

GUILT - THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE
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International 1999

Brethren it truly is a great joy and privilege for Sister Florence and myself to be with you once again. We bring with us the love of your brethren from the Chicago ecclesia.

Our book of memories has many pages filled with the fond memories of the past International Conventions. How blessed to contemplate that the friendships we develop here will continue throughout eternity

To begin our study today we would like to note a similarity between **GUILT AND PHYSICAL PAIN**. Both are absolutely essential to our life, and truly both are blessings.

Physical pain is chiefly "**A WARNING OF DANGER**", it alerts us to the fact that **something is wrong**, it waves a red flag as it were, to tell us we must take some type of action to alleviate something that is harming our body.

GUILT OF CONSCIENCE plays a very similar role for our **MORAL QUALITIES**, as pain does to our physical. While this is true for all mankind in general, today we will primarily be considering how it is an **absolute necessity** for our New Creature's spiritual well being.

We might look at **CONSCIENCE** as a scale on which we weigh all the various things presented to our judgment, to ascertain the **RIGHT OR WRONG**, the **JUSTICE OR INJUSTICE**, the **TRUTH OR THE FALSITY** of a matter. This scale as we will see could be very lenient or very stringent. All depending on how our New Creature regulates it.

GUILT in turn is an **EFFECT** produced by conscience, that disturbs our mental peace of mind, whenever we start heading in a direction that **CONSCIENCE DISAPPROVED**.

GUILT, therefore, just like **PAIN** is for the purpose of being "**A WARNING SIGN**," a **FLAG WAVING** as it were, that you are doing or about to do something that if you don't stop will bring injury to your **spiritual life**.

We would like to note a gem thought from Bro. Russell on Reprint page - 3777
"To the enlightened Christian, guided in judgment by God's revelation the Bible, **the voice of conscience becomes really the voice of God, and obedience to it is imperative.**"

I believe the thought of this quotation is powerful, and potentially could be most helpful to our New Creatures, if we can grasp it's import and abide by it. "**The voice of conscience becomes really the voice of God, and obedience to it is imperative.**"

Now we would like to go on to consider how our conscience communicates with us through the feelings of guilt, and **six** different ways we might **REACT** to these feelings of guilt. The first four are possible reactions to what is in reality the true voice of our

Conscience. It is guilt that comes to us whenever we fail to follow any of the admonitions of the Lord. We want to think of this guilt as the Voice of our Heavenly Father, reminding us, - warning us, - there is a better way!

The last two forms of guilt we will consider are **NOT** the voice of Conscience or the voice of God. They are improper forms of guilt that comes from our **OWN UNWARRANTED SELF-ACCUSATION.**

The first way in which we may react to a guilt feeling, is the ideal reaction that God had in mind as to what should happen when we feel guilt. We will recognize it as a warning sign, heed it's message, stop doing what ever it was that was displeasing to God, and pray for His forgiveness. Or it may be, we will start to do what God would have us to do, that we previously held back from doing.

More often than not, this voice of conscience will not come as a sudden loud thunder clap, but more as an uneasy feeling that comes upon us at the first thought or impulse of something that isn't quite as it should be.

If we are about to do something that will be neglecting the sacrificial aspect of our covenant and be pampering the flesh, we will feel it.

If we are about to spend far more money on a car, furniture, a home or what have you, than what would be appropriate for a consecrated sacrificial life, - we will feel it.

If we are in the process of doing something that is more or less a waste of time, we will feel it.

If we are entertaining an unholy, unjust, or impure thought we will feel it even stronger.

But for whatever, or whenever, whether it's minor or major, we must come to recognize this uneasy guilt feeling for what it is, **A RED WARNING FLAG WAVED BY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.**

Recognizing the sign, we might then and there seek our Fathers guidance, strength and help to overcome whatever is the weakness before us.

What I find helpful for myself on occasion is to do literally what Jesus did when he said, "Get thee behind me Satan!"

