

How to Get Rid of GUILT

Guilty! It's the way millions feel. Guilt feelings—bearing shameful memories, being unable to rid oneself of haunting doubts—are standard fare for too many people. They are also fertile ground for cults whose leaders exploit these feelings of guilt for their own selfish purposes. Are you a guilty person? Do nagging doubts about your past and apprehensions over your future plague your mind? If so, you need to read this. It could change everything

The taunting chant picked up in intensity, punctuated by the unbearable sight of Wanda's pigtails bouncing up and down saucily as she, too, joined the little group who had now abandoned their skip rope to take up the cry, "Jimmy's got a girl friend! Jimmy's got a girl friend! Jimmy's got a girl friend!..."

It was like a song, an old remembered refrain he had sung to himself at least a hundred times, consisting of only three notes that somehow contrived to rake against his brain like that horse-faced teacher's chalk had in English class when she made his skin prickle with the squeaking sound she had made writing on the blackboard.

They had been jumping one at a time when Gloria suddenly jumped into the middle of his turn and caused him to miss a step and fall awkwardly against her. Together they had yelped as the rope struck their ankles with the sting of bristle-stiff hemp, and then they had been on the ground, with Gloria's skirt embarrassingly high and Jimmy's arm somehow around her shoulders.

He had leapt to his feet then, trying not to look, checks burning with shame as the laughter began, and his arch enemy (that little smart aleck from the other side of town) began taunting him—"Jimmy's got a girl friend! Jimmy's got a..."

He had shyly pulled Wanda's pigtails once because he had heard some of the older boys in the third grade say the girls liked it and that was why they wore their hair like that. He liked Wanda and made up daydreams about her. Now even Wanda was there with her face swimming through the mist that clouded his eyes, nagging him like his own mother, joining the insufferable chant that, if it didn't stop, would reduce him to quivering jelly.

The recess bell rang loudly, and Mrs. Shuey, their teacher, clapped her hands

from the porch nearby. “That’s enough, children!” she said with her high-pitched, cracked voice. George slowly began to coil the rope, the first to quit the chant. But the bell and Mrs. Shuey’s voice had done it, and finally the ordeal was over.

But the shame remained.

He didn’t like Gloria at all. She was too forward, too much like a boy—and she was fat. It was all her fault. She had jumped right into the middle of his turn, and just because they had fallen ... It just wasn’t fair, but he felt ashamed—somehow guilty.

Simple cruelties of childhood can contrive to produce long remembered feelings of guilt in everyone. Shame, embarrassment, guilt—all are insufferable wounds to ego. Throughout all our lives we human beings seem unable to rid ourselves of feelings of guilt. From earliest memory we were shamed, made to feel dirty, evil, forgetful, inadequate and guilty. From playground encounters with other children to the rebukes and punishment of thoughtless parents who reinforced our feelings of guilt, most humans have been molded and shaped into many complex personality quirks that plague their minds.

Guilt and inferiority go hand in hand. Millions of seemingly outgoing, dynamic, successful people have been driven by inner feelings of inferiority. Seeking continually to prove these nagging doubts wrong, to demonstrate to themselves and to their friends they are not truly inferior (as they believe, deep down), they struggle to achieve, to succeed.

The Beginnings of Guilt

Thoughtless parents begin the process, cruel playmates refine it, and human feelings of inferiority complete it. Guilt. By the time most of us are adults, we have an intricate maze of subjective perceptions, concepts, apprehensions, doubts, fears, worries, neuroses, fixations, hatreds, anxieties and defense mechanisms. Our minds are terribly adept at fending off the truth about ourselves—far more effective than the most sophisticated radar-jamming devices. We are willing to go to almost any lengths to quiet these nagging inner voices—from frequent visits to a favorite shrink to pilgrimages to a neighborhood church.

The Freudian aspects are not to be ignored, for many of the most poignant of the

guilt feelings stem directly from witless teachings passed on by ignorant parents and thoughtless friends and revolve around sex. (No doubt there are people who believe anyone under five feet, six inches of the male species overindulged in masturbation [it will stunt your growth, the parent said]. And that carries horrible specters of unimaginable problems for midgets).

Ignorant masses of guilty people contrive to foist these same psychoses off on the next generation in spite of the imagined freedom of a sex-conscious, anti-Augustinian society. In the early teens youngsters become deeply conscious of their developing bodies, and with that consciousness come various hang-ups, doubts, anxieties, shame and guilt. The lies are endlessly promulgated that sexual prowess relates directly to size, so millions of males grow up feeling inadequate. Statistics would be impossible to collect showing the direct relationship between these lies perpetuated in high-school locker rooms and broken marriages, homosexuals, impotency or even suicide, but the relationship is there nevertheless.

Inferiority, Inadequacy and Guilt

All human beings feel inferior. Guilt and inferiority go hand in hand. Society demands success. To be successful is the only acceptable goal in life, and success is measured not by what we are but by what we have. When we are unsuccessful—that is, when we have fewer *things* than others—we feel inferior and guilty. There must be some reasons why we are unsuccessful or we wouldn't *be* unsuccessful. Those unspoken reasons haunt us, for we suspect our friends are continually speaking of them behind our backs.

