

Freedom from Guilt

Finding Release from Your Burdens

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Do you ever feel guilty? Guilt feels terrible. What you did keeps playing and replaying in your mind, and you are filled with regrets and “if onlys.” If a lot of people know what you did, your shame and regret increase exponentially. The wider the circle of people who know what happened, the more you suffer.

No one likes to feel guilty. But what exactly is guilt? The dictionary says that guilt is “an awareness of having done wrong or committed a crime, accompanied by feelings of shame and regret” (*Encarta Dictionary*). Since all of us have either done wrong things or failed to do right things, we have all experienced guilt.

You can devise all kinds of ways to try to get rid of your guilty feelings. But your guilt is not just a feeling or a personal problem—it really has to do with your relationship with God. How you deal with your guilt depends on how you view God and what place he has in your life.

How do you handle your guilt? Perhaps you will recognize your typical strategy below. There are many wrong ways to deal with your guilt. The one thing they all have in common is that they don't work. They might make you feel better momentarily, but they won't take away your guilt. The only right way to deal with guilt is by going to God. Only then will you experience true, lasting freedom from guilt.

Wrong Ways to Deal with Guilt

Deny that you are really guilty. One popular way of dealing with guilt is to deny you have done anything wrong. The reasoning goes like this: "I only feel guilty because I am living under standards passed down by an older generation who told me that certain things were right and wrong. To stop feeling guilty, I need to throw off those antiquated standards and live by my own."

According to this way of thinking, if you feel guilty for sleeping with your boyfriend, it's because

your mother taught you that premarital sex was wrong. You believe that, if you can convince yourself that premarital sex is not really wrong, your guilty feelings will disappear.

This approach to guilt denies the existence of God (or at least the God of the Bible), and that gets rid of a lot of those pesky, guilt-producing rules in the Bible. But does this really work? What happens when you decide to live by your own standards and you fail to keep even them? You are right back where you started—feeling those terrible guilt feelings and not knowing how to deal with them.

And if your guilt is only a byproduct of the rules your family and culture made up, why do you try so hard to escape your guilt feelings? Think about what you do when you feel guilty. Some people overeat, some exercise, some shop, some drink or do drugs, some sleep too much, some can't sleep at all—the list is endless. Why go to all this trouble for something that doesn't exist?