

GUILT FEELINGS

We are all moral beings and have a natural sense of morality. We are all equipped with a conscience - the monitoring apparatus that evaluates how we are doing. The trouble is that we all fall short of our own standards, never mind God's standards. Any shortfall between what we believe to be right and how we actually behave, registers as guilt on our conscience.

This is real guilt as opposed to false guilt. False guilt is when others make you feel guilty by measuring you against their expectations, or when you expect too much of yourself and keep falling short. This makes you feel bad about yourself. False guilt is in the mind; it is psychological guilt not spiritual guilt, and is to be rejected. But real guilt is where we have done things that are morally wrong. It has to be dealt with correctly or we damage our conscience, which is a very sensitive and important part of who we are as humans.

A guilty conscience is one of the things that can make us feel bad inside. Guilt is such an important issue that God made special provision to atone for it. It required sacrifice, by a perfect person to deal with the imperfections of humanity. That was the primary reason for the crucifixion of Christ. He gave his life and shed his blood to atone for our sins and grant us forgiveness. The Scriptures teach that it is only faith in the blood of Christ that can cleanse our conscience. (Romans 3v25,26). If we confess our sins He will forgive them totally. They will be removed from our consciences. (Hebrews 9v14).

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin' (Psalm 32 v5)

A clean conscience is a great blessing. A sense of total forgiveness is one of the greatest blessings it is possible to have. With a clear conscience we can hold our heads up high and face life. With a guilty conscience we don't feel worthy of life.

Two of Christ's disciples demonstrate the contrasting effects of dealing with, or not dealing with guilt. Peter denied the Lord with cursing and swearing. When his conscience sprang into action he was filled with remorse and sorrow. He felt a failure and wanted to give up his apostolic calling and return to fishing. But he was repentant, and wept bitterly over his failures. Christ forgave him and reaffirmed him in his life's mission and destiny. His guilt was removed and he went on to live a very courageous and fulfilling life.

By contrast, Judas, after he betrayed the Lord, likewise felt terrible remorse. But he did not return to God in repentance. He felt so awful that he could no longer live with himself, so he hanged himself to escape his pain. Suicide seemed to him to be the only way to cope with his shame.

For those tormented by guilt and a sense of failure, suicide is not the answer. Instead the answer is found in recourse to God's mercy and forgiveness. Faith in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins brings total forgiveness. Total forgiveness is a great feeling and a great way to live. The darkness and guilt of failure recedes and the light of a new day dawns.