

The Guilt Grind by Jeff Strite
Psalms 32:1-32:11

OPEN: A little boy had been given a slingshot for his birthday. He loved it and practiced every day aiming at different objects. During the summer he and his sister would spend a lot of time at their grandmother's house and, one day he was out in her backyard he spied his grandma's pet duck. On impulse he took out his slingshot, took aim and hit the duck with a stone. The duck died! He'd killed it! Then he panicked. What was he to do? This was grandmother's pet duck. She'd hate him forever for having killed her pet. So he hid the bird in the woodpile. And when he looked up... and there was his sister. She'd seen what he'd done. After lunch that day, Grandma told Sally to help with the dishes. And Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you Johnny?" And then she leaned over and whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? For the next several weeks Johnny did a lot of dishes. And every once in a while (when he'd be tempted to object) his sister would whisper to him: "Remember the duck"

APPLY:

Have you ever felt guilty?

Have you ever been sitting somewhere, or standing in the shower, or driving down road and suddenly remembered something you'd said you shouldn't have said. Or something you'd done you shouldn't have done. Or something you'd thought that would bring you shame if anyone knew you'd thought it? And this wave of guilt comes flooding over you, and you felt this shame and embarrassment that you just felt like crawling under a rock somewhere?

Have you ever felt like that?

Me too.

Somewhere along the line... we've all killed a duck.

And when we remember that incident of what we'd said, thought or done - we hate ourselves for it.

And, you know - the Bible tells me that - Satan loves to use that against us. Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan is "the accuser of the brethren..." and Satan has a lot to work with when he accuses us. He has no problem making us feel guilty... because we are guilty. Romans 3:23 says we've "...sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Billy Graham once noted that - everywhere he went - he saw a universal sense of guilt. It's a common emotion in EVERYBODY. And when we have unresolved guilt it can do great damage to us.

For example, when we have unresolved guilt, we get sick easier. Apparently there's a high percentage of the illnesses people suffer as a direct result of guilt folks have never dealt with.

ILLUS: Famed psychiatrist Karl Menninger once wrote a book called "Whatever became of Sin?" Now Menninger wasn't a Christian, but during his lifetime he'd noted how his profession had downplayed the effect of the shame improper actions had on people. His contention was that unless one dealt with a person's conscience and guilt there were many internal conflicts counselors could not fix. He once said that if he could convince patients in psychiatric hospitals their sins were forgiven (take their guilt away), 75% of them could walk out the next day.

ILLUS: Back in 2006, researchers at the University of Toronto found that people who suffer from a guilty conscience experience "a powerful urge to wash themselves". The researchers asked test subjects to recall past sins and were told to wash their hands as a symbol of cleansing their conscience. Another control group was told simply to wash their hands. The researchers found that those who recalled their sins washed their hands at "twice the rate of study subjects who had not imagined past transgressions."

(Our Daily Bread 2/4/08)

David described his feelings this way:

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." Psalm 32:3-4

David's guilt made him suffer physically. He said it felt like

- his bones were wasting away
- like there was a heavy weight upon him
- like his strength was totally gone

But why would David feel like that?

Why would WE feel like that?

ILLUS: Behavioral Scientists call it "cognitive dissonance". Cognitive Dissonance is the conflict (or dissonance) inside our minds (cognitive) when we BELIEVE one thing but we ACT in an entirely different way. Such a conflict exists when we act in a way that our inner conscience knows is wrong.

We THINK one way... and we ACT another.

This creates cognitive dissonance.

According to behavior scientists, this dissonance manifests itself as a sense of uneasiness, or a lack of peace.

The natural response to dissonance, of course, is to get rid of it. Because - one way or another - inner peace must be restored.

And that means one of two things:

We either need to change what we DO so it fits with how we THINK.

Or we need to change how we so it fits with what we DO.

