

The Higher Purpose of Guilt

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July 30, 2016

We are going to speak today about a subject that is very close to me, because guilt has always played a big role in my life, even as a little kid. My dad was a rough and tough old cowboy and all he had to do is look at us and clear his throat and my brother and I hopped to. Even as a little kid, if I did something wrong, oh I felt guilty. I felt so horrible and that look from dad brought the guilt on immediately. I can remember playing sports in high school and, if I missed a shot, I felt guilty about that. You let the team down or you didn't do what you were supposed to do, so you felt guilty. Then when God called me, coming into the church, and we realized that we were guilty of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:27 talks about that), then guilt came big time in that regard when we realized that, because of our sins, because of our shortcomings and faults, Christ had to die to pay the penalty for our sins, it really hit home with me. So, guilt is something I have had to wrestle with as a kid and for most of my adult life. As a man once said, "Guilt is to the spirit what pain is to the body."

Guilt can cause us a great deal of emotional and mental pain and agony. The fact is that God designed guilt. God designed us to have that feeling, that emotion. Let's go to Genesis 3:7 out of the New King James translation. This is the reaction of Adam and Eve had after eating the forbidden fruit.

Genesis 3:7. *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; ... (NKJV)*

They didn't know that before.

7b) ... and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

8) And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (NKJV)

This was mankind's first experience with guilt. They realized they had done something wrong and this new emotion, this new feeling they had never experienced before, it overwhelmed them. They were ashamed, not because they were naked. They had known nothing else. It wasn't that the nakedness itself caused shame, but they were ashamed because this new emotion of guilt overwhelmed them and they not only hid their bodies. They hid themselves from God because of their guilt over what they had done. We won't turn there, but you remember the account in John 8 of the woman who was caught in adultery and the religious leaders were trying to set Christ up and trick Him. They threw her in the midst of Christ and these elders of the church and they asked Christ should she be stoned. You remember what Christ said, "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." You remember what happened is that they all walked out from the greatest to the least, one by one. Why did they do that? It was because of guilt. They knew they had sinned and that feeling of guilt caused them to

abandon their attempt to try to trip up Christ and they stuck their tails between their legs and walked out one by one.

With that in mind let's go to Psalms 51:7 and see what David had to say when he was dealing with guilt over his sin with Bathsheba and all of the fallout that occurred from that. He was asking God to do something about this guilt and the feelings that he had and the fact that he wasn't right with God.

Psalms 51:7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (KJV)

Why did he use the word hyssop? Lepers had to present themselves before the priest after purification to see if the priest approved the fact that they were clean. The priest would sprinkle the leper with water and with hyssop. So, David knew that and was looking back at that. He knew that he didn't have leprosy, but he had kind of a spiritual leprosy in the sense of what he had done and he was drawing that analogy for God to please cleanse him.

8) Make me to hear joy and gladness; ... (KJV)

He wouldn't have said that if joy and gladness were there. They had gone away, because of the guilt. He said purge me with hyssop so I can experience joy and gladness again.

8b) ... that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

9) Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

...

11) Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. (KJV)

Notice what he says again, hearkening to verse 8 in verse 12.

12) Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. (KJV)

We see here that guilt destroys joy. David is telling us that because of what I've done it's broken my relationship with you, God. The horrible example I set has destroyed any joy I had. He is asking God to cleanse him and to restore the joy. You see, joy returns when guilt is gone. If you have guilt, it's hard to have joy.

Guilt is something that God created. Guilt is something that is useful. Guilt is something that God wants us to have and to deal with. If we ever stop feeling guilty when we sin, we are in a very dangerous place. If we can sin and feel no guilt, no remorse, not broken up at all, we are in serious spiritual trouble. As Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4, your conscience can be seared like a hot iron sears human flesh. There's no more feeling in that area. That then leads to the unpardonable sin, or the sin that will not be

pardoned. You see, guilt can destroy us if we don't use guilt properly and we don't deal with guilt properly. Everything God does is for a reason and He created guilt for a reason. We are going to see that He uses guilt in us for a higher purpose, for something good ultimately.