Are we lazy or just lacking in initiative, inventiveness, energy and zeal? Are we lacking in education and ideas? Since we tend to measure success by material possessions rather than quality of character, our success or the lack of it is terribly, painfully visible.

The neighborhood, the size and appearance of our homes, our automobiles (which are statements of our personality and our success), the club to which we belong, if any, and even the more personal aspects of dress, personal taste and culture are vastly important to our image.

How many millionaires are there who lack any specifically important goal in life

other than making money? Making money was a means to the end of owning things, and the size, location and quality of those things was the statement, visible to the whole world, of their true character. Rich is respectable.

There are probably as many successful, rich, prominent people who became so because of their desperate desire to overcome their guilt feelings, their inadequacies, their lack of success and suspected inferiority as there are those who were unaware of such nonsense.

Adolf Hitler had only one testicle. He had a deep, bitter hatred of an unsuccessful father and a deep, hidden mother fixation. His Freudian relation with Eva Braun was more as the passive, hurt, needy child creeping into a protective mother's arms than it was of lover, master or man. He was impotent, and the knowledge drove him to wild, demonic energy to be successful before the whole world in order to remove the gnawing pain of his deepest personal failure.

Despots do not become inadequate so often as the inadequate become despots.

Human nature is vanity, jealousy, Just and greed. It is, above all else, ego. The blatant egotism of people, so obvious to their detractors, stems from their deepest feelings of jealousy of others more successful and of their own inadequacies, feelings of failure and guilt. Some of the vainest people you know—insensate, lacking in sympathy for others, narcissistic to the extreme—are very likely driven by deep feelings of inferiority and guilt.

But there is a way to rid yourself of these feelings of fear and guilt!

The Fear of Death

Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" There is a root cause for fear and guilt.

God's Word says people are like slaves to their own passions and appetites. Here's why: "...that through death He [Christ] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through *fear of death* were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Believe it or not, fear of death is a powerful, underlying motivation in the minds of millions. The world's great religions and thousands of sects and cults are built on

this fear, at least to some degree.

For millennia human beings have pondered the unknowns of life after death, of the great nothingness beyond. Through their fears of death and their desperate tenacity to life, they have followed every conceivable form of religion from the staid, formal ceremonies to the weird, bizarre, cultic rites.

They want to *know*. The desire to be sure of one's personal destiny has led many a questing churchgoer from one religion to another striving to find that ultimate, magic solution.

Today the effects of "future shock" are upon us. In an overpopulated, polluted world of potential nuclear holocausts—a world of fantastic, noisy, hectic, awesome technology, a world of rapid travel, instant global communication, hydrogen bombs, nuclear ships, laser rays, skylabs, Venus probes and the remote hopes of cloning—millions are frustrated, disappointed, fearful, doubtful and wondering.

Whether it involves failure on the job, personal tragedy or loss of a loved one, we can all experience a "what's the use?" attitude to the point of contemplating suicide. Today even very young teens and small children have been known to take their own lives!

Of course suicide is the ultimate way out chosen by people who have allowed great discouragement to get them down. They simply cannot face life any more.

But no suicide should ever take place if a person truly understood the real *purpose* in his own birth—why he is here!

If we could understand the latent potential within each of us, we could begin to shut out of our minds these feelings of doubt, inferiority, futility, discouragement and frustration.

The Psychological Placebo

Is it really possible, by reading an endless series of books, journals, articles (including this one), to "kid" ourselves out of our troubles? Can any of you who are bedridden actually kid yourself into thinking you are not in bed? Can a person recovering from the shock of having lost a loved one—or even the loss of a limb or

eyesight or the experience of total bankruptcy—"delude" himself into thinking all this has not occurred?

Can people who have undergone the shock of sudden unemployment, a broken marriage or any number of other personal tragedies simply "talk themselves out of" their despondency?

How many psychology books are there that advance empty theories of confidence in *yourself*, attempting to show people how to overcome feelings of insecurity, despondency and disappointment? Unfortunately most of the "cures" do not seem to remove the root cause of the problem.

But let's get to the heart of the matter.

There are two major areas that have to do with the root *cause* of all these negative feelings. The first is what you think of yourself! The second is what *others* think of you!

Let's deal with the first one.

What are YOU? Have you ever really thought back to your own origins? It is true that the archaeologist's spade proves to us that the footprints of humankind lead away from the Middle East. Without a long dissertation on history, suffice it to say that every human being has grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on.

Americans were moved deeply watching Alex Haley's *Roots* and *Roots: The Next Generations* on national television; millions saw the former production twice. This black American's noble search for his origin captured the hearts and imaginations of those who vicariously accompanied Haley on his quest.

But, though few would like to admit the veracity of the very truth of God, we can all trace our "roots" and our origins right back to the three sons of Noah mentioned in the sixth and seventh chapters of the book of Genesis! Beyond that we can trace our "roots" right back to Adam, the first man on the earth!

Of course millions of people do not believe in God. Not that they have "disproved" the existence of God, they have simply allowed their minds to be clouded with dozens of evolutionary and atheistic concepts and have never tried to prove it one way or the other. But, to anyone who is willing to prove the existence of an all wise Creator God who is the Life Giver, Law Giver, Creator, Sustainer and the

Great Being who answers prayers, they could come to know a great deal more about themselves than could any skeptic or atheist.

