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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Guilt - Mental Health and the Bible 7**  
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Today we're going to talk about *guilt*. But we're going to talk about guilt in a way that many people may have never thought about before. We're going to talk about the effects of guilt on our emotional and spiritual health.

What is guilt? Guilt is what happens internally after we do something that we think is wrong – as opposed to shame. What's the difference between guilt and shame? Shame is what happens internally when we fail to live up to our own expectations. More later in another presentation about that.

Another word that we want to talk about today, in relationship to guilt, is the word *conscience*. That's the part of the mind that monitors and evaluates our behavior. You know, we all have the little voice inside that tells us when we're doing something that's right or wrong.

Paul said that all people have the law of God written in their hearts. Let's turn to that scripture and read that. It's in Romans 2, verse 14. Paul said:

**Rom. 2:14** – *Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts – their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending, them.* So he's talking about that little voice – right? – that everybody has. And he's telling us that the law of God is the moral compass for all people, even if they've never heard of it before. Now, you think, "How could that possibly be?"

If we stop and think about it, everybody knows it's wrong to kill. Everybody knows it's wrong to steal. Everybody knows that lying doesn't work and that that's wrong. Everybody knows that adultery is destructive to marriage and family. All cultures have

that in common. It seems like every other culture except ours knows that you shouldn't talk disrespectfully about God and use His name in vain. We seem to have forgotten about that one in our society. I think most other cultures...I don't think Buddhists use Buddha's name as an explicative. And I doubt Muslims use Mohammed's name as an explicative. But in our culture, we've lost that one.

In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul also tells us that if we do not know the law well, then our conscience is weak. In other words, it's not a very strong moral compass – if we don't know what the law says. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 8:4 and read that. He's talking about meats being offered to idols here. That's the context. And he says:

**1 Cor. 8:4** – *Therefore, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed, there are many gods and many lords), yet for us, there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things – and we exist for Him – and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things – and we exist through Him. However, not all men have this knowledge. But some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol, their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* So there were people who had a problem eating meat that had been offered to an idol. And then he says:

**V- 8-** *But food will not condemn us to God, for we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat it.* The idol is nothing, right? So, some people who had come out of Gentile society felt that they shouldn't eat meat that had been offered to idols – they learned that it was wrong when they came into the church and they still had that idea in their minds. The idol still had power over them, in other words.

**V-9** – *But take care, lest this liberty of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak – that is, people who weren't yet thinking about the idol being nothing. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge, he who is weak is ruined – the brother for whose sake Christ died – and thus by sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.* He talks about how we need to have an educated conscience and know what the law really says so that we will know what to feel guilty about, appropriately, and what not to.

When I was kid I used to feel guilty if I didn't go to church on Sunday. That's a good example. Paul would have said that my conscience was weak. So, when we hear the term *weak conscience* in the Bible, it's talking about having a conscience that doesn't really *know* what is appropriate and what isn't.

Let's go to Titus 1, verse 13.

**Titus 1:13** – *This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith – not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. But both their mind and their conscience are defiled. And they profess to know God, but by their deeds, they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.* (I’m reading, by the way, most of the scriptures today out of the *New American Standard*.) There’s another example where the Bible talks a lot about our conscience and how that it’s good to have a pure conscience. And if we don’t, then we don’t know what to do and we can become defiled, because our moral compass isn’t working well.

When we violate our conscience, that creates something called anxiety. And we’ve already talked about that in this series. And that’s something that’s not good for the mind when it comes in large doses. A little bit...it’s like pain. A little pain warns us that something is wrong, but if pain becomes chronic, then it also becomes a problem. Anxiety is the same way. So it’s important, according to the Bible and according to mental health, to keep our conscience clean so that we don’t have a lot of anxiety in our life. We have to take care of it – to take care of our conscience – and make sure that it’s not only educated the right way, but that we’re *living* by it.

Let’s go to 1 Timothy 1, and verse 18, and look at another scripture. He’s talking to Timothy here – Paul is – and he said:

**1 Tim. 1:18** – *This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies made previously concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.* If we don’t keep faith and live according to our faith and according to our conscience, then at some point, if we keep doing that, our faith can shipwreck.

I think about some young people I know, who have had sex before marriage. What a terrible foundation for a marriage relationship – to do something that makes you feel guilty and creates a lot of anxiety in you – that connection in the relationship is just there. What a thing to do to one’s own mind!

Let’s look in Proverbs 4:23 – another scripture that I wanted to talk to you about. The Bible is very clear that God has given us a mind, and a spirit, and a heart, and we’re supposed to take care of these things.

**Prov. 4:23** – *Above all else guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.* So we’re not supposed to do things that scar our conscience and cause a lot of anxiety in our life. We’re supposed to live a life in accordance with our conscience. And our conscience should be educated as to what’s right and what’s wrong – the way God thinks about it.

There are many occasions, however, when feeling guilty is good for us. That may surprise somebody to hear someone with mental health training say that guilt is good. And I used to think that psychologists thought that guilt was bad. But as I meet more and more psychologists and talk to more and more people in the mental health field, I have yet to find anybody that actually believes that way about it.

