

# Understanding Guilt

**TGI Biblical Counseling and Discipleship Class**

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# The Reality and Problem of Guilt

1. Guilt destroys personal joy
2. Guilt affects others
3. Guilt destroys relational joy and intimacy
4. Guilt offends others
5. Guilt separates

***Guilt is universal*** - even atheists like Freud admit that guilt is a serious problem.

***Guilt is undeniable*** - we can reject the concept of sin, but we cannot reject the reality of guilt.

# The Reality and Problem of Guilt

# Effects of Guilt

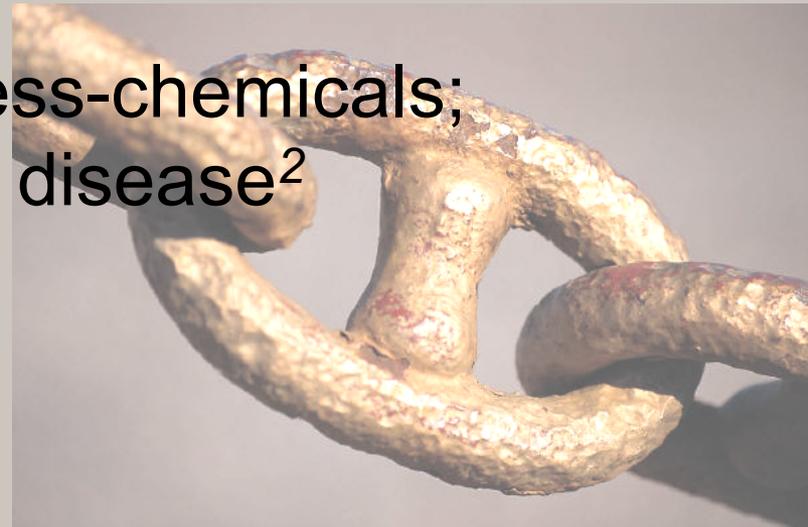
(Gen. 3:7-19)

1. Shame, embarrassment, disgrace
2. Fear, anxiety
3. Condemnation, isolation, avoidance
4. Blame-shifting, animosity towards God
5. Irresponsibility
  - a. “it’s Satan’s fault”
  - b. “it’s the woman’s fault”
  - c. “it’s God’s fault”



# Effects of Guilt (can't) (Gen. 3:7-19)

6. Depression, gloom, despair
7. Regret, anguish, grief, etc.
8. Anger, hatred, resentment, bitterness
9. Vengeance
10. Bondage
11. Psychological effects – stress-chemicals; headaches, cardiovascular disease<sup>2</sup>



# The Effects Do Not Define Guilt

*“Guilt is an affective state in which one experiences conflict at having done something one believes one should not have done”*

*“Guilt is an emotional response to wrongdoing”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Guilt is a feeling that you have done something wrong or bad or let someone down, or the state of having broken a law.”*

Guilt is most often defined as an emotion

# The Effects Do Not Define Guilt

*“Guilt is, first and foremost, an emotion. You may think of guilt as a good way to get someone to do something for you out of a sense of obligation. Guilt is not a very good motivator. It's more accurate to think of guilt as an internal state.” Psychology Today<sup>1</sup>*

She makes me feel guilty when she \_\_\_\_\_

# Man's Way to Deal with Guilt - Minimize

1. "I made an error in judgment"
2. Ignoring emotion without understanding the reason or source of the emotion is foolish and dangerous because it fails to discern biblically.
3. Minimizing guilt by labeling it "False guilt" is often rooted in unbiblical value-systems, inaccurate comparisons of ethics [standards] and morality [acts]

# Man's Way to Deal with Guilt – “False”

a “feeling-oriented” and man-centered belief-system. “rejecting feelings” is dangerous; fails to judge by God’s standard and must be repented of. Technically, “false guilt” describes false value-systems and false or inaccurate comparisons of morality [personal actions] and ethics [standards of behavior which are NOT biblical].

