

Smooth Criminals - Part 2 - Guilt - Troy Knight

1. Read, reflect, and discuss each of these passages individually.
 - Romans 1:18-19, 32
 - Romans 2:14
 - Romans 4:4-5
 - Romans 5:1
 - Romans 8:1
2. As you reflect on these passages as a whole, what stands out the most to you? Why?
3. As you reflect on the message, what one principle or insight stands out as being particularly
 - helpful?
 - insightful?
 - difficult to grasp?
 - challenging?
4. What do the passages and the message teach you about God? What do they teach you about yourself?
5. How could the next week be different if you incorporated these truths into your life?
6. If time allows, read and discuss this article on the 2nd page from gotquestions.org What does the Bible say about guilt?.

Question: "What does the Bible say about guilt?"

Answer: Guilt is the result of having violated a specific rule or law. When we cross a moral, ethical, or legal line, we are guilty. This is true even if we did not know a line was crossed. Guilt is primarily a state or condition, not a feeling. According to the Bible, we are all guilty before God (Romans 3:10, 23). The fact that a person may not "feel guilty" does not affect his or her guilty status legally or morally.

From the moment Adam and Eve broke God's law against eating the forbidden fruit, guilt entered human history (Genesis 3). With that guilt came a feeling of being guilty. They knew they had violated a specific law. They were guilty, and they felt guilty. God demonstrated His plan to cover human guilt with the shedding of innocent blood (Genesis 3:21; cf. Hebrews 9:22). What God did in the garden was a picture of what He would do thousands of years later to cover the guilt of everyone who trusts in His only begotten Son (John 1:12; 3:16–18; Romans 10:9–10).

Guilty feelings are useful when they drive us to repentance. However, Satan can also use guilty feelings to drive us away from God. Second Corinthians 7:10 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Worldly guilt is filled with condemnation and hopelessness. It tells us that we are bad and nothing will make us good enough. It lies to us about the character of God, insisting that we must try to earn the favor of a God who will never give it. Worldly sorrow hangs over our heads and colors our attitudes toward God.

Unbelievers stand guilty before God in that they have not trusted Christ as Savior (John 3:18–19). Unbelievers experiencing feelings of guilt should let those feelings lead them toward the only One who can absolve them—Jesus Christ. Their guilty feelings are accurate and are designed to create in them a desire for forgiveness. Believers—children of God who have trusted in Christ's death and resurrection for their salvation—have been declared not guilty before God (Romans 8:1). We have been justified (Romans 5:1). God has placed all our sin on His own Son (2 Corinthians 5:21). He has taken the righteousness of Christ and granted it to us. That divine exchange guarantees our acceptance by God and eternal life with Him (2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Romans 5:9–10). When we fail, we have God's promise that, if we confess our sins to Him, He will forgive us and wipe away all traces of guilt (1 John 1:9).

Many struggle with false guilt. They are forgiven, yet they still feel guilty. They feel stuck in guilt. They may think, "I know God has forgiven me, but I can't forgive myself." They have prayed, confessed their sin, and believe that God has granted them forgiveness because of Jesus. Yet they continue to beat themselves up. The reason for false guilt might not be what we think. Satan whispers into our souls that we don't deserve full pardon until we prove to God how sorry we are. We must continue to carry the load of shame; we deserve it. We are not worthy to accept God's pardon until we have punished ourselves, Satan says. And then he lies some more, telling us that, in hanging on to guilt, we are being humble.

The opposite is true. In hanging on to guilty feelings after we have been forgiven, we are being prideful. Humility gratefully accepts a pardon it can never earn and lives to demonstrate that gratefulness. Pride says, "God may forgive me, but my standard is higher than God's. What Jesus did on the cross may be sufficient to cover other sins, but not mine. I must help Jesus pay for this sin by punishing myself. I will continue to carry my shame until I decide I have paid for it." In clinging to false guilt, we insult the sacrifice of Christ by implying that His death on the cross was not powerful enough to cover every sin. False guilt can keep us from growing into the mature Christians God wants us to be.

True feelings of guilt keep us humble as we recognize no one can be good enough to earn God's favor. A recognition of guilt should drive us to gratefully receive all God has done on our behalf. True guilt propels us toward God; false guilt drives us away. False guilt sees failure as a life sentence; true guilt sees failure as another opportunity to experience more of God's mercy and grace. True guilt is erased by repentance and restoration; false guilt continues to cling to us even after we've repented. When we learn to recognize the difference, guilt does not have to dominate our lives.

God paid a high price so we could walk in freedom (2 Corinthians 9:15). Justification nullifies guilt. For those in Christ, guilty feelings can be a wake-up call that something isn't right, and we have opportunity to confess our sin and turn from it. Guilty feelings are simply a tool God uses to reveal sin. When no sin is present, guilt is being misused by our enemy and needs to be renounced. We were not designed to carry guilt; Jesus did that for us (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24). Because of Christ, we can walk in the light and never again suffer under the burden of guilt.