For indeed part of our battle is with this mighty foe. As Paul said in 2 Cor. 10:4 (Phillips Translation) "The truth is that although we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level...Our battle is to break down every deceptive argument and every imposing defense that men erect (or I might add that our flesh erects) against the true knowledge of God. We must fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ."

Yes this is our ultimate goal, to bring every thought and action to the obedience of Christ.

The 2nd way we may react to guilt is by rationalizing it's meaning.

That is, we make up a more acceptable reason for why we do something than the real reason. Because our flesh hates feelings of guilt, it makes up an excuse for our new creature that sounds perfectly plausible, and spiritually acceptable, as to why its permissible to do or not do, whatever we are contemplating.

A few examples:

At our class elections we are nominated for a committee, or brethren ask us to help with a certain project, and we know it will involve a lot of extra work.

Our flesh doesn't like the idea of doing more work. But this makes it feel guilty. So what does it do? Almost instantly it comes up with a reason that sounds quite plausible, and spiritually acceptable, as to why we should decline.

It might say to us, "you know you really aren't the most qualified for that position. There are others who could do a much better job. Or it might suggest, - that's really a job that would be better for a sister, - or a brother, - or a deacon, - or an elder," - anyone but ourselves. We think about it a split second, Yes, - That's really true! So we decline.

Notice what happened. Our flesh really didn't want to do more sacrificial work. But it couldn't say that for after all how would it look. So it proceeds to make up what is really an excuse, but one that is so plausible sounding, it actually can convince us that that is the real reason. Thus, it now makes it easy to decline the request for help or the nomination, and have no guilt feeling about it whatsoever. But what we are doing whenever we rationalize guilt, is we are dismissing the voice of God who was trying to speak to us.

Another example:

The scriptures are filled with admonitions along the line of the responsibility we have to be the Lords ambassadors. To proclaim the message of His kingdom, the most hope filled message in all the world.

But again that takes time, effort, sacrifice. Something our flesh would again prefer not doing. This makes us feel a little guilty.

So it may say to us, "oh since there's so few that ever respond anymore, the Lord must be telling us the Church is nearly complete and He'll call the few remaining ones, - you spend your time in more profitable ways of developing your character."

Again the guilt feeling is thus rationalized away, and we feel good and justified in our lack of activity.

Almost everything that confronts us that will involve more sacrifice will have a counter proposal by our flesh. It has countless excuses ready to divert us aside. They may not always be to shun the sacrifice completely. Sometimes the flesh may suggest to us to offer our sacrifice but only in measure, only that which would fit in comfortably within our own pre-erected comfort zone.

It may whisper to us “don’t go to an extreme, don’t get too tired, remember you have to preserve your health.” Our flesh wants us to forget the scriptural admonition to the consecrated, “He that saves his life shall loose it, but he that looeth his life for my sake shall save it.”

Brethren I truly believe one of the **greatest deceptions** to our New Creatures, - is our flesh’s inclination to rationalize. Almost everything we do that’s wrong, and everything we should be doing but don’t, can be rationalized away so that we won’t feel guilty.

We can justify our lack of love, our impatience, our evil speaking, our reason for not attending a week night meeting, our lack of zeal, our inactivity, our lack of sacrificing, our pampering the flesh, our purchasing a luxurious house or car. Yes the flesh could literally justify most anything.

Our flesh can become so skillful in the use of rationalization, that we can come to the point where we rarely if ever feel guilt. The rationalized response can come so fast, the feelings of guilt actually are no longer felt. In fact if we never or rarely feel guilty, we need to be especially concerned. For either we have reached spiritual perfection, or we have dulled our conscience’s ability to warn us through countless rationalizations.

Knowing our fallen flesh functions in this manner can be a help to our New Creature. For knowing that every message of guilt will be immediately followed by the flesh offering an excuse, will help us to be better prepared to analyze more correctly the real reason or motive for the decision we finally make.

Our new creature must take command, and carefully weigh the alternatives before it. It must base its final decision on true facts of spiritually guided reasoning that would be please our Heavenly Father, - and not plausible excuses suggested by our flesh, or Satan's prompting.

