

Chapter 10 - CHRISTIAN WALK:

SIN & GUILT

The Christian life is an exciting process of a manner of living, dedicated to God's word while using biblical tools to build a more god-like character. This process was outlined in the prior two chapters. However, there are a number of additional issues in the Christian life that are quite important in scripture and to Christians.

This chapter deals with several of these important topics: dealing with sin and guilt.

DEALING WITH SIN

How do we deal with sin? This is a big question and plagues each of us in our lives. The understanding of a proper answer, based on scripture, is so important to our mental health and relationship with God.

Teleios conducted a survey of 516 adolescents and millennials who were 2/3 evangelical, almost evenly split between Catholics and Protestants in orientation. The full results are on our website [\[1\]](#).

How did respondents handle sin? Most commonly:

- 90% ask for forgiveness.
- 45% indicated they would recognize the sin and be obedient.
- 37% would ask for absolution from a priest.
- 47% would feel guilty.

Further, 54% recognized that sin did not block our prayers although almost 2/3 recognized it could negatively affect how we pray.

SIN PRODUCES GUILT

How does a Christian handle, in a *biblical manner*, the issue of sin, real or perceived?

Not only is the sin itself a problem but it often produces guilt which might further reduce the quality of the relationship with God. Although opinions vary on this topic, here are some tips from scripture and what is not in scripture:

RECURRENT SIN OR “BAD” SIN

The epistles indicate the following:

OBEY

This is the predominant response to sin for Christians in the epistles: is simply to obey ([Romans 6:12-16](#); [Romans 12:1-2](#)). We are to be God’s worthy servant! Importantly, we love God and others by obeying Him ([1 John 5:1-3](#)).

PERCEIVED SIN

Make sure your sin is biblical and you’re not responding to:

- A self-imposed expectation
 - Social Christian expectation from family or friends
 - Legalism from other believers
- ✓ For example, watching a movie is not a biblical sin but you may feel guilty based on self-imposed restrictions, your reasons for watching the film (careful: might include sin), or the perceived expectations of your church or Christian colleagues. As [1 Timothy 4:4-5](#) states, everything we do and use in this world should be filtered through prayer and God’s word.
 - ✓ Remember if you do see the movie (or do anything), do so out of faith, because anything we do without faith itself is sin ([Romans 14:23](#)). Further, only see it if you do not make fellow Christians stumble ([Romans 14:13-21](#)).

HATE SIN

God hates sin as it is contrary to His righteousness (Hebrews 1:9). Sin ultimately hurts us. Part of maturity as a person of God is understanding the ill effects of sin and to hate it as God does (Proverbs 8:13).

DEFEAT SIN

We are to destroy sin in our lives. We can do this for two amazing reasons:

- *The Holy Spirit* – God gave us His powerful Spirit to help us defeat sin (Romans 8:13).
- *Regeneration* – The Holy Spirit regenerated us (Titus 3:5) at salvation to a new person who is not bound by sin (Ephesians 2:1-3) but it's free to serve God (Romans 6:2-16).

WE ARE FORGIVEN

([Romans 3:23-26](#); [Colossians 2:13](#))

We do not need to ask for forgiveness because Christ covers our sins by our faith. Some view [1 John 1:9](#) as saying we should ask for forgiveness; if so, it's the only such passage in the epistles. Although verse 9 is controversial, this passage presents a foundation for fellowship among believers through our salvation in Christ, before the author proceeds to discuss in chapters 2 through 4 how a believer acts and believes. It is key to observe that John assumes a concept of sin ([1 John 3:4-10](#)), and of not obeying the commandments ([1 John 2:2-6](#)), as a continual action that if it defines a person's life they probably are an unbeliever. Therefore, John is not using the term 'sin' in [1 John 1:9](#) as a daily sin of a believer who must ask routinely for forgiveness. The verse relates to unbelievers who need forgiveness for salvation, as defined in subsequent verses.

Nonetheless, it is healthy to recognize our sin ([Romans 8:13](#)) before our holy Father and change our life (please see next point), but forgiveness is not in view.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Remember that our fight is against Satan and not merely against institutions and people in this world. Our tools to defeat Satan, beyond our salvation, are:

- Being alert – Satan wishes to devour you (1 Peter 5:8).
- Remembering his methods – Keep from giving him a place and ability to snare you (Ephesians 4:27), caused by:
 1. Not knowing biblical truth or being mature in Christ (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Timothy 3:7).
 2. Incorrect emotions such as anger, lack of forgiveness or temptation! (Ephesians 4:27; 1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Corinthians 2:7).
- Resisting Satan – James 4:7; Ephesians 6:11

Put on the whole armor of God – This is vital and is discussed in the section about the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-17).

What not to do:

There is no need to feel guilty, kick yourself, and act defeated. Instead get up on your feet and obey the word of God! Get over it and get busy allowing God to use your good service to Him.

UNPARDONABLE SIN

This important passage is in [Matthew 12:31-32](#). These verses are often misunderstood and Christians apply them to themselves.

- *Remember, you should interpret the gospels through Jewish eyes!* In this passage, Christ was addressing the Pharisees, who were Jewish leaders. They had the witness from the Holy Spirit, descending upon Christ at His baptism ([Matthew 3](#)), which indicated He was the promised king bringing salvation prophesized in the Old Testament ([Isaiah 59:20-21](#); [2 Samuel 7:12-16](#)).
- The Pharisees rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit and so rejected the message of the kingdom and the gospel. Of course, this was unpardonable (rejecting the gospel)!
- For true Christians, we have not rejected the gospel but are saved through faith in Christ. Accordingly, the passage does not apply to Christians.

