“Guilt and Grace”, Good News About Grace, Part 2 of 7 – January 12, 2014 at SBC

James 2:10

Two men were on trial, . . . in superior court, for armed robbery. An eye witness, took the stand, . . . and, the prosecutor got up, to begin his questioning. First, he asked the eyewitness, "You were, at the scene, of the robbery?" Yes. "You saw a vehicle leave, at a high rate of speed?" Yes. "Did you observe, the occupants?"

The prosecutor, in a booming, prosecutor's voice, . . . said, "And, are those two men, in this courtroom, today?" At this point, the defendants, . . . sealed their fate. They both, . . . raised their hand.

Let's admit it. We're going to be, talking about guilt, today. The truth is, all of us, . . at some point, in our lives, have to honestly say, "I did it." There are things, we've all, struggled with. We're all, in the same boat.

James 2:10 – *"The person, who keeps every law of God, but makes one little slip, is just as guilty, as the person, who has broken, every law there is."* Obviously, when it comes to the way, we evaluate guilt, there are different degrees, of guilt. Some people, commit crime, . . . and, they deserve, what happens to them. It’s justice.

But, this is talking about, . . . God's kind of justice. Recognizing the fact, that whether it's one sin, or many, in our lives, . . . we've all slipped, we've all sinned, . . . and, we're all, in the same boat.

We're going to talk, this morning about, . . . What is it, . . . that real guilt is? What's the difference, between real guilt, . . . and, another kind of guilt, . . . **a false kind of guilt**? We're going to talk about, how our ways of dealing with guilt, . . . differ greatly, . . . from God's way, . . . of dealing with guilt.

**1. WHAT IS GUILT?**

We all know, what it, feels like. Psalm 38:4 – *"My guilt has overwhelmed me, like a burden, too heavy to bear."* Everyone of us, knows that, overwhelmed, burdened, feeling. That feeling of, "I hope, nobody, . . . finds out."

But, is that all, there is, to guilt? Is that, what God means it to be? Is it some kind of punishment, that He sends into my life/your life, . . . when we've done something wrong? He says, "OK, you did something wrong. Live with this, for a while!" Does He mean for us, to do that, for a while, . . or, the rest of our lives? No.

The purpose of guilt, is not just, . . . to make you feel bad. Guilt is actually, . . . **a warning light**. Picture it, that way. It's a warning light, that goes off that says, . . . "Something's wrong. Something needs, . . to be fixed." It's like the warning light, that goes off, on the dashboard, of your car, which says, . . . something's wrong.

\*\* Patty and I, have this conversation, . . . that, goes on in the car, sometimes. We're driving down the road, . . and, she says, "What was that? I heard a sound, in the engine. Sounds like, something's wrong." I say, "I didn't hear anything." She's got a, pretty good ear. She's usually hearing, that something, actually, is wrong.

But, I know, if something's wrong, I'm going to have to fix it, . . . so, I "don't hear anything"! For me, . . . the engine, . . . has to actually fall out, . . . before, I admit, that something, . . . is actually wrong.

That's, the way we deal, with guilt, many times. We try to ignore it, . . or, pretend, . . . it's not there. We've got lots of different ways, of dealing with this warning light, . . . that, God sends, into our life. But, the truth is, if something really is wrong, . . . the best thing to do, is to get it fixed.

I could try, to fix the car, myself, but, I'm not very good, at that. So, I need to take it back, to the manufacturer. That's, what we need to do, with our lives. That's what, the warning light, is saying. It's saying, . . . "You need some time, with God. You need God, to heal this." That's the warning light, . . . that, God's showing us.

Before, we look at the difference, of how we try, to deal with that warning light, . . and, how God's able, to deal with it, . . . how we try, to fix ourselves, and how He's able, to fix us, . . . we've got to make, . . a very important distinction. There's an important distinction, . . . to discover, about guilt. There's two, . . different kinds.