(Matt. 4:4 Deut. 4:2 see also Prov. 30:6; Gal. 3:15; Rev. 22:18-19 2 Cor. 7:10b)

# Man's Way to Deal with Guilt – Forgive & Love Self

*“You need to forgive yourself and learn how to love the person that God has made in you!”<sup>1</sup> ... this is rooted in the inability or unwillingness*

1. to see God's righteous standard for holiness (Is. 6)
2. to grasp the sinfulness of sin and depravity (Rom.3)
3. to accept that I am that bad (Rom.7:18)
4. to recognize that only God can forgive sin (Mk.10:7)
5. to see the all-sufficient power of the Cross (1Jn.1:7-2:2)
6. to grasp and accept to embrace “double-imputation” for complete forgiveness from God (1 Jn.1:7-2:2) as a gift.
7. to take thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:3-4)

# Man's Way - Ignore

Ignoring a state of guilt is  
dangerous – A BLINDFOLD  
WON'T STOP A GUILLOTINE

Ignoring emotions is folly.

Guilt or innocence must be  
established OBJECTIVELY

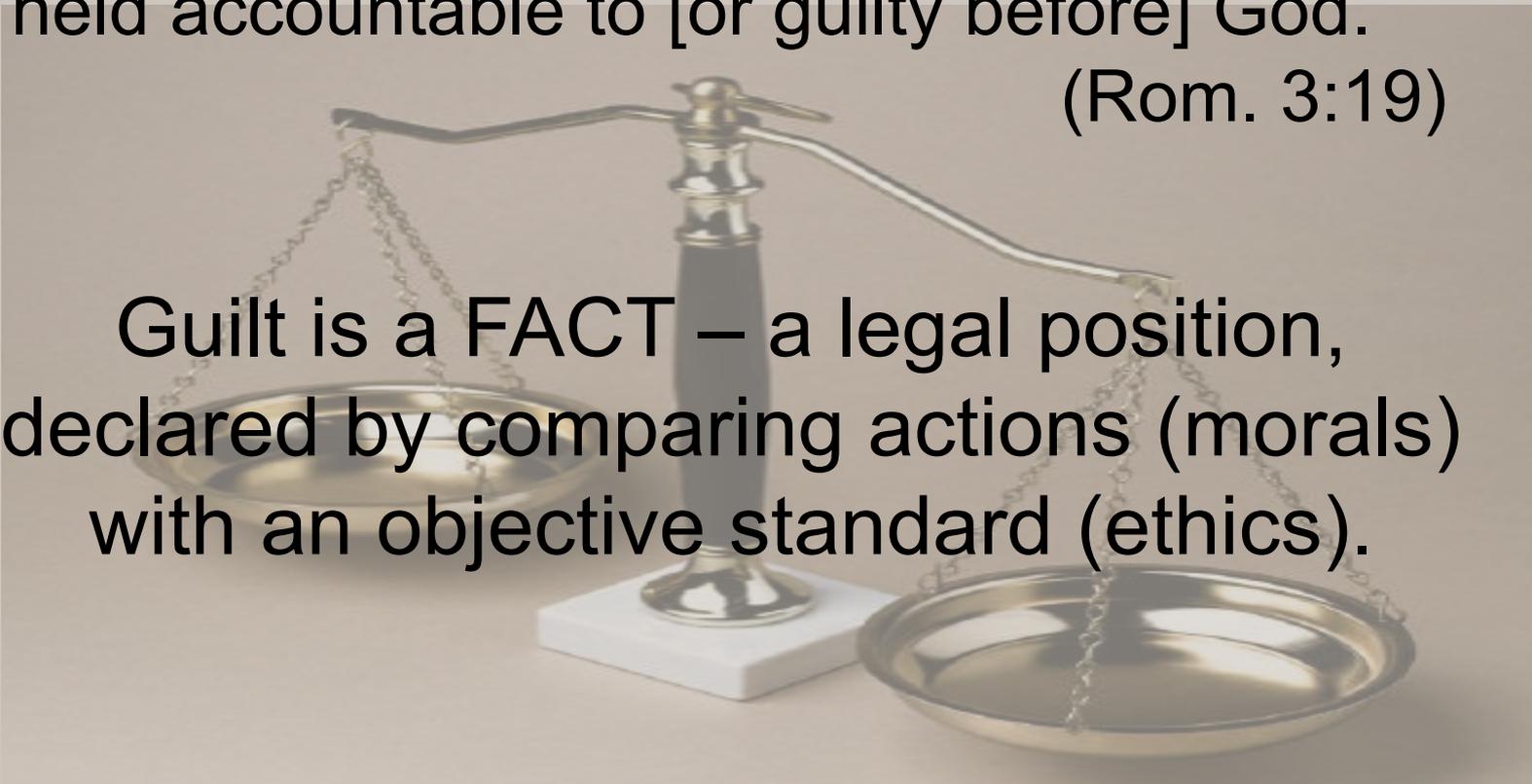


# Defining Guilt Biblically

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to [or guilty before] God.

(Rom. 3:19)

Guilt is a **FACT** – a legal position, declared by comparing actions (morals) with an objective standard (ethics).



# Defining Guilt Biblically

All wrongdoing is sin, (1 Jn. 5:17)

*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.*

(1 Jn. 3:4)

*For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* (Rom. 4:15)

among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature** children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph. 2:3)

# Guilt is a Position of Culpability

1. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23)
2. “A state of meriting blame or condemnation” - Responsible; Liable for punishment; At fault; In-the-wrong; Accountable; To-blame
3. Guilt is the state one is in when he/she sins.
4. By common grace, all humans have a sense of sin and justice when a victim of wrong-doing.

# What is Sin?

1. *Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature.* Grudem
2. “*The nature of sin is selfishness*” isn’t a biblical definition of sin.” ...Not all self-interest is sinful...
