

## REALITY AND GUILT

- A. Introduction: For a number of weeks we have been talking about emotions as part of a larger discussion on how to overcome in life's trials. If you don't learn how to deal with your emotions then how you feel rather than what God says will dictate your actions.
1. Emotions or feelings are spontaneously generated in our soul. They are a response to stimulus such as sight and circumstances, thoughts and memories. You cannot will emotions to come or to go.
    - a. Emotions are part of human nature. As infants we feel before we learn to reason or believe. Thus, our emotional responses are more developed and established than any other part of us.
    - b. But as with every part of human nature they have been damaged by sin and can give us incorrect information as well as drive us to act in ungodly ways. We can't let our emotions shape our view of reality nor can we allow them to move us to act in ways contrary to scripture.
  2. Christians sometimes feel bad for feeling bad. Negative emotions don't mean you lack faith or are a lousy Christian. Bad stuff happens in a sin cursed earth so there will be times when we feel bad. It's not wrong, it's natural. But our emotions must be brought under the control of the Word of God.
    - a. The Bible has specific instructions for dealing with emotions: When you're angry, don't sin (Eph 4:26). When you're afraid, trust God (Ps 56:3). When you're sad, rejoice (II Cor 6:10). A major key in dealing with emotions is changing your view of reality.
      1. Fear rises up when something comes against us that is greater than the resources available to us. For a Christian reality is: Nothing can come against you that is bigger than God.
      2. Sorrow arises when we lose someone or something dear to us. For a Christian reality is: All lose is temporary and subject to change by God's power either in this life or the life to come.
    - b. When we learn to see reality as it truly is (the way things are according to God) and meditate (think and talk) on that, it will strengthen us to stand and give us peace in the midst of the storm.
      1. Prov 12:25--Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but an encouraging word makes it glad. (Amp)
      2. Prov 15:15--All the days of the desponding afflicted are made evil [by anxious thoughts and foreboding], but he who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances] (Amp); a continual tranquility (Lamsa).
      3. Ps 94:19--In the multitude of my (anxious) thoughts within me, Your comforts cheer and delight my soul! (Amp)
        - A. That's the point: We use God's Word about the way things really are to cheer ourselves. It doesn't mean willing yourself to feel good when you feel bad. Cheer means encourage.
        - B. Gladden or cheer is the same thing as rejoicing in hope (Rom 12:12). It means strengthen yourself by talking about who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
    - c. This is not a gimmick to solve your immediate crisis or get you out of trouble. It's changing your view of reality and then living out of that accurate view. This is not passive acceptance. This is an active response of rejoicing. It's learning how to navigate through a sin cursed earth.
  3. Recently we've focused on dealing with sorrow or grief due to loss of someone or something dear to us. Last week we talked about sorrow over choices we've made that can't be undone.
    - a. These choices can range from bad decisions where we ignored the "red flags" along the way and hurt ourselves and/or others to what we presumed were good, well thought out choices but they didn't produce the results we'd hoped for to outright sinful choices.
    - b. This kind of sorrow is called regret or guilt. We're going to continue our discussion in this lesson.
      1. Just as sorrow over loss of someone or something dear to you can become overwhelming grief that turns into despair or hopelessness, in the same way sorrow or regret and guilt over poor, wrong, disappointing, or sinful choices can become overwhelming.
      2. The church at Corinth had a man who was sleeping with his father's wife. Paul instructed them to put the man out of the church because he refused to turn from his sin. I Cor 5:1-5

A. The man did eventually repent and Paul exhorted the church to restore him. II Cor 2:7-- Now is the time to forgive and comfort him. Otherwise he may become so discouraged that he won't be able to recover (NLT); overwhelmed by despair (Berkeley)

B. Comfort means to exhort and lessen the suffering, raising the spirits and encouraging.

4. There are some challenges with teaching on this topic. It is likely that everyone listening to or reading this lesson has guilt or regret over something -- a wrong or sinful choice, a wrong done to another person, a wrong against God.

a. We can't cover every scenario. We can only give general principles and trust the Holy Spirit to specifically apply them to our particular situation.

b. Guilt and regret are difficult to define in that both have different shades of meaning and both are a feeling as well as a state of being.