The title of the sermon is

The Higher Purpose of Guilt

What we are going to do today is look at four individuals in the New Testament who had their own sins, their own faults, their own shortcomings, but in every case they did not let guilt destroy them. Rather, they used the guilt to go forward, to move on, to overcome and to become effective tools of God in helping us, through their examples in the New Testament. If we can learn from their examples, then we can deal with guilt in a similar way and we can move forward and not let guilt hinder us and not let guilt hold us back or we will get so wound up in guilt we just can't break out of it and we just sit and don't move forward.

1. Thomas

The first example is one of the apostles that had a label. If I said unto you doubting, everybody knows who we are talking about. He has this label of doubting Thomas. We are going to John 20 and break into the story. Christ has been placed into the tomb at the closing of the Sabbath. Sunday morning Mary saw Christ, if you recall, and she thought he was the gardener and then he revealed himself to her. She was so excited she had to run and tell the disciples. Let's go to John 20:18 and pick up the story.

John 20:18. *Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.*

19) Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20) And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

...

24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. (KJV)

Nobody knows the answer for sure, but you ask the question, why wasn't he there? Was he scared of the Jews, as we just read or did he think that now that Christ is dead, the gig is up? I'm going to go back and do what I did before I met Christ. It's all over with. We don't know.

25) The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. ... (KJV)

Notice what he said.

25b) ... But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. (KJV)

We are going to see that Christ did not allow this statement that Thomas made to go unanswered. He did not allow that statement to stand. Thomas had to answer for that statement.

26) And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. (KJV)

The first thing he did is address the situation with Thomas. He was not going to drop it, not going to let it go. This was important. He could have talked about other things first, but he went right to Thomas.

27) Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. (KJV)

He gave Thomas a gentle rebuke. He said, Thomas you have a problem here. Can you imagine sticking your hand into the side of Christ or putting your finger in the hole in his hand where the nail was?

28) And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. (KJV)

All of the doubt went away. He realized who Christ was. Talk about a personal experience of putting your flesh, your finger or hand into these wounds. It made quite an impression on Thomas.

29) Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. (KJV)

That's another gentle rebuke to Thomas, because he is saying, look Thomas, how long was I with you? How many miracles did you see? You should have believed. Blessed are those who do believe. He is obviously referring down the road to us, that we haven't seen, haven't touched but we believe. He was referring here directly to Thomas' unbelief. We see those who do not believe in the world today in the scientific community. The evolutionists particularly do not believe. They have the same unbelief that Thomas had. Unless we can measure it, unless we can look at it we're not going to believe.

The point is what did Thomas do after this embarrassing situation? What did he do after this rebuke? Did he stick his tail between his legs and slink off, never to be heard

from again? After being singled out did he quit because of his guilt? He did not. Let me quote from a website dedicated to the legends of Thomas in India.

The Saint Thomas Christians [referring to the Saint Thomas Christians in India] at present there are seven million of them, refer to themselves in this way because their tradition holds that their ancestors, who all came from the high castes of Hindu society were converted by the Apostle Saint Thomas, who landed in India in the year 52 AD” Church tradition tells us that he preached in ancient Babylon, near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where Iraq is today. He traveled to Persia, present day Iran, and continued to win disciples in the Christian faith. Then he sailed south to Malabar on the west coast of India in 52 AD. He preached and established churches and won to Christ the high caste Brahmins, as well as others. When the Portuguese landed in India in the early 1600s, they found a group of Christians there. The Mar Thoma church was established through Thomas preaching a millennium and a half before.

They had been there for 1500 years. When the Portuguese come to convert India and they find all of these Christians there. Let’s go on.

Finally, Thomas traveled to the east coast of India, preaching relentlessly. He was killed at Mylapore about 72 AD near present day Madras. Tradition tells us that he was thrown into a pit, and then pierced through with a spear thrown by a Brahmin.

Think about that. We have no proof, but there is a lot of historical evidence that indicated that Thomas went east through Babylon into India and his life ended there preaching the gospel.