So the next time we experience the uneasy feeling of guilt, think, and think again, and think a third time, is the suggestion we hear truly the best alternative for my spiritual welfare, or is it an excuse of the flesh, or a suggestion from Satan.

A third way we may react to guilt is we **CONTINUE** in that which is wrong full well knowing it is wrong. Guilt may plague us, but because of weakness of the flesh we find that the pleasure, or comfort we derive from the improper course, is greater than our determination to stop.

Some of the causes of this type of guilt are those type of sins that we may think of as

being somewhat addictive in nature, that try as we may we just can't seem to control. Such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, improper sexual behavior, over eating, and so on.

Those who have these weaknesses may hate themselves because of it, may desperately want to stop, but because of weakness, and lack of sufficient determination just continue on. It truly results in a terribly frustrating state of mind filled with guilt.

Much of this is brought on by our present day promiscuous society. Everywhere we turn the implication is given that everything is permissible as long as you enjoy it and it doesn't hurt others. Everyone else is doing it so it must be all right.

We're especially concerned for our young people, who are surrounded by this type of subtle suggestion everywhere they turn. It can have an effect upon us all, but especially when we are in our younger formative years. For it is the time of our life when peer pressure is the greatest to conform to what others are doing.

If not careful this thinking can slowly but gradually begin to make inroads into our minds. Like to mother Eve, Satan will tempt by suggesting "oh go ahead and just try it once, you don't know what your missing, It's a fantastic experience."

For this reason we need to be on guard, always thinking ahead. Striving to avoid those circumstances that will lend themselves to our falling into a temptation that we may have a weakness in.

For if our defenses are down, and our flesh suggests a rationalization, "perhaps we should try it just once so we could have first hand experience of what the world is going through. We'll be better prepared to know how to help others." Subtle, subtle are our flesh's and Satan's suggestions, and if followed can begin a life of misery, with our mind soon plagued with guilt, but unable to stop.

But before it happens, you can be sure your conscience will be **WAVING THE WARNING FLAG FURIOUSLY**. Please, please don't ignore it. Please don't fool yourself into thinking it'll be alright, since it's a weakness I have, God will understand and forgive.

May we never forget, "**what we sow we shall reap.**" Every violation of conscience will leave a scar. Depending on the degree of sin, some of these scars will be quite severe.

Does that mean that God will not forgive? No! God will forgive a repentant heart from sins of weakness. But depending upon the severity of willfulness involved, stripes and chastisements are sure to follow.

We remember the sin's of David. Adultery with Bathsheba. She becomes pregnant. So he then arranges for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle.

David pleaded for forgiveness and was forgiven, but for the willfulness involved, oh what severe stripes he had to endure.

The prophet Nathan informed David that he would be forgiven, but his child of

Bathsheba would die. Other heart rending experiences followed! Later David's firstborn son Amnon raped his own half sister, and he was then murdered by her brother. Then David's son Absalom rebels against him. Disgraces David, incites a civil war against his Father, and is then killed in battle. David wept and cried out 2 SA 18:33: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Yes, David was forgiven for his weakness, but the stripes which came because of his willfulness, were almost more than he could bear. Let us remember the experiences of David.

If we find ourselves in any situation of sin that we know is wrong, but just can't seem to get the determination to stop, we will be often so plagued with guilt, that we will feel completely unworthy of even coming to God in prayer. It is at a time such as this that we may enter in to the fourth aspect of how we may deal with guilt.

Because we may be terribly disgusted and ashamed with ourselves, we may feel completely unworthy to come to God in prayer. And instead we may try to offset our guilt by doing some good works, to make ourselves worthy before we can approach God again in prayer.

But may we encourage any who may be going through such a trial, that there is absolutely nothing, nothing that we can do in the way of works that can make us acceptable to God. We must acknowledge our wrong and immediately fall on our knees in prayer, remembering Heb. 4:15,16.