A Spark of Life

What are you?

You are a spark of life in the vastness of an interminable, unbelievably awesome universe. Your life is *yours*. You have a right to be here! Your life once was only a potential for life and did not exist of and by itself. At one instant in time, at the very beginning of your own life, there were *millions* of potential human lives struggling toward one female ovum in the womb of your mother. But that one male sperm cell that was to unite with the female ovum and become *you* won the frantic quest, and at that instant a new human being began to be formed!

David wrote of these marvels in the Psalms, showing his awe at the existence of human life and its marvelous and miraculous origins.

Yet there was a moment in time when, although the *potential* for you” existed, “you” did not yet exist. Then, at the uniting of those infinitesimally small seeds of human life, *you*—yes, *you*—began.

By the miracle of begettal designed by the awesome mind of the Creator God, the very *pattern* that was to become you—all that you were to inherit from your parents, including, but not limited to, your height, general weight, stature, shape of head, pigmentation, color of hair and eyes, texture of skin, your very nature and possibly the tenor or timbre of your voice, certain personality attributes and abilities—was beginning to be formed in the womb of your mother.

Too often too many people “sell themselves short.” Buffeted all their lives by feelings of inferiority, tossed to and fro by feelings of self-doubt, continually attacked by the shark like environment of their earliest schoolyard experience on up to the mature experiences of adult life, they find these feelings of inadequacy and inferiority continually heightened as they are made ever more poignant and unbearable by being constantly exposed in the light of the successes of others.

There was the story some years ago, for example, of a young Puerto Rican-American who in utter desperation and self-disgust gulped a deadly poison, doused himself in lighter fluid, struck a match and then, after all this, leaped out

of a window of a skyscraper! As grisly as it sounds, this was a man who wanted to make *sure*!

Not knowing the tremendous potential of human life, not being even a little bit “in awe” of his own meaning, origins and ultimate destiny, this man “succeeded” in killing himself.

Suicide is a *sin*, a sin that can and will be repented of in the resurrection. When Jesus Christ of Nazareth *raises* that young man from the dead and teaches him what the ministry of this world *should have been teaching him all along*, perhaps he will repent and learn then what *you* can learn now!

Consider Your Potential

Though the Bible encourages a person not to think more highly of himself than he *should*, too many people, drifting into feelings of despair, doubt, inferiority and discouragement, do not think *enough* of themselves! However, there is a great difference between thinking of your potential in the very family and the Kingdom of God and your actual “net worth” as a person today.

Believe it or not, the Bible teaches that we should not have the kind of self-confidence” promoted by most of the psychology books! As a matter of fact, one might assume God says we should feel exactly the *opposite* from the approach presented to us by most psychologists.

Jeremiah, writing about the human mind and human nature, said, “The heart [the mind] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked [margin: sick]; who can know it? I the Eternal search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to *his ways*, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

The apostle Paul said, “For I know that *in me* (that is, in my flesh) dwells *no good thing*: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18). Here Paul was talking about the “downward pull” of human nature!

He said later, “Because the carnal mind is *enmity against God*: for it is not subject to the *law of God*, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

In explaining this downward pull, he said this, “The good that I want to do, I can’t do, and the evil which I really don’t want to do, I find myself doing!

“Now, if I do that which I don’t want to do, it isn’t really me that is doing it, but sin that seems to dwell in me.

“I have found there is a law that, when I want to do good, evil is present within me.

“Actually, I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man—but I find another law in my physical members, in conflict against the law of mind, which tends to bring me into captivity to the law of sin which rages in my members.

“O wretched man that I am! Who can deliver me from this body of death?

“But I thank God that through Jesus Christ our Lord it can be done!

“So then, with my innermost mind, I myself—the *real me*—serve the *law of God*, but with my physical, fleshly body I tend to serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:19-25, paraphrased).

When Job repented he “came to himself.” That is, for the first time in his entire life, with all of the ego, jealousy, vanity, especially his incredible amount of self-righteousness, stripped away, Job saw only the true emptiness that was within.

He said to God, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye *sees You*. Wherefore I *abhor myself* and *repent* in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5,6).

But, once a person has come to this total awareness of the law of “sin and death” that rages in our members and has come to the point of *abhorrence* of self, it is to be immediately replaced with the true appraisal of the ultimate worth of oneself—that is, the ultimate *potential* that is there!

Even as Jesus said no man yet has “hated his own flesh,” so these scriptures in God’s Word are *not* intended to replace feelings of false self confidence with great feelings of guilt.

Unfortunately some religionists have gone to an opposite extreme! In their haste to do away with all the “pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps” philosophies of pseudo

success, they have tended to shift to the opposite extreme of instilling in people feelings of total worthlessness!

Some religious teachers urge upon people continual feelings of rejection, worthlessness, guilt, vanity, carnality, enmity and hostility toward God, futility and uselessness. Such feeling *can* in extreme cases lead toward suicide and sometime do just that.

In my own personal experience I recall that a few years ago a Bible instructor in the college of which I was president was giving one of his “don’t-live-a-double-life” lectures in the freshman Bible class. Unfortunately this very stern and harsh lecture concerning the secret sins in people’s private lives happened to be scoring far more telling blows in the mind of at least one frightened, defeated and frustrated young person than the professor might have known.