3. God seeks His own glory.
4. God teaches us to seek salvation, blessing, sanctification, etc. and to avoid God’s wrath, consequences of sin, etc.
5. Sin results in guilt and culpability.

# Biblical Definition of Sin

1. God's standard for man is holiness. *"Be ye holy, for I am holy..."* (Lev.19:2; Matt. 5:48)
2. The failure to meet God's holy standard is sin. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"* (Rom. 3:23) *"For there is no man that sinneth<sup>6</sup> not"* (1 Ki. 8:46)
3. Sin is breaking any commandment of God. *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth<sup>1</sup> also the law: for sin is the transgression<sup>2</sup> of the law."* (1 Jn. 3:4)
4. *"All unrighteousness is sin:"* (1 Jn. 5:17)

# Sin is Universal and Undeniable

	Omission (Neglecting the Law)	Commission (Breaking the Law)
Presumptuous (Willful, rebellion)	<i>I know I should, but refuse to obey</i>	<i>I know I shouldn't, but I disobey anyway</i>
Ignorant (Not knowing the Law)	Don't know; don't obey	Don't know; disobey

# Culpability for Sins of Ignorance

He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven. “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, **though he did not know it**, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity.  
(Lev. 5:16-17)

# Culpability for Sins of Ignorance

**But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. Rom 14:23**

**And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb. 11:6)**

# Discerning Guilt

**Creation** - Rom. 1:19-21

**Conscience** - Rom. 2:15

**God's Word** – Rom. 3:19

**Holy Spirit**

Jn. 16:8-9



# Discerning Guilt – The Conscience

1. “con” (“together”) and “science” (“to know”)
2. Greek - “co-perception”, “to know together” with an objective standard.
3. The conscience is a God-given “guilt-meter”, enabling every human heart to compare one’s morality (behavior) with an ethical standard.
4. Webster’s 1828 Dictionary - *“Internal judgment of right and wrong; ...which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections, and instantly approves or condemns them.”*

