

STUDY 3 NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. Which of these come closest to your feelings about guilt?

- a. I rarely feel guilty.
- b. I feel guilty all the time and I cannot identify why.
- c. There are a few things in the past that I still feel guilty about.
- d. Guilt has helped me grow.
- e. When I go to church it makes me feel more guilty.
- f. When I go to church I feel less guilty.

Guilt has both positive and negative functions. Explore the options with the group and encourage free discussion. Be ready with a few responses such as “Why is that?” or “Does anyone else ever feel like that?” Try and create an atmosphere where group members feel a freedom to share.

2. A church in Sydney had a sign at the entrance that read, “You are entering a guilt free zone.”

- a. Why would a church have a sign like that?
- b. Should a church be a “guilt free zone”?
- c. What is the difference between a guilt free zone and freedom from guilt?

The sign implied that guilt is a negative emotion but the sermon points out some of the positives regarding guilt. “Freedom from guilt” has a far better ring. The Gospel is meant to imply that our guilt is removed and that because of the grace of God we are free to have a relationship with him.

3. The Bible uses different language to imply that that our guilt should not prevent us from having a relationship with God. Have a go at matching the following word with its meaning.

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| a. Atonement | b. Justification | c. Propitiation |
| d. Reconciliation | e. Redemption | f. Expiation |

Meanings:

- i. God, through Jesus, paid the price to release us from slavery to sin and frees us from guilt. (e. *Redemption*.)
- ii. The Holy God wants to overcome the gap that exists between Him and his guilty people. (a. *Atonement*)
- iii. Even though we are guilty, God pronounces us “not guilty”. (b. *Justification*)
- iv. God made the moves to be at one with his people, even though they are the ones who strayed. (d. *Reconciliation*)
- v. God in his mercy and powerful love, is prepared to act as if our guilt was removed. (f. *Expiation*)
- vi. As in the Old Testament the sacrifice brought about the forgiveness of God, so Jesus’ sacrifice also brings us freedom from guilt. (c. *Propitiation*)

4. The sermon distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate guilt. Which of the following could be described as “appropriate guilt”?

- a. A policeman uses capsicum spray on a violent criminal who soon after dies of a heart attack.
- b. A mother who had an abortion 15 years ago, is close to tears every time she has a conversation with a boy in mid teens.
- c. A father who has left home following an affair feels guilty when his 4-year-old asks him, “Daddy, when are you coming home?”

- d. A doctor who has diagnosed a throat infection discovers eventually that his patient has advanced cancer of the larynx.
- e. A mother feels guilty when she takes her 3-month-old child to Childcare on the way to work.
- f. A worshipper leaves the church after a disagreement with the minister and the minister feels guilty.

SOME BIBLE PASSAGES ABOUT GUILT

(Leaders please note - you may not have time to do all these passages.)

5. Read Psalm 51.

- a. What are the general feelings of the author?
 - b. What do you think he had done? *(This psalm is attributed to David after Nathan had confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheeba.)*
 - c. What does the author know about God? *(God's love. God's holiness and purity. God's concern for the individual. God's concern about inward truth. Pure judgement. God allows new beginnings.)*
 - d. What words does the author use to describe what God can do with sin and guilt? *(Blot out. Wash. Purge. Hide your face. Create a new spirit etc.)*
 - e. What does the author think of the old ways of dealing with guilt, such as sacrifices in the temple? *(See verses 16-17.)*
 - f. What is guilt doing to the author? *(See verses 5 & 8, 10-12. Guilt was having a strong emotional effect and was affecting his self esteem.)*
6. a. Are there any hints that the author had learnt a lesson through his guilt? *(See vv. 13-14.)*
- b. Is this a meaningful psalm for you? Why/ Why not?