Consequently the young freshman, his mind filled with feelings of total frustration and discouragement, walked straight out of this professor’s classroom, continued several blocks to Pasadena’s famous “Suicide Bridge” and leaped to his death in the arroyo below.

How about *that* as a “fruit” of religious teaching?

By means of a lecture on the secret sins of people’s private lives, a young man was so deeply thrown into the blackest kind of discouragement and despair that the only way “out” he could see was to hurl himself off a bridge.

Does God really intend this kind of *self-hate*?

We shall see!

Should You Hate Yourself?

The apostle Paul said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

Was he lying about his deepest feeling of self?

Did Paul really feel “wretched”? He *said* he did, and he said so under the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit—the “other Comforter” Christ said He would send and which He called “the Spirit of truth.”

Some assume Paul didn't really *mean* he had any personal feelings of spiritual inadequacy and seem to feel Paul was only "faking it," only attempting to *appear* "humble."

No, Paul meant it fully. However, he was contrasting himself in his purely human, day-to-day physical state with the perfect spiritual law of God (Romans 7:14).

When making such comparisons any human being is bound to fall far short. What about even *thinking* a thought tinged around the edges with evil? What about moments of irritation, anger or even hatred? If you experience these, then you have in that moment broken the spirit of the Ten Commandments—broken the law, *sinned!* John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we *confess* our sins [*to Him*, not to any human priest, or to other human beings], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8- 10).

Paul was not afraid to acknowledge that he *fell short* of God's perfection.

He knew that—putting all his past sins and experiences and his present difficulties (striving to do the right thing and falling short) into one lump sum—he came up feeling inadequate.

But on balance you need to equate these statements with other scriptures wherein Paul was speaking of self-righteousness and feelings of self-worth.

Paul was concerned for the fledgling Christians of the Corinthian church. False ministers were turning their heads, making them feel true righteousness came from such physical efforts as circumcision, various physical rituals and rites and self-righteous pharisaical attitudes.

To shame some of these new Christians who had begun to be impressed by the "credentials" of such "great men," Paul wrote, "Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

"For you suffer fools gladly, seeing you yourselves are wise. For you suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

"I speak concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit

whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly) I am bold also.

“Are they Hebrews [these false teachers]? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.

“Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death oft.

“Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

“Besides those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

“If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my infirmities” (2 Corinthians II: 18-30).

Later he said, “...For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Corinthians 12:11,12).

Paul had said at the beginning of this discourse, “For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5).

One of the wonderful things about the Word of God is that it allows the human nature of its strongest heroes to shine through. We are able to see the humility and meekness of Paul when he says he is “wretched” when measured against God’s righteous, spiritual, perfect law, yet see his boldness in comparing himself with the “very chiefest” of the other apostles, human beings just like Paul and men who had the same carnal pulls of human nature.

Paul’s sarcasm toward the false teachers, his willingness to descend into the “foolishness” of carnal comparisons of various ethnic and religious “credentials,”

is obviously an exercise in futility. Yet he shows that, *if those are the standards by which the Corinthians were going to judge* he stood head and shoulders above the others who were leading them astray.

Still, even in the boldness of physical comparison, Paul maintained his meekness. At the end of the entire dissertation he said “though I be nothing” (2 Corinthians 12:11).

Paul could feel “wretched” by *comparison* to God’s perfect, righteous, spiritual *law*, but he could hold his head high when carnal-minded religious teachers wanted to hide behind “spiritual credentials.” Paul had an accurate appraisal of self-worth. He said Christ had revealed to him, “...My grace is sufficient for you,” and continued, “... for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Through Jesus Christ, *on faith*, Paul could feel *strong*. He could have total confidence, a deep flowing sense of complete commitment of purpose, of an ultimate goal and of self-worth in *knowing* he was accomplishing his own personal destiny in spite of his personal failings.

By looking to Jesus Christ as his righteousness and not searching into his own feelings of inner guilt or inadequacy, by having the faith to know he was forgiven when he sinned, he pressed toward the calling of Christ with his eyes firmly fixed on his Savior—filled with *absolute conviction* that the final outcome would be *right!*

Paul never became suicidal with despondency, even though he had more than enough to bother his conscience, or to hurt his feelings, or cause for complaint through physical suffering, rejection, persecution and fear of death.

Did Paul Become Discouraged?

Anyone reading through the scriptures above (“...five times received I forty stripes save one”) carefully and trying to imagine exactly *how it feels* can understand. Paul was lashed to the stocks, stripped to the waist and *beaten* with whips *five times*, when even the shame of feeling one cut of a lash would be forever indelibly imprinted on the mind. Notwithstanding the physical anguish, what about the damage to the spirit? Many a man has been reduced to a

whimpering, fear-ridden shadow of a man by such horrible beatings. Prisoners of war can testify to strong men being turned into craven collaborationists through physical torture. Yet Paul endured such terrible suffering and, not only endured it, but also was able to use the experience in teaching others.

