

Guilt and God's Word

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Feeling guilty is a natural, God-given emotion. We sometimes call it our "conscience." People without a conscience are ruthless, cruel, and barbaric. Guilt and conscience are the only things besides laws and force that stop genocide, holocausts, or anarchy.

But guilt is not always good. Guilt is sometimes the devil's favorite tool to make good people stumble.

Satan's strategy is to make us feel guilty over things that we really should not feel guilty about. Such guilt is sometimes called "false guilt". It usually is a result of believing one of Satan's favorite lies.

The first lie is "You must do everything perfectly." People who believe this lie tend to become perfectionists or to give up. Perfectionists feel guilty if the silverware is misplaced on the table by a millimeter or two, or if a dandelion pokes its head up in the front yard.

Setting a neat table or maintaining a well-kept yard are very nice things to do, but there is nothing particularly biblical or holy about them. People who feel guilty over imperfections that have nothing to do with godly living soon find that it is impossible to do anything at all without feeling guilty. As a result, they are hard on themselves, try to drive others to a level of perfection they themselves cannot reach, and are simply not very much fun to live with.

The second lie that produces false guilt is this: "You must do everything that you have been taught to do, especially if you learned it from your parents or from the church."

Fortunately, most of what we learn from our parents and from the church is good and ought to be followed. But neither parents nor churches are equal to the Word of God.

Satan hates it when Christians study God's Word for themselves because they soon discover that God can give them power to begin living it. They focus on growing with the Lord and not on measuring up to impossible standards. As a result, they don't live in guilt or become discouraged and give up.

On the other hand, Satan loves it when people set their standards according to what others say. No one can possibly do what everyone else thinks they ought to do. The result of equating human standards with God's standards is never ending guilt that often leads to bitterness against God and the Church. The solution to such guilt is to study God's Word, attend a positive, Bible preaching church and then trust God to judge us fairly.

A third lie that produces false guilt is "You are wrong no matter what you do." For example, a person who feels guilty about placing his elderly parent in a nursing home may feel just as guilty if he does not place that same parent where he or she can be cared for 24 hours a day. Or mother of young children may feel guilty for not volunteering at school, but once she starts to volunteer she may feel guilty for being away from her family too much. She feels guilty if she does and guilty if she doesn't.

People who feel guilty no matter what they do need to discover God's will for their lives and then do it regardless of how they feel. Instead of judging ourselves, we are to do what is right and leave the judging to God.

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