1. The dictionary defines guilt as: the fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation or wrong especially against moral or penal law. In other words you did something wrong so you ARE guilty. Such a state can make you FEEL guilty or feel REAL GUILT.

2. But you can also FEEL guilty even when you AREN'T guilty. You can feel guilty even if you haven't done wrong because you believe you've done wrong.

c. We'll call this FALSE GUILT. Consider some examples of false guilt.

1. You decide that you are going to get up an hour early every day to pray. You fail to do it and then you feel guilty. But you aren't guilty before God. He didn't ask you to do that. You made your own rule and didn't live up to it. That's weak flesh, not real guilt.

2. You have a vague, nebulous feeling of guilt. You can't identify what you've done wrong but you feel certain there must be something.

A. Many people struggle with a false sense of guilt due to issues that go way back to childhood. Constantly hearing, "You're a bad boy, you're a naughty girl, etc." can build a constant feeling of guilt into that

B. One reason God's Law has been written down is so that we know clearly what we should and should not do. You don't have to wonder or guess with God.

3. We feel like we let people down. But we, not them, set the standard we failed to reach. We are upset about it but they aren't.

d. Regret and guilt often give rise to "if only" and we torture ourselves with: If only I had or had not...! But fixating on the "if onlys" does nothing positive.

1. If you've truly done something regretful, what's done is done. It can't be undone. You can only deal with the situation as it is, not as it should have been. Victory comes from seeing reality as it truly is or the way things really are according to God's Word.

2. Focusing on the "if onlys" feeds the emotions of regret, guilt, and sorrow. If you don't feed those feelings, with time, they will fade because emotions naturally fade when nothing stimulates them.

B. How do we deal with the regret, remorse and guilt that arises from choices that produce negative results beyond our power to change? How do we encourage ourselves when we feel this kind of pain?

1. To begin to answer those questions we're going to consider something that happened to Peter. He denied Jesus on the night before He was crucified. All four gospels refer to this incident.

a. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane Peter at first defended Him with a sword (John 18:10; Matt 26:51). But when Jesus' disciples saw He wasn't going to resist arrest, they all fled (Matt 26:56).

1. Peter followed behind as Jesus was taken to the authorities. But when he was accused of knowing Jesus, he denied the Lord three times, abandoning Jesus in His hour of need. Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 13:36-38

2. Fear no doubt drove Peter to do it. When pressed by those asking if he knew Jesus Peter lied

and swore and cursed that he did not. When Peter's eyes met Jesus' and his failure was exposed, his regret was overwhelming.

