

# Feeling Guilty?

Then you probably are, and Christ is the remedy | Vern S. Poythress

A young woman student came into a campus pastor's office to ask why she had guilt feelings about living with her boyfriend. The pastor gave the biblical answer: You feel guilty because you ARE guilty. The guilt feelings are a warning that you have to attend to your relationship with God and stop doing what rebels against His will.

Of course we can find cases where people feel guilty for something for which they were not responsible, or for something that was not actually wrong. But such cases are exceptional. The main reason for guilt feelings is guilt.

Yet pop psychology has succeeded in convincing many people that guilt feelings are always a bad thing. Supposedly, guilt feelings are a sign of an unhealthy psyche, and we are supposed to get rid of them at the first opportunity by pumping up our self-esteem. "Feel good about yourself, and then you will lead a happy life" — so the recipe goes. If you try to talk to such people about being guilty before God, and about God's absolute holiness, they may react by asking you to absent yourself, lest you ruin their self-esteem. They don't want to hear it.

The sad thing here is that this flight from guilt means not only a life of delusion, but a life of spiritual misery. If you are guilty, you are alienated from God, and you flee from Him. Then you are lonely at a fundamental level, because only God understands you deeply and can supply the deep fellowship that you yearn for. Cut off from God, your life is meaningless, because meaning flows from God. In addition, you lose capacity genuinely to befriend other people, because you can't admit your guilt to them. Instead of loving others, you are caught up with maintaining your own self-esteem — your own pride. You are swirling in a downward spiral toward death.

So how can we help people like this? Pray for them, certainly. But we may sometimes have the opportunity to talk about the loneliness and meaninglessness that beset them. Why are they lonely? Because they miss God. They must travel the supernatural road from human need to the deeper remedy that God offers us in Christ. Christ can fill their loneliness and give them joy: "I have called you friends" (John 15:15). "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

But along the way to Christ's solution, people have to face some hard truths: Much as our culture might want to deny it, guilt remains our underlying problem that produces the surface miseries. In fact, we can face the full weight of our guilt only when we can be reassured that Christ has provided a remedy by bearing and taking away our guilt on the cross: "He Himself [Christ] bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).



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