There is, . . **genuine guilt**. The real, deal. We've all dealt with that, the genuine guilt, that comes from the fact, that, we've done wrong things, that have hurt ourselves, hurt others, and hurt the heart of God. That's the honest truth. Unless, we're perfect (and, none of us are), . . we've all had to, deal with this feeling, . . . of genuine guilt.

There's another brand of guilt, . . . that, is very important to understand, if you're going to get past this, . . . and, find God's grace, in the midst of it. That is, . . . **false guilt**. That's thinking, that maybe there might be, a light on the dashboard, that comes on, and you're so worried about it, . . that, you worry yourself, into a guilt.

That's feeling like, "If a light on the dashboard, ever came on, . . . what would people, . . . think of me?" There's many people, who deal with, . . . this false guilt. I can't tell you, how many times, I've heard people say something like this, . . . "I just have this, overwhelming feeling, . . of guilt. I don't know, where it comes from. I can't really, put my thumb on it. I don't know, . . . the source of it. But, . . . I just, . . . feel bad."

If you're dealing, with false guilt, . . . you're probably, sending yourself, . . a lot of false messages. And, they’re kind of like this, "You think, that's enough . . . You call that, acceptable . . . Look at all the things, you haven't, gotten finished. . . . You have disappointed, the people, that are around you." That's, the kinds of things, you're hearing a lot, . . . if, you're dealing with, . . . false guilt.

We need to understand, that often, false guilt, in our lives, . . . if we struggle a lot with this, . . . is the result of incidences, that may not have been, . . . your fault. Some of the people, . . . who struggle the most, with false guilt, . . . struggle, because, they were caught up, in the circle of someone else's sin, at some point, in their lives. It may be a parent, a friend, . . . or, a physical, . . . mental, . . . or, emotional abuse.

But, somehow, maybe even, at an early age, . . . you were caught up in the cycle, of someone else's sin, and you feel, that you just can't get that, out of your life.

There is also times, that false guilt is there, . . . because, you just can't, get past, . . . your past. This is what, we hear people say, . . . when they're feeling, this way. "I've asked God, a thousand times, to forgive me, . . and, I just don't, . . . feel forgiven." That's when, you can't, . . . get past, . . . your past.

Probably, all of us, have dealt in some ways, . . . with false guilt. What we need, to understand, today, is that false guilt, is very popular, . . . among, church goers. It's a great thing, in the church. It produces a faith, that, . . . is more walls, . . than doors. There's, no way, out. It closes in, on you. It's been a problem, for those, . . . who've been trying, to find the truth, of God, for a long time.

In Galatians, Paul talks to some people, who are struggling, with false guilt, . . . trying to make themselves feel better, . . . by doing a lot of good things. Galatians 3:3 – *"You began your life, in Christ, by the Spirit. Now are you trying, to make it complete, by your own power? That, is foolish."* But, that's the sign, of what happens, . . . when we struggle, with false guilt. We can't feel forgiven, by God, . . . so, we try more and more, . . . to make it better, . . . by our own power.

One of the best things, we can do, as we talk about guilt, is talk about, how do you know, . . . the difference. How do you know, the difference, . . . between, true guilt, and false guilt? How do you know, if it's God who's speaking to you, . . . or, your Jewish grandmother, . . . or, Sister Margaret from parochial school, or, Brother Bob from some fundamentalist church? How do you know, who it is, who's really, speaking to you?

**Three tests.** Three tests, that will help you, . . . determine, discern, whether this is true guilt, . . . or, false guilt:

**1. Is the focus, on people, . . . or, is it, on God?** Dr. Paul Tournier says, "False guilt, is that which comes, as the results of judgments, and the suggestions of men." True guilt, is that which comes, as a result of divine judgment, . . . what God thinks, about the situation.

If you're struggling, with false guilt, you're going to find yourself, . . . striving, for a lot for approval. You'll be, . . . an approval junkie. You need other people's approval, . . . to make you feel better, . . . about yourself. It's a daily fix, . . . that, you need. And, you need more and more, . . . to help you feel better, about yourself.

