

How To Get Free From Guilt

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April 6, 2014

Shadows of the Cross Series

Leviticus 16

Virtually, every religion and every therapy has had to come up with a way to deal with the universal experience of guilt. Now, there are some people who have an over-active guilt meter. There are lots of technical terms for people who have an overactive guilt meter. I will just use a layman's term: they are called "mom." Seriously, there are people, who feel guilty about everything, even things that the vast majority of folks would not regard as being close to being wrong. These hyper-sensitive, guilt-prone people remind me of a defective smoke alarm that goes off when you light a candle in your house, or cook something on the stove. Several times a day there is this shrill, high-pitched alarm that sets everyone on edge and makes everyone in the house continually irritable and agitated.

What am I talking about by folks with an internal defective smoke alarm? I think of a woman who feels guilty because her mother used to wash and wax the kitchen floor three times a week. But because of this woman's job, she can only wash the floor once a week. And, on top of that, Mom used to bake cupcakes on her children's birthdays for all their classmates. But this woman just hands out store-bought cookies. I think of lots of folks who feel guilty because they are not meeting some absolutely unrealistic standard of what a clean house must look like, or what a good parent must do.

In the 21st century guilt-prone, hyper-sensitive folks are becoming rarer and rarer in the Western world. Now, it seems more and more that people go through life with consciences that are like a disabled smoke alarm. Yes, I know some people have defective smoke alarms that go off all the time, but it seems like more and more people have disabled smoke alarms. We've deliberately taken the batteries out so that alarm doesn't sound even when the house is on fire.

If you read the advice columns in popular magazines like Psychology Today when people write in and say, "You know, I just feel guilty about an affair," or "I feel guilty because I cheated on my boyfriend," or "I had sex with my best friend's wife," you virtually never hear about feeling guilty as a sign that you've got a well-functioning conscience. You will never read in a popular magazine that the reason why we may feel guilt is because we have violated some objective standard, or we've hurt someone, or we are cheating on our marriages. Sleeping with our best friend's spouse ought to make us feel guilty!

In the 21st century guilt is almost always seen as pathological, as harmful, as a waste of emotional and psychic energy. Here is some advice from one popular magazine given to a person, who feels guilty. The expert wrote:

Accept that you are human and that you are always acting the best you can in any moment, given the circumstances. Most people encounter difficult situations and do things they regret later. Do not ever regret, for it implies judgment of yourself. Never judge yourself or others because it is not your place to judge yourself or others. The actions you take in any moment are your truth in that moment. And although they sometimes cause you and others harm, they are what they are. Judgment doesn't bring you further in life and it has no purpose other than to tie you to the event that you now regret. This is just like the guilt you feel which binds you to the past. It paralyzes you from going forward and it prevents you from living in the moment. Don't let any past moments stop you from enjoying and being in this present moment.

Sounds like perfect counsel for how to become a thorough-going sociopath! One magazine chided its readers on ever feeling guilty and with a sort of paternalistic pat on the head, it conceded saying:

- 1. Set a no-guilt-allowed rule whenever you go on vacation or do something that's just fun. Tell yourself that you are taking a break and doing it for a reason (improved health, decreased stress, etc.) so there is no room to feel guilty. As soon as you hear yourself saying, "I should be" remind yourself that guilt is not allowed.*
- 2. Take five minutes in the morning to feel guilty. If you must feel guilty, allow it to last for only five minutes. Then either do what you are feeling guilty about (e.g., call your mother) or forgive yourself and move on.*

We are so trained by modern therapy that guilt is almost always harmful that as we move down through the generations from the WWII generation to what's called the Silent Generation, those born in the 30's and early 40's, my generation of Baby Boomers, to GenXer's, to the Millennials, those born between the early 1980's and the year 2000 – as we move down the generations people report feeling less guilty. There is a direct correlation between the generation that someone is born in in America and their feelings of guilt. One really common phrase you hear among 20-somethings is: "I have no regrets."

