

Guilt

By Kenneth W. Greene

The Godless Life

"Such are the paths of all who forget God, the hope of the godless man shall perish. His confidence breaks in sunder, and his trust is a spider's web. He leans against his house, but it does not stand; he lays hold of it, but it does not endure." Job 8:13-15

For many individuals daily living has become mundane, routine, and without purpose or meaning. Self-confidence, poise, and assurance have eluded them. They fear...and they suspect..., knowing not the experience of love and faith: They wonder: *"Does life have anything worthwhile for me?"* They ponder: *"How much longer can I endure?"*

The Godly Life

"Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Psalms 16: 11

Life is beautiful, meaningful, and rewarding for those who have discovered *abundant living*. Eternal joy and satisfying pleasures fill their lives. They have learned *"there is more to life than eating, drinking, lusting, and chasing a falling star."* They have determined to move in the direction of God, seeking daily -to be like Him. Unashamedly they have approached God for a more complete existence...for a richer life.

The Godless Life or The Godly Life

Which of these two descriptions more fittingly reveals your attitude toward life?

Is it time for you to seek a better hope, a better way, a better life? Are you willing to consider the value of spiritual living? Are you willing to explore what the spiritual realm has to offer in your quest for a richer life?

Key To This Message is Self-Examination

One who is seeking a richer life would do well to ask himself many penetrating, maybe even provoking questions in the first person. The only pronoun nobler than "I" is "you." However, it will not suffice to examine "you" and "your life." "I" must deal with "myself" I must read this tract in the first person as I strive to evaluate my own life.

I must look within and *"grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"* (Ephesians 4:15).

I must strive to be presented *"mature in Christ"* (Colossians 1:28).

I must dedicate myself to lead a life worthy of the calling, *"with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:2, 3).

I must say, simply and humbly, "*Whereas I was blind, now I see*" (John 9:25). I must seek to answer the question "*Am I immobilized by guilt?*"

The richer life has eluded me, and I know not why. I have decided that the more I strive to live a righteous life, the more conscious I am of my failures. The vast difference between what I ought to be, as compared to what I really am, gives me many hours of mental anguish. Does this mean I am suffering from a guilt complex? Is it possible for guilt to be a real hindrance in achieving peace of mind? Am I willing to explore the total spectrum of guilt and seek its cause and cure?

Living At The Feeling Level

A purging self-examination reveals that when self takes control of me, something inevitably happens: "*My heart begins to control my head.*" I become confused, and I fail to think clearly. I become irrational and unreasonable when my feelings dictate to me. When I feel despondent over life's difficult situations, I often begin to question God. During my saner moments, when I intelligently consider my life, I realize that I must not permit feelings to take possession of me.

The apostle Paul was a master physician in treating the diseases of the soul. He knew it was pointless to deal with the mind until the heart was right. In Philippians 4:6, 7 he states: "*Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" Since the trouble is mainly in the realm of feelings, the heart is listed first, and the mind is listed second.

I must not be controlled by my feelings, since they are so easily influenced. If "*feelings only*" lead me to peace of mind, how am I to know when my feelings will snatch this peace from me? Much of life is a matter of attitude and disposition. I see what I want to see. I feel what I want to feel. Therefore, I must search for peace with my mind as well as with my heart.

Dealing With Symptoms

Psychiatry, long influenced by medical principles, often treats symptoms and seldom deals with causes. I cannot deal superficially with my guilt. I must learn what produces this mental anguish. Does the Bible deal with symptoms or causes?

In Mark 10:17 a rich young ruler asked Christ: "*What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*" Christ quoted some commandments of the law. The young man replied that he had observed all these things from his youth up. In Luke 18:22, Jesus says: "*One thing thou lackest yet, sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor and thou shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. But when he heard these things, he became exceeding sorrowful, for he was very rich.*"

The lesson: *Jesus did not wait until he was a follower to tell him that his religion would cost him something.* Jesus knew how important material possessions of life were to this man, and

so he confronted him with the problem in his life. Was he willing to completely turn to God, or did he want to continue to trust in the material possessions of life?

New Testament conversion must deal with those matters, which separate one from God. In the case of one convert it might be material possessions. In the case of another, it might be the control of the temperament. However, in each case, there must be a turning toward God. In each case God must deal with the cause of sin. This can be accomplished in my life when there is a realization that God now controls my life. I am now in Christ. I have received the indwelling of God's spirit. I am now motivated by spiritual interests. I am now growing spiritually to be more like my Father in heaven. The pursuit of spiritual matters is uppermost in my life because I have been completely turned in the direction of God.

