

# Guilt is a Good Thing

*by Bryan Gibson*

Maybe, just maybe, we've forgotten that. "I know what I did was wrong, BUT (insert your favorite excuse)." We don't like to feel guilty, and we don't want anyone else to feel that way, either. We're reluctant to point out their sin, or perhaps we make excuses for them, too.

It's the way of society today, but it's not the Lord's way. He wants us to feel guilty when we've done wrong, assume responsibility for our actions, and refuse to blame anyone or anything else. A few Biblical examples will help illustrate the Lord's approach. Nathan, the prophet, was not about to let King David off the hook—"YOU are the man...why have YOU despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" (2 Samuel 12:7, 9). Peter, the apostle, did likewise to his audience in Acts 2—"YOU have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (v. 23)—speaking, of course, about what they had done to Jesus. And finally, Jesus said this to Saul when He appeared to him on the road to Damascus: "I am Jesus, whom YOU are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Saul was guilty, and the Lord wanted him to know it. These are just a few of the many examples found in the Bible.

Why is it so important to the Lord for us to feel the burden of guilt? Using the Scriptures, we can find at least three reasons.

Only then will we see the need to repent, to change our ways. The recognition of guilt before God, or "godly sorrow" is a good thing, because it "produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10). When we're ashamed of what we've done, we don't want to do it anymore.

Secondly, it's only when we feel the burden of guilt that we seek forgiveness (Luke 5:31-32). That's exactly what happened in the examples cited above—they felt the burden of guilt and sought forgiveness from the Lord. David certainly felt this immense burden: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psalms 38:3-4). It's this burden that makes us say, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalms 51:2).

Finally, it is when we feel guilt the strongest that we appreciate forgiveness the most. The sinful woman in Luke 7 had great love for Jesus, because she was so thankful to have her "many sins" forgiven (Luke 7:36-50). Paul characterized himself as the "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), so it's little wonder that when he was forgiven, he "labored more abundantly than they all." He wanted to do all he could for the Lord, because he was so thankful for His grace (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

So you see, guilt IS a good thing—if it makes us repent, if it causes us to seek forgiveness, and if it deepens our appreciation for the grace of God.