A sociologist named Christian Smith did an extensive study of 20-somethings in his book titled Souls in Transition.

Picture of Souls in Transition by Christian Smith

It's a great book! If you want to understand the spiritual world of 20-somethings, just read [Souls in Transition](#). Here is a sample of what Smith said:

Despite often smarting from hard lessons learned, most of the [millennials] who were interviewed explicitly denied feeling any regret about any of their past decisions, behaviors, or problems. Reinforcing their widespread feeling of optimism about the future, most of the survey respondents – including many of those with miserably depressing histories and current problems... - insisted that the past was the past, that they learned their lessons well, that they would not change a thing even if they could, because what has happened is part of who they have become, and they have no regrets about anything at all. In fact, even though many [millennials] appear to harbor regrets about the past, they do not want to see themselves as having regrets, even though they also get angry with themselves about mistakes and continue sometimes to be haunted by problems in the past. The very idea of regrets presupposes a clear sense of good and bad, right and wrong by which to judge, which – as we will show – many [millennials] lack.

So, for example, in interviewing one young man, who spent much of his teens and early 20's thoroughly addicted to drugs, in and out of rehab, the young man said, "I can see now that drugs were bringing me down even though I don't regret it, I don't regret it all because it made me who I am today." One woman, who had sex when she was 13 because she was pressured into it said, "I don't regret it. I learned from it."

But is this the only way to deal with guilt? To deny that it even exists for you? To pretend that nothing you do is ever really wrong? No regrets? Is that the only option? Or do we admit that really do screw up at times. That we do make really stupid and selfish choices. That we have hurt other people. That we can hurt ourselves. That we do do damage to our relationship with God. Are the only options really, either a defective smoke alarm that goes off even when you light a candle, or a disabled smoke alarm that never goes off even when the house is on fire? Can we have internally a proper functioning smoke alarm? And if the alarm goes off, how do we deal with it?

Some level of guilt is necessary to keep us healthy. Healthy guilt keeps a person honest. Healthy guilt keeps us honest with ourselves, honest with others, and honest with God.

To prepare us for Good Friday and Easter Sunday, I'm doing a mini-series that I've titled Shadows of the Cross. Today I'm going to talk about How to Get Free From Guilt. Let's pray.

Leviticus 16:1–10 (NIV)

16 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place

behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

3 “This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. 5 From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

6 “Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. 7 Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 8 He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. 9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

The Book of Leviticus with all of its rituals including all the duties of the priests and all the sacrifices and all the issues regarding sin and uncleanness – the whole book of Leviticus comes to a climax here in Leviticus 16 regarding the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, was the name given to the annual holiday that provided a way for the slate to be wiped clean. One day a year on the Day of Atonement, God’s people could be set free, be cleansed, be set free from debt and slavery, and be redeemed so that God could continue to live among his people. The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, is the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar because Yom Kippur formed the foundation on which God could forgive people for their sins. It was a way for guilt to be covered. The Day of Atonement points towards the Cross.

Now, this chapter, if you read it through, seems a little confusing at first blush because of the repetition. But if you understand that Leviticus 16 is written like many chapters in the Hebrew Bible, it is not so confusing at all. First, in vv. 1-10, you have an introduction and broad summary of the various rituals to be performed on the Day of Atonement. So, vv. 1-10 is kind of an outline of the chapter. And then from vv. 11-22 there are detailed instructions about the various stages of the ritual.

Last weekend I mentioned that there is a way to understand the Old Testament, what Jews call the Hebrew Bible. There is a correct way to read the Hebrew Bible and that is that the whole Hebrew Bible, the whole Old Testament, is a signpost pointing ahead of itself to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. And in particular, it points to Jesus’ death for the sins of the world. The Old Testament is God’s rough draft; it is God’s model of the perfect One who is to come, namely Jesus and his perfect sacrifice. The Old Testament was a rough draft, a rough model of the perfection that was going to come through Christ and his work on the cross.

