

Forgiving and Accepting Ourselves (Rom 8:28)

Reference - 'Totally Forgiving Ourselves' by R.T. Kendall



A. Conscience and Repentance

1. Paul, the former murderer of Christians and persecutor of the Church, says this :

'For I know of nothing against myself (my conscience is clear, NIV), yet I am not justified by this (my conscience is not the ultimate judge), but he who judges me is the Lord.' (1 Cor 4:3-4)

'I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.' (Acts 24:16) Keeping a good and clear conscience is valuable before God and is an integral part of walking with Him.

Paul warns about some deceived Christians departing from true faith, *'having their conscience seared with hot iron'* (2 Tim 4:1-2). It is possible to have an 'undisturbed conscience' and yet be truly guilty before God. Some men may treat their wives atrociously, yet feel no guilt at all! Others may come into God's presence and feel a powerful conviction of sin. Isaiah said, *'Woe is me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.'* This is the work of the Holy Spirit (Is 6:5,7). Isaiah had a respectable life and ministry, and yet he was powerfully convicted with a 'sense of his sinfulness' in the presence of God's holiness.

When we walk closely with God who is holy, experiencing the 'sense of our sinfulness' is to be expected, and it causes us to want a 'clean conscience'. This is different than carrying the burden of guilt.

2. What the church needs more than ever is the holy fear of God and fresh awareness of God's holiness, and the conviction of sin. This is the missing ingredient for the great harvest of the earth to take place (Rev 14:14-20). The Great Awakening produced supernatural conviction of sin! (C.f. Jonathan Edwards, 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God' (July 1741). *'Their foot shall slide in due time.'* (Deut 32:35))

God wants to send the Great Awakening again. *It is the Holy Spirit that convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn 15:8-9)* Our problem today is that we live in a society of full of people with *'seared conscience'*. And we don't have enough of God's people walking with a clean conscience before Him, who carry the anointing to convict the world of sin. We desperately need the 'Isaiah moment' in the Church today!

3. However our conscience is part of the fallen nature, and it needs re-education. We often suffer guilt complex, and are condemned with 'pseudo guilt'. But at the same time, we hardly know what means to be convicted with true guilt that offends God. Whether we feel the conviction of sin or not, sin blocks our relationship with God.

'Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.' (Isa 59:1-4)

David sinned grievously and displeased God (2 Sam 11:27), but he felt nothing until God sent Nathan the prophet to him. Later when he counted his fighting men, he was stricken with guilt because it revealed he was depending on human strength, *'I have sinned greatly in what I have done...'* (2 Sam 24:10). Why? By then David developed a healthy conscience that could be convicted by the Spirit!

Our conscience needs to be re-trained. How? By the word of God and by the Holy Spirit. 'Beatitudes' unveil the true nature of sin (Matt 6-7).

4. Conviction VS condemnation – True conviction of sin may or may not accompany any sense of sorrow or emotional pain. But true conviction must lead to a U-turn or 'change in thinking'. Holy Spirit never demoralises us or discourages us into self-pity.

Judas was filled with remorse after betraying Jesus, but he did not turn to God. He did not return to the Lord, but took his life. Peter denied the Lord in his weakness and wept bitterly in pain, but he turned to God, and came back to the Lord.

B. How to Deal with True Guilt

1. Once you have confessed your sins before God, you must accept God's forgiveness at once and move on! Don't bring it up against yourself again and again. Show yourself that you truly believe in the power of the blood of Jesus by refusing to entertain the guilt.

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (1 Jn 1:9)

2. Once you have accepted God's forgiveness of your sin, forgive yourself and refuse to live under fear (1 Tim 1:7). The sin is gone. The guilt is gone. God doesn't require any more than true repentance from your part. God remembers it no more. So do not give into fear. Once you have received God's forgiveness, it is either 'your flesh' or the 'devil' that remind you of your past, and try to bring you back under condemnation and guilt. If the devil speaks to your mind, resist the devil and he will flee (1 Pet 5:8-9).
3. Hold your head up high and then boldly ask God to bless you even though you know that you don't deserve it. We are all unworthy. That is why it is God's grace, not our good works. 'In every saint, there is something reprehensible' (John Calvin). There is not a saint in the history of redemption who would not die a thousand deaths if all about them was revealed before the world. So join the club!
4. What if you have received God's forgiveness, but people wouldn't forgive you? David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba, *'Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.'* (Ps 51:4) How can David say this? Because all our sins are ultimately directed against God, so it is God and God alone who can truly forgive us, and only through the blood of Jesus Christ. David forgave himself and the guilt was cleansed from his conscience (C.f. Ps 51:16-17).