God deals with causes, not symptoms. God enables one to deal with the *cause of his guilt*. Am I willing to examine fully the cause of my guilt? If so, I will seek to know more about the nature of man. If so, I will explore those characteristics all men have in common.

It is imperative that I step aside and look at myself as I really am, not as men say I am. If I am ever to achieve peace of mind, satisfaction, joy, fulfillment, I must acquire the ability of looking at the real picture rather than the beautiful painting of impressions.

God, The Unchanging One

I observe that this is the space age. I know this is an age of progress, an age of explosion in knowledge. Man is looking ahead, not backward. Man is moving forward in science, upward in rockets, outward into space. However, in all ages man has not confused material pursuits with spiritual living. Up to this present day man has looked back to God, believing that this was the most progressive thing he could do. He returns to God today because God is contemporary, up-to-date in every generation. God has not changed through the centuries. What He did for man's happiness was done completely, never to be repeated, once and for all. Christ came promising to relate man to God through salvation. God, through Christ, did then, and can now, heal the sinner, the deformed, the psychotic, the neurotic, the psychopath, and all who are out of harmony with Him. He can lead a person, through the Gospel, to His Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He can make of him a whole person.

Wholeness means peace, a reconciliation of conflicts through self-discovery and an allegiance of the total personality to the highest Power of all powers. *"As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering"* (Hebrews 2:9, 10). I need to focus on Jesus and bring my will in subjection to His. He must be the figure of authority in life.

The Nature of Man

What about man? Has he changed through the centuries? Fundamentally, man is the same. He has the same basic needs. He has the same drives. He has the same capacity for good

or evil, happiness or unhappiness. Twentieth Century man can hate his wife just as intensely in an airplane at 600 miles an hour as first century man hated his wife while riding on a donkey at six miles an hour. Also, man's condition has not changed. Like man in the first century, modern man still wrestles with guilt, fear, pain, and death. With all his scientific progress man has discovered no cure for sin. The sins of Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome are the sins of New York, London, and Tokyo. As in the first century, modern man needs something definite upon which to base his life. Modern man still hungers for direction, meaning, purpose, unity, and thrust in his life.

Sin, A Universal Characteristic

If man looks objectively at himself, he concludes that for centuries he has been wrestling with the problem of sin. One pagan writer, many years before Christ, said: "*Wicked we are, wicked we have been, and I regret to add, wicked we always will be.*" Numerous pagan writers had a very pessimistic outlook concerning the state of man. Some current environments have led man to be very pessimistic in his outlook concerning man's state. However, Christianity was *and* is the reverse of pagan pessimism. Paganism generally taught that man was irredeemably evil. Christianity, though recognizing that man was self centered and selfish came on the scene teaching: *no man need stay the way he is.* The Son of God taught the reconciliation of man to God. Christ taught a better hope, a better way than even Judaism was able to offer, much less the paganism of the Roman world. Today, Christianity still possesses a changing power, which many religions completely lack. Christianity offers man a cure for sin.

Anxiety, A Universal Characteristic

As man looks honestly at himself, he is impressed with the universal characteristic common to man, which is often called anxiety. A thinking man recognizes that anxiety in its simple form is normal in both man and animal. A child has an inherent or natural tendency to criticize his own behavior. This tendency is gradually enlarged by the critical attitude of his parents toward him and his behavior. He learns early in life that he ought to do certain things, which are right, and not to do other things, which are wrong. This self-critical tendency is enhanced during the growing up period by a sense of guilt or self reproach over too strong a desire to retain the childish relationship to the parents beyond childhood. Children of three or four often say to their parents when they feel their relationship threatened by discipline: "*I hate you!*" "*Go away!*" "*I wish you were dead!*" This is an outward manifestation of an inward anxiety.

Conscience: A Universal Characteristic

Every child has an overwhelming need for being loved. Security is a very real need of not only children but adults as well. Because of a child's inherent nature to please those who love him and give him security, he is sensitive to the wishes of his parents. They indicate pleasure or displeasure, approval or disapproval, toward his behavior. As the child adopts his parents' attitudes, he creates his budding conscience. *His anxiety might well be termed the earliest form of his conscience.* His conscience slowly develops as he seeks to please those who meet his inherent needs.