To understand the Old Testament, I think it is helpful to be reminded of an old Sunday School rhyme that goes this way:

*The New is in the Old concealed
The Old is by the New revealed
The New is in the Old contained
The Old is by the New explained*

The New Testament is concealed. It is hidden in the Old Testament. The Old Testament with all of its strange sacrifices is revealed, it is explained by the New Testament. The theological term by which we understand the Old Testament in terms of the New Testament is called typology. We find a correspondence between a person, an event, a thing in the Old Testament and a person, event or thing in the New Testament – typically Jesus in the New Testament. We find a correspondence between the sacrifice of an animal in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament. That's typology.

So, how does Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, way back here in the Hebrew Bible in Leviticus 16 deal with the problem of guilt and point ahead of itself to Christ?

First of all, by the Day of Atonement access to God is gained.

Access is gained

The Day of Atonement was unique in the Hebrew calendar because it was the one day each year when one person, the High Priest, as a representative of God's people was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies and had access to God's presence.

Understand something, friends. Temples in the ancient world, not just the Jewish Temple, but all ancient temples were typically not houses of public worship. They weren't like church buildings where anyone and everyone are welcome – where you can come as you are and you'll be loved. In the ancient world, the Temple rule was come as you are and you'll be killed. Access to sacred places in a temple was heavily restricted because it was considered to be holy ground. The more sacred the area, the more restricted the access. The restriction on access was designed to protect human beings who would be taking their lives in their hands to trespass on sacred ground. And it was designed to protect the particular god from being desecrated by unclean people.

We see this in the way the Hebrew Tabernacle was constructed and then later the Temple. There were two areas - one is the holy place where only the priests could go and it was separated off by a curtain, a thick woven curtain that shielded the Holy of Holies. Any approach to God demands extreme care, extreme cleansing, meeting the qualifications that God sets out for coming into his presence.

And so the Day of Atonement was the one day on the Hebrew calendar in which only one person, the High Priest, as a representative of God's people, was able to go behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies and have access to God's presence.

Thus, the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 9:7

Hebrews 9:7 (NIV)

7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

One day a year, and only one person – all other access to the presence of God was denied. In fact, when people in the Old Testament tried to push into God's presence at some other time, or in some other way, they were instantly killed. Thus we read in Leviticus 16:2 these words:

Leviticus 16:2 (NIV)

2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

There was a curtain that protected the place of God's presence. The curtain formed a 2-fold protection. On the one hand, God's holiness had to be protected from our sin. God would have been dishonored by having unclean people come into his presence. On the other hand, human beings had to be protected from God's judgment on sin. The presence of God was something that was dreaded in the Old Testament.

But through the death of Jesus Christ the protective curtain that shields people from the presence of God and shields God from the presence of unclean people has been torn from top to bottom. We read in the book of Matthew that when Christ breathed his last on the cross,

Matthew 27:51 (NIV)

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split

What an incredible picture of people being able to gain access to God through the death of Jesus Christ. At the moment that Christ was crucified, the invisible hand of God tore the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies from top to bottom. The place that only could be entered into once a year on the Day of Atonement, by one person, the High Priest, and only then by throwing blood all over the place, now the presence of God is open to

anyone who will come to God through his Son, Jesus Christ – anyone and everyone are welcome into the Holy of Holies through faith in Jesus Christ.

And so we also read in Hebrews 10:19-22 these words:

Hebrews 10:19–22 (NIV)

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

In other words, Christ's death was a protecting death. It protects God's holiness from being offended by unclean, guilty people in his presence and it protects us from being consumed by the holiness of God. The result of Jesus' death on the cross is that access is now gained into God's presence for any sinful person who at any time comes to God through Jesus Christ. If we come through Jesus Christ, God is protected from us sinners and we are protected from God. God's presence is not to be dreaded any longer for the Christian. Rather, God's presence is something to be enjoyed.