3. Mark 14:72--And having put his thought upon it, he broke down and wept aloud and lamented (Amp); as he considered that he wept audibly (Berkeley).
  - b. It will get worse for Peter before it gets better because Jesus will be crucified and for the next three days Peter will have to face bitter regret -- if only, what if, etc. On top of that Jesus had warned Peter that very night what he would do and he did it anyway. Matt 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31
2. Before we discuss how Peter got past this we need to make an important point. At the Last Supper Jesus told all of His disciples: Matt 26:31--You will all be offended and stumble and fall away because of Me this night—distrusting and deserting Me. (Amp)
  - a. Peter said: Everyone else may abandon you, but not me! Jesus replied: You'll deny me three times. Peter let pride and what he was feeling in the moment trump the Word of God (whole lesson for another night).
  - b. Luke 22:31-34 gives more details about what Jesus said to Peter. He told Peter that Satan wanted to sift or sieve him as wheat (reference to separating useful part of wheat from the chafe; used figuratively to mean to test to see what will remain). Satan wanted to knock Peter out of the game by convincing him to give up on Jesus.
    1. The word offended (Matt 26:31) comes from the Greek word SKANDALON. That word literally means the trigger of a trap or the part on which the bait is placed. When it is touched by an animal it springs and causes the trap to close and the creature is trapped.
    2. When emotions are raging, particularly due to a calamity in our lives (like the arrest of your Lord and friend) we are most vulnerable to the mental schemes and strategies of the devil (Eph 6:11,12). That's why it is so important to learn to put what God says about everything above what we see and feel.
    3. The depth of Peter's emotional pain -- his guilt, regret, remorse -- made him a target.
3. Back to Peter's denial of the Lord. We don't have any record of Peter's thoughts and emotions during the next three days. We can only imagine based on what we would think and feel. But the same principles we have been studying in regard to dealing with emotions would have applied to Peter.
  - a. Peter, like each of us, needed to remember and encourage himself with Jesus' Words to him. Jesus knew this would happen. He said He prayed for me and I would make it through.
  - b. Jesus said He'd see us in Galilee. I don't understand what He meant but everything He ever told us came to pass just as He said it would. Luke 22:32; Matt 26:32
  - c. This drama ended well because Jesus raised from the dead. But even though He was resurrected that would not have automatically cleared up feelings of guilt and regret in Peter. Emotions are real. The devil is real. Dealing with emotions can be really challenging.
    1. Every time Peter walked by the High Priest's palace in Jerusalem (the actual place where he denied knowing Jesus) it would have stimulated his emotions of guilt, regret, shame. His natural inclination (helped by the devil) would have been to fixate on "if only" and "what if"?
    2. How does he get past it? Peter can't undo what he has done. He can only deal with it as it is.
4. Peter had to put what God said above what he could see and feel. He would have had to recount how:
  - a. When Jesus rose from the dead He paid a personal visit to Peter to restore him. Peter's failures were sinful in that he lied and swore, but they were relational as well. He had been Jesus' closest friend and follower and Jesus came to tell Peter -- it's all okay. Luke 24:34; I Cor 15:5
  - b. On Resurrection Day Jesus explained to all His disciples that His death provided remission of sins. Remission means to cause to stand away; to release one's sins from the sinner. Remission is the blotting out, the wiping out, the erasing of sins. From God's standpoint, Peter's failure was gone.
  - c. Peter had to choose to believe all of this and put forth effort to feed his faith not his emotions. Peter would have heard Jesus preach the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus told that parable in part to show the response of our Heavenly Father to a sinner who repents of his sin. Luke 15

1. The father was watching for his wayward son to return and when he saw him coming home he ran to meet him (v20). Jesus “ran” to meet Peter.
    - A. The prodigal son wanted to talk about his sin. He had a speech all prepared (v21). But his father blew right past it. He knew his son was sorry for what he had done.
    - B. The father’s purpose was not to recount his sons failures but to cleanse him of every trace of it and restore him to his place in his father’s house (v22,23).
  2. What if the prodigal let emotions of regret and guilt keep him from receiving the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration of relationship and position that his father offered?
    - A. What if he insisted on living out in the back shed on bread and water, trying to make up for what he had done? What if he spent his days and nights lamenting the “if onlys”?
    - B. The prodigal had to believe what his father said and did to be free from emotional pain. Peter had to do the same.
  5. When we look at the words and actions of Peter after Jesus returned to Heaven we see he did believe.
    - a. Peter’s first public statement about sin is found in the sermon he preached on the Day of Pentecost to the crowd that assembled after the Holy Ghost fell on the disciples in the upper room. Acts 2
      1. He told the crowd that they had turned the Christ, the Messiah over to wicked men who killed him, but God had raised Him from the dead. Their consciences were pricked and they asked what they should do.
      2. v38--Peter told them to repent, be baptized, and accept remission of sins: the fact that your sins have been put away (Wuest); release from your sins (Amp).
    - b. Peter was so free from guilt over his sin that he had the confidence before God necessary to administer power and heal a man in the name of Jesus at the Temple. Acts 3
      1. He told the crowd that gathered that they had denied the Holy One of God. v14--denied and rejected and disowned (Amp). That’s just what Peter had done.
      2. Yet he was able to preach to them: v19--Repent and be converted to Christ so that your sins may be blotted out, wiped clean (Amp); cancelled (Weymouth); taken away (Basic).
  6. Peter had say no to the “if only” trap. He had to believe what Jesus did for him and what God said about him despite what his feelings said.
    - a. He had to see and agree with reality as it truly is not with what his emotions told him about the way things are.
    - b. By doing so Peter was able to move past his failures and the pain of regret and guilt that went came with them. We need to follow his example.
- C. Conclusion: We have much more to say about regret, remorse, and guilt next week.