



WHAT IS GOD'S HEART ON
**GUILT &
SHAME?**

GUILT & SHAME

Breaking Free from Guilt and Shame

What Is God's Heart on Guilt?

God's grace is greater than our guilt. It's one of the most central and remarkable truths of the Bible. For *every* sin and for *all* our sin—God has grace for us. The Bible says, “*he gives us more grace*” (James 4:6).

We all experience guilt. We've all said or done things we shouldn't have, and we've all failed to do things we know we should have done.

Guilt can lead to two very different responses. On one hand, guilt can drive us *away* from God. This often leads us to cover up our sin and guilt, try to ignore it, or we attempt to “earn” God's approval through our “good works” or trying harder or beating ourselves up. This usually leads to feeling more guilt, shame, and frustration.

On the other hand, guilt can drive us *to* God. Guilt can serve as a signal that we've done something wrong and we need to come back to God to receive His grace and forgiveness.

Realize, no matter what you've said or done, no matter how many times you've failed, no matter how great your sin—you're never outside the reach of God's love and mercy. The Lord extends forgiveness to you and calls you to walk in the freedom of His grace.

*“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace
to help us in our time of need.”*

(HEBREWS 4:16)

God is gracious and forgiving, yet He does not overlook or excuse the guilty.

“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty” (EXODUS 34:6–7 NLT).

God declares that all people are guilty of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).

God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:5–6).

*“For every sin and
for all our sin—
God has grace
for us.”*

God does not condemn those who are in Christ—who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (ROMANS 8:1).

God will judge those who reject Christ and His free gift of salvation.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them” (JOHN 3:36).

God doesn't want you to hide your sin and guilt but to confess it and receive His grace.

"People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy"
(PROVERBS 28:13 NLT).

God wants you to repent with godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

"For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death" (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT).

God completely forgives and cleanses you of all sin.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"
(1 JOHN 1:9).

God calls you by His grace to live holy and leave sin behind you.

"Neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (JOHN 8:11).

God wants you to regularly remind yourself that He is gracious and compassionate.

"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (PSALM 145:8-9).

God wants you to forgive others who are guilty of wronging you.

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

God wants you to tell others about His forgiveness.

"My friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (ACTS 13:38).

Key Verse to Memorize

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
(ROMANS 8:1)

Key Passage to Read

*"Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!
² Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!
³ When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.
⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.
⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD."
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."
(PSALM 32:1-5 NLT)*

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

“I’ll never tell anyone.”

“No one will love me if they find out.”

“I feel dirty. Damaged.”

“God will never forgive me.”

Statements like these reveal the lasting sense of guilt and shame. If these emotions go unaddressed, they can impact how you view yourself, how you interact in your relationships, and how you relate to God. In order to break free from these strongholds, the feelings of guilt and shame need to be correctly defined and dealt with God’s way. With God’s help, you can start walking in the freedom of His grace.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD,
and the LORD answered me and set me free.”*
(PSALM 118:5 NLT)

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are not the same. **Guilt** focuses on your behavior; **shame** focuses on you.

Shame can be a response to what was done to you, but **guilt** is a response to something you have done.

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined **guilt**.

Shame focuses on who you are, but **guilt** focuses on what you’ve done.

Shame is experienced when your **guilt** moves from knowing you have done something bad to feeling that you are bad.

Shame creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior; **guilt** can motivate a desire to change—or justify emotions and behavior.

Shame produces feelings of loneliness that foster unhealthy dependencies, but **guilt** produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

Shame steals the joy of your salvation; **guilt** confessed restores joy in salvation.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*
(PSALM 51:12)

The Difference Between True Guilt and False Guilt

False guilt can blind and deceive people from seeing the truth about themselves, their situation, and God. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to already difficult emotions. Realize, there's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt. ...

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues even after confessing and repenting of a sin that is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt leads to freedom, as it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- **False guilt** is resolved by rejecting the lies of the enemy and believing the truth of God's Word. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the "accuser of our brothers and sisters." He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins which you have confessed and repented of, realize this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- "What am I hearing?" (Accusation.)
- "What am I feeling?" (False Guilt.)
- "What are the facts?" (I am not guilty. I am fully forgiven.)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: "Thank you, Father, that you don't condemn me and don't want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ."

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

(ROMANS 8:1)

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

If you are experiencing true guilt (feeling bad about what you've done), confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

"I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (PSALM 32:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing false guilt (feeling bad although you've done no wrong), reject the false guilt and replace the lies you've been led to believe with the truth of God's Word.

"Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (PSALM 25:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing shame (feeling bad about who you are), embrace God's love for you and meditate regularly on your identity in Christ as a chosen, beloved child of God.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 JOHN 3:1).

The powerful emotions of guilt and shame can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God's Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

"In abundance of counselors there is victory."

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

How to See Yourself through God's Eyes

We naturally see ourselves and the world around us through eyes that are colored by our own thoughts and beliefs. We see ourselves as we think (assume) we really are. If you *think* you are a wretched person, whenever you look in a mirror, you will see a wretched person, and you will think and act and feel like the wretched person you believe yourself to be.

Realize, there's a vast difference between *our perceptions* and *God's perspective*. Our perceptions are often wrong. They can be unreliable and untrustworthy. But God's perspective is never wrong. He sees everything completely and accurately. That's why it's important to see ourselves as God sees us.

That's why we need to willfully choose to yield ourselves to the Lord and to work with Him to transform us. We do this by allowing His truth to replace our faulty thoughts (often based on our feelings). Since all of God's thoughts are true, we need to saturate our minds with His words of truth—allowing those words to cause us to think as He thinks and see as He sees. Thus, He changes our minds . . . about Him, about us, and about others.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

(ROMANS 12:2)

Seeing Yourself through God's Eyes

This process of change involves: (1) identifying the image you presently have of yourself, (2) identifying the contrasting image God has of you, and then (3) choosing to believe from His perspective rather than your own perception. It is that simple . . . and yet that profound.

Do you think . . . you are unacceptable?

God says . . . you are accepted by Him.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (ROMANS 15:7.).

Do you think . . . you are alone?

God says . . . He will never leave you nor forsake you.

"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Do you think . . . you are incompetent, a failure?

God says . . . He has made you competent.

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God”
(2 CORINTHIANS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are bad, not good enough?

God says . . . He sees you through the lens of His mercy.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (TITUS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are a mistake?

God says . . . you are wonderfully made.

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well”
(PSALM 139:14).

Do you think . . . you are defeated?

God says . . . you are more than a conqueror.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (ROMANS 8:37).

Do you think . . . you are unloved?

God says . . . He has great love for you.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (EPHESIANS 2:4-5).

Do you think . . . you can't be forgiven?

God says . . . your sins are forgiven.

“He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins”
(EPHESIANS 1:7 NLT).

Do you think . . . you don't have enough strength?

God says . . . He will strengthen you Himself.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).

Do you think . . . you can't have victory over a sinful habit?

God says . . . You have victory through Jesus.

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:57).

God's thoughts are revealed to us through His Word, which is powerful and able to transform us to be like Him in thought, in word, and in deed. . . .

*“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

(ISAIAH 55:10–11)

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*
(JOHN 5:24)

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to this topic, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin*, *change*, or *stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to this topic, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding this issue? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with this topic/issue? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

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