Once Paul was stoned. So far as he knew the end of his life had come. He was stood up against the wall, the traditional stoning place where those guilty of alleged capital crimes were put to death, and a large crowd proceeded to hurl hundreds of stones at him. The hail of rocks of every size that could be hefted and hurled was impossible to dodge. Finally, after his back, sides, anus, shoulders, head, face, legs and every part of his body had been struck until he was a mass of purpled and blackened bruises, with welling cuts and abrasions, he fell into a heap, partially buried by the growing mound of stones.

At length someone shouted for the hail of rocks to stop, and, stooping to check whether their victim was indeed dead, tried to find signs of life.

Paul's pulse was so low, the heart a mere faint flutter, that his antagonists assumed he was dead, so he was dragged out of the city and rolled over a slight precipice.

No doubt friends later picked him up and cared for him (see Acts 14:19,20).

What does it take to discourage someone?

Paul had more reason than ninety percent of the human race for feeling a "what's the use?" attitude! No one would have blamed him if he simply gave up and quit.

But he didn't.

Do you know why?

Paul had been party to horrible outrages against Christians, and it constantly sawed against his conscience.

In the stoning of Stephen, Paul (whose name was Saul then) was an interested spectator. Though he didn't take part directly, he nevertheless guarded the garments of those who did and watched the murder take place. "Then they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their

clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:57,58).

No doubt thoughts of this participation in a stoning came back clearly while Paul was himself feeling the sickening shock of jagged rocks thudding into his flesh and bones years later.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles ... As for Saul, *he made havoc of the church*, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:1-3).

A Complete Transformation

After being struck down and blinded on the road to Damascus, Saul underwent a complete transformation in his life. He became *converted*, completely *changed*! From a carnal-minded, hostile, hate-filled *murderer* of men and women, a tyrannical terror whose very name conjured up visions of ghastly suffering, Paul (even his name was changed) became one of the kindest, gentlest, most loving, forgiving, longsuffering Christian men in history. His letters are wonderful testimony to his humility. His self-effacing attitude of gratitude for Christ's loving mercy and his perseverance under the most unimaginable trials and suffering are wonderful examples.

Paul spoke of the great change in his life in his defense before King Agrippa. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

"And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul's conscience was washed clear and clean by the atoning sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ long before he made these statements to Agrippa. Yet the poignant, painful memory of having actually tormented poor human beings to the point of forcing them to scream out curses against God before they died plagued his mind.

He knew he was forgiven, knew Jesus Christ had spoken to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:14,15) and remembered vividly the time he had spent with Christ (who appeared to him over a long period of time), and still he was able to remember with a good deal of shame the horrible things he had done (see 1 Corinthians 15:8; 9: 1; Galatians 1: 12,17,18).

During the rest of his ministry, Paul was continually able to contrast his past actions with the love and mercy of Christ. He was able to keep a proper balance between the knowledge of his past sins and his feelings of unworthiness and humility as a result, and, on the other hand, his feelings of self-worth. Paul knew he was a leading apostle and said so.

“For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5); “...for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest *apostles, though I be nothing* ” (2 Corinthians 12:11).

With Paul it was a matter of keeping his goals clearly in mind, never deviating from the whole absorbing, consuming purpose in his life, and never accepting a diffusion of goals, false, aimless, useless goals, or being subject to dark feelings of self-pity and inferiority.

He very likely had a terrible physical infirmity (Galatians 6: 11; 4:15 and 2 Corinthians 10:10) to add to his troubles. Evidence indicates it may have been a disease of the eyes, causing not only partial blindness (to prove the authenticity of his letter to the Galatians he said, “See how with such large letters I have written to you in my own handwriting”), but the additional burden of physical ugliness.

For all this Paul was not discouraged or tormented by feelings or worthlessness.

Look at Paul objectively—try to imagine him as a man you know, a neighbor perhaps. Here was a man who had violently persecuted Christians, even causing them to curse God before they died, a man whose conscience would forever be indelibly burnt with the recollections of those persecutions. He said “[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief .. Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief’ (1 Timothy 1: 13-15).

He said, “For you have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it...”

(Galatians 1: 13).

Here was a man who constantly bore the shame of his past sins even though he knew he had been forgiven—who always *stayed humble* through that knowledge. “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born [Greek *gennao*, meaning “begotten”] out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:8,9).

Yet, in spite of these memories, Paul was able to hold up his head in confidence and say on other occasions that he was no “one whit behind the very chiefest apostles.”

Here was a man who lived alone—not being married because of the terrible hardships he suffered in the preaching of the Gospel.

Analyze his life up to this point.

Deny Christ's Blood?

How many people do you know (including yourself) who allow knowledge of *their past guilt* to drag them down? How many people are there who actually *deny* the blood of Christ through their guilt?

How do you deny Christ's blood? If you feel His shed blood is *not sufficient* for *you* personally—that you are a special exception, that your filthy past is so bad that you certainly *cannot* ever be forgiven—then you are denying the power of Christ's sacrifice! But His shed blood is perfectly adequate, totally efficacious for you. How many tens of thousands of “tired old Christians” are there who have given up in defeat, who are just slipping along in life, harboring feelings of discouragement, doubt, fear and worry because of their own personal sins?

How many are there who have swallowed Satan's lie that if you sin in this or that category, and you are forgiven, and then, if you sin *again in the same category*, you are all finished?

