

## Overcoming Guilt

Online Sermon:

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The mind's capacity to remember thoughts, emotions, and events is a remarkable gift, but it can also be a source of profound pain. On one hand, it is a blessing to recall the beauty of cherished moments—walking on the beach as the sun sets,



feeling the warmth of the breeze, or reflecting on life-changing milestones like marriage, the birth of a child, or the day we said "Yes" to Jesus, becoming new creations in Christ.

These memories bring joy and gratitude, reminding us of God's goodness. But how often do we find ourselves dwelling on the mistakes we've made, wondering if we'll ever truly be free from the shame of our past? Not all memories are pleasant; they can also dredge up painful reminders of our sins, mistakes, and moments of rebellion against God, often leading to overwhelming guilt and shame.

John Powell aptly describes guilt as a "small pebble lodged in our shoe"—a constant, nagging pain that hinders us from walking freely.<sup>1</sup> Guilt pulls us back into the past, where we futilely attempt to rewrite what is already done. But when guilt arises from our sins, this reflection, as the Apostle Paul writes, is a good thing because it can lead to "godly sorrow," which brings repentance and healing (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).



Even though Scripture assures us that our sins, once confessed, are washed "white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18) and removed "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12), we often struggle to forgive ourselves. When we

replay shameful events in our minds, it fuels anger and despair. Have you ever felt like the weight of your past sins is something you just can't shake, no matter how much you've confessed them to God? Today's sermon will address this form of false guilt, offering hope through the truth that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. As God no longer keeps a record of confessed sins, neither should we.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the book *You are What you Think*, loc. 1466.

## Looking Back with Regret

Throughout Scripture, even the most faithful men and women of God wrestled with deep feelings of regret and guilt. Let's explore a few examples where they confronted their past mistakes and encountered God's grace in their brokenness. After King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband, Uriah, he was confronted by the prophet Nathan, which brought his sin into sharp focus.



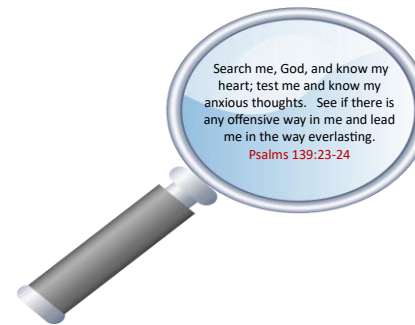
Overwhelmed with guilt, David penned Psalm 51, appealing to God's unfailing love (hesed) as the basis for his forgiveness. Through this prayer of repentance and brokenness, David

found assurance that God no longer despised him. Similarly, after Peter denied Jesus three times, he wept bitterly when he heard the rooster crow. Stricken with guilt, Peter abandoned his calling and returned to fishing. It took three affirmations from Jesus, the Good Shepherd, instructing him to care for His sheep, for Peter to be restored to his divine mission (John 21). Apostle Paul also struggled with overwhelming guilt, having been a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians. Yet, after encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was transformed by God's grace and became a powerful witness, filled with joy

and purpose (1 Timothy 1:13-14; Acts 9). Let's now take a moment to reflect on how these men of God overcame their guilt and allowed His grace to redeem their lives.

## Letting Go of Guilt

The first step to overcoming guilt is learning to remember rightly. Despite the complexities of our minds, we often recall events through the distorted lens of our own sin and biases. Being born again does not mean the old sinful nature is completely eradicated. As the Apostle John reminds us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not

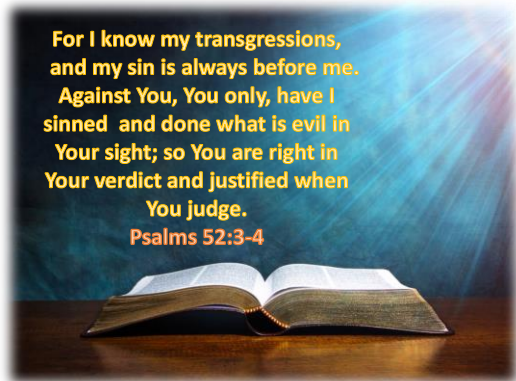


in us" (1 John 1:8). Though Paul exhorts us to "count ourselves dead to sin" and not let it reign in our bodies (Romans 6:9-11), we still battle against our earthly nature (Colossians 3:5). This sinful lens can lead us to either rewrite our past to

make it seem more acceptable or judge ourselves too harshly, believing a "wretch like me" could never be forgiven, like Peter was. To truly overcome guilt, we must put on the lens of truth. Since we cannot hide from God's perfect discernment, we should, like David, ask, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Only through God's eyes, the One who "knit us

together in our mother's womb," can we discern whether our guilt is calling us to repentance or merely a false burden over sins already forgiven.

