

## I Believe in God...But I Still Feel Guilty

### Welcome/Prayer

### Foreword

Throughout our current sermon series, we've learned that there is more than one type of atheist in the world. The messages in this series have focused on the "Christian Atheist," someone who believes in God but lives as though He doesn't exist. For this study guide, we're going to explore how we, as Christ's followers, can experience freedom from guilt, a burden that many of us continue to carry.

### Introduction

Oftentimes we find ourselves emotionally or spiritually burdened by excess "stuff." One of the most common types of emotional "baggage" that we tote around is guilt. One dictionary defines "guilt" as "the *fact* or state of having committed an offense, crime, or wrong, especially a violation of a moral or legal law." Compare that to how "shame" is defined: "the painful *feeling* that arises from consciousness of having done something improper or immoral."

Since we all sin and fall short of God's glory, we are all guilty—that's a fact. *Shame* is what makes us aware that we are indeed guilty. To understand the distinction, consider the following: Godly sorrow = guilt + shame. Worldly sorrow = shame only.

1. Discuss some of the emotional or spiritual "baggage" people carry around with them.
2. What is the difference between guilt and shame? Share some examples from your experience.
3. How does Satan use shame and guilt to keep us in bondage?

### Preparation

Read aloud the key scripture from Paul's letter to the Corinthians related to today's message.

#### **2 Corinthians 7:8-10 (NLT)**

<sup>8</sup> I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while. <sup>9</sup> Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. <sup>10</sup> For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.

Paul knows that he made the Corinthians feel guilty, but the result was that they repented, changed their ways, and sought God's forgiveness. That is "the kind of sorrow God wants" us to experience (v. 9)...godly guilt.

1. When has a sense of guilt caused you to do something constructive to remedy the situation? (i.e. "the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have")
2. How does "worldly sorrow" lead to "spiritual death?"

## **Break it Down**

### **Sources of Shame and Guilt**

The Bible makes it very clear that God does not want us to live with shame or guilty feelings. When He first created us, we were “naked, and [we] felt no shame.” (Genesis 2:25 NLT) But, it was the Fall of Man (Genesis 3) that brought guilt and its associated feelings of shame and rebellion. Throughout the book of Leviticus, we see examples of the Jews’ repenting and seeking atonement for their sins through “guilt offerings.” God’s promise to His people is that “Those who put their hope in [Him] will never be put to shame....” (Psalm 25:3 NIV) Unfortunately, many Christians have done what is required of them (i.e., confessed and repented), yet we remain shackled with regret, leaving us saying, “I believe in God, but I still feel guilty.”

1. Share something that you still feel guilty about or ashamed of, even though you may have already asked for God's forgiveness.
2. What are some reasons that guilt takes ahold of us, and why is it difficult to let go of our guilt?

### **What others have done to you.**

Sometimes we feel ashamed because of choices other people have made, especially when those choices impact us (e.g., betrayal, abuse, rejection). As far as what others say about us or do to us, their culpability is not ours to own.

1. Consider something you have felt guilty about, but, in truth, you bore no responsibility for what happened. How has carrying someone else’s baggage impacted your life?

### **What others around you have done.**

This point is similar to the preceding one. You bear no responsibility for the actions and choices of other people; however, you are accountable for your response to them.

1. Why might we feel guilty for what others around us do?
2. Consider a time that someone (parent, child, sibling, spouse) embarrassed you...or that you embarrassed someone else. How might this kind of shame prevent you from ministering effectively to others?

### **What you have done.**

Sometimes there’s a sense of shame associated with something we’ve done. We all make mistakes and choose unwisely from time to time. But there is peace and forgiveness in confessing and repenting. Recall that “the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation.” (2 Corinthians 7:9 NLT)

1. Share about a mistake or error in judgment that you later felt guilty about committing.
2. Why is this sort of guilty feeling unproductive?

### **Who you are or what you’ve become.**

It’s easy to get caught up in the rat race, especially when you see what people post in social media. Don’t buy into the misconception that having more or being more will remove the shame or absolve the guilt of who you *aren’t* or what you *don’t* have. Embrace who you are...who God created you to be. “Finally I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.” (Psalm 32:5).

1. Fill in this blank: "I'm only a \_\_\_\_\_;" or, "I always \_\_\_\_\_." What is wrong with this kind of thinking?

### **Conclusion**

Whether you are guilty or simply feel guilty about something, the only shameful thing is not to turn to God and receive His forgiveness through repentance. "I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces." (Psalm 34:4-5 NLT) Allow God to set you free and set you right so you'll be able to say, "I'm a Christian, so I don't feel guilty...because I'm not!"

1. Have you ever confessed a sin to God and experienced His forgiveness and freedom from shame? Explain how you felt.
2. Do you find it difficult to accept that "the past has passed?" If so, why, and what effect does that have on your present condition?
3. Consider whether there is anything that you are guilty of that you need to confess to God. Ask Him to reveal it to you.
4. If there is something you feel ashamed of that you need to release into God's care, pray for the courage to confess it to Him and receive His forgiveness.

### **Close in Prayer**