't entertain the suggestions and the doubts that he puts in your mind, but claim the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and stand on the promise that the blood

of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Praise God tonight for the blessed truth that God has affirmed. Their sin and their iniquity will I remember no more, and the best way to deal with Satan when he comes to make you miserable is simply to say bluntly, shut up! My sins are under the blood. In effect, satisfy God.

It certainly ought to satisfy any one of God's sins. I realize that there can be no easing of a guilty conscience, because you come to know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. I have been teaching and preaching tonight for the benefit of God's children who may wrestle with this problem, and I don't want to relieve your guilt one bit if you have never accepted Jesus Christ as Savior.

I want you to be the most miserable person in the world so that you can't go to sleep tonight until you have faced this question seriously, until you realize that God loves you and Christ died to save you, and that you must bear your own guilt until Jesus Christ takes that guilt away by covering your sins with his blood. I invite you to accept Christ personally as your Savior, and urge you to do it right now. We pray, our Father, that God the Holy Spirit may instruct us out of the works, may give us the assurance that God has dealt with our sins so perfectly by the blood of Christ that there is no remembrance of them forever in heaven.

May that which is covered by the blood be so dismissed from our minds that the accuser of the brethren cannot destroy our joy in the Lord by reminding us of what God has forgiven and forgotten. Let the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace rest upon us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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