(Marlin Howe. Pulpit Helps, May 94 (Vol 19, No 5). Page 10)

Now, the Bible tells us that our most logical course is to repent.

To change what we DO or THINK so that we please God.

But in order to repent, people face another kind of "cognitive dissonance":

In order to repent... you have to admit you were wrong.

And people don't like to do that.

Do you ever like to admit that YOU are wrong?

Of course not. None of us do.

So when faced with this choice many folks will try ANYTHING to avoid facing their guilt.

ILLUS: Politicians are very skilled at this.

When politicians do wrong things, they often follow this course of thinking:

1. Don't get caught.

2. But if you do get caught... deny. Then deny. And after that, deny.

3. Employ a little righteous indignation ("How dare you imply...")

I remember one politician testifying before congress complaining "I have NEVER had anyone question my integrity!" And I thought to myself: "Well, it's about time somebody did."

4. Cover up and delay responding to the accusation.

Politicians have found that the longer they can delay action on their wrong doing the less attention the media and the general populace pay to their guilt.

5. Minimize the mistake.

"Yes, I did wrong... but the other guy has done worse."

6. Deflect responsibility and blame.

(Tim Woodroof, Otter Creek Church of Christ, in "The Lookout" September 24, 06 p. 14)

Politicians aren't the only ones who use these tactics, but it's this last option

(deflecting responsibility and blame) that most people find to be extremely popular.

"Yes, I did wrong, but it's NOT MY FAULT."

ILLUS: I was watching a YouTube video this past week on guilt. A young woman was trying to explain how to deal with personal guilt, and her conclusion was: guilt is a bad thing. You shouldn't feel guilty. You don't have to EVER feel guilty.

Guilt (she explained) is the result of "socialization". You feel guilt because your parents made you feel guilty. As they were raising you they'd say things like "You did a bad thing." Or "you've been a bad girl/boy."

And your parents did that with you because their parents had done that to them. And their parents had ingrained this thinking into them because their parents had done the same to them. And so on, and so on. Essentially, if it hadn't been for your parents (and grandparents and great-grandparents, ad infinitum) you wouldn't feel guilty.

GUILT IS A BAD THING (she concluded).

Now, by contrast, I read a Christian author who said guilt is a GOOD THING.

ILLUS: "If I tell a lie, take something that isn't mine, or treat someone unfairly, I may feel awful about it. Lie awake that night. Feel sheepish the next time I meet him. As a matter of fact, the terrible thing would be for me to do something awful to another person and NOT have some pained reaction.

The child that can pour gasoline on an animal or the adult who can participate in a rape and laugh about it has limited chances for salvaging his humanity. If there is no remorse for causing pain to another person something is terribly defective about that person's conscience. And it doesn't take too many repetitions of evil without remorse for a person to numb a conscience. That person's heart is cold. They cannot be bothered with embarrassment.

Guilt, then, is a good thing. It is like the engine light that flashes to warn you that something needs attention. You damaged a relationship. You broke a law. You did something against an intuitive or learned value.

If you don't respond to it, things start to break down. If you do respond, you reclaim your humanity."

(Rubel Shelly Heartlight.com 5/4/10)

In other words – guilt is like that idiot light on the dash of your car. The light is telling you something's wrong... and you need to fix it.

However, the worldly way to deal with that guilt is what I used to do with the idiot light on my old van. It was a red light that kept blinking and blinking. It was annoying.

But I fixed it.

You know what I did?

That's right! I took some black tape and I covered it over.

And that's how the world often tries to deal with their guilt.

They COVER their sin.

It's as old as Adam and Eve

What did they do when they realized they were naked (they hid).

And what was the first thing Adam did when God asked "Eat of that tree"?

He told God "The woman you gave me..."

He wasn't just saying it was the woman's fault. Adam was telling God –

"YOU gave her to me. If you hadn't done that we wouldn't be here now!"

Adam hid his guilt behind someone else.

It wasn't my fault!!!!