Over the centuries, because of what we just read in the Bible, many people relate to Thomas. All of us are human and all of us have periods of doubt. Sometimes our faith is strong. Sometimes it’s not so strong and we relate to Thomas, who said, I’ve got to see this. We know we shouldn’t have that, but we do like the example we see.

It reminds me of the man that brought his son to Jesus Christ in Mark 9. His was demon possessed. He foamed at the mouth. He tore at himself, cut himself and all of that. Remember what Christ said to the father. He said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes.” Remember the reaction of the father. He cried out with tears and said, “help you in my unbelief.” Give me the strength. We know that comes through God’s holy spirit and it’s not the faith that we work up humanly. It is the faith of Christ, the faith that Christ had that’s available to us through the holy spirit.

Thomas was not converted at that time. He did not have God’s spirit in him. We can all relate to Thomas. The fact is that when Christ confronted him in front of all of the apostles. He was the only one that doubted. Can you imagine the guilt that he had and the embarrassment that he had to be singled out in front of the whole group. Christ called him up and said, put your hand in here. Now maybe you’ll believe. He could

have been destroyed by his guilt and his doubt. He could have just slinked off into obscurity, but he did not. Look what he did after he overcame his guilt and overcame his doubt. Thomas did not allow guilt to dominate him from that day on. He used the guilt to turn himself around spiritually, to grow in faith to the point that before it's all done we don't know how many hundreds of thousands, millions would have been converted during his life and thereafter because of his example and because of his deeds. Many were converted because of what he did after his guilt. That's the first example.

2. Peter

The second example is Peter. Let's go back to the last night of Christ's life. We covered that recently, so we won't go through the scriptures, but we'll just summarize it now. Peter had a very rough few hours at the end of Christ's life. Remember, Christ washed the disciples' feet. He had given them the bread and the wine. Then guess what happened immediately after that? The apostles, most likely lead by Peter began to argue. Do you remember what they argued about? Who was the greatest. This was surprising so soon immediately after the foot washing. They missed the whole point, of course. It was undoubtedly led by Peter, because he was the most outspoken, most vociferous of the bunch.

After that rebuke, Peter tells Christ in front of everybody that I will follow you to prison and I will follow you to death. He gave this bold statement in front of everybody. We know what happened after that. That night and early in the morning, just a few hours later after making that statement, Peter denied Christ three times. One of the gospels tells us that he did so with cursing and swearing, if you can imagine that. The fact is that Peter was more concerned at that moment about what strangers thought of him in the courtyard and his reputation. He was more concerned about his own life, thinking that he might be grabbed up and suffer the same thing Christ did. This is just a few hours after he said, "I'll stand with you to the death." He was obviously more concerned about his interests, his life, his reputation than what his Lord and Master thought about him.

Let's summarize Peter's actions. He was part of an argument as to who was the greatest, which occurred right after the foot washing. By the way, remember that before they took Christ and Peter had to follow, he tried to kill a servant of the high priest? He attempted to cut off his head. Because Peter was a fisherman and not a soldier, he missed and cut off the guy's ear and Christ healed him. He was admonished by Christ, if you recall, in Matthew 26. Christ said all they that take up the sword shall perish by the sword, so Peter was even admonished right then.

Then he denied Christ three times. After Christ looked over at him after the third time, we are told he wept bitterly. Why? It was because of the guilt that he felt. He looked back and said, "I've been arguing about who is the greatest. I tried to kill this guy and that's the exact opposite of what Christ taught all of his life. I've denied him three times." Cursing and swearing, he wept bitterly. After this you could easily see where somebody would just quit; stick the tail between the legs, walk off into the night never to

be heard from again. He could have been overcome with guilt. He could have quit his calling, quit his apostleship, but he did not.

In Acts 2 Peter gave that inspiring sermon in which he told people they are guilty of the body and blood of Christ and that Christ had to die because of their sins. They were so convicted that they asked what they should do. Remember, he said that they need to repent. They need to be baptized. We know that thousands were converted by his preaching. Let's go to Galatians 2:7. Paul is writing to the church at Galatia. Notice what he says about what Peter did after this guilt, after this embarrassment, after having looked eyeball to eyeball at Christ after he denied him three times.

