

Forgive Yourself

Guilt and shame produce fear and avoidance of God. If you owed a friend a lot of money that you could not repay and saw them in town, you would avoid them, or at least, hope they do not see you. The outstanding debt would make you fearfully self-conscious of your lack instead of friend-conscious with gratitude. Then guilt would overwhelm you. Then shame would overcome you for feeling guilty instead of grateful. Likewise, if you do not receive God's unconditional gift of forgiveness as a once and for all payment for sins, you will avoid God and keep yourself at the edge of his grace. And then feel ashamed for doing so. Then you withdraw from vulnerable fellowship with other believers as well.

Guilt, shame, and fear are three of the most powerful emotions. They are part of the curse that Christ became so that you would not be under the curse of guilt and shame or fear. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin (guilty) on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness (not guilty) of God in Him."

Forgive Others (Yourself) Even as God Has Forgiven You

Self-loathing is a subtle and deceptive form of self-punishment through self-criticism. Not forgiving yourself will cause you to draw away from God instead of drawing near. As you draw near to God, God will draw near to comfort you, to build you up in His love and acceptance, and to remove the "guilt and shame of your sin." Christ paid for your sins so that you would not be conscious of them (guilt/shame) but conscious of Him (love and acceptance) and what He has done for you and in you.

- Eph 4:32 "Be kind to one another [the body-yourself included], tender-hearted, forgiving each other [the body-yourself included], just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Reasons that Believers Continue to Struggle with Guilt and Shame:

1. You may not believe (or wasn't taught) that Christ paid for all your sins and "forgave the guilt of your sins."¹
2. You continue to struggle with guilt and shame because you are still trying to earn unconditional acceptance and worth instead of receiving right standing before God as the gift of salvation. Therefore, when your behavior doesn't measure up, you beat yourself up. This is living under the law, which produces sin consciousness and condemnation instead of God-consciousness and peace. (Rom 5:1)
3. Believing your sins are too awful for God to forgive. Without realizing it, you have concluded that the blood of Christ is not sufficient payment for your sins, so you are punishing yourself through self-loathing and self-hatred and self-condemnation.

Factors that Increase the Likelihood of Suffering from Guilt and Shame

4. Guilt-tripping parents: "You didn't try hard enough, and that is why..." (Your parent blame you for failures—yours and others, real or perceived.)
5. Religious guilt-tripping: "You have disappointed God." "You are breaking God's heart." "You should be ashamed of yourself." (You are shamed for failures/shortcomings.)
6. Religious training/thinking: "God will only forgive your sins if and when you confess your sins." "You must forgive others before receiving God's forgiveness."
7. Performance-based relationships: You must do well to earn love and acceptance, and affirmation. When you did not do well, parents, family, or teachers rejected you. You learned to earn love and acceptance.

¹ Psalms 32:3-7

Biblical Examples of Receiving God's Forgiveness for Even the Worst Sins

The Bible never talks about “forgiving yourself” but states that the believer is “forgiven” through Christ’s blood. You cannot pay a high enough price to justify yourself or make up for your sins. You certainly cannot offer a better sacrifice for your sins than Christ offered. The only thing you can do is confess your sins and receive God’s forgiveness and love as the gift of being sons of the Most High God. Stop trying to be good enough and accept that the blood of Christ was and is eternally more than good enough.

- King David and Peter both had powerful feelings from failure and falling short.
- The Woman at the Well or The Woman Caught in Adultery
 - John 8:10-11 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”
 - Jesus was the only one who could condemn her, and He didn’t.
- The Apostle Paul not only accepted God's total forgiveness for persecuting the church unto death but also forgave himself the moment he knew God's forgiveness.
 - Acts 22:4-8 "I persecuted this way [the believers] to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons... I started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'"
 - 1 Tim 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.
 - Eph 4:32 "... forgiving each other (yourself included), just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."
 - 1 Cor 4:3-4 But to me, it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine [judge] myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this [my opinion] acquitted [free from punishment], but the one who examines me is the Lord. [He acquitted me!]
 - Rom 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ, Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Prayer to Forgive Yourself

Psalm 32:3-7 When I kept silent about my sin², my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me³; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the guilt of my sin⁴. Selah. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance⁵. Selah.

Father God, I have been loathing and disliking myself instead of loathing sin and flesh. I confess that I am made righteous through co-crucifixion with Christ. I receive your forgiveness as the basis for forgiving myself for _____.

Thank you, Jesus, that You have made me righteous and acceptable to enter the throne of grace and stand before Father God knowing that I am entirely accepted, loved, forgiven, and blessed. Father God, take the feelings of guilt and shame unto Yourself and exchange them for your peace and acceptance. Amen!

² Avoiding God, stuffing, keeping busy, punishing self, or trying to be good enough to get rid of feelings of guilt/shame.

³, God wants us to bring our sins and guilt into His light so that He can remove the guilt (feelings) of our sin.

⁴ Not just the sin but the “guilt of our sins” too. (Forgive means to “release to remove from”.)

⁵ Instead of waves of guilt and wet blankets of shame.