The process of conscience building involves four phases: (1) an inherent impulse to love and be loved; (2) a profound need for holding our parents' love and for being obedient to them; (3) an interweaving of the childish impulse for self-criticism with the parental criticisms; (4) the modification of all these feelings by the contact with life.

In other words, every child, through the process of socializing himself develops a profound sense of wrongdoing. This is true in every environment under heaven. All cultures teach that some actions are right and some actions are wrong. Authority figures, such as policemen, parents, preachers are presented to a child and play important roles in the development of a conscience. It is unnecessary to give a child a sense of wrongdoing in order to enable him to become a social person or to develop a conscience. Conscience building is inevitable for all men.

Guilt, A Universal Characteristic

A violation of this conscience or sense of wrongdoing produces guilt. As a child matures, such things as simple comments or more complicated prohibitions become transformed into his mind as unchangeable, fundamental laws of right and wrong. Certainly, the violation of a conscience cannot be called sin in every situation. Nevertheless, the violation of these rules or laws can result in a very serious mental conflict, which may be called "guilt. "

Conscience is the most wholesome and creative aspect of personality, and it helps mature men achieve their highest potentialities. It is awesome in its power and persuasive in its influence. It rewards a person for cooperation and punishes an individual for violation. Actually, conscience produces genuine persons.

The violation of this learned conscience produces varied responses within the individual. As resentment or hate might be experienced by the little child, the adult reacts in much the same way when he is guilty of violating his conscience. The violation of the conscience expresses itself in such subtle forms that the individual is often unaware of the causes. Sometimes conscience speaks through our bodies by bringing suffering and discomfort to them. This process has been termed organ language. The so-called functional illnesses have no physical basis but bring about fifty per cent of the patients to a doctor's office. Suffering from headache, stomach upset, heart palpitation, or any of a multitude of disorders, the functional illnesses are just as real as if the organ itself were damaged or diseased, yet it comes from an entirely different source: the violation of the *conscience and the resultant guilt*.

Therefore, one may not accurately say, "*I have guilt feelings*." He should elaborate further by saying, "*I have been thinking guilty*," or "*I have been suffering mental anguish because of guilt*". It is quite possible for one not to "feel guilty," yet his actions speak louder than his feelings, or his body condemns him though his feelings do not. He slips into discouragement, despair, depression; all the while insisting he does not *feel guilty*.

If man looks at himself as he really is, he recognizes many characteristics, which he has in common with all men. He asks himself why his life is not rewarding, and he determines to seek the cause. In his search for meaning, the thinking man considers guilt as an integral part of every human being's makeup.

DEALING WITH ONE'S GUILT

I may deal with my guilt by responding to the will of God.

Face The Sin

First, I need to face the sin. I need to say with David, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* It is not enough to admit sin against individuals or even against self. If I am to achieve true peace of mind, ultimately I must face God with my sin.

Confess The Sin

Secondly, confession must take place if I am to deal with my guilt. If I do not confess my sin, it becomes bottled up inside, and mental and nervous tension results.

(1) Confession is not complaining

"When I was a child thus and so happened to me." It is unfortunate that *"thus and so"* happened to me, but I cannot do anything about it now. I am a responsible adult who must answer to my God for my life. People remain immature or become neurotic or psychotic because of irresponsibilities. I must stop complaining and face responsibility.

(2) Confession is not blaming others.

"If I have sinned, I want to make things right." *"If I have sinned"* often means *"they are to blame, but I am troubled to the point that I had to respond."* Confession is often a camouflage to attack others. David did not blame Bathsheba as Adam blamed Eve.

(3) Confession is not boasting.

"My problem is that I'm too sweet. I let the family run over me." Longsuffering is a virtue. *"I must confess that I have been working too much lately."* Too much worry, perhaps, but not too much work. An industrious person is usually a happy person.

(4) Confession is not for others.

"I have sinned, and he or she is guilty also." One must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. It is not true confession when I desire to hurt others. Confession serves as a catharsis for my soul. It is like a refreshing breeze on a warm spring day. It is ventilation of my spirit.

