

FREEDOM FROM GUILT

Once a man lived who was intrigued by the existence of human guilt. Opportunity allowed him to visit many countries, to be exposed to numerous cultures, and to look at many societies on each level. An observation astounded him: guilt was a universal problem! The rich and poor, the powerful and the weak all had problems with guilt. No matter where you were or what level of society you examined, guilt was there. It was not an American, European, African, or Asian problem--it was a people problem.

He decided he would determine who most suffered a continuing problem with guilt feelings.

To him, it seemed the obvious place to start was in jails and prisons among uncontested criminals. However, he found some criminals with overwhelming guilt, and some criminals with no sense of guilt--they were too hardened to feel a sense of guilt.

Next he decided to examine people who exploited people. He observed people who craved power so much that they would destroy others to get power. He looked among the greedy who would do anything to anybody to obtain money. He found a lot of guilt among those who used people, but not as much as he anticipated. Most of them were so in love with power or money, they felt almost nothing.

Next he looked at people who lived for pleasure. These people indulged themselves! They were extremely selfish! However, he found more people who felt empty than felt guilty. He was more likely to find the despair of discontentment and meaninglessness than guilt.

The last place he looked was among religious people. In some churches he found little guilt. These people genuinely felt redeemed. Finally, he examined conservative, evangelical churches. He found the more the church preached about sin, the more sinful they felt. The more they taught about the Bible, the more evangelistic they were, the more they encouraged sinners to be saved in Jesus, their likelihood of feeling guilt went up. Strangely, the people who most emphasized the ability of Jesus to destroy sin were the people who felt the most guilt.

How strange! He found more of a sense of guilt in these people than in prison, or among the power hungry, or among the greedy, or among those who lived for pleasure.

I call your attention to a reality I know exists. Many New Testament Christians live with the burden of feeling guilty almost every day of their lives. Is that what Christ intended for his people? Is that what we are supposed to feel? Is freedom from guilt possible?

Consider the problem of guilt in Christians.

I. **Our beginning point should be the day of atonement in Israel in the Old Testament.**

A. On the 10th day of the 7th month on the Jewish calendar (Tishri) was the annual day of atonement held to cleanse ancient Israel from its sin.

1. It was 2nd in importance only to Passover.
2. By our calendar, it was in October.
3. It provided forgiveness of sin for the whole nation.

B. Leviticus 16 records the day of atonement in detail.

1. The High Priest put on his sacred garments.
2. Two male goats and a ram were selected from Israel's flocks.
3. The High Priest would sacrifice a bull as a burned offering to purify himself and his family (he had to cleanse himself before he approached God for the nation).
4. Lots were cast regarding the male goats.
 - a. That determined which goat would be sacrificed.
 - b. The other goat would be used in the ritual of "the removal of sin."
5. The High Priest took some blood from the sacrificed bull and some incense as he entered the Most Holy Place.
 - a. The incense formed a cloud around the mercy seat.
 - b. The bull's blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat.
6. After this, he sacrificed the goat for the people.
 - a. He returned to the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the goat's blood on the mercy seat.
 - b. All of this took place with no one present but the High Priest.
7. When the High Priest returned to the courtyard, he put blood from the bull and the goat on the corners of the altar, and sprinkled the altar with blood 7 times to cleanse the altar.
8. Then the High Priest took the live goat and began the ritual of removing sins.
 - a. He placed his hands on the goat's head and confessed Israel's sins.

- b. A man took this goat bearing Israel's sins to the wilderness and loosed it.
- 9. Then the High Priest took off his sacred garments, washed with fresh water, and put on his regular clothes.
 - a. He then completed the burnt offerings.
 - b. The unused portions of the sacrificed bull and goat were taken outside the camp and totally burned.
- 10. This annual process was used to remove sin from Israel as a nation.

