

The Great Physician's Prescription for Guilt and Shame

Your chest tightens. Nervousness develops in the pit of your stomach. You knew better, so how could you have done such a thing?

Then fear kicks in. You fear you can't talk to God as before; you fear you're not clean enough to be in His presence—not after what you've done.

These symptoms of guilt and shame are almost as old as time itself.

Adam and Eve instantly felt shame after the original sin. They tried to hide from God. Peter denied Jesus three times and then wept bitterly. After betraying Jesus, Judas took his own life.

Not much has changed, has it? Thousands of years later, guilt and shame remain as crippling as ever.

Guilt Versus Shame

Many confuse those two words but, while they are connected, they are quite different.

You experience guilt when you have done something against your code of ethics. It's the feeling you get when you've done something wrong, such as, "I blew my diet binging on doughnuts," or "I lost it on my kids."

In contrast, shame shifts the blame to your character. It's the belief that your whole self is wrong. With shame, you may think, "I blew this diet because *I'm* bad," or "I yelled at my

kids because *I'm* a terrible parent." Shame is also why many Christians won't mention they battle depression or anxiety or admit when they are sick.

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Guilt causes fear of punishment, and shame causes you to feel inferior, incompetent or deficient. Both share a simple cure: the gospel of Jesus Christ—so long as you accept three truths about it.

Truth No. 1: The Gospel Freed You From the Law

Jesus acknowledged, "I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writing of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose" (Matt. 5:17b, NLT).

Some might say, "See, Kyle, Jesus didn't come to do away with the Law." I agree, but it's not instructions you must live by today. It was never meant to be *your* code of ethics to uphold or else.

The Law remains here to do what it was always meant to do—reveal to people that they can't live perfectly and they need a Savior (see Rom. 3:19–20).

Jesus came as that Savior and, in doing so, He fulfilled the Law (see Romans 10:4). His sacrifice was all that was necessary. What the gospel means is that you are free from the guilt of failing the 613 rules in the Law (which begin with the Ten Commandments).

Truth No. 2: The Gospel Promises You Are Forgiven Forever

The gospel promises that you are forgiven—not just of past sins, but also of future sins.

Total and timeless forgiveness is a consistent theme

throughout the New Testament. Perhaps the apostle Paul put it most explicitly: “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19a).

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Besides putting you at ease, believing that you remain forgiven is also empowering. That’s because humans do better in an environment of grace, where there is no pressure to perform and no fear of punishment.

I explore this big idea in my next book, “Permission to Be Imperfect.” It’s as the author of Hebrews warned: If you remain sin-conscious, with all the guilt that comes from it, you will just continue to sin (see Heb. 10:1–3).

Focus on your forgiveness instead. You will sin less when you think less about your sin and more about your forgiveness.

Truth No. 3: The Gospel Provided You With a New Identity

Salvation isn’t just forgiveness. It’s an exchanged identity. It’s a new nature. The gospel assures that on the cross, Jesus took your sin and, with your belief, you received His identity.

This changed identity is the cure for shame. Remember, shame is the feeling or fear that “I am wrong.” The gospel maintains that Jesus made you right.

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“All who believe are made right with God” (Rom. 3:22b, RAD).

It’s as I often say, “Christ rights you despite you!” You don’t have a sin nature; you have a new nature.

Stop feeling bad about your mistakes or about yourself. Don't live guilty. Don't live shamed. Live loved. Live as the new person you are.

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