

What Is True Guilt?

- True guilt is the result of sinning.
“So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27).
- Guiltiness is the condition we are in when we sin.
“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).
- True guilt requires a sacrificial payment for violating God’s revealed will.
“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

What Is False Guilt?

- False guilt arises when you blame yourself, even though you’ve committed no wrong or when you continue to blame yourself after you’ve confessed and turned from your sin.
- False guilt keeps you in bondage to three destructive weapons ... **shame, fear, and anger.**
- Ironically, confession does not resolve false guilt. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the “*accuser of our brothers and sisters.*” He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

*“Godly sorrow brings repentance
that leads to salvation and leaves no regret,
but worldly sorrow brings death.”*
(2 Corinthians 7:10)

True Guilt vs. False Guilt

- **True Guilt:** Based on fact
False Guilt: Based on feelings
- **True Guilt:** Results in a godly sorrow over sin
False Guilt: Results in a worldly fear of consequences
- **True Guilt:** Brings conviction from the Holy Spirit
False Guilt: Brings condemnation from Satan
- **True Guilt:** Results in repentance
False Guilt: Results in depression
- **True Guilt:** Accepts forgiveness
False Guilt: Abides in self-pity
- **True Guilt:** Appropriates Christ’s finished work
False Guilt: Achieves many personal good works
- **True Guilt:** Brings reconciliation with God and others
False Guilt: Brings alienation from God and others

*“Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”*
(John 8:32)

Development of False Guilt

- **Wrong Belief:** “I don’t feel God’s love, and the only way I can have any sense of value and worth is to be loved, accepted, and admired by another person.”
Right Belief: “The only way to receive God’s fulfilling love is to recognize my inner needs and look to Him for love, for acceptance, and for meaning in life.”

*“Anyone who believes in him
will never be put to shame.”*
(Romans 10:11)

Key Verse to Memorize

*“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 32:5)

Key Passage to Read

Hebrews 10:1–23

Recognize the Voice of Your Enemy

Satan tenaciously incriminates committed Christians, using guilt and fear to generate severe spiritual discouragement. Learn to discern the lies of Satan. He often communicates with a subtle use of unreasonable *shoulds*.

- “You *should* be smarter and more capable.”
- “You *should* be able to get over your loss much more quickly.”
- “You *should* have been more careful and conscientious.”
- “You *should* do more for the poor people around you.”
- “You *should* endure hardship and pain with dignity.”
- “You *should* never display anger or disappointment.”
- “You *should* never let anyone know your real feelings.”
- “You *should* never cry or show weakness.”
- “You *should* never tell your pastor *no*.”
- “You *should* be the perfect friend, mate, parent, or employee.”

*“The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them
before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”*
(Revelation 12:10)

True Guilt or False Accusation?

- **True Guilt** speaks with conviction, reminding you that we are all guilty of sin.
False Accusation: “I feel like a failure and not as worthy as others.”
- **True Guilt** is concerned about developing your inner character.
False Accusation: “I worry about how I look in the eyes of others.”
- **True Guilt** communicates God’s love and encouragement.
False Accusation: “I feel humiliated when I do something wrong.”
- **True Guilt** does not make excuses for itself.
False Accusation: “I feel that I can’t be healed ... that I’m a victim of my past.”

- **True Guilt** allows for failure.
False Accusation: “I feel like I’ll never measure up because of my repeated failures.”
- **True Guilt** encourages your real feelings to surface.
False Accusation: “I feel I must never become angry.”
- **True Guilt** is accompanied by a desire to change.
False Accusation: “I feel like there is no hope for me.”
- **True Guilt** lifts your spirit and brings joy when you commune with God.
False Accusation: “I feel like God doesn’t hear my prayers.”
- **True Guilt** is optimistic about the future.
False Accusation: “I feel that something bad is sure to happen to me in the future.”

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(Jeremiah 29:11)

You Are Forgiven

Find the source of your guilt. (2 Timothy 3:16)

Own responsibility for your sin. (1 John 1:9)

Realize that God means what He says.
(Ephesians 1:7–8)

Give up dwelling on the past. (Isaiah 43:18)

Invest time in renewing your mind.
(Ephesians 4:22–23)

Verify truth when Satan accuses. (Isaiah 54:17)

Exchange your life for the life of Christ.
(Galatians 2:20)

Notice that God brings your feelings in line with the facts when you obey Him. (Hebrews 10:36)

*“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one
whose sin the LORD does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*
(Psalm 32:1–2)

The Holy Spirit and True Guilt

- The Holy Spirit is a gift from God. (Acts 2:38)
- The Holy Spirit makes His home in your heart. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- The Holy Spirit communicates God’s love for you. (Romans 5:5)
- The Holy Spirit writes God’s laws on your heart. (Hebrews 10:15–16)

- The Holy Spirit helps you understand the thoughts of God. (1 Corinthians 2:11)
- The Holy Spirit confirms your conscience. (Romans 9:1)
- The Holy Spirit brings conviction to your heart. (1 Thessalonians 1:5)
- The Holy Spirit fills you with hope! (Romans 15:13)
- The Holy Spirit gives you the power to obey God. (Acts 1:8)

Questions and Answers

“What happens when I disobey the prompting of the Holy Spirit?”

To disobey the prompting of the Holy Spirit is to reject the Holy Spirit. To reject the Holy Spirit is to reject God.

“Anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.”

(1 Thessalonians 4:8)

“If I am supposed to feel guilty when I sin, why do I feel happy when I am sinning?”

Scripture does not say that sin is unpleasant. The attraction and lure of sin is that it indeed promises happiness. But the Bible warns, although there is pleasure in sin, the pleasure lasts only for a season.

*“The mirth of the wicked is brief,
the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.”*

(Job 20:5)

“I saw a friend steal something, and the next day I reported it. How can I not feel guilty for betraying my friend?”

Consider this: *Who is the one that is truly guilty?* Your “friend” is the one who needs to feel *true guilt*. Recognize that you are feeling *false guilt*. Any weak person can keep silent after witnessing a theft, but it takes a strong person—a real friend of conscience—to speak up. Although you may not see it now, if your friend experiences a painful repercussion, you may have saved your friend from a lifestyle of stealing.

“A truthful witness saves lives.”

(Proverbs 14:25)

“How can I know which sins are deeply buried if I’m not even aware of the truth?”

Trust God. He knows the hidden places of your heart and will reveal them to the sincere seeker of truth.

*“Would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?”*

(Psalm 44:21)

HOPE FOR THE HEART’s *Biblical Counseling Library* contains our *Biblical Counseling Keys*, providing *God’s Truth for Today’s Problems* on 100+ topics.

The *Quick Reference Guides* contain excerpts from our *Biblical Counseling Keys* and offer immediate, concise answers with *biblical hope and practical help*. For more comprehensive help and additional resources, refer to our *Biblical Counseling Keys* on **Guilt**.

If you would like more information, biblical counsel, or prayer support, contact:
1-800-488-HOPE (4673)
www.HopeForTheHeart.org

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Related Topics ...

- Abuse Recovery
- Anger
- Depression
- Habits & Addictions
- Perfectionism
- Self-Worth
- Worry



*Together ... Changing Minds.
Changing Hearts. Changing Lives.*

P.O. Box 7, Dallas, TX 75221