You know that text we just read in Hebrews 10 speaks to us not only about a spiritual reality, a curtain being removed and we being able to gain access to God through our faith in Christ, but that passage in Hebrews also talks about a psychological reality. That because of the death of Christ, guilt is cleansed from us so that we can draw near to God. What a great statement of psychological reality.

When you and I feel guilty, our tendency is to run from God, to hide from him, like our first parents, Adam and Eve, hid from God in the Garden after they sinned against him. Guilt causes us to shrink back from being honest and transparent before other people. And guilt causes us to shrink back from being honest and transparent with God. Our guilt can bear the light; it hurts too much to be completely exposed. So we hide.

But the author of Hebrews is saying that the blood of Christ takes care of the problem of guilt so that we can enter the presence of God with confidence.

Access to God – without the Old Testament background of this curtain in front of the Holy of Holies, and the Day of Atonement, and the dread of God's presence, we would have no idea how privileged we are as Christians to be able to have an audience with God without fear. In fact, the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 3:12 these words:

Ephesians 3:12 (NIV)

12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The Greek word for “confidence” is “parresia,” which means “outspokenness, frankness, plainness of speech.” What does it mean that we can come into God’s presence, right into the Holy of Holies, with boldness and confidence because of Jesus Christ?

Let me give you an illustration. When my son was a teenager he had about 5-6 friends who would hang out at our house every Sunday afternoon after church. And like teenage boys, they would run back and forth in the house. They were always hungry. My son’s friends would come in the house and say: “Mr. Nathan, is it OK if we get a drink? Is it OK if we take a glass from the cabinet?” My son’s approach was entirely different. He would run in the house, throw the refrigerator door open, and stare inside as if he was watching TV. There was something fascinating about looking into a refrigerator for him. Then, he would say: “Mom, I’m hungry. Will you make me a pizza?” Or he would announce that he was going to eat the pie that was leftover from the night before, or he would just reach in and drink milk from the container.

Access to God, as a child of God. Let me ask you. Do you pray boldly? I don’t mean disrespectfully, or arrogantly. But are you able to be frank? Are you able to be bold? Are you able to be outspoken as you approach God in prayer? Or do you cloak your real desires with lots of spiritual sounding words as so many Christians do? So many Christians do not understand their access to God. God does not have to be flattered or buttered up. You do not need a special vocabulary to pray. You don’t need to speak to God in a special reverential tone: “Our Father...” Or overwhelm God with lots of Bible verses. God knows the Bible; he wrote it!

You know, the way to see whether we understand the access that Christ has gained for us through his death on the cross, the way to see if we really understand that the curtain in the Temple has been forever torn from top to bottom and that we’re all welcome into the presence of God through faith in Jesus Christ and his shed blood on the cross is to simply listen to our prayers. The test of whether you understand your access to God is to just listen to your prayers. Do you pray with confidence? Do you pray with assurance? Do you pray with boldness?

Be simple when you pray. Be frank. Tell God what you need. Is there a financial need? Then be honest with God and tell him simply about your need. Do you have a need for a job or a change in jobs, or a change in the atmosphere in your office? Tell God that frankly. Is there a need in your family for a healing? For a salvation?

Access to God – what does it mean that we have access through the payment of Christ’s blood? We Americans understand purchasing access, don’t we? If you don’t, you don’t know what every lobbyist in Washington and every lobbyist down at the state house understands. When a PAC or an individual contributes money to a political campaign, in an honest world, that doesn’t guarantee that their lobbyists will necessarily get a bill passed, or a contract awarded. But it generally does guarantee a sympathetic hearing. The average person typically cannot get an appointment with a busy senator or

congressman, but if you are a large contributor, you'd better believe that most often you or your lobbyists will get a hearing, often a sympathetic hearing.

