

Dealing with my Guilt
Churchill & Kingham 26/4/2009
Readings: Luke 11:1-13; 1 John 1:5 to 2:6
Everyone carries guilt

I don't know what it's like in your home, but a very common expression in ours is the phrase 'It's broken.'

All sorts of things break themselves at 6 The Grange.

Take our vacuum cleaner for example.

Great machine, but one day 'It's broken' happened to it.

It wasn't immediately obvious why it wasn't picking up, so I took it apart and found great wads of Molly's dog hair entangled round the roller and bristles.

It looked OK on the outside, and it went through the motions, but it was stuck.

I hate to sound corny, but life can be a lot like that vacuum!

I don't mean life sucks!

I mean that sometimes stuff gets entangled inside and you get stuck.

Is something hindering your progress in life this morning?

What's stopping you from growing closer to the Lord; closer to other people; achieving worthwhile things?

What is holding you back?

Most of us try to blame external things like the boss, the credit crunch, my upbringing.

The truth is, the thing that holds you back is often inside.

Jesus said that, to people who thought external things were their problem: he said 'out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.' Matthew 15:19

The Bible tells us that what holds me back more than anything else is guilt from unconfessed sin.

None of us is perfect.

We don't measure up to our own standards, much less God's.

So we live with guilt that can keep us stuck in the past.

That's not news to God: The Bible says 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' Romans 3:23

And it shouldn't be news to any of us here, as it's one of the things that Becky & Zoe's baptism symbolised just now.

God's desire to wash us clean of all guilt and sin; the stuff that holds us back; the stuff inside.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote Sherlock Holmes, tells of a dinner party where he challenged the guests to choose the most morally upright citizen they knew.

And send him an anonymous telegram simply reading 'All is discovered; flee at once!'

Conan Doyle wrote in the Washington Post: 'He disappeared the next day and has never been heard from since.'

Because everybody carries a load!

We weren't made to carry guilt

But we weren't made by God to go around carrying that guilt.

That's why it damages you.

King David of Israel was one of the greatest warrior kings in history, yet listen to what unconfessed sin did to him.

In Psalm 32 he says to God: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." v3f

Have you ever felt like that because of unconfessed sin?

I have!

You & I weren't built for carrying guilt!

So the Bible says this: Hebrews 12:1 "Let's throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles us, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Did you know that, that when God made you he had a purpose marked out for your life?

Many don't know there's a race marked out for them by God.

Others do, but get sidelined, tripped up and entangled.

Either way, they end up just living plan b, or plan z.

But God says, why settle for second best?

"throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles".

Deal with all unresolved, and even unconscious, guilt.

Often we try to deal with guilt in ways that don't work.

We deny it; we excuse it; we rationalise it.

I read this week 'rationalise' means to tell rational lies!

It means your head trying to convince your heart that what feels wrong is in fact OK.

But it's not, so there's a battle inside you.

No, God doesn't want you running around with a lot of guilt.

Because it destroys your confidence; damages your relationships, especially with God, and reduces your potential.

In fact, guilt is the most destructive emotion there is.

Because when you feel guilty you're always worried that someone will find you out.

'If they really knew what I'm like, what I've done, they wouldn't love me; employ me; be my friend.

'So how can God love me, when he knows it all?'

This also isn't news to God who made us – the Bible says "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Proverbs 28:13

But how do you deal with guilt effectively & permanently?

Let me show you the Bible's 6 steps to a clear conscience.

Step 1 -- I review every area of my life.

Step 1 - Review every area of your life.

Sit down alone with God and ask him to show you everything that you're guilty about, and make a list.

King David did it in Psalm 139: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." v23-24

That means 'God, show me the stuff that entangles me, I want to deal with it.'

Writing it helps to get out of you and on to the paper - don't worry, you can burn it later!

The Bible says "if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment." 1 Corinthians 11:31

So if you've not done something like this recently, go home today and review every area of your life with God.

Step 2 -- I repent of every sin

Step 2 - Repent of every sin on your list.

What does that mean?

'Repent' literally means to change the way you think.

So, firstly, take responsibility for what you've done, something our leaders rarely model for us!

The Bible says: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves..." 1 John 1:8

I won't blame others; I won't excuse it; I won't rationalise it.

I will take responsibility for it.

Then I decide to turn away from it.

And then I turn to God, and tell him I want to go his way.

Take responsibility; turn away from the sin; turn to God.

Do you know what the word 'confess' in the Bible means?

In the Greek it is the word homologeo.

Homo means the same; logeo means to speak.

So confession means 'to say the same thing'.

God says 'Tony, that was wrong.' I say 'Yes, I agree it was.'

Are there things you're pretending not to feel guilty about, that aren't wrong and don't bother you, but really do?