As secrecy got me into trouble, so openness sets me right with God and with my fellows. I cannot say, *"I care not what others think or say."* I do care what some others think about me. My behavior must be in harmony with those who are significant and important in my life. Even if no one cares for me, God still cares, and I want God to think well of me. I determine to live a life of openness and confession among my friends and loved ones and before my God. *"Confess your faults one to another"* is the will of God.

Make Amends

Though confession to another human being can lift an enormous burden off my shoulders, it is necessary for me to make amends. Conscience will never leave me in peace until this third principle of making amends for wrongs committed is employed by me. Confession takes place, not only with the mouth, but is complemented and completed with appropriate activity. *"He who says 'I know Him' but disobeys His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,"* ([John 2:4). *"If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth,"* (1 John 1:6).

Accept Forgiveness

The fourth thing essential is the acceptance of forgiveness. If I am impoverished and starving, and someone offers me a box of food, I will go by and pick up this food. If the weather were twenty degrees below zero, and you offer a warm coat in exchange for my sweater, I would come by and see you. If my life is burdened with guilt, and forgiveness can be mine by going to God and asking Him for it, surely I will accept His forgiveness. If guilt lingers, it may be because I have been unable to accept God's forgiveness.

Obey God

Fifth, I can know the forgiveness of my sins through baptism. Personal experiences are often vague, unexplainable, and based on emotional response only. Personal experiences cannot produce the results in my life that come from a response to a direct command of God. *"And He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord..."* (Acts 10:48a). Oh, what relief can come when I am willing to do as Paul was instructed: *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* (Acts 22:16). Oh, what peace comes when I know that *"...even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."* (1 Peter 3:21). The importance and significance of baptism can always be in the memory of the child of God. I can have confidence in my Lord with whom I was buried in baptism, *"in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God..."* (Colossians 2:12).

Change Daily

Sixth, as I truly seek release from guilt, I will permit God to help me and change me daily! The cross of Calvary says to all men, *"I have borne your sins in my body upon the tree. My power can make you what you ought to be."* In other words, it is not in man to direct his own steps. The gospel is, *"The dynamite of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."* Again, *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."* I must work diligently and pray fervently that a fear of the past, or a fear of failure, or a fear of the future will not immobilize me, I should be able to say, *"I am strengthened because God began a good work in me, and God will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:7). *"I am encouraged because it is God who works in me both to will and to work for his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:12,13). *"I am not left to my own devices for God is working in and through me. This is the reason why I want to know Christ and the power of his*

resurrection " (Philippians 3:10). *"God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all I ask or think according to the power that works in me"* (Ephesians 3:20). If I permit weakness or fear to reign in my life, I bring indictment against God by insisting that God does not have the power to accomplish His will in my life.

Serve Meaningfully

Seventh, forgiven sin must be woven into future service. In a psalm of confession David cried: *"Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit, then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee."* I will share my spiritual convictions with others because I have the joy of the Lord's salvation in my life.

ACHIEVING A FULFILLING, REWARDING, MEANINGFUL LIFE

Furthermore, God's Word speaks forcefully and often in calling me to fulfillment, meaningful existence and purpose in life. As I hear the voice of God, I will form four concepts, which will enable me to achieve enduring peace of mind.

True Design of Life

First, I must understand the true design of living. A false ideal of the ends of living has confused many people. Therefore, only a true ideal can calm human beings. Many people think their only purpose for living is to seek pleasure. The more they search for pleasure, the more they lose it. Man is not here simply to eat, drink, lust, and chase a falling star. Outward experiences can never satisfy the inner longings of man's spirit. Inasmuch as I am a spirit, as well as flesh, then the restful life necessitates a communion with the Great Spirit. In Ecclesiastes 12:13 I read, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."*

"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24). Mammon was a Hebrew word for material possessions. Originally, the word meant to entrust. Mammon was that which a man entrusted to a banker or to someone for safe keeping. However, mammon came to mean not that which is entrusted, but that in which a man puts his trust. The end of the process was that mammon came to be spelled with a capital M and was regarded as nothing less than a god. The history of that word shows vividly how material possessions can assume a place in life which they were never meant to have. Surely there is no better description of a man's god than to say: *"It is the power in which or in whom he trusts"*. When a man puts his trust in material things, then material things have become not his support but his god. In a materialistic society it is a very real temptation to measure things according to the *"almighty dollar"* standard. It is imperative to remember *"the love of money is the root of all evil."*

Too often I measure all things by the standard of gain or wealth or luxury. As a maturing Christian I must evaluate my life in the light of the deteriorating and destroying standard of the world. I must continually be reminded of the spiritual realm and how that its pursuits are

in contrast with pursuits of the world. I must appreciate the true design of living, as God wills it. My goal is the heavenly home.