Once you have received forgiveness from God you are truly free, although men may not forgive you. Is there anything I can do for those whom I have sinned against? We can do 'restitution' (Lev 6:1-7; Lk 3:11-14) Stolen money is to be returned, hopefully with some interest. This is not the condition of salvation, but it is for our 'good conscience'. We do everything we can so far as it is in our hands, and follow the principle of 'peace.'

5. So in summary: (i) dignify true guilt by repentance; (ii) refuse to entertain false guilt. Treat it like a temptation that must be resisted.

C. Distinguishing Grief and Regret from Guilt

1. Grief is a deep sorrow that comes from a 'sense of severe loss'. We grieve when we lose loved ones, jobs, income, property, health, etc. God wasn't displeased with us when we suffer loss and grieve. God is even more for us when we are going through deep grief. If someone is grieving, we cannot stop his grief. Sometimes we are called to endure. 'Everyone can master a grief, but he that has it.' (Shakespeare) Jesus wept with Mary and Martha, so can we.

Why do we have to go through grief? God always has a purpose behind His people's suffering – to partake of His holiness, the fruit of righteousness. (c.f. Heb 12:10-11; Rom 8:28)

2. Regret is mental pain coming from a wish you could go back and change the past, but you cannot. It is too late. Again, it may or may not involve true guilt. *What if I studied harder? What if I did not meet this person? What if I didn't drive the car that day?* The list goes on. Sometimes this is the reason why we don't forgive ourselves totally. If there was no sin involved, know that you didn't fail God! Don't feel guilty, please! God is not angry with you. Both grief and regret are resolved in Rom 8:28.
3. If sin and true guilt are involved, repent before the Lord and commit to Him your past sin. God wants nothing more than true repentance from you. God has already done everything to deal with your sins through the blood of Jesus! He doesn't want you wallowing in remorse. It is totally counterproductive and is the opposite of faith and trust. God will take your past upon Himself to cause all things to work together for 'good', including your unsavoury past if you simply hand over to God your past failures and continue to walk with Him and give Him time. Remember, Jesus came through Bathsheba's line as if it were all along God's plan, even though what David did was indeed evil! (Matt 1:6)

D. Did You Totally Forgive and Accept Yourself? (c.f Ps. 139:13-18, 23-24)

1. Do you accept your parents? They were God's choice, and God did not make a mistake in choosing your parents. They were God's chosen instrument to bring you into this world because God wanted you. Accept your birth and all that has happened to you as part of God's plan of shaping you into what you are to be. We must forgive our parents; accept them as God's choice. Thank God for them, and do not look back.
2. Do you accept your past including any painful past in your upbringing? You cannot accept yourself and at the same time deny things that happened to you which became part of you today. God did not make a mistake. You are not a product of God's mistake.
3. Do you accept your gender? God did not make a mistake with you. You are a male or female by the will of God. This is how God wanted you. Do not buy into the enemy's lies.
4. Do you accept the level of your intelligence? Who doesn't wish to be smarter? God has given you certain abilities. He will always give you enough to achieve what you are called to do. And God will give wisdom to whoever asks of Him (James 1:5ff).
5. Do you accept your gifts and calling? Visible or invisible, spectacular or unspectacular. high profile or low profile. 'Your abilities and talents are God's hint of what your assignment is in life. You may be called to a certain field, but not always 'like' it. David Brainerd was a very successful missionary, didn't enjoy his vocation (1718-1747).
6. Do you accept your present faults and limitation, including illness, disability, singleness, etc? This is not a refusal to work on improvement, or seeking God's blessing for a breakthrough. It is knowing God accepts you in the present. Great freedom comes when we don't have to prove anything.
7. Do you accept yourself in the light of the mistakes you have made? 'I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be, but thank God I am not what I used to be.' (John Newton)
Thank God we are all work in progress, and God is not finished yet!

The same God who commands you to forgive yourself now says: 'Accept yourself.'

'By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' (1 Cor 15:10)