Galatians 2:7. *But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (KJV)*

Look what he did after all of this.

8) (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:.) (KJV)

Christ worked with Peter to go after the Jewish community and to convert as many as God would call. Peter didn't walk off into the night. Peter took that guilt and did something positive with it. How many billions will be converted by the time it's all said and done by the writings of Peter and by the example of Peter? You see, he did not allow guilt to dominate him and to destroy him. He bitterly repented, we're told, and then he moved on to follow God and to do God's will.

3. James

The third example is the Apostle James. We know Christ had at least four brothers and at least two sisters. We don't know, but there is indication that James was the oldest of the brothers, next oldest to Christ. It appears that maybe he was one to three years younger than Christ. Let's go to Mark 6:1. James is very close in age to Jesus Christ. Notice what happened in the life of Christ; in his early life and in his later life relative to James.

Mark 6:1. *And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.*

2) And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

3) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. (KJV)

His own family was offended by him. The Greek word for offended is Strong's 4624. It's the Greek word "skandalizo" that we get the English word scandal or scandalize. It means *to trip up*. We would say they stumbled at Christ. They didn't get it. They didn't believe him.

4) But Jesus said unto them, ... (KJV)

Because of this they were offended or scandalized by him.

4b) ... A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. (KJV)

A prophet has honor everywhere but where he grew up. He is telling us that while he was growing up and while he was doing his miracles he got no respect from his family, his brothers or his sisters. In fact, we're going to see in just a minute that they thought he was crazy.

5) And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

6) And he marvelled because of their unbelief. ... (KJV)

He is talking about his family.

6b) ... And he went round about the villages, teaching. (KJV)

It appears, looking at these scriptures that his family did not recognize him as the Messiah. They didn't even recognize him as somebody special. He had no honor among his brothers and sisters. Let's go to Luke 2:41. This is all relative to James, because he was probably the oldest of Christ's brothers and sisters. We are going to paint a picture here of what James saw as he grew up and the example that he saw from his older brother.

Luke 2:41. *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.*

42) And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43) And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his [Christ's] mother knew not of it.

44) But they, supposing him to have been in the company, ... (KJV)

This means they thought he was tagging along with relatives and friends going back home.

44b) ... went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45) And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46) And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors [of the law], both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47) And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. (KJV)

He was twelve years old. He died a little beyond age thirty-three, so if you take away the twelve years, he had spent at least twenty-one years astonishing those people around him; astonishing those in the general area where he grew up, astonishing the doctors of the law here, hopefully astonishing some people in his family, but as we're going to see, not. You see, during all of these twenty-one years of doing the miracles, of the speaking, of the crowds following him, James had to have been there and had to have known of his deeds and his words.

Let's go to Mark 3:7. Notice, this is just an example of the fact that Christ was taking over the country, so to speak.

Mark 3:7. *But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, (KJV)*

Verse 20 from the New Living Translation

20) When Jesus returned to the house where he was staying, the crowds began to gather again. And soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat.

21) When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them, saying "He's out of his mind." (NLT)

They were making excuses for him. They didn't understand it. His family, including James thought he was nuts. When we get to the deeds of James and what happened to James, he spent a lot of years not believing his brother, thinking he was crazy.

We have to ask the question: Were Christ's brothers at the wedding in Cana in John 2? Probably so. Were Christ's brothers there when Christ raised a woman from the dead in Matthew 9? Probably so. Were they there when he raised the widow's son back to life in Luke 7? Probably so. When the 5,000 people followed him looking for a meal in John 8 and he did all of the miracles and fed all of the people, were they there? Probably so. Maybe they weren't there for all of them, but they were there for some of them or at least they heard about it if they weren't there. We don't appreciate this, but Christ was the talk of the nation. The fact is, after going around that area and doing all of these many, many, many miracles, he was indeed the talk of the nation and his brothers, James in particular, had to know all of this.