True Forgiveness God

A second concept is found in 1 John 1:7: "*If we walk in the light as Christ is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*" This teaches that the faithful child of God is not condemned. Further proof is given in Romans 8:1. "*There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.*" The reason why the faithful child of God is not condemned is that God does not impute to him sin. For example, Romans 4:8 states: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin.*" The word impute means to charge to one's account. Hence, there is a person to whom the Lord does not charge sin, the one who walks in the light of His will. I can be that one if I am willing to pursue the spiritual life.

A realization of this fact will eliminate a guilt complex. For me to suffer from guilt when I am walking in the light is an insinuation that His plan is not effective and that the blood of Jesus Christ is not continuously cleansing the faithful Christian. Furthermore, this fact eliminates the idea that a person must specifically catalogue and acknowledge every sin of which he is guilty if he is to be saved. Certainly, I must do this with reference to known sins, but what about that vast area of sin of which all are guilty and often unaware of that guilt? It is in this area especially that the marvelous truth of the lesson applies: *the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing*. The sphere of that life is walking in the light. The standard of that conduct is indicted if I walk in the light as Christ is in the light. A resultant blessing is fellowship, joint participation one with another in this marvelous plan of God.

A realization of this single fact should bridge the gap to God for me and enable me to better deal with my guilt. The blood of Jesus continues to cleanse the faithful Christian, thus releasing him from an immobilizing sense of guilt and thrusting him into a rewarding happy life on this earth and promising him the joyful hope of perfect peace in eternity.

True Burden Bearer

Third, Jesus said: "*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus can bear the burdens of men. Jesus can give peace to men (Philippians 4:7). By giving myself to the greatest cause of all, I can find something challenging and satisfying for which to live and to work. When I stumble, the Lord lifts me up.

True Interest in Others

Fourth, one is more apt to find peace if he quits thinking so much about himself and begins thinking more about others. The person with the big heart, the one who is always busy doing for others, usually finds happiness. Just as our guilt affects the lives of those dear to us in an evil way, so the answer to the problem of guilt is to be found ultimately in the relationship between us and those whom we love. In addition to our relationship to loved ones, there is Christ who loves all men and has identified himself with each man and woman in a very special manner. Jesus lived and died for the sake of others. "*Though he was rich, yet for*

your sakes he became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9). Unselfishness characterized the life of Christ, yet he lived a calm and serene life in a restless and turbulent world. Likewise, as I identify with Christ and with others, my life promises to be calm and serene.

A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

As I determine to change my thinking by forming these concepts, I should remember that a prerequisite for achieving tranquility is an approving conscience "*With this hope before me, I do my utmost to live my whole life with a clear conscience before God and man* " (Acts 24:16). Am I acting in a responsible way as I strive to live with a clear conscience before God and man? Has my behavior condemned me and chained me in the prison of a disapproving conscience? Must I confess that my guilt has immobilized me and thwarted my efforts to achieve spiritual maturity and a richer life? Am I willing to respond to God's will, submitting myself to the wishes of my God? Am I willing to deal with my guilt, and thereby experience a measure of the richer life?

APPENDIX

In addition to the passages in the tract, I will prayerfully read the following references, carefully studying the context of each verse before making specific applications. I will permit God's Word to be the ultimate standard by which I will deal realistically and meaningfully with my guilt.

Genesis 26:10
Genesis 42:21
Exodus 20:7
Leviticus 4:13,22
Leviticus 4:27
Leviticus 5:17
Leviticus 6:4
Numbers 5:6
Numbers 5:31
Numbers 32:22
Numbers 35:31

Deuteronomy 5:11
1 Samuel 26:9
1 Kings 2:9
Matthew 12:7; 23:18
Matthew 26:66; 27:4, 26
Mark 14:64
Luke 7:47
Romans 3:19,23
1 Corinthians 11:27
1 Corinthians 6:18
1 Corinthians 8:12

Ephesians 4:26
Colossians 1:14
Titus 3:11
Hebrews 10: 2

Hebrews 12:1
James 2:10
1 Peter 4:8
1 John 1:10
1 John 2:1

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