Listen! the only sin that is “unpardonable” sin is a sin from which a person *refuses to beg God's pardon!*

Jesus Christ was “Himself tempted in every point like as we are,” and the Bible says the greatest men of Scripture—David, Elijah, Moses and others—were “men of like passions with us.”

So one of the first steps to a *real cure* for discouragement is to *quit thinking your case is different!* Wake up and realize that your problems are no worse than those faced by thousands and thousands of others—and probably *nowhere near so great!* Think about Paul again. Have *you* ever been shipwrecked? Have *you* ever been beaten with canes? Ever been whipped almost senseless—not once, but three, four and five times? Ever been stoned and dragged unconscious out of town and left for dead?

Probably not.

No matter how terrible your own personal problems may seem at the time, you can probably think of any number of people who are worse off, who are suffering trials that are almost unimaginable. Practically every day you read in the papers or hear over the news of people whose loved ones are murdered, raped, robbed or injured in automobile accidents. You hear of the incredible poverty, squalid conditions, disease and death in the overpopulated, underdeveloped countries. What is *your* situation in comparison with others?

Settle the Big Question First

The second step is to completely rid yourself of *feelings of guilt!*

But how?

Jesus said, “Repent!”

To repent means to be deeply remorseful and sorry you have broken God’s holy, righteous and spiritual law (Romans 7:12-14). “...Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

When one repents and is baptized (Romans 6), God promises to *forgive!* “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

“Who forgives *all* your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies ... The Eternal is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so *great* is His mercy toward them that fear Him.

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pities his children, so the Eternal pities them that fear Him” (Psalms 103:3-13).

John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to *forgive* us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The really biggest question of all is *what happens when you die?*

God’s Word says *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That means death from which there is no resurrection—death for all eternity!

Remember it is given to “all men once to die” because that is the very nature of man since Adam.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The natural death that comes to us all from some final cause or other is *not* the punishment for sin. It is *natural*, set in motion at creation. We are born, we live, and we die. But the wages of sin is “the second death” (Revelation 20:14) in a lake of fire (verse 15).

The greatest question in your life is a question of *eternity*. God wants to grant you eternal life, life forever, which is very God-life, being made a member of the very family of God.

Jesus Christ is called the “firstborn of the dead” (Colossians 1: 18) and the “firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). Christ is the “firstfruits” of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:23).

When you are *born of God* by a resurrection from the dead, you inherit life *eternal!* Notice. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits

of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order. Christ the firstfruits; *afterward* they that are Christ's *at His coming* ... the last enemy that shall be destroyed is *death* " (1 Corinthians 15:19-23,26).

That ultimate enemy, that greatest of fears, that dark, unknown mystery—death—needs to be conquered in your mind. Christ has triumphed over death, *destroyed its power*. Satan is characterized as the former "lord of the dead," as the one who has power over the grave. And Christ, through being killed, being buried and then resurrected, has *overcome* that power and has destroyed the power of the grave.

What you need to do is to receive Jesus Christ as your personal *Savior from death!* That is the really *big* decision in your life.

It is a more important decision than marriage, purchasing a home or an automobile or having children. It is more important than having an operation or any other choice of life.

The first step toward overcoming doubt, discouragement, fear, worry and feelings of futility is to *repent* and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior! He said, "Repent you, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Let Go of Your Faith

Next, you need to quit *worrying* your faith!

Tens of thousands of people *think* they might be forgiven. They *hope* they might have been forgiven—they once remember asking God for forgiveness—but they're not quite sure.

They listen to the devil's lies. Satan is the constant "accuser of the brethren" who day and night keeps trying to fill God's ears with accusations against God's people.

He is the original sinner, the first liar and the very architect of all sin! He is the origin of *your* sins too! Not that you didn't have something to do with your sins—you did—but Satan was the primary *influence* in your sins. As such he

has *his* guilt to bear too. You didn't sin alone. You didn't sin because you *wanted* to. You probably wanted to rationalize around in your mind that what you were doing was somehow *right* under the special circumstances.

You wanted to "do right"—you wanted to "be good," but somehow the desire to do good was not quite strong enough to overcome the pull of your own human nature, your physical lusts and appetites, and the unseen, powerful influence of this world and of Satan the devil!

Like Paul you found it was like a natural *law* that, when you *wanted* to do good, evil was *present with you*. That was Satan! *He* must bear his guilt in your sins, and finally God will place squarely upon Satan that guilt, where it belongs (That act is pictured by the solemn observance of the Day of Atonement, one of the seven annual Holy Days of God, showing Satan finally bound and the world at one with God).

Don't believe the present lies of Satan, who likes to nag around the edges of your consciousness and try to convince you that you weren't really wholly forgiven! Satan would like you to *worry* about your forgiveness—to worry over your faith!

Like a little puppy "worrying" a rag in playfulness, many people keep worrying over their faith. Instead of just *dropping* the matter, believing *completely* that they have been forgiven, they allow their present tendencies toward carnality to cast doubt continually on their past conversion, make them doubt God, doubt their repentance and baptism, doubt God's Holy Spirit!

You need to *quit worrying* your faith, and *let go of it*!

