

**Solid Rock Christian Church
Manassas, Virginia**

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**Bible Study
For
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Topic: Guilt, Shame and Emotional Well-Being

Part I

I. Introduction

A. Our Sovereign Creator, Almighty God created us and in so doing, he instilled within us certain emotions. Prior to the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, man had no awareness of guilt or shame. However, these two distinct feelings surfaced after man's disobedience. This will be the central focus of this study and how God provides emotional and spiritual well-being.

B. What are emotions and how is the term defined? In its most literal sense, it can be defined as "any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling or passion."

C. Emotion can also refer to a feeling and its distinctive thoughts. There are several emotions that as human beings we encounter. Here are a few emotions and the thoughts or expressions that accompany them:

1. Anger - expressed as fury, outrage, resentment, wrath, indignation, animosity, annoyance, irritability, hostility, and, perhaps at the extreme, hatred and violence.
2. Sadness - grief, sorrow, gloom, melancholy, self-pity, loneliness, dejection, despair, or depression.
3. Fear - anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, misgiving, edginess, dread, fright, terror or panic.
4. Enjoyment - happiness, joy, relief, contentment, delight, thrill, or satisfaction.
5. Love - acceptance, friendliness, trust, kindness, devotion, and God-like love which is agape love (i.e., unconditional love).
6. Surprise - shock, astonishment, amazement, wonder.
7. Disgust - contempt, disdain, scorn, or distaste.
8. Shame - guilt, embarrassment, remorse, humiliation, regret and contrition.

D. The above list is certainly not all-inclusive but just a representative sample. There have been some scholarly studies that have tried to identify mankind's core emotions of which, there is no consensus. However, consider the following:

1. Specific facial expressions for fear, anger, sadness and enjoyment are recognized by people in cultures around the world, suggesting their universality.

E. No matter where a person is geographically, it is generally easy to detect if they are angry or experiencing enjoyment from their facial expression. Notice that I did not include anger and sadness in this group of which the academic scholars suggested were universal. This is because many people can hide or disguise fear and even anger.

II. Guilt and Shame

A. Guilt and Shame are the products of judgment. Both became a part of our human existence since the Fall of Man. In the case of guilt, a person feels bad or judged because he or she has done something that violates God's standards, a public or private standard.

B. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, neither of them had a feeling of guilt or shame. However, after disobeying God's command (see Gen. 2:16,17), guilt and shame entered in.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." [Gen. 2:16,17 (KJV)]

C. Guilt is a failure to keep a standard. Genesis 3:1-7 describes Adam and Eve's downward path from innocence to guilt. [Let's read this passage and discover how it points out shame.]

D. Shame is related to guilt but is associated with feelings that one is defective or bad in one's inner being.

E. Among the inner thoughts of those who are filled with shame are such beliefs as being a mistake, flawed, disgusting, not good enough, unloved, embarrassed, and/or humiliated.

F. Guilt and shame are closely associated with deficits in self-esteem. When these feelings set in, reducing them must be approached from a biblically-sound sense of self-worth. For the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:9 says:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people (i.e., people possessed by God; His own special people)"

III. Sorting out True and False Guilt

A. False guilt is culture or family-based. Instilling guilt is often practiced as a way of controlling children (who will one day become adults). Consider the following story.

A young man had tremendous feelings of guilt whenever he had to turn down his widowed mother's requests for help. He was raised in an environment where he was taught that loyalty to his parents was important.

The problem now was that his mother's many requests were more like demands. His helping her had begun to take more and more of his time, which made it difficult for him to get his own work done. This resulted in growing resentment from his wife. Whenever he said no to his mother, she had a way of letting him know that he had let her down, and he felt intense guilt.

Question: Was he experiencing true or false guilt?

B. Consider this - False guilt is closely related to shame because it encourages people to feel bad about what they have done and even about themselves.

C. True guilt on the other hand, is based on biblical standards of right and wrong.

Note: Before Almighty God, we are all (judicially) guilty. Romans 3:10 declares - "As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one."

D. However, when a confessing sinner, from a sincere heart, is godly-sorrowful and repents, and ask Jesus Christ to come into their heart, he or she receives God's forgiveness and He Justifies (declares that person righteous). As a result, he or she becomes free from guilt. (Cf. Romans 5:1; 8:1; 10:9-10)

E. For those who have already received Jesus Christ into their heart, 1 John 1:9 is applicable when we violate God's standard (i.e., when we sin).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

IV. Receive God's Forgiveness and Forgive Yourself

A. As long as you wallow in guilt or shame, punishing yourself for your transgression(s) or awfulness, there can be no healing.

B. Because those who struggle with guilt and shame often internalize perfectionistic standards, anything less than perfection to them is proof of their need to be condemned.

Comment: Some people find it hard to accept God's forgiveness or they just refuse, and as a result, they cannot or will not forgive themselves.

C. As an encourager (which believers in Christ should be), when you encounter someone in the above situation, share Scripture with them regarding the grace and love of God, in light of His uncompromising holiness. Why? Because our God is a forgiving God!

D. Consider God's accepting and forgiving response toward David (who committed adultery and murder), Rahab (a prostitute who ended up in the genealogical line of Christ) and the Apostle Paul (a murderer, who would later record in 1 Timothy 1:15 - "This is a faithful saying: and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of which I am chief.")

E. God, through the Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross, has already forgiven true guilt. Consequently, self-crucifixion is unnecessary.

F. Confession is how guilt is removed.