

Forgiveness and Guilt



MEMORY VERSE: “If we confess¹ our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing” (1 John 1:9, TEV).

**SAB
PM**

IN SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY *MACBETH*,² **LADY** Macbeth was involved in a murder. Afterward she wandered around the castle at night. She would whisper to herself and rub her hands as if she were washing them. “It is an accustomed [usual] action with her,” said a gentleman of the castle, “to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her [to] continue in this a quarter of an hour [fifteen minutes].” In the same scene, Lady Macbeth cries out, “Here’s [here is] the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!”

Lady Macbeth was pictured in the play as a coldhearted woman willing to do anything to achieve her goals. But Lady Macbeth apparently had something inside her she did not understand. That something was a conscience.³ And that conscience began eating away at her because of the murder she had done.

Lady Macbeth is not alone. We all are guilty of sin. This week’s lesson will help us look at the answer to the human problem of guilt.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Who is guilty? How bad are we? Why do we suffer from guilt? How strictly does God expect us to lead a righteous (holy) life? What is the only cure for guilt? In what ways are guilt and forgiveness connected?

*Study the week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

¹confess—admit we have sinned.

²*Macbeth*—one of Shakespeare’s more famous dramas (plays), in which Lady Macbeth encouraged her husband Macbeth to murder King Duncan so they could steal the throne from him.

³conscience—a knowledge or sense of right or wrong with an urge to do right.

SUN THE GUILT PROBLEM.

“Well then, are we Jews in any better condition than the Gentiles [non-Jews]? Not at all! I [Paul] have already shown that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin” (Romans 3:9, TEV).

In May 1919, Arthur Stanley Eddington pointed a telescope at an eclipse. He proved that gravity did bend light. But nothing can be pointed at the heavens or the earth to prove that Jesus is the Son of God who sacrificed His blood to forgive our sins. We need faith to believe Jesus died for us. Faith means belief in something that cannot be “proven.”

But there is one part of our religion that does not require much “faith.” It is the sinful nature of humanity.⁴

What does Paul say in Romans 3:9-18?

Someone could argue that Paul’s words are too strong. *No one is good? No one seeks after (looks for) God?* After all, some people do good things. Some people do try to know God and His truth?

Perhaps Paul is just picturing the general condition of humanity without the power and presence of God on the earth. People who do good do it only because of the action of God upon their hearts. People who seek Him do so only because the Holy Spirit

⁴humanity—all the people of the world.

is moving upon them. But without God’s help, we are all just like those people whom Paul wrote about in Romans.



Without God’s help we are all quick to hurt and kill.

How do you answer people who argue against the Christian idea of humanity being evil? Perhaps the best way to help them understand is to help them understand the definition of evil. How would you as a Christian describe evil?

MON GUILT TRIP.

Yesterday’s lesson said that every person was sinful. So is it any surprise that humans suffer from guilt or that the whole world is on a guilt trip? Paul says, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith [said], it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19).

Guilt is a fact of life. Guilt shows us our sinful condition. Guilt is part of who we are, because we are humans who do wrong.

What things have you done during the past week that make you feel guilty? What about these things are the same? For example, did all of these things break God's law or hurt someone you love? What can you learn from this?

Guilt is a part of our life. As Christians, we feel guiltier because of the high standards⁵ we have. If you compare⁶ yourself to other people, then you might not feel so bad. Why? Most of us can find people who do "worse" things than we do. But as Christians, we have only One example. Our example is Jesus.



⁵standards—laws of moral conduct.

⁶compare—show how things are the same.

What does Philippians 2:5 and 1 John 2:6 tell us to do?

The Bible gives us high standards to follow: Love our enemies. Do not lust in our heart. Give freely of ourselves. Take up our cross daily. Help other people keep thinking about Jesus. We know we are to do these things. We know God has promised to give us the power to do them, but sometimes we do not do them. So it is no surprise that we feel guilty.

Guilt is a real problem. How can we as Christians let God use that guilt for something good in our lives?

TUE THE CROSS ANSWER.

“Our message is that God was making all mankind [people] his friends through Christ [Jesus]. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends” (2 Corinthians 5:19, TEV).

Whom was God making His friends? Not just people from Asia or South America. Not just people from the Solomon Islands, but all the people of the world. In Romans 3:9, Paul says all people are sinners. In 2 Corinthians 5:19, he says all sinners can be His friends through Jesus.



We can all be God's friends through Jesus.

What is the important part of 2 Corinthians 5:19 that explains how we can be brought back to God? What does that part mean?

We feel guilty because of our sins. But according to 2 Corinthians 5:19, God no longer holds those sins against us because of Jesus. No matter how widespread guilt is, God's forgiveness is just as widespread. We all are sinners. We all are guilty. But through Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross, we all receive forgiveness if we accept Him.

It is important to remember that Jesus died for us because of our sins.

“There is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:12, NIV). For this reason, Jesus died for us. Because our “words are full of deadly deceit [lies]” (Romans 3:13, TEV), Jesus died for us. Because “ruin and misery [suffering] mark” our ways (Romans 3:16, NIV), Jesus died for us. Because we “are quick to hurt and kill” (Romans 3:15, TEV), Jesus died for us.

Because of these things, Jesus accepted our sins and took upon Himself the shame, the penalty, and the guilt of our sins.