The real problem with this, when you're struggling with false guilt, . . . is you live a lot of life, worn out. Why? We have a hard enough time, just living up to, our own expectations. If you have to live up to, everybody else's expectations, to get their approval, . . . that, wears you out. Is it people, . . . or, is it God?

**2. Is it vague, . . . or, is it specific?** Sometimes, people will say something, like this, "It's this cloud, of doubt, . . . a fog of guiltiness, . . .", and, they don't know how, . . . to get rid of it.

If you ask them, what it leads back to, . . what's the struggle, they're facing. And, they really, can't say. Almost all the time, when it's the vague, foggy feeling of guilt, . . . it's Satan, talking to you, . . . and, not God.

God, when He wants to tell us, we've done something wrong, . . . and, help us get it right, . . . He does it, like a pinpoint of light, . . . not this vague, cloudy thing. When God wants to speak to us, about something, . . . He's able to do it, like a pinpoint of light. He just does it, . . . everywhere, we are.

We hear a sermon, . . . and, it's on, that subject. We turn on the radio -- somebody's singing a song, . . . on that subject. We watch a television show, and it's on that subject! Everything, is about that. God, does that. So, is it this vague, feeling of guilt, that you don't really know, where it's coming from, . . . or, is it God's pinpoint of light, . . . saying, "Here's, what is wrong, . . . and, here's how, to get it fixed."

**3. Rules, . . . or relationships?** When you're struggling, with false guilt, the big feeling is, "I broke, the rules." When you're struggling, with genuine guilt, the feeling is, "I hurt someone. I hurt my wife/husband/children/the heart of God, . . . because, of what I did." That's the difference, . . . between, the two.

The rules, become more important, . . . than, the relationship. So, it becomes a religion, . . . rather than, . . . a relationship. In church, it becomes duty, . . . rather than, desire. False guilt, blinds us, to the miraculous work of God, . . . and, it **binds us**, to the meticulous rules of men. Which would you, rather have?

\*\*\* Whatever, kind of guilt, we're dealing with -- true guilt/false guilt -- we've got ways, of dealing with it, . . . and, God's got ways, of dealing with it. **OUR WAYS OF HANDING GUILT:**

Back to the light, on the dashboard: What are you going to do, when that light comes on? How do you, handle it? It's amazing, how we have common ways, of handling, these feelings. They go all the way back, to the first man, the first woman, the first sin. The ways, they dealt with that first sin, . . are pretty common, today.

We can all, . . relate to it. Genesis 3, the Bible tells us, that they first *“sewed fig leaves together, . . . and, made something, to cover themselves*.” Then, they hid, . . . from the Lord God. Then, when challenged, Adam said, *"I was afraid, because I was naked. She gave me, some fruit, from the tree, so I ate it."*

\*\*\* Three ways, that are indicated, in the way, they responded, . . . and, the way, we respond, today, too.

**1. We often, . . . respond, with shame.** We feel bad, about it. If you think, you can feel bad enough, about the wrong things you've done, . . . to make them ok, . . . probably most of you, have already discovered, . . . that, doesn't work. Shame, . . . doesn't work. They sewed fig leaves, . . . and, tried to hide out.

**2. Hiding.** They hid, in the bushes, from God, . . . as if God, couldn't see them there. That's like trying, to put your hand, over the light, on the dashboard, that's going off, . . pretending, that nothing, is really wrong. It doesn't work. But, they tried, that one. They, hid out.

**3. Blame.** This is, a popular one. It's sort of a tragic, humorous story, . . what happens, in Genesis. You've got Adam and Eve, and the serpent, . . . and, God comes. God asks Adam, "Did you eat, of that fruit, of that tree?"