7. Read Isaiah 6. 1-9.

- a. What is all this about "seraphim" etc? What do you think Isaiah was trying to say about God?
 - b. Why is God described as "Holy Holy Holy"? Wouldn't one "holy" have been enough?
 - c. What does it mean to call God Holy?
- a. The prophet is saying through the imagery of the vision that God is awesome, great and unexplainable.*
- b. The Hebrew has no superlative and the way of expressing "most" is to repeat the adjective three times.*
- c. The Holiness of God refers both to his awesome "otherness" as well as to the fact that he is a righteous, moral God.*

8. See verses 5-6

- a. What is it that makes Isaiah feel guilty?
 - b. Can you work out a 'theology of guilt' from verse 6? What is the vision teaching us about guilt?
 - c. Have you ever felt a great relief from guilt? How did it come about? What were your feelings before and afterwards? Was God involved in the process?
- a. Isaiah catches a glimpse of the purity of God and then sees his own unworthiness. It is rather like appreciating how inadequate you are at sport, music, when you see a professional in action.*
- b. The God of grace takes the initiative and comes to people offering cleansing. God sees the desire of Isaiah's heart and makes the response Himself.*

9. See verses 8-9.

- a. What difference did the whole experience of understanding the holiness of God and experiencing forgiveness do for Isaiah?
- b. If you have had an experience of relief from guilt, what did it do for you?

a. Isaiah is released from his feelings of unworthiness and is ready to take on his prophetic ministry.

10. Read Romans 5. 1-11.

Only use this passage if your group is experienced in Bible study.

- a. What has this passage to do with guilt?
- b. What words are used to describe the fact that God wants us to overcome our guilt?
- c. If you have had an experience of relief from guilt, what did it do for you?

a. Note that this passage deals more with our status before God as Christians and the fact that we have generally been pronounced as “not guilty” if we are in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. The passage has less to do with the specific feelings of guilt related to events or feelings, but rather to our whole destiny and status as Christians.

b. Note justified, reconciled, etc

11. a. How would you explain this passage to a person who was unfamiliar with the Bible?
- b. What has Jesus got to do with our general feelings of guilt?
- c. It has been said that to continually feel guilty is a form of “ongoing blasphemy.” How does this passage throw light on that comment?

a. Note that this passage reflects Isaiah 6 in that God comes to us, just as he did with the seraphim, and offers cleansing through Jesus Christ.

c. If God has justified us, or pronounced us not guilty, then to hang onto our guilt is to partially ignore the grace of God expressed in Jesus.

12. In the light of this study how would you respond to the following comments?

- a. There are times I feel so bad about some of the things that I have done I doubt that I am really a Christian.
- b. Sometimes I feel as if the sermon is aimed right at me. How does he know what I have been up to?
- c. My cousin suicided a year ago today. still feel as if I let him down.
- d. I felt guilty about what I was doing to people so I resigned from my job.
- e. It has been three weeks since I have been to see my Mum at the nursing home. I was feeling so guilty that I dropped my small group and went to see her.

GUILT A sense of shame at personal wrongdoing. Guilt implies being responsible for an offense or a wrongdoing. It is a situation that exists because one has done something forbidden or failed to do something that was required. The source of the forbidden thing or omitted thing may be religious, legal, social, or personal. It may be a wrongdoing against something written or unwritten.

Guilt may be either a fact or a feeling. For example, a direct violation of law would make one guilty of violating that law. The guilt in this case would be present whether or not the person feels guilty. The condemnation may come from oneself, others, or from God. Or the condemnation might not occur at all. Nevertheless, the person is guilty because a real violation has taken place.

The Bible frequently contrasts those who are guilty with expressions that signify righteousness or just behavior. For example, Job insisted on his righteousness before the Lord (Job 27:1-6). His friends insisted that he was wicked and therefore guilty (Job 22:5; 35:1-8). To be guilty can mean the same thing as to be wicked. In Psalm 1 it is assumed that the wicked, sinners, and scoffers are guilty of sin and that they will ultimately perish. When Pilate said that he found no guilt in Jesus, he meant that He was innocent of the charges brought against Him (Luke 23:14; John 19:4,6). There was no basis on which to charge Him.

