



The End of

Guilt & Shame

Greg Albrecht

Apart from God's forgiveness, we all feel a sense of condemnation. Shame and guilt result when we fail to measure up to societal, ethical, biblical or family standards. The fact that everyone is imperfect does not help when we experience a major failure. Shame and guilt can be a burden carried and lived with, like a recurring nightmare, for decades.

Many parents are haunted by memories of what they could or should have done when raising their children. They know they could have been better parents. I know that rabbit trail—I've lived there. It's a depressing place—*the land of would have, could have and should have is a dark hole.*

Many husbands and wives also

experience feelings of shame and guilt. I know that valley of the shadow of death as well. Marriage and family are, by nature, full of regrets over missed opportunities and what has been said and done. "If only" we could retrace our missteps.

A Spiritual Swamp

Shame and guilt comprise spiritual swamps that imprison so many. Shame relates to how we feel about ourselves—who we think we are. Guilt relates to our behavior—what we have done.

When overwhelmed by guilt, we say, "I *did* something bad." When we are ashamed, we say to ourselves, "I *am* bad." Guilt says, "I *made* a mistake." Shame believes, "I *am* a mistake."

Guilt can be a healthy reaction, alerting us to our need

to ask God to help us put the brakes on behavior that is outside of Christ. *Healthy guilt* can come by the prodding of the Holy Spirit, calling us out of unhealthy behavior.

Healthy guilt motivates us to godly sorrow that leads to repentance that, when complete, leaves no regret (2 Corinthians 7:10). It is a gift of God's grace, which empowers us to turn from wrongdoing. By grace, we are lifted out of the swamp into which we've fallen so that we may commence our walk with Christ.

Healthy guilt is normally based on criteria about behavior—it doesn't torture us, but rather motivates us to positive change and inspires us with hope.

Healthy guilt leads us to quickly rest in the forgiveness

of God. It assures us that God loves us despite what we have done and that he renews us daily.

Healthy guilt leads us to Christ, to accept his yoke and unite with him, and to find rest for our souls. A soul at rest has been released from toxic guilt.

Unhealthy guilt is guilt left unresolved. It plagues and torments us, and it is directly related to shame. *Unresolved guilt* breeds shame. Those who've not found rest in Christ continue to bear the weight of guilt for having done bad things and they feel shame that they are bad people.

There are many self-prescribed mechanisms used to treat shame and guilt. Some believe blaming an external source or person will offer relief. In their anger, some determine to scapegoat others for negative feelings. Others turn inwards, sinking deeply into self-blame and self-loathing.

Some attempt to self-medicate their depression with alcohol and drugs, but substance abuse only numbs the pain temporarily. The cycle of self-medication is a vicious and unforgiving one, ever more destructive and demanding as time goes by.

Many who flounder in these swamps think Christ-less religion will help them. Sadly, they encounter an industry that only exploits and intensifies their guilt and shame.

Captivity in the swampland of guilt and shame is a horrible

experience of muck and mire—a toxic cesspool of raw spiritual sewage. If left to fester, shame will snuff out faith and hope.

Escape from a spiritual swamp never comes by our own strength—we often convince ourselves we deserve what we're experiencing.

Continuing to live in guilt for failing to behave properly will condemn us to shame about who we are. We become convinced we're unworthy of God's love—we are trapped by our shame.



The Way Out

Amid that revolting swamp of shame comes the grace of God. Grace brings healing and cleaning, restoration and renewal. It brings rest for our souls.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

No more condemnation means the end of being ashamed of who we are.

No more condemnation is possible because we accept and are assured of God's love. And when we experience his love, our sense of self-loathing and shame is vanquished.

No more condemnation means we resign from the judgment seat—we realize it's not our place to sit in judgment of

others, and as we rest in Christ, we become confident that we are not beholden to judgment committees who undertake to shame us.

No more condemnation means we no longer allow any individual, organization or authority to disgrace us as scum of the earth.

No more condemnation means that we are free in Christ—free from self-loathing and shame—*free at last, thank God almighty, free at last.*

No more condemnation is possible because of the greatest love of all. We have been set free through Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose again in our world of guilt and shame in order to overcome it.

Jesus carried the world's guilt and shame on his shoulders to his cross, and he has once and for all forgiven it. Now he calls each of us to receive that gift in faith, believing that he alone can do what no one else can do for us.

No more condemnation means we rest in Christ, because we have been rescued from judgment to grace—saved from law for mercy—delivered from condemnation to God's love.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever would believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16-17). □

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