“Satan tries to cover God's people with blackness and to ruin them. But Jesus acts for their sake. People have sinned. But Jesus has taken the guilt of their sins upon His own soul. Jesus has pulled humanity out of the fire. By His human nature, He is connected with humanity. But through His divine (godly) nature, He is one with the eternal⁷ God. Help is offered to dying souls. The enemy (Satan) is stopped.”
 —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's [Jesus'] Object Lessons*, p. 169. How does the truth that Jesus accepted and carried our guilt help us deal with guilt in our own lives?

WED THE LOVE ANSWER.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning [cleansing, forgiving] sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NIV).

⁷eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

Some people bothered by guilt are like boilers ready to explode. For many years, they have ignored their guilt so it has turned into anger and rebellion. According to many psychologists, our parents demand too much, criticize too much, and praise too little. By doing these things, they can cause harmful guilt in us. This process becomes even more serious when we talk about religion.

The story of Cain shows this point. Notice that Cain (1) became angry and murdered his brother, (2) experienced guilt because he killed Abel, and (3) dealt with his guilt by rebelling against God who held him responsible (Genesis 4:16). These principles have often been repeated throughout history.

Of course, as Christians we are called to the highest possible standard (Matthew 5:48). But to reach that standard, we must understand one thing: The foundation (basis) of our salvation does not depend on how close we come to that standard, because we can never get close enough to earn salvation. Instead, we must depend only on Jesus. He reached that standard for us. And he offers His good works in place of our failures. If we do not accept Jesus' good works in place of our failures, we will be filled with guilt and rage when we fail. We might even leave the church to gain some peace of mind.

High standards are very important. But without the balance between love for Jesus and these high standards, church members can become frustrated and rebellious.

What principle in 1 John 4:7-10 can help us deal with people who are suffering from guilt? In what ways does the Cross show us how important forgiveness is to love?

THU PEACE WITH GOD.

“Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”⁸ (Romans 5:1, TEV).

We need to be willing to surrender ourselves completely to Jesus. We need to give Him our will, our desires, our fears, and our sins. If not, we will fight a losing battle with guilt. We will never be able to forgive ourselves for our sins. Then, filled with our own guilt and anger, we will be slow to forgive other people.



We must totally surrender our lives to Jesus.

⁸Lord Jesus Christ—another name for Jesus.

Here is the moment when the Cross becomes so important. We understand Jesus has forgiven us. We also understand that our guilt has already gone in advance to judgment. Then we can begin to forgive ourselves and other people. We also look at the Cross and understand that God knew all about our sins. But He made a way to forgive us those sins. Then we can truly have the peace we desire.

What has happened that gives us peace with God? Romans 5:1. Write in your own words what Paul is saying in Romans 5:1. How do guilt and forgiveness fit with having peace with God? Also read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 1:7.

God forgives even the worst of our sins. This is a mystery too deep for us to understand. There is no question that He does forgive our sins and has accepted the guilt of our sins at the Cross. For these reasons, we can forgive ourselves and live without the heavy burden of guilt.

But this does come with some hard questions. For example, what do you say to someone whose child has been murdered? The murderer is in jail, but has accepted Jesus and now talks about joy, peace, freedom, and true sorrow for the terrible crime he has done. As a

result of confession,⁹ repentance,¹⁰ and sorrow, the murderer now claims to have “peace with God.” Is it right that this person should now be guilt-free? Could you go to the parents and tell them with rejoicing that the person who murdered their baby now stands perfect in the sight of a loving God? How could you tell them that the murderer is sorry for that sin and has confessed it to the Lord, and the Lord has now given the murderer peace of mind and freedom from guilt? How could you explain this in a way that could make any sense to the parents, or to anyone?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “A council (meeting) was held in heaven. The result of this meeting was that God’s dear Son agreed to save humanity from the curse and the shame of Adam’s failure and to conquer Satan. Oh, how wonderful that the King of heaven would be willing to become fallen humanity’s Substitute¹¹ out of love and pity! He would accept humanity’s guilt. He would take the anger of His father upon Himself, instead of letting it fall upon humanity, because of his disobedience.”¹²—Adapted from, Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, pp. 16, 17.

“As one with us, He (Jesus) must accept the burden of our guilt and curse. The Sinless¹³ One (Jesus) must feel the shame of sin. The peace lover (Jesus)

⁹confession—to say you believe in Jesus.

¹⁰repentance—being sorry for your sins and wanting to stop sinning.

¹¹substitute—someone who takes another person’s place; Jesus is our Substitute, because He died for our sins.

¹²disobedience—not obeying.

¹³sinless—without sin.

must live with trouble. The truth (Jesus) must remain with lies. Purity (Jesus) must deal with sin. Every sin, every problem, every lust that law breaking had caused brought suffering to Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.

God is waiting to give the blessing of forgiveness, of pardon for sin, of the gifts of righteousness (holiness), to all people who will believe in His love and accept the salvation He offers. Jesus is ready to say to the sinner who repents,¹⁴ “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments [clothes] on you (Zechariah 3:4, NIV).” The blood of Jesus is the plea that speaks for sinners’ sake. This blood “cleanseth [cleans] us from all sin (1 John 1:7).” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 517.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you say to someone who says, “The Cross makes me feel even more guilty. I see God’s love for me there, but I sin anyway”?
2. What does it mean that Jesus suffered the guilt of our sins? Is that fair? Is it supposed to be fair?
3. No guilty person “is ever acquitted [excused, forgiven] at the bar [court] of his own conscience,” wrote the Roman poet Juvenal. How does the Cross correct this thought?
4. Is it right for a Christian to no longer feel guilty about bad actions, even after those actions have been forgiven? Explain your answer.

¹⁴repents—being sorry you have sinned and wanting to stop sinning.