The Day of Atonement points beyond itself to Jesus, our great High Priest, who bought us access to God. We can set an appointment with the Sovereign of the Universe because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his only Son. We may not get what we are asking for from the all powerful Sovereign, but we will always get a sympathetic hearing. We are guaranteed of a sympathetic hearing every time we go to God through Christ praying in Christ's name – not just one day a year; every day, all day, whenever we pray – we can come into God's presence through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you speak to God with a sure knowledge that the Sovereign of the Universe is giving you a sympathetic hearing whenever you pray?

This is what Hebrews 4:14-16 says:

Hebrews 4:14–16 (NIV)

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now, on what basis is our guilt removed. The benefit we gained when our guilt is removed is that we have access to God. But what is the foundation of our guilt being removed? How does this work? How do we get free from guilt?

Let's look together a little more closely at the ritual of the Yom Kippur service, the Day of Atonement service. First of all, a bull was sacrificed as a sin offering for the priest. And the sacrifice of the bull was also for the High Priest himself, because the High Priests were sinners and they needed a sacrifice. And so a bull was sacrificed in order for the High Priest to gain access to God. This is what we read in Leviticus 16:6:

Leviticus 16:6 (NIV)

6 "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household.

Now, here is a way that the Day of Atonement did not point to Christ. Because Jesus, as our High Priest, did not need the sacrifice of a bull in order for him to gain access to God because unlike all of the High Priests in the Old Testament, Jesus, our High Priest never sinned. Here is what we read in Hebrews 9:11-12:

Hebrews 9:11–12 (NIV)

11 But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

So, first of all on the Day of Atonement, a bull is sacrificed for the sins of the priests and the sins of the High Priest in particular. And the second ritual involved two goats.

Leviticus 16:7–10 (NIV)

7 Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 8 He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. 9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

One goat was sacrificed as a sin offering to pay for the sins of the people. The second goat was the so-called “scapegoat” which we’ll read about in just a moment. The scapegoat carried Israel’s sins out into the wilderness. Let’s look at these in turn.

The first goat that is offered is offered as a sin offering.

Leviticus 16:15–16 (NIV)

15 “He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. 16 In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Let’s just stop here for a moment. Why do we feel guilty? As I said earlier, some of us have hyper-sensitive consciences. We feel guilty over what is not wrong at all – some self-imposed standard of what our kitchen floor ought to look like, or some unrealistic standard of how many people we ought to be helping. We see people burning themselves out, driven by a self-imposed sense of responsibility that God has not given to them. But with a well-functioning conscience the reason we feel guilty is because we are, in fact, guilty. Subjective guilt, guilt feelings are sometimes based upon objective guilt. We sin and internally feel that we have done wrong.

So, how can we be forgiven? Leviticus 16:15-16 lays out the means of forgiveness as clearly as possible. The goat that is sacrificed becomes a substitute for the people.

SLIDE

A substitute is offered

Now, the basic way that the sin offering worked is as a sacrificial substitute. The life blood of the sacrificial animal was spilled as a substitute for the life blood of the worshipper. There is symbolism here. Innocent life was sacrificed in the place of the guilty life. And this was particularly symbolized by the worshipper or the priest putting his hands on the head of the animal while the worshipper or the priest confessed all of their own sins, or all of the sins of the people. Sins were symbolically transferred to the animal. And then the animal was killed.

The importance of blood sacrifice, the substitutionary atonement can't be over stated in the Bible. It is the fundamental means by which sin is forgiven. God doesn't simply wave his hand and say, "Well, I just forgive because I'm forgiving." Sin is paid for by the blood of a substitute. Hebrews 9:22 says this:

Hebrews 9:22 (NIV)

22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

There is throughout the Bible this substitutionary shedding of blood – a life for life principle in order for us to have atonement at one moment.

Atonement = At-One-Ment

The way to become one with God, to be reconciled with God is by a substitute. Jesus offered his own body up to be a perfect sacrifice for sins by his shed blood. We're given complete atonement before God.