Baptism: a Type of Burial

The purpose for baptism is to act out a burial ceremony. Read Romans 6. God tells us we are "buried by baptism" as if we are considered *dead* to the law. God's law demands the death penalty, but Christ has suffered that penalty *for us* in our stead. His death, burial and resurrection are symbolized in our taking of the Passover (Lord's Supper) once each year to reconfirm our acceptance of His shed blood for the removal of all past guilt, and by the ceremony of *baptism*, being lowered completely into water as a symbol of burial!

Funeral directors explain that funeral services help bereaved family

members *accept the fact* of death. When one dies, is he merely taken quietly away and buried with no ceremony? No, a church or chapel service is usually held. The body may even be on view, and there may be a grave-side service with relatives actually witnessing the interment of the coffin. Though always painful, this ceremony helps the grieving survivors accept the fact that death has taken place. Seeing the funeral service or the burial indelibly forces upon the memory that one has *died*, that death is *final*!

Have you ever dreamed that someone who had died was still alive? But, awakening from such a dream, you probably were forced to remember the funeral, the burial. No matter how vividly your memory tried to convince you that person was *not really dead*, you reminded yourself that you knew that person had died, that you had *seen* his dead body or that your other relatives had, and you realized it was only a dream.

This tendency to resist accepting the *fact* of death is why the families of “MIAS” (soldiers “missing in action”) or families whose loved ones are listed as “missing” in an airline crash or ship disaster or storm have such a difficult time. They always hold out hope their loved one still lives—since there was no *proof* of death! They believe, sometimes against all odds and over a span of many *years*, that their loved one is still alive!

But, after a funeral service has occurred, no matter how badly they might *want* to think their loved one is still alive, they must face the incontrovertible *fact* that death has occurred!

Satan wants you to believe your “old man” (Ephesians 4:22) *is not really dead*. He wants you to believe your old self is like a “missing-in-action” report, *probably* still alive! If he can get you to doubt your conversion, doubt your baptism and doubt you have truly been forgiven, then he has you actually *doubting the power of Christ’s blood*, the power of His death, burial and resurrection!

But Satan is a liar and the father of all lies!

If you repent, the next step is *baptism*.

Baptism is a symbol of *your burial*. The “old man of sin” has been destroyed, and, when you are brought up out of the water, a water 11 grave,” after a moment’s complete submergence (baptism means “immersion,” not “sprinkling” or

“pouring”), *all your sins of the past are left behind!*

All of them!

You need to *believe* that, to come to know it!

Perhaps a few mental thought processes could help. You know that many relatives visit a grave to place flowers upon it from time to time. Have you ever thought (if doubts nag your mind) about the site of your baptism? You should think of it as a *grave site*, the place where you *left* your sins *behind*. I am not suggesting a visit to a river bank or baptismal pool in someone’s basement or a church; I’m suggesting that the site of your baptism is like a *permanent* place, a *permanent* happening that actually occurred there! In that point of time, *you left your sins behind!*

You need to have the faith to *know* that your old man is gone—dead, buried—to *know* that you are walking in *newness of life*. “... Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

“If you then be risen [by being brought up out of baptism] with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God ... For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3).

“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:4-6).

A New Life!

When one is truly *converted*, a *new life* begins!

The Bible speaks of “walking” (living) in newness of life—a different *way of life* from that prior to conversion.

Your repentance, baptism and total change of attitude are brought about by receiving the very mind and nature of God—His Holy Spirit!

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace ... But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you” (Romans 8:6-11).

When your human, physical existence is “quickenened” by the Holy Spirit, it means being made truly, spiritually *alive*. A *new creature*, in Christ, has begun.

You are then called a “babe in Christ,” a newly begotten new creation!

Think about it.

How many little babies do you know who awaken each morning with a monstrous cloud of *guilt* hanging over them? Why should a *new creature*, a little baby in Christ, feel guilty, ashamed, condemned or embarrassed?

No! Healthy little babies are usually the happiest little creatures alive, gurgling their joyous acceptance of life with smiles and laughter toward their parents when they are well fed, comforted and cared for. They are a *new human life*, and they are *innocent*—no feelings of guilt!

When you repent and are baptized and receive God’s Holy Spirit, you become a *new creation of Christ*, and you should feel *innocent*, because you are!

What About Present Sins?

If you were converted at some time in the past, but you still have difficulty in overcoming feelings of guilt, it may be that you do not understand how you can be forgiven for *present sins*—or sins and mistakes you may have made *since your baptism*!

Remember. “... God commendeth His love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We were living in sin, in a *constant* sinful state, contrary to God’s laws, carnally minded and hostile to the

way of God and the Ten Commandments of God.

But, when we repent, Christ's shed blood forgives us of our past sins! "Much more then, being now justified by His blood..." (verse 9).

Justified means being forgiven of *past guilt*! It is *not* blanket forgiveness of present and future sins and mistakes, but the removal of all past sins and mistakes up to and including the moment of baptism and the laying on of hands for the receiving of God's Holy Spirit. Christ's *death* removes your *past guilt*—*but it requires a living Savior*, the life of Christ as a daily High Priest at the right hand of God the Father, to forgive you on a daily basis!

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled [justified] to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life!*" (Romans 5: 10).

Notice the future tense in this scripture concerning the process of *being saved*—the *present progression* of a Christian who *will* make mistakes on a daily basis but who is looking to the daily intercession of a *living* Savior for forgiveness!