Adam, took it like a man, . . . and, he blamed, . . . his wife. He points, right at Eve, . . "She did it. It's her fault. She gave me, the fruit." So, Eve's standing there, blamed too. She points at, the serpent, "The serpent, did it." {Of course, the serpent, . . . **didn't have a leg, . . . to stand on**.}

Isn't it easy, . . to try to blame your way, . . . out of the wrong things, that have happened? We all, do this. But, sooner or later, . . . it doesn't work, . . . anymore. All the blame, all the shame, . . all the ways we've got, . . . of dealing with guilt. What do you do, . . . when that happens?

\*\*\* God has a way, of dealing with guilt, too. Very different, . . . from our ways.

**GOD'S WAY OF HANDLING GUILT: GRACE**

When we first become a Christian, . . . one of the first verses, of the Bible, that we should learn, . . . about how to live, this new life, that God has given to us, is 1 John 1:9 – *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins, and purify us, from all unrighteousness."*

That's how we deal, with the guilt, . . . that, makes us sick, and splits us up, and tears us apart. **God’s way**:

**1. Confess, . . . your sins.** You say, "God, I did it. I confess, my sin." Not just, our needs – our sin. Not just, our frustration -- our sin. Not just, our problems -- our sin.

What does that word, mean -- sin? There's a lot, of fancy definitions, out there. The easiest way, to understand it for me, is to look at the middle letter, in the word. Sin is all about, . . "I". It's all about, my way. It's all about me, saying to God, "Excuse me, . . but, I'm going to live my life, my own way. I've got, my own plans."

It's about me, looking at the car, and saying, "It looks ok, to me, . . so, I'm leaving God out." That's what, it's all about. Whether you look, very moral, in this world's eyes, . . . or, very immoral, . . . you can still have, that "I", right in the middle, of your life. Leaving, God out. That's what sin, is all about.

When it comes to sin, we do one of two things -- cover up, . . . or, face up. We try to cover it up, . . and pretend, it's not there, . . . or, we face up to it. When you face up to it, . . the number one thing, we need to do is, to tell God, that we're facing up to it. How do you confess, your sin? You, tell God. You might as well tell Him, . . . He already knows. He already knows everything, . . . so, why not, . . . tell Him.

Why not, be honest, about it? Psalm 69:5 – *"God you know, what I have done wrong. I cannot hide my guilt, from You."* There's nothing, more difficult, . . . than, trying to hide something, that cannot be hidden. There is nothing, more wearying, . . . nothing, more costly. Why try to hide it, from God? Be honest, with Him.

Telling God – confessing, to God -- means more, than just, admitting. The literal meaning of this word, . . . is "saying, the same thing about". You say to God, . . . "I agree with You, . . . about this.

How do you, confess? How do you, tell God? You do it, . . through prayer. The second part, of 1 John 1:9, . . reminds us, to really experience God's grace, . . we not only, have to confess, our sins, . . but, we need to, . . . . .

**2. Trust, . . . God's character.** Many people, confess their sins, . . . but, really never get to know, . . . the God, who is forgiving them. Because of that, they never **feel**, . . . the forgiveness, . . . that, He wants to give.

*". . . He is faithful, and just, . . ."* You can count, on God. You can count, on His faithfulness. A lot of people, think, they can't get close to God, . . . because, they just don't, . . . feel forgiven. In a way, that's a trap, because the truth is, . . . the closer you get to God, . . . the more, you'll feel, . . . forgiven.

When you and I, get close to the God, who loves us, who gave His life, for us, in Christ, . . . when we get close, to Him, we really sense, . . . what His forgiveness, . . . is all about. So, as long as you hold God, . . . at arm's length, . . . you're not, going to feel, . . . His forgiveness.

Look at His invitation, in Hebrews 10:22 – *"Let us come near to God, with a sincere heart, and a sure faith, . . . because, we have been made free, . . . from a guilty conscience."* Jesus makes us free, . . . from, a guilty conscious. That's what the cross, is all about. That's what, Him giving His life, for us, . . . is all about.