Now was Adam right?

No, of course not.

Adam sinned because Adam chose to sin!

It wasn't anybody else's fault.

And this caused him to feel GUILT... and he tried to deal with that guilt by covering his nakedness with fig leaves. Then he tried hiding in the trees. And when that didn't work – he tried blaming someone else.

And in this sinful response to God, Adam did the same thing our present culture tries to do.

The sins of the child are visited upon the parent.

The sins of the criminal are society's fault.

Protesters aren't guilty... it's the politician's (or policeman's) fault.

One person described this blame game as:

"An endless daisy chain of deferred guilt."

(Aram Bakshian Jr. in R.Digest 3/79 p. 204)

Everything is SOMEONE else's fault.

There's only one problem with that.

IT DOESN'T WORK!

God has designed us to have a conscience. God has designed us to realize

when we've sinned/ messed up/ failed/ fallen short.
And if you don't fix it God's way... it's not gonna get fixed.

David discovered: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."

You cannot try to cover your sins and expect to solve your problem.
So... what you gonna do?
How can you get rid of the guilt?

Well... you confess it to God.
Proverbs 28:13 tells us "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

And David learned that same truth: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Psalm 32:5

ILLUS: There was an interesting study done last year by researchers in the US and in Israel. The study involved over 4,000 test subjects confessed things they'd things felt guilty/ashamed.
Researchers found that those who only confessed part of what they'd done wrong felt worse than those who made a full confession of their guilt.
The Harvard Business Review summarized the research this way:
"Confession is a powerful way to relieve guilt, but it works only if you tell the whole truth."
("Telling the Whole Truth May Ease Feelings of Guilt," American Psychological Association 1-23-14)

Part of what that study proved was this: full confession works for both Christians and non-Christians. It works because God promised it would.

CLOSE: Do you remember my story about little Johnny at the beginning of the story?

Well, there a little more to that tale:

As Max Lucado tells it: After a while Johnny began to wear down. He was half afraid his grandmother would learn the truth, and his guilt made it so he could hardly even get any sleep.

So one day, he confessed to killing duck.

"I know, Johnny," his Grandma said. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you."

(In the Grip of Grace; Max Lucado)

His guilt had enslaved him.

But confessing his guilt freed him.

And that's the promise God has made to Christians.

In I John 1:9 God tells us "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Admit that you've done wrong.

Place it ALL His feet.

And God promises He'll remove your sins as far as the East is from the West. He'll bury your sins in the very depth of the sea and He'll put a "no-fishing" sign above it.

Like I've said before - confession works for both Christians AND non-Christians. But we have an added advantage. Whereas the NON-Christian can find temporary relief from their guilt by confession we gain PERMANENT relief by the blood of Jesus.

Romans 6:4-7 says it this way:

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may LIVE A NEW LIFE.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should NO LONGER BE SLAVES TO SIN—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

Confession will remove guilt from the non-Christian... for a while. But it can't give them a "new life." It can't completely free them from the slavery that sin's guilt and shame burden people with. And baptism was God's way of communicating that truth to us.

You see, God designed baptism as a way for us to realize our sins have been buried. It's like God promised Micah 7:19 where we're told that God will cast "all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

And I Peter 3:21 says something interesting:

“Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as AN APPEAL to God for A CLEAR CONSCIENCE, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” You see baptism is our appeal to God for freedom from guilt. It’s our appeal to Him to remove our shame. It’s our appeal to Him to gain from Him a clear conscience. Baptism saves us because it makes the appeal to God for the salvation that can only come through the blood of Christ.

God doesn’t ask much of us in gaining His salvation. He asks that:

1. We believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God.
2. He asks that we repent and turn away from our sins.
3. He asks that we acknowledge that Jesus will now own us. He will be our Lord and Master.
4. And He asks that allow ourselves to be buried in the waters of Christian baptism and rise up to live in newness of life.

INVITATION.