These mental disciplines regarding handling of sin are critical to a healthy mindset. God has graciously given us a provision of unimpeded access to Him in prayer through our forgiveness in Christ.

DEALING WITH GUILT

Christians feel guilty, seemingly almost routinely. Guilt is practically accepted as a part of the Christian life. Should we feel guilty and why? If not, how do we stop?

HOW COMMON IS IT?

Teleios surveys have shown that approximately 70% of evangelical Christians feel some level of guilt. Fortunately, it appears typically mild.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS FEEL GUILTY?

Teleios has examined this question among church attendees in an evangelical church on three levels [2]:

A person is not a believer (5%)

1

This was a very small percentage, but recognizes that there are people within the church community who really do not understand salvation by grace, and the Spirit is probably convicting them ([John 16:8-11](#)). In this case, the guilt is appropriate and perhaps will lead to their salvation.

Fear of loss of salvation (28%)

2

These Christians knew they were saved by grace, but they had some sin, past or present, that would cause God to retract their salvation. However, the scriptures indicate Christ's sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to cover all sins. For a Christian, saved by grace alone, all sins are forgiven ([Ephesians 1:4-5,13](#); [Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [Romans 3:23-26](#); [Romans 6:2-9](#); [Hebrews 6:1-8](#)).

Fear of God's displeasure (41%)

3

The greatest percent knew they were saved and secure yet somehow felt some sin, or lack of good work, would cause God to reject them, producing the guilt. This idea is also unbiblical in that we have direct access to God through the ripped veil based on Christ's sacrifice ([Hebrews 10:19-22](#)).



WHAT TRIGGERS GUILT?

What are the triggers that cause guilt related to God's perceived displeasure? We do not know precisely, but here are some suggestions:



Lack of knowledge of God's word

This is key! If we don't know God's word then we are left defenseless in determining if we hear or read something that suggests we are sinning. So not knowing, the nagging doubt if we are wrong, leads to guilt.



Not meeting others' expectations

Family, friends, and church members may have expectations for us, that even may be dressed up in Christian jargon, which can produce guilt if we do not meet them. This issue relates directly to the first point in that if you do not know the Bible then you cannot determine if their expectations are correct.



Self expectations

Again, this is related to the first point that we may place burdens on ourselves that we fail to meet, but may not be biblical.



Wrong response to sin

Even if we know that we are in sin, we may not respond to that sin in a biblical way. Our response may be based on social Christian tradition or expectations, such as priestly or work-based absolution, re-dedication or re-baptism, or pleading for forgiveness from God. These efforts may reduce immediate guilt but are not biblical and would not solve most likely a long-term guilt problem.



WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE BIBLICAL ATTITUDE REGARDING GUILT?



Realize that guilt is not required.

- For a true believer who is saved by grace alone the answer is simple: 'Don't.' Why is this? Let's take it to the source, the Bible. The Bible does not teach guilt to the believer. The New Testament epistles, the part of the biblical text that provides Christians guidance, does not teach believers to feel guilty for acts of sin or any other reason.
- Christians are forgiven by Christ's gracious sacrifice, received by faith; His offering was fully sufficient to cover all our sins. It is given to us as a free gift. Guilt is not part of the package ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#); [Romans 3:23-26](#)).



God wants our obedience.

- This is the New Testament response to sin, simply to obey and mature into the worthy servant that God wants us to be. In this way we can get good things done such as spreading the gospel and serving others, while not being self-focused, tied up in knots over the insecurity of salvation, wondering about our relationship with God, and burdened by our guilt ([Romans 6:12](#); [6:16](#); [12:1](#); [Hebrews 5:11-6:3](#)).



WHAT IS THE SOLUTION FOR GUILT?



Make sure you are a believer.

Otherwise, ensure that you recognize your glorious salvation is based completely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross by faith alone and not mixed with works. Further, you should see evidence of biblically-based changes in your life (2 Peter 1:10). Please see Chapter 1 for further details. There is nothing that you can do to help God save or keep you. He does it all!



Realize you are secure.

God provides protections, both legal and morphologic, by declaring us righteous, adopted, sealed by the Spirit until Christ's coming, and changed irreversibly into a new person. (Ephesians 1:4-5, Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:23-26; Romans 6:2-9; Hebrews 6:1-8).



Realize you are forgiven.

Certainly, in our relationship with God it makes sense to recognize our day-to-day sin with regret. However, we must realize with God that those sins graciously are forgiven already by Christ's sacrifice (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 1:7).



Access.

We have bold access to God! Our only limitation is ourselves by sin that would keep us from approaching God or hindering our prayers ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#); [Hebrews 10:19-22](#)).



Realize the truth about guilt.

The Bible doesn't tell believers to feel guilty but to obey, and have joy and peace. Therefore, get up, obey the word, live by faith, live guilt free!

A good motto for the Christian life:



Live by facts (i.e., the Bible) and not emotions!

Believe scripture, and do not rely on emotions that you or others place on yourself. God is great and gives us such wonderful biblical wisdom to enrich our lives.

REFERENCES

1. <https://teleiosresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-09-24-Biblical-responses-to-key-questions-sanctification.pdf>
2. <https://teleiosresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Guilt-and-wellbeing-data.pdf>

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