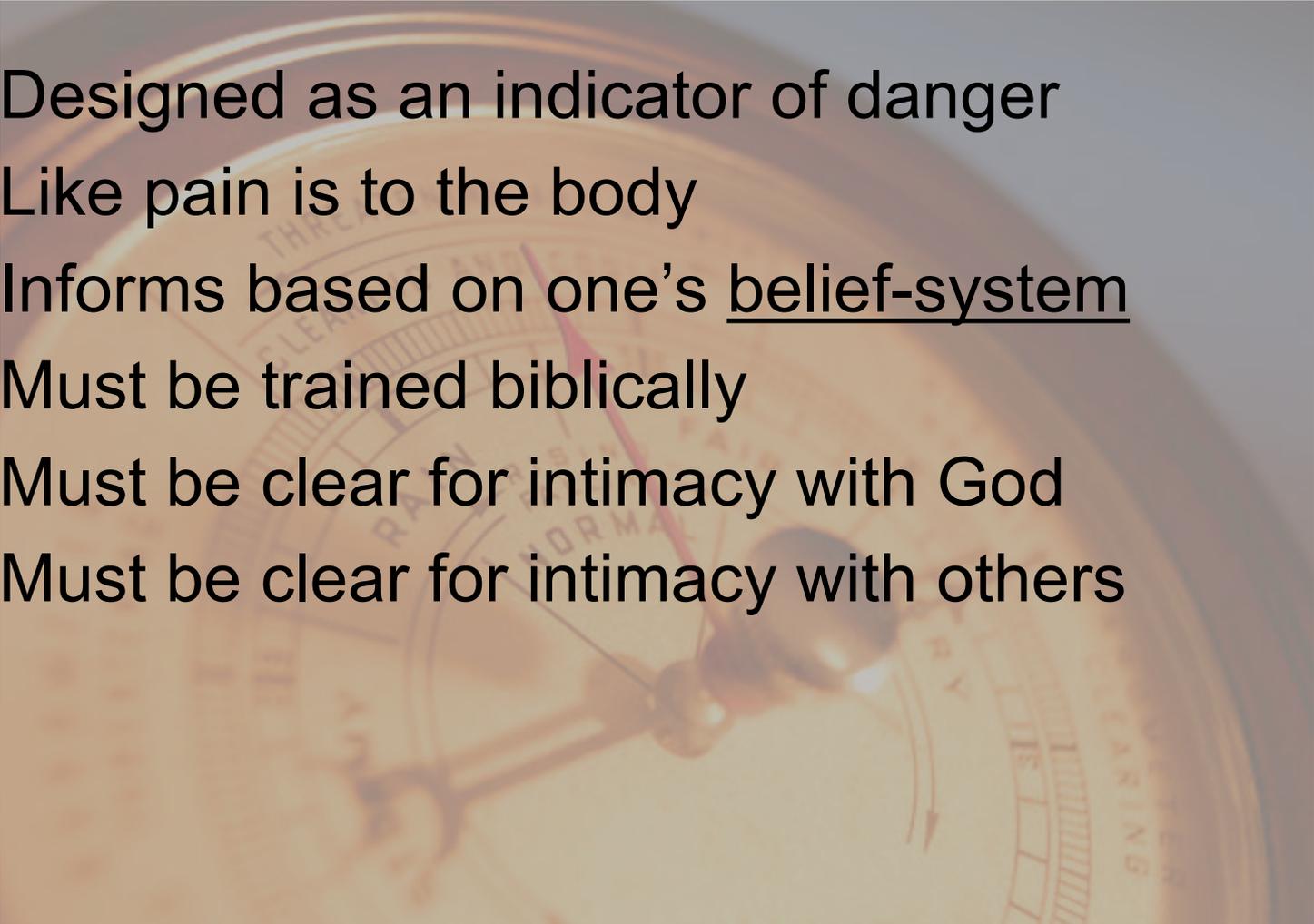
# How the Conscience Works

1. *“that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former, and avoid the latter.”* Vine's Expository Dictionary
2. *“Cowardice asks ‘Is it safe?’  
Expedience asks ‘Is it political?’  
Vanity asks ‘Is it popular?’  
But conscience asks, ‘Is it right?’”*  
Author unknown, quoted in *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* Standard Book Company

# How the Conscience Works

1. God designed the conscience to plead with us to do what we believe is good and right and warn us to stay away from what we believe is wrong.
2. *“The conscience stands over us, addressing us with an absoluteness of authority which we did not give it and which we cannot take from it.”*  
(John MacArthur)
3. *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their **conscience also bears witness**, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Rom. 2:15)*