(NAS Translation) "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Thus coming with confidence knowing our Lord will understand we must follow the admonition of 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Yes there is only one way that our sins can be forgiven and our guilt removed. The first step is acknowledgment and true repentance with a desire to stop sinning with all our heart. Pray for forgiveness, and then if we have injured another in the process, seek if possible to undo the hurt we caused them.

Such an all encompassing precious promise. Profound in its simplicity.

If we confess our sins He will forgive, and cleanse us from ALL, -- ALL, -- ALL our unrighteousness. There is no sin that if we are sincere in our repentance that the Lord can't forgive.

But alas for some, perhaps for all of us at one time or another, we may understand the scripture intellectually, but fail in being able to truly believe it and apply it to ourselves.

Which is what brings us to the next aspect of how we might deal with guilt.

The fifth way we react to guilt is to continue to punish ourselves for past sins that were over and done with long ago. Sins that we repented of long ago, sins that we pleaded God to forgive, sins that God did forgive long ago, but yet we just can't let ourselves forget and accept God's forgiveness.

This fifth aspect of guilt together with the sixth which is **IMAGINED GUILT**, is not the voice of God, but of **unwarranted inner self accusation**.

It is not healthy, for rather than causing improvement, it produces depression, that paralyzes us, and is very self destructive.

The original cause of this prolonged form of guilt is often caused by that which greatly affected the course of our lives, or the lives of others.

But whatever the cause we just can't seem to let our hearts and minds forget, and we keep browbeating ourselves, going over and over it in our minds. Why did I ever do that. If only I would have followed my first impulse, it wouldn't have happened. If only I would have taken a different road, if only I didn't push my children so hard, if only I would have gone to the other doctor, the IF ONLYS could go on and on and on.

But to what avail?? Brethren nothing in the world can change what has taken place yesterday. **IT IS DONE! IT IS OVER! IT CANNOT BE CHANGED!**

All we can hope to do is possibly modify the effects of our actions to some degree, and learn a lesson from it. But all the extended guilt, anxiety, and browbeating of ourselves will not change it one iota, all it will do is depress and discourage us to such an extent, that our spiritual life will be paralyzed.

How Satan enjoys to get us in this frame of mind. We must pull ourselves together. We must remember PSA 103:14: "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

Our heavenly Father knows we can't do perfectly. All He expects is for us to strive to do the best we can. We will slip, we will fail, but He wants us to pick our selves up and continue on.

He has provided the means by which we can come back into harmony with Him through His grace of forgiveness. He has promised to forgive us all our unrighteousness if we will confess our sin. And so in essence, if we continue to go over and over our sin and guilt, we are in reality rejecting our Fathers wondrous grace. We are questioning His promise to forgive.

Another motivation that sometimes accompanies this form of self induced, prolonged guilt, is one that we may, or we may **NOT** even be aware of. Which is a subconscious feeling that we must punish ourselves for our wrong doing.

This too is wrong. For we know if there was any measure of willfulness involved, our Father will determine far better than we, the appropriate amount of chastisement to be given.

In other words we must leave all in our Father's hands. Paul recognized this for himself. If anyone, had reason to afflict upon himself his own punishment it was Paul. For he was guilty of persecuting the saints and was responsible for the death of many of them. But notice what he says in 1 COR 4:3: "I judge not mine own self." Yes he left the judgment of himself to God. He just went on doing the best he could.

So it should be with us. God will bring us stripes and chastisements whenever necessary as He sees best. When they come we must accept them and be rightly exercised by them. But let us not feel we must punish ourselves! We are unqualified!

We must pick ourselves up and follow Paul's example of PHIL 3:13 (NLT) "I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead."

So may we forget our past failures, except for hopefully having learned from the experience, and go forward, to grow more and more into Christ's likeness.

Now we come to the final sixth way we react to guilt, which is to **IMAGINED GUILT**.

It is a feeling of guilt that we bring upon ourselves that is completely unwarranted. It is guilt that is not the voice of God, but comes from our own imagined unworthiness. It is a guilt like the previous one that can leave us paralyzed spiritually.