Once, we've accepted that gift, . . . the invitation is, . . . "Get close, to me." When you get close to God, . . . and, understand His grace, . . . in a new way, . . . it frees you, to become the person, that He wants you to be.

It doesn't happen, . . . through guilt. You don't become, . . . the person God wants you to be, . . . through guilt. You become, the person, . . . God wants you to be, . . . through, . . . His grace.

**3. Accept, . . . God's forgiveness.**  If we confess our sins, . . . He's faithful, He can be trusted, to forgive us our sins, . . . and, the verse ends, by saying, *". . . and, cleanse us, from all, . . . unrighteousness."* He will purify us, from all unrighteousness. Not, "He'll purify us, from most unrighteousness, or a lot of unrighteousness."

But, He will purify us, . . . from **all**. What an important, three letter word, . . . about grace, what God's able, to do! Yet, a lot of people, who ask for God's forgiveness, . . . recognize, that Jesus is willing, to forgive, and, yet, . . . they only feel cleansed, . . . from part, of their sins, . . .rather, than all.

Look at, God's promise. You just accept, God's forgiveness. John 3:8 – *"People who believe, in God's Son, are not judged, guilty."* When we believe in Christ, and trust what He did for us, on the cross, . . . the Bible says, . . . you're not judged, . . . guilty.

If you've already trusted in Christ, and believed in what He's done, . . why are you continuing, to judge yourself guilty, when God's already said, "I judge you, . . not guilty." If you've never, trusted in, what Christ, has done for you, His willingness to forgive you – and, God's saying, "I'm willing! I'm willing, to say, `Not guilty!' to you!", . . . why not take advantage, . . . of that offer?

We all have this picture, that we're going to get to heaven, at the pearly gates, and that's where we're going to be judged, . . . guilty, or not guilty. That's not, where it happens. It's determined, here on earth, . . . not in heaven. Right here, and now. You can, settle the issue. God's willing, through Christ, to say, "I will judge you, . . . `Not guilty!'" Why? Because, you deserve it? Of course not. But, . . . because of, God's grace.

Does that mean, . . . you'll never, fail again? Never make, a mistake, again? Of course, not. But, it does mean, when you do, . . . you confess your sin, again, . . . you recognize, His willingness to forgive, . . . you take the consequences, . . . and, recognize that His grace, . . . can even help you, . . . with the consequences.

This thing of accepting God's forgiveness, is somewhat like getting a medical bill, in the mail. Maybe, you've had a big bill, at the hospital, and all of a sudden, the words, "Paid in Full", . . . appear, on that bill. If it says, "Paid in Full", are you going to worry any longer, about that bill? Only, if you feel like, "I didn't really pay it." If you feel like, "Some computer somewhere, made a mistake, and someday, they're going to catch up with me."

A lot of people, feel that way, about their sins. They feel like, "I know the Bible says this thing, . . about Paid in Full, . . . but, someday, God's going to catch up with me." But, what if, along with that hospital bill, . . . that invoice, there was a letter inside, from the director of the hospital, that said, "We're deciding, to pay this bill, in full, for you, . . . and, if there is ever any problem, with the accounting department, . . take this letter, with my personal signature, my name on it. Take it in, and show it to them, . . and that will make sure, that they know, that this bill, is paid in full." Would that, make a difference? Would that give you, . . . more confidence?

God's given us a letter, . . . called the Bible. The Bible, was written to us, to clearly say, He wants you to know, that the sin debt, in our lives, . . . is paid, in full. Next time, Satan, . . from the accounting department calls, . . . show him, the letter. (It was signed, . . . with, His blood!)

Some of you, may still be, . . struggling with this. It's a big struggle, to recognize, . . . how great, God's grace is.

You're thinking, . . "You don't know, how big, my sin is! You don't know, what I did. It may have been years ago, and no one knows about it. You don't know, how I hurt my kids, how I hurt my wife, how I hurt my parents. You have, no idea. How could God, . . . forgive me?"