Let's go to John 7:1. Just as an explanation, back in chapter 5 he healed a lame man on the Sabbath by the pool in Bethesda and the Jews sought to kill him, because in

their view he violated the Sabbath, but more importantly he was taking glory away from them.

John 7:1. *After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. (KJV)*

It was for that very reason.

2) Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. (KJV)

I'm going to read verse 3 and on from the New Living Translation.

3) and Jesus' brothers urged him to go to Judea for the celebration, ... (NLT)

Why did they do that?

3b) ... "Go where your followers can see your miracles!" they scoffed.

4) "You can't become a public figure if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, prove it to the world!"

5) For even his brothers didn't believe in him. (NLT)

All of the modern translations say brothers, rather than brethren. It is clear it's a blood relative, not in the sense that we use brethren as members of God's church, part of the body of Christ.

Let's look back now and summarize. James was likely somewhere between one and three years younger than Christ. Christ died at a little over age thirty-three. Therefore, James was with him for thirty years. How many miracles did he see in those thirty years? How many astounding things did James see in those thirty years? With that in mind let's go to 1 Corinthians 15:3. What happened to James after Christ's death? We'll see.

1 Corinthians 15:3. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received,... (KJV)*

Paul is talking to this dysfunctional church.

3b) ... how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5) And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6) After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. (KJV)

This means they have died. Look at the witnesses, Paul is saying.

7) *After that, he was seen of James; ... (KJV)*

Christ appeared to this brother, who thought he was nuts. Christ appeared to this brother, who did not believe him.

7b) *... then of all the apostles.*

8) *And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (KJV)*

Can you imagine what Christ would say when he appeared to James? What would he have said to him? My guess he would say something like, we were together for thirty years and you didn't believe me. You saw all of the miracles. You didn't believe me. You heard the words that I said. You didn't believe me. I died. You thought I was dead. Now I am standing in front of you. What are you going to do about it, James? James took that rebuke to heart and James did indeed do something about it. Let's go to Galatians 2:9 and see what happened. James turned it around. He overcame his guilt.

Galatians 2:9. *And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. (KJV)*

We are told here in 52 AD that James was one of the three pillars of the New Testament Church. The Wycliffe Bible translation says that "they were seen to be leaders," those three. So, we see now by 52 AD that James was a leader of the church, right up there with Peter and John. All of a sudden James turned it around. If we will recall the Acts 15 conference, guess who summarized the consensus of the conference? It was James. James was the head apostle of the Jerusalem church. What we can learn from this is that James, despite rubbing elbows with his brother for thirty years and not believing him and doubting him and even maybe making fun of him, after all of that time Christ then appeared to him and confronted him. Can you imagine the guilt that he must have felt, wasting all of this time, wasting all of these years in doubt or ridicule or whatever he threw at his older brother? He did not allow the guilt to dominate him. He repented. He turned his life around through the power of the holy spirit. At some point he was baptized. Then, just a short period of time later he was the head apostle of the Jerusalem church. He did not allow guilt to destroy him. He did not stay stuck in the past. He moved on.

4. Paul

Now we come to the fourth example, Paul. If anybody in the New Testament would have guilt issues, it would be Paul, based on what he had done prior to being converted on the road to Damascus. Let's go to Acts 8:1. We'll just cover the highlights. I think all of us know what Paul did to the church. Just as a reminder, let's hit a few of the highlights.

Acts 8:1. *And Saul was consenting unto his death. ... (KJV)*

He was consenting, voting for his death.

1b) ... And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad ... (KJV)

Because of the persecution, the whole church just got scattered.

1 continued) ... throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2) And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3) As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. (KJV)

Now, the Greek word for “havock,” Zodhiates in his Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament says this is *ravage, waste, injure, destroy*. Paul did all of that to the early New Testament Christians. Adam Clark’s Commentary says that *it signifies the act of ferocious animals such as bears, wolves and the like in seeking and devouring their prey*. Paul had that attitude of a ferocious animal just trying to tear them apart and destroy them. Let’s go to Acts 9:13. This is talking about Ananias, who was a disciple. You can see that in verse 10.