What do we mean by **IMAGINED GUILT**? It is just that, Imagined! It is guilt that should not be there. It is guilt that God is not pleased with, for it is unjustified self accusation.

What causes it? One possible cause is something that may have occurred earlier in our life, that left us with an extreme negative image of ourselves. A general overall feeling of inferiority compared to others.

Many factors can contribute to it. Perhaps in our childhood or adolescence, someone made us feel extremely guilty about something.

A teacher or even our parents may have ridiculed our incompetence in some area, hoping to thus prompt us into doing better. But alas, it left a lasting negative effect.

Or perhaps our parents expected great things of us that we were unable to fulfill, and as

a result we felt we failed them.

But in any case, these as well as many other experiences, could have left us with an extreme inferior viewpoint of ourselves. A feeling that we just can't seem to get over, and as a result we tend to feel inferior, and therefore guilty about most things in our life. Things that in actuality we may be doing beautifully in. Things that our heavenly Father is very well pleased with.

If we are having this problem it truly is an extremely heavy burden. We must strive to recognize what it was, or what it is that is making us feel constantly inferior, and make a determination to put a stop to it, and strive to ascertain a true realization of self worth,

For we truly believe everyone of the brethren have qualities that God is greatly pleased with. For God would not have called anyone, in which He did not see the potential attributes of character that He desires for his "royal diadem." (Isa. 62:3)

We must pray earnestly that God may help us to gain a proper perspective and outlook in evaluating self. When God says He desires humility in us, it does not mean that we are to feel we have no worth. But rather He wants us to have a true evaluation of self. Not overly inflated, and not belittled. But one worthy, that befits one of the children of the King of the Universe. For he would not have called you if he did not see qualities that he desired with all his heart.

Another example of what could cause Imagined guilt, is when some unthoughtful one makes us feel guilty by evil surmising. They could have been completely wrong and unjustified, and yet their crushing remarks could make us feel maybe they're right. It's true I'm not very good, I've failed

Another form of imagined guilt can happen to parents when one or more of our children did not follow the path we desired for them. It can cause us to imagine guilt, feeling that somehow we failed in providing the proper guidance over the years.

But we may have been an outstanding parent. And the child chose the path they did, not because of our poor parenting, but only because they have a mind of their own. We cannot force others, even our children to conform to our desires for them. Each is a free moral agent who must choose his or her own path in life.

However don't lose hope. It may be they may yet come to see the path you desired for them, is truly the only worthwhile life to follow.

Another example of when we may have imagined guilt is after the loss of a loved one in death.

We may have lovingly taken care of them till we were ready to drop. God knows and appreciates the thousands of ways we ministered to them with all our being.

But oh how we miss them, and we can begin to imagine guilt. Feeling somehow that if we only could have acted sooner, called another doctor, or was more alert for the symptoms, or whatever, they would still be with us.

We must remember all our times are in God's hands. There's nothing we can do to alter God's providences. Not even a hair of our heads can fall without His knowledge.

We must be thankful for all the years we had together with our loved one, and reflect on those precious memories, and be happy we had the opportunity to share them together and to minister to them.

Another example may happen as we get into our older years.

We look back and it seems that we have accomplished so little with our life. Perhaps we're not able to participate very well in studies any more, for our memory is failing. Many of our closer brethren have finished their course, and perhaps few have close fellowship with us any more. And we begin imagining maybe it's because I'm unworthy.

Please don't think in those terms. You may be one of the dearest saints of God. Try to remember that it isn't what great works for God that we have accomplished, or how much knowledge we have, or how much witnessing we have done, or how many meetings we've attended, that really matters, BUT -- what have we developed in our hearts and minds.

This is the supreme goal of our spiritual life, to be **TRANSFORMED** by the renewing of our minds into the character likeness of Christ.

Brethren it is our prayer that when we reach the closing twilight years of our life, it may be our joy and our blessing to realize the fulfillment of 2 Cor. 4:16: "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;"