

Freedom from Guilt – Romans 3:19

The Treasure that is Your Life in Christ #10

Introduction – We continue to consider what is this Treasure that is Your Life in Christ. One of the great benefits that Christians, and only Christians, can experience in this life and in the life to come is freedom from guilt. With this in mind, let us consider carefully why it is that so many Christians feel guilty and what should and can be done about this.

The Gospel, Sin, and Guilt – The world charges Christians, especially the conservative, Bible-believing ones, with being guilt-farmers. They say that we try to make everyone feel guilty for living their lives however they want to (by the way, they do the same thing according to their standards). But what is the standard for sin and guilt? Romans 1 teaches us that the Gentiles are all under sin and they know it, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18-21). In Romans 2 teaches us that the Jews are also under the same power of sin (Rom 2:17-20, 25). In this third chapter of Romans, he sums up that all Jews and Gentiles are together guilty of breaking God's law, all are under the guilt and power of sin (Rom 3:19-20, 23). To be "*under the law*" is to be under the condemnation of the law. God wants us all to be confronted with our guilt and that is a good thing. But it is only a good thing if there is more to come. Nevertheless, He wants us in a place where "*every mouth is stopped*"; no backchat, no mind-games, no excuses. Guilty. This is what the law does.

Objective Guilt – This word, guilty, "*hupodikos*," is only used once in the NT. It is a judicial term referring to the state of an accused person who has exhausted all possibilities of refuting the charges against him and reverting the consequences which must follow. This guilt is outside of us, whether we feel guilty or not, whether we know about it or not. Guilt is created by, and measured by, the law of God. When the judge declares you "guilty," how you feel about that guilt has no measure at all upon the issue. The Lord is lord of all creation, Judge of all the earth, and what He declares is settled. To deny this guilt because one does not "feel" guilty is the same thing as the leper denying that his fingers or toes are decaying and falling off because he doesn't "feel" any pain. It doesn't matter what he "feels" and to deny his situation is only going to make matters worse.

The Word also objectively condemns us of breaking all of God's law when we stumble in just one point (James 2:10). Some sins are worse than others, but all sin condemns us fully.

Subjective Guilt – Guilt feelings are a consequence of objective guilt, they are good moral nerve endings triggered by the law (Rom 7:7, 24). This is the way we should feel when we are disciplined by God's objective judgments. But feelings must be disciplined by the Word. When a man is physically wounded, the wound is objective, and usually he "feels" wounded. Unfortunately today we live in a world that says that if we "feel" wounded (offended) that means that we must have been wounded (offended). But that gets it all backwards.

False Guilt – A false standard of righteousness can create feelings of guilt. But the problem is not with the feelings, it is with the false standards. We are warned not to create false standards (i.e. Col 2:20-23), and so someone might feel more guilty about eating refined sugar, or his lack of recycling, than about his porn problem or his anger problem. We must not be a slave to men or their standards. So how do we tell which sins are really sins and need to be confessed? Most often they are the ones we don't want to confess.

There is a false guilt that appears as someone with an over-sensitive spirit. But this often is an indication of submitting to false standards or of refusing to confess the real sin, including the sin of following false standards. And one of those false standards is refusing to believe that Jesus could (or would) pay for the sins you have committed.

The Lord Our Righteousness – God will by no means clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7), and so how are we to deal with our guilt? Rom 3:21-26 answers this question for us. We are "*justified freely*," which is to be declared "not guilty" or "righteoused" and to have that declaration at no cost to us. God offers "*propitiation by His blood through faith*." Propitiation is the turning aside of wrath, wrath that is aimed at guilt. This is the holy wrath that must come from a holy God as a response to sin and the just declaration of guilt.

If God says "guilty" He would be just, but not the one who justifies. If God says, "not guilty" then we would be justified but He would not be just. The only answer to this is the Cross. But in order to understand this, we must see Jesus as another Adam, the head of a new human race, who stands as our representative before God. The first Adam disobeyed at a tree and plunged his race into sin and misery. The second Adam obeyed at a tree and bore the sins of his race. The ones who have faith in Him die with Him and their sins. But when Jesus rose, we rose with Him without the sins; this is our justification (Rom 4:25). This is the glorious exchange (2 Cor 5:21).

No Condemnation (Rom 8:1) – And this is why God looks at you in Christ and sees perfection. Every day. Outside of Christ, "*If God were to mark iniquities, who could stand?*" (Psalm 130:3). But in Christ, there is no condemnation. This means that we must learn to confess our sins as forgiven sinners. We don't confess our sins to get justified; we confess our sins because we are justified. We follow and obey Jesus not because we are guilty but because we are free. We learn to refuse to walk in sin because we learn that we have died to sin and are alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6). We can do this all because we call Jesus, "*the Lord our Righteousness*."