When you pick up this book, God's letter to us, you start to read, story after story, that says, "Yes, God can not only forgive us, . . . but, even use us." You read the story, of a guy named Abraham, . . . in the Old Testament.

He started out, worshiping idols. He had a lot of struggles, with lying. Yet, we call him, the father of our faith.

You read a story, about Moses, who at the start of his life, . . . was a murderer. Yet, today, we call him, the one who set the children free, to go to the Promised Land. You read the story, of a John Mark, who was a coward. He left a missionary trip, because some reason he was afraid. You read the story, of a guy, named Paul. He started out, being named Saul. He went to churches, and persecuted people. He actually stood by, while Christians, . . were murdered. Yet, you and I call him, an apostle, . . and, a writer, of the New Testament.

God not only, wants to free you, of your guilt, He wants to **use you, in a new way**. That's the good news, about grace. I realize, that this has not been easy, . . . for some of you, to hear. For some of you, . . . guilt has become, sort of a strange best friend, in your life. Sort of like, a Teddy Bear, with fangs. You cuddle it, . . . but, it will get you, in the end. You get real used to, . . . your guilt, sometimes.

It motivates you, . . . in the morning. You get up, have a little guilt, for breakfast, to get you going, have a little right, before you go to bed. You really are wondering, "If I step out, into the fresh air, of God's grace, . . I don't think, I can stay, motivated. I think I'd plummet, if I do that." As if your guilt, could hold you up, . . better than God's grace. It doesn't make sense, . . . but, it's how we feel. It's scary. It’s scary, to step out, into God's grace.

For others, guilt has been the enemy, that you've been running from, all your life. You're pretending, . . that, it's not there. You've got a lot of different tricks, a lot of different ways, like all of us do, for hiding from it.

Whatever the case, . . . here’s a verse for you. Psalm 32:5 – *"I finally, admitted all my sins to You, and stopped trying, to hide them. I said to myself, `I will confess them, to the Lord.' And, You forgave me. All my guilt, is gone."* Incredible!

Some of you need, the first half, of that verse. *"I finally admitted, all my sins to You, and stopped trying, to hide them, . . ."* You need to say, "God, I admit it! I need, Your forgiveness. I'm tired of trying, . . . all my ways, of making up for it."

Some of you need, the second half, of the verse. *". . . and, You forgave me. All my guilt, . . . is gone."* The sad thing is, that for some people, . . . it's taken them 10, 15, 25 years, to get from the first half of this verse, to the second half of the verse. Don't let it, be that way, with you. Recognize, that He's the God of grace, who wants to forgive, . . . and, showers grace, upon us. Why? Because, we deserve it? No. Because, He love us.

“Guilt and Grace”, Good News About Grace - Part 2 of 7

James 2:10 – *"The person who keeps every law of God but makes one little slip is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is."*

I. WHAT IS GUILT?

Psalm 38:4 – *"My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear."*

Guilt is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

There are two kinds of guilt

\* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Guilt

\* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Guilt

Galatians 3:3 – *"You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish."*

How do I tell the difference? Is the focus on . . .

People or God?

Vague or Specific?

Rules or Relationship?

II. OUR WAYS OF HANDING GUILT \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:7-12 – *". . . they sewed fig leaves together and made something to cover themselves . . . they hid from the Lord God . . . `I was afraid because I was naked' . . . `she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.'"*

III. GOD'S WAY OF HANDLING GUILT: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 1:9 – *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

1. Confess \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\* Tell \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 69:5 – *"God, You know what I have done wrong. I cannot hide my guilt from You."*

\* Trust \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 10:22 – *"Let us come near to God with a sincere heat and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience."*

\* Accept \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

John 3:18 – *"People who believe in God's Son are not judged guilty."*

Psalm 32:5 – *"I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, `I will confess them to the Lord.' And You forgave me! All my guilt is gone."*