Acts 9:13. *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: (KJV)*

He was just tearing the church apart. Now let’s go to Acts 22:4. Paul here admits what he has done. He is writing it there for all to see over the millennia.

Acts 22:4. *And I persecuted this way [the way of Christ] unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*

5) As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. (KJV)

That means tortured, whipped, as we are going to see, to try to get them to recount their belief in Jesus Christ. Now look at Acts 26:9 out of the New Living Translation. Paul is speaking.

Acts 26:9. *I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.*

10) Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers in Jerusalem to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. (KJV)

He had a hand in putting Christians, God's beloved children, to death.

11) Many times I had them whipped in the synagogues to try to get them to curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands. (KJV)

Talk about persecuting the church. He was the front man for the persecution of the church. Let's go to Galatians 1:13. Paul, again, is admitting his guilt, admitting his sins.

Galatians 1:13. *For ye have heard of my conversation in time in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: (KJV)*

The Greek can also mean destroyed it. As we read earlier, all of the brethren in Jerusalem fled, except for the apostles because of the persecution. I have mentioned this several times over the years, but imagine Paul now having been converted and traveling around the Middle East and going into areas where he previously had persecuted people. Can you imagine him preaching to people who were out in the audience, whose relatives, brothers, sisters, parents, children he caused to be put to death or preaching to people whose relatives were still in prison at that time? He's there telling them about Christ, which he previously persecuted them for, the relatives are in prison and now he's preaching to them. God was allowing that to happen so that Paul could see the depth of what he had done and see the hurt on people's faces and people coming up to him and saying this is what you did to my family. Paul had to experience that firsthand.

Let's summarize Paul's past. He approved of Stephen's death. He took great pleasure in it. He broke into houses, dragged people out, threw men and women into prison. Can you imagine? He chased members of the body of Christ into foreign lands and he imprisoned them and he had them beaten. He asked the high ranking elders and priests for permission and authority to do murder. He forced some Christians to blaspheme Christ when they were in the middle of torture. He did everything possible to oppose the name of Jesus Christ and then God struck him down and God called him. The question we have to ask (and we know the answer in hindsight) is: Did Paul allow that tremendous guilt of his sins to just destroy him? A lot of people would want to just commit suicide. Look what I've done to the church. Bam! Have it all over, but he didn't do that.

When God talked to Moses from the burning bush and said, I want you to go back to Egypt and free your people, remember Moses' answer? Moses said, "Let somebody else do it. I don't want to do it." Paul could have said I have sinned so much. Use somebody else. You can't possibly use me because of my reputation and what I've done and the evil that I've done, but he didn't do that. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 15:9 from the New King James translation. Notice his attitude. Paul had been taken down several notches and he looked back to see what he had done and now realized that Christ wanted him to do something different.

1 Corinthians 15:9. *For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, ... (NKJV)

Meaning I've been called. I have His holy spirit and He is giving me a job to do.

10b) ... and His grace toward me was not in vain; ... (NKJV)

Meaning I was called and God gave me a commission to do, a job to do and who am I to turn my back on that, despite what I've done, despite my sins. He showed Christ by his fruits that he had rejected his past and he wanted to obey him and wanted to serve God's people, despite his evil deeds. Can you imagine the guilt he would have, any of us would have, if we had done what Paul had done. Despite that, notice what he said in 2 Timothy 4:8. He could say there's no way I'm going to be in the kingdom. There's no way God loves me and hang his head low and go off and eat some worms or something like that, as we say today.

2 Timothy 4:8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (KJV)*

He said, "I'm going to have a crown, despite all of the evil I have done." He overcame the guilt and did the works, wrote more of the New Testament than any single author. This is a man who killed God's people. Paul went on to dynamically serve God and dynamically serve His people.

We have talked now about four men who have overcome guilt, did not allow guilt to hinder them. These were four incredibly flawed human beings. Thomas, Peter, James and Paul committed horrible sins, lacked faith and yet they did not allow guilt to dominate them. They repented and they moved on to do God's will, to serve God's people. God used each one of them to push forward dynamically the gospel.