If so, don't you think it's finally time to deal with it and get the guilt and stress out of your life?

Find the freedom of a clear conscience before God and then all that he wants to do with your life.

Get unstuck with God!

Step 3 -- I resolve to make restitution

I review my life; I repent of every sin on my list.

Step 3 - Resolve to make restitution.

As you go through that list and repent before God, you can put a line through each one.

The Bible says when God forgives sin, it is gone forever!

He will never bring it up again.

The Bible says "it's as far as the east is from the west." Psalm 103:12

But you might find somebody on that list whom you've hurt.

You can put a line through it from God's point of view, but not from theirs.

Go to them and make restitution; put it right.

That may just mean saying sorry.

I can think of many cases where much pain and damage could have been avoided if someone had just said sorry.

It may also mean doing something real to make amends.

Sometimes it's not possible because they have died or moved away and you can't find them.

Or perhaps they've married and it wouldn't be good for you to open an old wound.

So in some situations you can't make restitution.

But anything you can do to make it right, go and do.

Remember Zacchaeus the crooked tax collector?

When he met Jesus, this is what he said.

"if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said "Today salvation has come to this house..." Luke 19:8f

So step 3, I resolve to make restitution.

Step 4 -- I trust that I've received God's forgiveness

Step 4 -- Trust that you've received God's forgiveness.

And this is a biggie for many people.

Let me tell you how not to ask God for forgiveness.

You don't need to keep begging God - he sent his only son to die, that's how badly he wants you to be forgiven!

And don't bargain with God - "If you forgive me I promise that...."

'So what do I do?' You just believe.

'Believe what?'

Believe God's promise to forgive any who ask him on the strength of Jesus' death in their place.

Here's the promise: 1 John 1v9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Your forgiveness isn't based on your deserving it, how sorry you feel, but on God's character - he is utterly "faithful and just".

Wouldn't you like to be totally clean on the inside, have all that guilt gone?

God says it's only a prayer away - just ask Him!

The Bible says this: “since we’ve been justified [that means acquitted by God] through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” Romans 5:1
See, there's no other way to find peace with God and get rid of all the guilt.
No other religion; no other philosophy; nothing you can do in your own strength.
It’s only through trusting the Lord Jesus Christ when he said he would die in your place and in mine.

You say, ‘But you don’t know what I’ve done, God could never forgive me.’

You’re wrong, even though I don’t know what you’ve done.

The murderer nailed to the cross next to Jesus was forgiven the instant he repented.

It won’t mean your perfect; it will mean you’re forgiven!

Step 5 -- I reveal my fault to a friend

Step 5, and you won't like this: Reveal it to a friend.

It’s what the Bible says: “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” James 5:16

Not to everyone: one good, trustworthy friend will suffice!

This isn't to get God's forgiveness - asking him does that.

No, this is to help deal with the fact that many of us know we've been forgiven by God yet still carry the guilt.

We can't forgive ourselves and move on.

The Bible doesn't tell us to confess our sins to a priest.

Just find one person whom you can trust, and say ‘I need to get this off my chest. Will you just listen to me.’

You’ll probably find that they are no better!

There’s something about telling another person that lets the pressure out.

So who do you share this with?

A mature Christian who will keep it confidential.

Who won't be shocked or judge you, but will just remind you you're forgiven in Jesus name, and pray with you.

And there are plenty of people like that in this church.

‘Well, what do I say?’

How about ‘I need someone to come clean with. I don’t need advice, I just need you to listen to me. This is what I've done, this is how I feel about it and this is how I want to change. The Bible says I should confess it to another.’

And that’s it.

If you do that with a mature Christian, they won't be shocked, they’ll be honoured by your integrity & trust.

They’ll understand the importance of it.

And if somebody comes to you this week and says they want you to listen to their confession, just listen to them and tell them they are forgiven because of Jesus.

Try it, and see if it doesn't deal with the bogeyman!

Step 6 - I repeat these steps regularly

So I review every area of my life; I repent of every sin; I resolve to make restitution where I can; I receive God's forgiveness; and I reveal my fault to a good friend.

Finally, Step 6 - Repeat steps 1 to 5 regularly!

Here’s three good bits of grandfatherly advice:

1. Never put off changing a nappy, it’ll all come out in the end; the longer you put it off, the messier it’s going to be.

2. Do take a bath or shower every now and again.

And 3. take the rubbish out of your kitchen everyday.

In other words, for low stress living, always keep short accounts with God and with others.

I’m a very flawed individual, I often blow it.

So I need to keep short accounts with God, otherwise today’s rubbish will just accumulate with tomorrow’s.

Jesus said ‘When you pray, say ...Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.’ Luke 11:4

Let us pray.

Prayer (do business)