Guilt is connected with sin in the Bible. Sin is basically against God or against God's law. It can mean rebellion against God, or a willful transgression. Sin can also mean to miss the mark.

The Hebrew writers generally did not distinguish between the act of sin and the guilt that came from the act. The various words used for sin in the Old Testament also expressed the idea of guilt. To sin, therefore, is to become guilty. Leviticus 5 lists a number of forbidden actions. It is assumed that a person committing any of these prohibited acts is guilty (Lev. 5:1-5). Hosea, also, spoke of the various sins of the nation Israel. Even though the people did not acknowledge their sins, the Lord pronounced them guilty (Hos. 5:15; 10:2). Jeremiah noted that those who sinned against Israel became guilty before the Lord and would be punished (Jer. 2:3). These illustrations show that guilt is a companion of sin. The sin may be that of omission or commission, but it puts one in a state of guilt.

To connect sin and guilt is a way of saying that human beings are responsible before God for their actions. Paul, in the Book of Romans went to great lengths to show that all mankind is guilty before God (Rom. 1:18-20). If all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), then all are guilty and cut off from God. Something must be done to remove the guilt.

The Old Testament describes several things that could be done to remove guilt. Sinners could confess their sins and make restitution for the wrongs they had committed (Num. 5:6-10). Various sacrifices could be brought to the priests for a guilt offering (Lev. 5:6-7:38). Restitution, sacrifice, or ritual penalty had to be made for sin and guilt.

A new idea presents itself in passages like Isaiah 53: it is the idea that a righteous one can suffer for the guilt of others. One can bear the sin of many and intercede for their transgressions (Isa. 53:12). In the New Testament, Jesus fulfilled the role of the one suffering for the sins of many ... "Christ died for the ungodly," and we are reconciled to God (Rom. 5:6-11; compare Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:19-20).

The idea of a sacrifice or offering for sin and guilt is picked up by other New Testament writers. Jesus was made a merciful High Priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. (2:17). Twice 1 John says that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). This emphasis shows how seriously the Bible takes sin and guilt. Guilt has to be dealt with in an objective way. Guilt, according to these New Testament writers, requires the sacrifice of the Son of God. See Expiation and Propitiation.

Guilt is both corporate and individual in the Bible. The corporate aspect can be seen in 2 Chronicles 24:18. The king and officials of the nation abandoned God, and their guilt brought wrath on the nation. Ezra lamented the guilt that had come upon the people for their sins (Ezra 9:3-6). The individual nature of guilt can be seen in passages like Psalm 32. There the psalmist acknowledged his own transgression and asked for forgiveness from guilt (v. 5). Jeremiah in speaking of the New Covenant declared that all people would be held responsible for their own sins (Jer. 31:30).

As a feeling, "guilt" refers to the emotional aspects of a person's experience. An individual may feel himself or herself to be condemned or to have sinned. The feeling may bear little or no apparent relationship to the fact with which it is associated. In other words, one may feel guilty when there is no evidence to suggest a reason for guilt.

However, feeling is often a legitimate expression of guilt. The bitter lament Psalm 51 carries both an awareness of sin and deep feelings of remorse and repentance. Psalm 38 paints a picture of a suffering sinner weighed down with sin and guilt. Guilt is a burden (Ps. 38:4) that creates anxiety (Ps. 38:18).

Because human beings are so complex, it is often difficult to separate guilt feelings from real guilt. These guilt feelings must be taken seriously. If a person cannot resolve these guilt feelings before God, it may be wise to seek a counselor to help determine where the guilt feelings originate. Unresolved guilt can have a paralyzing effect on a person. Asking for and receiving forgiveness is one of the major ways that we can be absolved from guilt. God in His faithfulness has promised to forgive us from all iniquity (1 John 1:9).