Ultra-orthodox Jews like Hassidic Jews – you may recognize them by their long curly sideburns and the black hats and long black coats – the ultra-orthodox recognize this principle of a need for a blood sacrifice to be a substitutionary atonement for sin. And even to this very day on the Day of Atonement, ultra-orthodox Jews will take a live chicken, swing it around their heads three times, while saying this:

This fowl shall be in my stead, shall be my atonement, it shall go to death, so that I can attain a good life and peace. This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my expiation, my cleansing.

In his book, Written in Blood, Robert Coleman

Picture of Written in Blood by Robert Coleman

...tells a story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease that the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was a perfect donor. “Will you give your blood to Mary,” the doctor asked? The brother, Johnny, hesitated, his lower lip began to quiver. Then he finally said, “Yes, sure, for my sister I will.”

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room. Mary was pale and thin. Her brother, Johnny, was healthy and red-cheeked. Neither spoke. When their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. And with the ordeal almost over, his voice broke. He began to cry and said, “Doctor, when am I going to die?”

Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated regarding the blood transfusion. He thought that by giving his blood to his sister, he would be giving up his own life. And this little boy needed just a moment to think about it before saying, “Yes, for my sister, I will do it.” Johnny didn’t have to die for his sister.

But you know, each of us has a condition that is way more serious than the condition that Mary had. We have a deadly disease called sin. And there was someone who had to die in our place in order to heal our condition. What did the Day of Atonement point to? Access to God is gained. A substitute for our sin is offered. And the guilt that results from sin is cleansed.

Guilt is cleansed

Remember that there were two goats on the Day of Atonement, on Yom Kippur, one that paid for the people’s sins; the other, what the King James Bible calls the scapegoat, or the escape-goat, carried people’s sins away into the wilderness. The first goat was the one that was sacrificed as a substitute. And that first goat was offered as a means for paying for sin. The second goat that is sent off alive into the wilderness symbolizes the effect of the substitutionary sacrifice. The sacrificed goat is the means or the basis upon which our sins are forgiven; the live goat sent away is the effect, the consequence, what it is like to have your sins carried away. Look with me at Leviticus 16:20-22:

Leviticus 16:20–22 (NIV)

20 “When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. 21 He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

Can we have a more perfect picture of how forgiveness works than this? Forgiveness in Hebrew literally means to send away, or to drive away. That's what it means, friends, when God forgives you through the blood of Christ. To be forgiven by God is to have your sins separated from you by God. It is to have your sins driven into the wilderness. This release, this sending away, this driving away is what we read about in King David's song of praise, Psalm 103:12:

Psalm 103:12 (NIV)

12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

This separation, this removal, this sending away of our sins is given another expression, another picture in Isaiah 38:17:

Isaiah 38:17 (NIV)

17 Surely it was for my benefit
that I suffered such anguish.
In your love you kept me
from the pit of destruction;
you have put all my sins
behind your back.

You know, when something is behind our back, it is out of our sight; we can't see it anymore. That's what God says he has done with our sins. It is not that we haven't sinned. We know that we sin daily. It's that God puts our sins behind his back so that he doesn't look at them. Do you understand what it is like to be separated from your sins as far as the east is from the west, or to have your sins put behind the back of God? The Bible uses still another picture to describe this separation of sinner from their past sins. We read this in Micah 7:19:

Micah 7:19 (NIV)

19 You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Right now the whole world is searching for that missing Malaysian Airline. It disappeared from the radar screen. We suspect that most of the plane has sunk to the bottom of the sea, lost forever, never to be recovered. That's what God is saying about your sins and my sins when they are forgiven. They don't just sink into the sea, they are hurled by God into the sea. They don't just fall overboard, or drop out of the sky. Our sins are hurled into the depths. He wants them lost forever because they've been finally dealt with through the death of Jesus Christ.