Millions falsely assume the "death" of Christ saves you automatically, that there is nothing further *you must do!* But notice that your own Bible plainly states it is His death that removes your *past* guilt and that it is His *life*, His daily intercessory work at the right hand of God, that can forgive you *now* and tomorrow and the day after!

God's Word says, "If *we* [we who are Christians, we who have already been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9). John is writing to *converted* people. People who had already repented, been baptized and had hands laid on them for the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Yet he says, "If we say that we have not sinned," it is made clear that *all Christians* still fall short of the mark of perfection, still make mistakes, commit sins, omit the positive actions of love and faith toward others on a virtually daily basis! "If we [converted Christians] say that we *have not sinned*, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

This is the crux of guilt feelings on the part of *converted persons*.

Many believe the devil's lies that—since they were once converted, baptized and received the Holy Spirit and then they weakened, they “backslid,” or they “went back into a life of sin”—they can now *never be forgiven*.

Oh, they *want* to be forgiven—they desperately want God's help. They want to be restored to the love, mercy and goodness of Jesus Christ. But they feel they are a special case, *so low, so dirty, so no-account, so useless and so guilty* that God just cannot put up with them any more.

The strongest proof that Jesus Christ can, and will, still forgive you is your own deepest desire that He do so! If you *want* forgiveness, you can be sure you have not sinned *willfully*.

These wonderful scriptures prove that even *Christians* can, and do, sin!

They also prove that God is willing to forgive you when you sin—If you sincerely and humbly call out to Him and ask for Jesus Christ's *daily* intercession.

What About Long—Term Sinning?

But what about habits such as profanity, lying, smoking, drugs or sex problems?

Will Jesus Christ forgive you when you know in your heart that you should not do something, such as smoking, but you do in on an almost continual basis?

First, let's understand that smoking is a physical matter, an assault (and insult) against your *body*. It is only “spiritual” in the sense that it may break the commandment against “coveting” (to lust for physical satisfaction of the senses). It is not the grossest of all sins—it is not the most obnoxious, hated, ugly, evil act of all time—as some might portray it. But it is something Christians *should not do*.

Let's assume you are a smoker and you want to repent and be baptized and receive God's Holy Spirit.

But then for some reason—the same old companions, same bowling team, same restaurants or bars, same business or job—you revert to your old habits and are tempted to smoke again.

Is this the unpardonable sin?

Absolutely not! You probably need help with the problem since it can be as much a problem of the nervous system and have deep physiological roots as well as psychological ones. The Schick centers can give people help, and there are many excellent books written by former smokers that can help. God can help through prayer. You can change your places of recreation, alter your daily routines.

But, even after trying all this, suppose you slip up now and then?

God can still forgive you *if you want to be forgiven!* You will eventually *break* that grip on yourself with His help!

What about a person who is virtually a prisoner to medicines or drugs?

God still loves that person. Jesus Christ understands his terrible human weaknesses—He stands ready to help lift away the burden of “the sin which doth *so easily*, beset us” (Hebrews 12:1) when He is called upon for help.

Notice. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:2-4).

What? “Resisted unto blood, striving against sin”? Then you are pictured (even as a baptized, converted Christian), *not* as a posturing, self-righteous, pharisaical, “perfect” person who *never sins*, but as a struggling, working, praying, *striving* person doing *daily battle* against your sinful nature just as the apostle Paul said *he* did!

You have probable “resisted unto guilt” or “resisted unto hopelessness” or “resisted unto your near total exhaustion” against some temptations of your flesh—but have you “resisted unto blood, striving against sin”?

Probably not.

David prayed, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against

You, You only [all sin is *against God*], have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge. Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me ... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalms 51:2-7).

This beautiful psalm of repentance is a good one to read on your knees, to make as your own prayer to God. Next time you are showering or bathing, you might be saying to God, in your mind, that even as you are being *physically* cleansed (just as David referred to "hyssop," which is a strong cleansing agent), so you ask God to cleanse you *spiritually*.

Close the Door on Sins Past

When you go through a door and close it behind you, you might think that is the way your old sins were left behind—like the closing of a door, the closing of an old book, the final, absolute departure from sins that are past.

You need to *let go* of your faith—quit "worrying" it—and trust God for your forgiveness.

Remember, then, that you are not the only one with problems. There are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, *millions* of people who have similar problems, and many of them even *worse* problems than you have.

Remember that God loves you, that He is not willing that "any should perish." Remember that Jesus says to you, "Come unto Me, you that are weary, and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

He says, "*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

You need to enter into a personal relationship with your Savior, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who can wash away all your sin. He can become your *daily* High Priest (Hebrews 9:14-28) to help you with every personal need.

You need to *know*, and *know* that you know, that all guilt has been buried—washed away, forgotten—removed from you completely.

You need to know you are a "new creation" in Christ, like a newborn baby,

completely *free* from your guilty past and joyously looking forward to each day in the knowledge that if you do make a mistake you can be sorry about it, repent of it, go to God in prayer and ask for forgiveness from it, and go to sleep that night knowing *you are forgiven*.

If you wish personal counseling, and if any of our ministers or helpers can serve you in any way—if this booklet has inspired further questions, or if you want to discuss your own spiritual needs—then please write to us and let us know.

And remember, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven!”

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