

A MESSAGE ON YOUR GOD-GIVEN WORTH

FREEDOM FROM GUILT: IMPROVED SELF ESTEEM

God seeks to free us from the low self esteem that often results from guilt and resentment.



By George Foster

Some of the greatest causes of low self esteem have nothing to do with looks, money, brains, or social position. They are related to things we have done and are ashamed of, or things that have happened to us that cause us pain and resentment.

Memories come back to haunt us with accusations that we are no good and that we deserve to suffer for what we have done. These memories may be like reliving the experience and feeling the pain and the shame again and again. Even when actual memories have faded away or have been repressed, they may have left harmful responses and thought patterns that we cannot explain even to ourselves.

Many times these feelings go away when we repent of our sins and take Jesus into our lives. We experience the new birth and everything becomes new.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

There are times, though, that we continue experiencing the guilt or resentment until we deal with specific things from the old life. That often means forgiving people who have hurt, or cheated, or offended us in the past. It may also mean confessing, repenting and repaying people whom we have hurt or cheated or offended. We have made our peace with God at our conversion, but we must also make restitution for wrongs we have committed against people.

Get free from the pain of hurtful memories

The apostle Paul, before his conversion to Christ, was known as Saul, a notorious persecutor of Christians. His memories could have crippled him for the rest of his life, but he didn't let that happen.

In his letter to the Ephesians he acknowledged, “Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

To his disciple, Timothy, he added: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

At one point, defending himself before a court of law, Paul admitted that in his pre-conversion days...“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison...” (Acts 22:4).

Continuing his defense, he went on to tell of a bright, blinding light that shone and a voice that spoke to him saying, “Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?”

Recognizing that it was God speaking to him, Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?”

The answer came immediately, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. (See Acts 22:7-9).

Saul’s change was more than a name change; it was a revolutionary transformation. When Jesus came into his life as Lord and Savior, everything was different. Christ’s presence in Paul made him a new person with new hopes, joys, dreams, aspirations and values. Things he treasured before diminished in importance and were replaced by a healthy vision of life and a fresh start at it.

From persecutor, Paul became persecuted. From attacker of the faith he became the faith’s most prominent defender. He always carried the memory of the wrong he had done, but he was free from torment. Paul could have suffered for the rest of his life, but he found freedom through a wonderful formula:

“One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

These powerful words are easy to understand, but not always easy to follow. We can only be free from the torment of guilty memories when we correct what we have done.

Quit hiding.

Israel’s King David committed a terrible sin and then went through a time of torment in his life when he tried to keep his sin hidden from public knowledge.

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. 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 32:4-5).

Once that forgiveness was granted, David rejoiced:

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2).

Instead of hiding his sinful schemes, David then wanted his buried thoughts and sins to be exposed so he could deal with them in a healthy and permanent way:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”. (Psalm 139:23, 24).

When the Holy Spirit reveals the hidden things in our hearts, we can deal with them. If He shows us sin, we can repent and confess. If He shows us hurt and resentment, we can forgive those who have hurt us. Then we are ready to accept God’s promise—like this one in Isaiah 43:18:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland” (Isaiah 43:18-20).

Keep your conscience clear.

Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy his disciple:

“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk” (I Timothy 1:5-6).

Paul is writing about absolute essentials. A Christian life can only be built upon these foundation stones:

a pure heart,
a good conscience,
a sincere faith.

None of these stones can be eliminated. We must do whatever it takes to have them firmly in place. If we fail to establish this foundation, we may suffer serious consequences as he expresses in the following passage:

“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith” (I Timothy 1:18-19).

Dare to ask for joy

We are made in such a way that we cannot separate what we are from what we do. We commit sins because we are sinful at heart. Even when we have been forgiven and changed at the core, we may suffer if we consider ourselves such sinful persons that we should never think of being joyful again.

That was not the case with David. His repentance and confession were so thorough that he dared believe that he could be honorable and happy again. His prayer of repentance that started with “I know about my wrongs and I can’t forget my sin,” went on to include these well known lines:

“Restore to me the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.” (Psalm 51:3,12).

You, too, can have your joy and confidence restored. If your low self esteem is caused by a guilty conscience or wounds caused by others, you can do something now. Apologize and ask forgiveness of those you have hurt, and forgive those who have hurt you. If you have a debt to pay, declare your intention to pay it and then clear it up as quickly as possible. If you desire inner peace and confidence and the assurance that God’s will is being fulfilled in your life, don’t put off the liberating experience of clearing your mind, your heart, and your conscience of resentment for wounds you have suffered and guilt for wounds you have caused.