The two goats point ahead to Jesus Christ. The one goat, the one that was killed, points ahead to the sacrificial death of Christ, who paid for our sins as our substitutionary atonement. His substitution is enough. The live goat sent out into the wilderness points to the effect of Christ's death. Just as the priest laid his hands on that live goat, confessed the people's sins, and then drove that goat away, so when we come to Christ and confess our sins, it is as if we are placing our sins on the head of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says this:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, commented on 2 Corinthians 5:21 saying,

Our most merciful Father...sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him...the sin of all people saying, "Be thou Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David the adulterer; the sinner which ate the apple in Paradise; the thief who was hanged upon the cross; and be thou the person which has committed the sin of all men..."

Our sin was placed on the head of Christ. Paul described the power of the cross in freeing us from the guilt of sin.

Paul describes the power of the cross in freeing us from the guilt of sin in Colossians 2:14:

Colossians 2:14 (NIV)

14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

In the ancient world when a prisoner was crucified by the Roman government, the charge that stood against them was hung over them. On the cross of the condemned person would be the charge: Murderer, Thief, Rebel. And you will recall when Jesus was crucified, over the cross in three different languages was the charge leveled against him. The sign on Jesus' cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews."

But there was another sign hanging over his cross, a sign listing your sins and my sins – all the charges against us were nailed to his cross. His cross didn't only say: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, his cross said: Adulterer, Pornography User, Slanderer, Negligent Parents, Gossiper, Cheater, Liar, Unforgiving One, Ungrateful, Self-Pitying, Proud, Angry, Greedy, Anxious, Selfish, Self-Centered, Lover of Money, Hater of God.

When you look at the cross, friend, do you say, “I see the sign listing my sins.” Do you say, “The cross is where my sins were nailed and separated from me. I no longer need to feel guilty. God has separated me from my sin and placed it on the head of my Savior Jesus Christ?”

Now, we’ve heard what Christ has done. He is our High Priest who removed the curtain from in front of God and gained us access to God. He fulfilled the picture of the two goats dying as our substitute and carrying our sins away into the wilderness. Why then do we still feel guilty even after we have confessed our sins to God on multiple occasions?

Let me close with this.

What if I still feel guilty?

Despite hearing about the death of Christ for our sins, despite believing in Christ, a lot of people still hear condemning thoughts. Some even think that God is the one condemning them, that God is the one who is saying, “You’re a loser. Get out of my sight. I don’t want anything to do with you.”

Friends, nothing could be further from the truth. God never says to anyone, “You’re a loser; get out of my sight.” Jesus said “he came not to condemn the world, but to save it.” Condemnation of a Christian believer comes from Satan. Condemnation is meant to tear us down. Condemnation continually points out to a person what a failure they are, how badly they messed up. Condemnation keeps people from coming to God. Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world. The Apostle Paul says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Satan on the other hand is known as the accuser of the brethren.

Conviction is totally different.

Condemnation vs. Conviction

Condemnation says to us, “You are a failure. Look at what you’ve done.” Condemnation pushes our faces into our sins. Conviction causes us to look to our sins, but then to look to the solution for our sins namely Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. Condemnation shows us the problem and hides from us the solution. Conviction shows us the problem but then displays in even bolder relief the answer to the problem. When we’re convicted, we can hear the voice of God speaking to us saying, “Come to me, though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow.”

Friends, when you mess up, do you hear the voice of Satan, or do you hear the voice of God your Father? Do you hear a voice saying, “There’s no hope for you. You are condemned. You’ve blown it! It’s all over.” That’s the voice of Satan. Do you hear

another voice, “Come to me. Turn to me and I will forgive you.” That’s the voice of God. Isaiah 30:18 says this:

Isaiah 30:18 (NIV)

18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.
For the LORD is a God of justice.
Blessed are all who wait for him!

You ask is God willing to forgive me. God is not only willing to forgive, he longs, he deeply desires to forgive you and me. That’s what the death of Christ is all about. Let’s pray.

How To Get Free From Guilt

Rich Nathan

April 6, 2014

Shadows of the Cross Series

Leviticus 16

- I. Access is gained
- II. A substitute is offered
- III. Guilt is cleansed
- IV. What if I still feel guilty?
 - A. Condemnation vs. conviction