# How the Conscience Works

1. Designed as an indicator of danger
  2. Like pain is to the body
  3. Informs based on one's belief-system
  4. Must be trained biblically
  5. Must be clear for intimacy with God
  6. Must be clear for intimacy with others
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# How the Conscience Works - Logically

Uses logical syllogism (Rom. 3:23)

1. **Standard** - All men are sinners and are condemned to Hell (1 Ki. 8:46).
2. **Measure** - I am a sinner (Rom. 7).
3. **Conclusion** - I am guilty and condemned to Hell (Job 42:5-6).

# 3 Options for the Conscience



*The court-room of  
the heart*

**Liberal  
Conscience**

**Rigid, Cruel  
Conscience**

# A Biblical Conscience

1. *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)*
2. Conscience motivates confession of sins, moves the person to seek forgiveness and reconciliation; e.g. Prodigal Son.
3. Everyone has the ability to make moral self-assessments. The right operation of the conscience is *“Man’s judgment of himself according to God’s judgment of him”*.

John K. Eusden

# A Biblical Conscience...

***Seeks to be cleared of guilt through forgiveness!***

1. Rejects blame-shifting – accepts his culpability
2. Rejects minimizing – confesses accurately his sin
3. Rejects separation - seeks reconciliation
4. Rejects passivity – goes to the offended party
5. Rejects deception – speaks honestly, frankly
6. *A pure conscience is a bi-product of the community that the Body of Christ offers; “exhorting one another daily” and “Walking in the light.”*

# A Good Conscience

1. A clear conscience (good/pure/purged), results in joy, hope, freedom, contentment, happiness, wellbeing, etc.. Don't confuse this "sense of peace" with the judicial declaration of peace pronounced at the moment salvation (Rom 5:1).
2. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith. (1 Tim. 1:5)
3. I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1).

# A Good Conscience

produces one of the following:

- 1) an accurate sense of guilt; an awareness of a conflict with the Law-giver **“Conscious-Guilt”**
- 2) A **“Clear conscious”** (a barrier-free relationship with the Law-giver).

But when they [Pharisees] heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. (Jn. 8:9)

(see also Gen. 42:21; Eccl. 7:22; Rom. 3:19; Ps. 40:12; Is. 59:12; Jer. 3:25)

# Why Can't I Clear My Conscience?

## The Unbeliever

- May or may not be accurately informed
- Evil conscience--condemns and accuses eternally
- Seared conscience-completely rendered insensitive, unable to be touched or respond to the knowledge of sin any longer.

## Believer's Conscience

- Defiled - soiled, polluted, stained or contaminated by sin (1 Cor. 8:7)
- Calloused through repeated exposure to sin and repeated failure to *“walk in the light”*

# Believer's Week Conscience

1. Uninformed or ignorant of biblical Truth
2. Misunderstands Truth
3. Believes falsehoods
4. Hypersensitive, overactive
5. Un-exercised (Rom. 14:1-5, 23)
6. Chooses worldly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10b)
7. Condemns self, others, blame-shifts.
8. Creates a "personal gospel" to relieve guilt - circumvent God's solutions for redemption and sanctification.
9. Confines oneself, choose penance vs. repentance; is controlled by condemnation, fear, self-sacrifices.

# Believer's Defiled Conscience

1. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through **former association** with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. (1 Cor. 8:7)
2. A defiled conscience is a result of a poor or limited understanding of a biblical standard. A belief that one is guilty because of believing unbiblical standards.

# Defiled or Weak

must be cleansed and purged through repentance and faith.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

# A Calloused Conscience

1. A calloused conscience is a product of failing to “*walk in the light*”, *confessing* sin on a regular basis.
2. My brother’s calloused conscience is my responsibility.
3. A calloused conscience can be avoided by accountability in the Body of Christ through open confession to one another.
4. (1 Jn. 1; Heb. 3:12-13; Ja. 5:16)