Now that leads to the fifth point.

5. How can we learn to move on once we have sinned?

Once we have repented, how can we move on? I have known God's people that get stuck in the past, can't get unhinged from the past. They look at the sins they've committed and they forget the scriptures and just get stuck in the past. They can't move on, can't break out of it. What we're going to do is talk about three ways that we can move on, overcome the guilt once we have seen our sins and then once we have repented of our sins.

5.a. First, we need to realize that there are no categories of sin.

We have talked about that before over the years. Let's go to James 2:8. This is a sermon in itself, but we will just briefly cover it. One of the four who we have covered today is talking to us right now.

James 2:8. *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:*

9) *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

10) *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (KJV)*

We know that the penalty is the same for disobeying any of the commandments. It's the same; death, Romans 6:23. Therefore, if you look at the ten, human nature will categorize them as to which is the worst and which is the least worst. God is saying if you break one, it's the same as breaking them all. The penalty is exactly the same. There are no categories in God's eyes. In fact, in God's eyes there is no difference between doing murder and lying. The penalty is the same.

Yes, certain sins have bigger consequences than others. If you take somebody's life, there is a huge consequence to that and the person's family and all of that. We can think of other sins that we can commit and they leave longer lasting, deeper scars than others, but in God's eyes they are all the same. Once the law is broken, it is indeed broken. Therefore, we should not have differing levels of guilt depending on which one we break. If we tell a lie, we should have the same guilt as if we killed somebody. In God's eyes it is the same. God takes all ten seriously and James is trying to tell us that. Therefore, we can't have varying levels of guilt based on our view of which sins are worse than others, when God says you can't do that because they are all the same.

5.b. Once we acknowledge our sin and repent of it, God keeps no record of wrongs.

The beauty is the second point. Once we acknowledge our sin and repent of it God keeps no record of wrongs. We do, but He doesn't. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13:1 from the New King James translation.

1 Corinthians 13:1. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.*

2) *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

3) *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

4) *Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; (NKJV)*

Now we get to the key.

*5) does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
(NKJV)*

The Greek word for “thinks” is Strong’s 3049. Guess what it means? You wouldn’t intuitively think this. It means *to take an inventory*. It tells us here that love takes no inventory of evil. In the New International Version and in the margin of the New King James translation we are told it’s translated *keeps no record of wrongs*. There are two messages there. First, we shouldn’t keep a list of other people’s sins and hold that against them. Also, we should keep no record of our sins once they have been repented of. The fact is that we are told in the scriptures that God is love. We all understand that. So, since 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs, we can correctly connect the two and say that God keeps no record of our wrongs once we acknowledge them and repent of them. God does not have a laundry list of our sins posted on the bulletin board in heaven. Sometimes we have a hard time dealing with that. I do. God knows my sins. He knows what I’ve done. Yet, we are being told He is not keeping a list here. He doesn’t have this thing on His iPad with all of my sins on it. We are told that God does not do that and we have to believe that. Yet, sometimes we think, I have sinned so much, I have sinned so greatly that how can He wipe them away. How can He not remember, because I remember? Just because we remember doesn't mean God remembers. Once we repent the sin is gone. Once it is gone it remains gone as long as we don’t repeat it. Therefore, we should not keep a laundry list of our sins, to keep beating ourselves up about.

That being said, we obviously should be aware of our weaknesses, our flaws, our shortcomings and our tendencies so that we can remain on guard from repeating those sins. But to beat ourselves up with a past laundry list of our sins, what happens is that we can allow guilty to overcome us and we get stuck in the past. We have seen by four giants in the New Testament that they did not allow that to happen and neither should we. Let’s go to Hebrews 9:11 from the New King James translation.

Hebrews 9:11. *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. (NKJV)*

It wasn’t a physical tabernacle.

12) Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

13) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

14) how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (NKJV)

This is exactly what those four men did. They cleansed their conscience from the dead works, the unfruitful works, the unproductive works of doubting Christ or not believing Christ, or persecuting the church and went on to serve the living God. That's what they did. Of course there is a message for us. Turn to Hebrews 10:19, again from the New King James translation. This is because God has forgiven us and He is not keeping a record of our wrongs.

Hebrews 10:19. *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, (NKJV)*

Now, that boldness does not come from the weak and base things of the world, as we read in 1 Corinthians 1:26. That boldness comes, because we are a new creation through the holy spirit. We have been cleansed from guilt and cleansed from sin. Therefore, we can come boldly to the throne of God without having a laundry list taped to our back, so to speak.

*20) by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,
21) and having a High Priest over the house of God,
22) let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
(NKJV)*

The Hebrew word for sprinkled is taken from the atonement command. Remember, the high priest would take the blood of the lamb and sprinkle it over the mercy seat. That lamb was a lamb that God chose. Obviously, in its fulfillment God chose His Son to do the same thing. You see, when the priest in Ancient Israel sprinkled the blood over the mercy seat, then all of the people of Israel were symbolically clean. Then the high priest emerged out of the holy of holies to stand in front of the people and the entire nation would cheer "clean before God" because of what had just happened. Because of God not keeping a record of our repented wrongs, we can go forward with boldness without guilt holding us back, as these four men did.

5.c. With God, every day can be a do-over.

This is good news, too. With God every day can be a do-over. Each new day is an opportunity to do the right thing that we did wrong yesterday. We don't have to repeat the same sins. We don't have to have the guilt dragging along behind us. Once we see our sins and repent of our sins, guess what? The next morning when we open our eyes we have a do over. I can do it right today. I don't have to repeat what I did. As the man said, "We often allow guilt to consume us, but we must realize that we can start over again at any time we choose." Let's go to 2 Corinthians 5:17. The reason we can start over is this.

2 Corinthians 5:17. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: ...
(KJV)*

The Greek can also mean *creation*. He is a new person. He is a new being. She is a new person and a new being.

17b) ... old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)

Each day we have the opportunity to be that new person, who does not repeat the sins of the past and who has come out of the guilt of the past to go on and do what we see the examples of these four men teaching us to do. What a blessing from God. Each new day we have an opportunity to show God that we want to be like Him and behave like Him that we have truly repented of our sins. The way we show God we have truly repented of our sins is to not repeat them again. We are judged by our works. When all of a sudden we stop repeating a sin, then God knows we have truly repented. We have overcome it. It is not a problem anymore. It is as far away as the east is from the west. I will not remember it. We need to do the same thing. It's hard as a human, but we need to do that.

So, we have seen three ways to not let guilt hold us back. Let's summarize now. Guilt is a gift from God. I mean that. It is a gift, because it leads to repentance and it leads to change. It motivates us to change, because we don't want to repeat the agony and the horror of what we did yesterday mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. One of the great benefits of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, one of the many things that Christ did and continues to do for us is that once we have repented our conscience is cleansed, as we read. Our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. We have not been called to dwell in our past sins. For some of us that's harder than for others, because we feel so guilty, but we have been called to move on as Paul did, as Peter did, as James did, as Thomas did. If we've repented, they have been forgiven.

Remember this. No amount of guilt can change our past. Our past is our past. It's there. We did it. There's nothing we can do to change that, but guilt can motivate us not to repeat the past. That's the key. Guilt can be used for a higher purpose to motivate us to not repeat the past. When we don't repeat the past, guess what God says. They have overcome. It's gone; east from the west.

Look at the examples we've seen. Look at doubting Thomas. Look at Peter's behavior at the end of Christ's life, denying him with cursing and swearing three times. Look at the wasted thirty years James had of not believing his brother. Look at what Paul did to the church murdering people, men and women, in prison torturing them, beating them, causing them to reject and denounce Jesus Christ. In each case these four became new creations and they moved on with their spiritual lives. Let's follow the examples of these four and countless others and daily thank God that once we repent our conscience can be one hundred percent clear and clean and the guilt can be removed. As David said, then we can know the joy of salvation.