The second step to overcoming guilt is confessing one's sins. When King David sinned, his initial reaction was to hide it. After committing adultery with Bathsheba and discovering her pregnancy, he tried to cover it up by calling her husband, Uriah, back from the battlefield, hoping he would sleep with her and

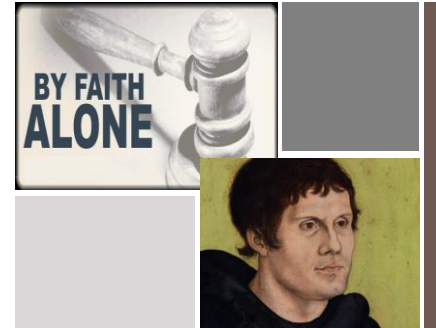


conceal the truth. When this failed, David had Uriah killed and married Bathsheba, believing his secret was safe—until the prophet Nathan exposed his wrongdoing. The crushing weight of

David's guilt as both an adulterer and a murderer could only be lifted through confession. In Psalm 51, David poured out his heart to God, saying, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight" (verses 3-4). True freedom from guilt comes when we acknowledge our sins before God, seek His forgiveness, and rely on His strength to turn from them, allowing us to be cleansed and restored.

The third step to overcoming guilt is forgiving oneself and relying on God's grace. Martin Luther, in his early years as a monk, grappled with deep feelings of unworthiness before

God, believing that no amount of confession or good works could secure his forgiveness. His obsession with earning grace through his own efforts led him to spend hours confessing even trivial sins. This intense inner turmoil drove him to study Scripture, where he ultimately discovered the doctrine of



justification by faith alone, a revelation that became central to the Reformation. Similarly, the Apostle Paul, in Romans 7, expresses his own struggle with sin, lamenting his inability to do the good he desires. He exclaims, "What a wretched

man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (v. 24). Paul finds his answer in Christ, acknowledging that it is through Him that he is set free from sin and death (Romans 8:1-2). Both Luther and Paul illustrate that true freedom from guilt comes not from self-effort, but through faith in Christ's redemptive work.

Even after confessing our sins and accepting God's forgiveness, guilt can sometimes resurface, trying to steal our peace. This recurring guilt is often a tactic of the enemy, who wants to keep us bound in shame and self-condemnation. When we find ourselves repeatedly haunted by past sins, we must stand firm in the truth of God's Word, which declares, 'There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1). In these moments, we should remind ourselves that God has already forgiven us, and we can choose to reject the enemy's lies by recalling God's promises. One practical way to overcome

recurring guilt is to speak Scripture over our lives, such as 1 John 3:20: 'If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than



our hearts, and he knows everything.' Through prayer, Scripture meditation, and fellowship with other believers, we can train our minds to focus on God's grace instead of guilt. But while we may learn to shift our focus, the enemy often

tries to bring our forgiven sins back into the spotlight, causing us to dwell on past mistakes.

This brings us to the final step of overcoming guilt: not allowing past sins, already confessed and forgiven, to hold us



captive any longer. Have you ever felt that no matter how much you've confessed your sin, it keeps creeping back into your thoughts? We must make the conscious decision to stop replaying those moments in our minds, because God has already removed them from us. Have you ever found yourself replaying a past sin so clearly that it feels as though it just happened, only to be overwhelmed by the memory of

fleeting pleasure followed by crushing guilt? This can feel like a

sharp stone in your shoe, constantly pricking you, making it difficult to move forward. This is why the Apostle Paul urges us to "forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead," pressing on toward the prize God has called us to in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14). While reflecting on past sins can offer wisdom to help avoid repeating them, we must not allow guilt over forgiven sins to trap us in shame. God has already removed those sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12), freeing us to walk in His grace and press forward in faith.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, overcoming guilt is a process that requires us to align our thoughts with God's truth, confess our sins, embrace His grace, and release what He has forgiven. Practically, this means daily renewing our minds by dwelling on Scripture rather than our past mistakes (Romans 12:2). When guilt arises, examine whether it is leading you to genuine repentance or is simply a false burden. Confess your sins sincerely, knowing that God is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). Finally, stop revisiting sins that have already been forgiven. Learn from them, but don't let them chain you in shame. Instead, focus on Christ's sacrifice, which has set you free, and move forward in the newness of life He has given you. Remember, God calls us not to be trapped in guilt but to walk in the freedom and joy of His grace, always pressing on toward the goal of our heavenly calling.

For the closing prayer, I invite you to take a moment to reflect on any areas in your life where you may be carrying guilt or shame. If there are sins you have not yet brought before the Lord, confess them now and stand firmly on His promise that He is faithful to forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. For those who have already sought forgiveness but find that the enemy continues to use past sins to burden you with guilt, ask the Good Shepherd to intervene. Pray that He would help you remember rightly—that His blood has fully covered your sin, and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Let us take a moment of silent prayer to seek His grace and freedom.