

How to Handle Guilt

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness. ... To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ...
—Revelation 1:5

Have you ever driven down the highway and heard the wail of a siren behind and seen that flashing blue light in the rearview mirror? What a relief when the patrol car overtook you and sped away! It was not you the police were after.

It is almost impossible not to feel guilty about some things. Moreover, sometimes guilt can motivate us to do strange things when it comes to our relationships with others. For example, we may feel guilty because we dislike a person, and to compensate we try to be extra friendly.

But true guilt can be experienced beyond doubt through regeneration. We may try to make unconverted people feel true guilt, but we never quite succeed in making them aware they have sinned against God: it is the Holy Spirit who does that. When the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, they see they have offended God, and they come to the place where David was when he prayed, “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4). Only a regenerate person can talk like that.

How, then, should we handle true guilt? I believe we have three options:

1. The “fatal” solution

Some people repress their guilt. God created us in His own image, and we ignore our conscience at our peril.

2. The temporary solution

I can change my life, and then I will have no reason to feel guilty. It’s so easy to make a promise, but you will break it eventually. This solution will only work for a time.

3. The biblical solution

The Bible offers a permanent solution to the problem of guilt. We need to look at Revelation 1:5 for the answer. All our guilt was placed on Jesus when He took our place on the cross. And when we accept what He did for us and turn in repentance to Him, God looks at us, and His verdict is, "Not guilty!"

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