II. **It is to these events that Hebrews 10:1-4 refer.**

- A. Understanding the context of the passage helps us understand the passage.
 - 1. The immediate context starts in chapter 9 with a discussion of the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus as the Christian's sin offering.
 - 2. In 9:1-10 the writer discussed the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the High Priest's acts when he offered atonement for Israel.
 - a. All this was a symbol of a higher reality.
 - b. It had one basic flaw, one critical weakness: it could not solve the conscience problem.
 - c. The Jewish worshipper was not made perfect in conscience.
 - 3. In 9:11-22 the writer declared Jesus is the perfect High Priest. the perfect offering for sin, the mediator of a new covenant, and gave the perfect blood of atonement.
 - a. Thus Jesus is the perfect solution to our problem with sin.
 - b. The perfect atonement available in Jesus' sacrifice addressed all previous inadequacies.
 - 4. In 9:23-28 the writer stressed the Mosaical system of atonement was a shadow of a higher reality, a copy of things to come.
 - a. What Jesus did was superior to what the High Priest did.
 - b. The High Priest had to offer atonement sacrifices for Israel yearly in the earthly sanctuary.
 - c. Jesus took his own sinless blood into heaven's sanctuary as an eternal offering for sin and as the foundation for an eternal solution for sin.

- d. Jesus forever resolved the sin problem by sacrificing himself.
 - i. He came to earth the first time to be a sacrifice.
 - ii. He will return a second time to save eternally those who accept his sacrifice.
- B. Now look closely at 10:1-4.
 - 1. The Mosaical system was just a shadow of Jesus' reality.
 - a. The first solution did not perfectly address all the need created by sin.
 - b. God did not intend for it to be the permanent solution.
 - 2. The yearly atonement sacrifices offered repeatedly could not "make perfect" those drawing near to God.
 - a. The idea behind "make perfect" has two emphases.
 - b. Those sacrifices were not a lasting solution.
 - c. Thus, they could not create an ideal relationship with God.
 - 3. If animal sacrifices could do those two things, this would be true:
 - a. Were the sin problem solved, yearly repetition would be unnecessary.
 - b. The people receiving the benefit of those sacrifices would have a sense of permanent cleansing--the consciousness of sin would cease.
 - 4. The writer pointed to an irony in the Jewish day of atonement.
 - a. It was given to resolve the problem of sin for a year.
 - b. However, it became a memorial to Israel's sinfulness.
 - c. It became a memorial to sinfulness, not to cleansing!
 - 5. That is the exact opposite of cleansing in Jesus--communion is a memorial to cleansing, not sinfulness!
 - 6. There were two weaknesses in the ancient Jewish day of atonement:
 - a. It could not destroy the feeling of guilt, the consciousness of sin.
 - b. Animal sacrifices could not eternally remove people's sins.
- C. The basic weakness in the ancient Jewish system of atonement was revealed in the problem of guilt.
 - 1. That system could not resolve the problem of guilt.
 - 2. There was no sense of permanent cleansing or forgiveness.
 - 3. The writer stressed that fact.

- a. 9:9--Those animal gifts and sacrifices could not, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect.
 - b. 10:2--Those sacrifices could not give the worshipper a sense of cleansing that destroyed the consciousness of sin.
- D. It was that weakness that Jesus' blood and sacrifice addressed.
 - 1. 10:10--The Christian is sanctified once for all time.
 - 2. 10:12--Jesus offered the once forever sacrifice for sin.
 - 3. 10:14--Jesus' offering perfected forever those who are sanctified.
 - 4. 10:18--Once sin was forgiven in Jesus, there is no need for another sacrifice.
- III. **What is the point of all this emphasis?**
 - A. The cleansed Christian has no need to feel guilty.
 - B. The point of Jesus' perfect blood is this: sin is a solved problem.
 - C. When the sin is destroyed, the guilt arising from the sin is destroyed.
 - 1. Romans 4:7, 8.
 - 2. Hebrews 8:11, 12
 - D. For what should a Christian feel guilt?
 - 1. He/she should feel guilt for unrepentant, rebellious sins which have not been "owned" or acknowledged to God.
 - 2. He/she should feel guilt for sin that has come to awareness for the first time.
 - 3. However, he/she should not feel guilt for sins repented of and forgiven.

Without question, the most beautiful, powerful blessing of Jesus Christ's forgiveness is this: the past is dead; it does not matter to God; it is to be released as if it never existed. Every day is a new day. Every day is a new life. All that matters in Jesus' forgiveness is today.

Is it not time you became a Christian and stopped feeling guilty because you have been forgiven?