I was talking to my boss, who's been a family therapist for many years, and I was telling him about one of the kids I was working with who was suffering a lot of guilt because of a lot of bad things he was doing. And he said, "Good! He should feel guilty for those things he's done!"

When we do something wrong or hurtful to others and we feel guilty about it, that's completely appropriate. And it *can* be good for us if the guilt causes us to stop doing what we think is wrong. That stops the anxiety. So guilt can be a very good motivator for us. The anxiety is reduced and we're living in accordance with our conscience if we try to get away from that guilt by stopping what we've been doing. We get away from the ambivalence of thinking something is wrong and then doing it anyway – not a good place to be.

I had a client who was raised by a critical mother, who never showed her any approval. My client was about forty years old. Her mother, she told me, was always finding fault with her and always angry with her. She couldn't remember a single time in her childhood when her mother ever complimented her or praised her for anything she'd done. Yet she got straight As all the way through school. Never heard a word of encouragement or praise about it. In fact, she got straight As all the way through high school and never took any work home, because she's so brilliant she didn't have to. And her mother was always finding fault with her.

Now this woman has a son, who is in elementary school, and she has the same problem toward him. She realized that she had that problem. His way of dealing with her is to be deliberately disobedient so that it irritates her. And he knows what things irritate her the most. Destroying property and lying are her two hot-button issues, so that's what he does. He'll lie to her when she's got the evidence to the contrary right in front of her. He's been caught at school telling lies about things that he's done, and so on. And she always blows up at him.

I think the reason he does that is, number one, it draws attention to the problem that he's having with her, and I think the other one is, since he can never do anything right, why try? He gets the same treatment no matter what. He knows that lying upsets her, so he tells lies that are obviously lies just to make her angry – just like she did with her mother. And she explodes just like her mother did at her son. So she sees that she's hurting her son just like she was hurt, but she can't seem to stop going off. And she feels really *guilty* about that. And that guilt, more than anything else, is what has propelled her into therapy

and is keeping her there. So that's a good thing, isn't it? It's not fun to feel that way, but that feeling, of realizing that she's damaging her son the same way she was damaged, is what's keeping her in therapy. It's *motivating* her to overcome the problem. And that, along with the love she has for her son, is doing that.

Now, it's also true that.... We said that guilt is good, right? But now we're going to talk about the other side of that coin. There is also a group of mental health diagnoses around a lack of appropriate guilt. Most people have a conscience that works. Some few do not. And those are the people who are called *wicked* in the Bible.

It's kind of funny.... In our language, if we call somebody "wicked," and then someone else "evil," we think that *evil* is the stronger term. But in the Bible it's actually reversed. The term *wicked* in the Bible is the stronger term. If you go to your concordance, or your Bible program, and you look up all the instances of the word *wicked*, here's what you're going to find about wicked people. They are people who take things from others – or borrow and don't return it – who are deceitful, who think that the reason they can do all these things – you know, take money from others, or stuff from others – is because they deserve it and others don't matter. They are the ones who scheme to take advantage of people. They think they deserve everything and they're willing to take it away from others any way they can. Those are the people who also lie in wait to kill people heartlessly and who don't care if they hurt other people, or take their things from them, or do hurtful things to them. So what the Bible's describing there – that talks about people who are wicked – is people who don't have a conscience. If we do something wrong and we don't feel guilty about it, in mental health, that's called sickness or pathology. And there's a whole constellation of diagnoses that revolve around that idea of not having a conscience.

One is *oppositional defiant disorder*. That's usually put on teenagers – people who grow into teenage and don't feel any remorse about the bad things that they've done. There's *narcissistic personality disorder*, which is about those people that are so self-centered they think that whatever they need comes ahead of everybody else, and it doesn't matter if other people get hurt in the process. Then probably the strongest one is what's called *anti-social personality disorder*. Those are the people that populate the prisons – you know, are the heartless criminals that have done violence to other people and who are con artists – who rip people off and don't care what they've done to them. All of these feature doing harmful things to others and not feeling any guilt or remorse over it.

I've mentioned before, that, in my clinic work, I met a mother once who tried to convince me that her daughter had one of these disorders because she was so resistant to her mother. She told me once that her daughter kicked a hole in the living room wall while she was having a tantrum. As I got to know this twelve-year-old girl, I saw that she certainly did have trouble controlling herself, and she had also done a lot of mean things to her mother and other people, but I saw that she also felt guilt and regret about her

actions after she calmed down. So that's something different. That's not being able to control yourself, which is different from not caring whether you control yourself or not. When she kicked a hole in the wall, she actually became afraid that there was something mentally wrong with her, and she felt really guilty about what she had done. That was very appropriate for her to feel that way. She never heard "no" when she was crawling around on the floor, so she never learned to put the brakes on herself.

It's kind of interesting how that happened. Her mother had been treated very roughly when she was a little girl, so she didn't want to do that to her daughter. She never told her daughter, "No," because she was reacting inappropriately to her own upbringing.

Now, if she *hadn't* have had a conscience, then she would have been in a much more serious condition, because most of those diagnoses I mentioned – you know, those two personality disorders – anti-social and narcissitic – are *very* hard to deal with.

I think we've all met, though rarely, heartless people, who don't care if they hurt other people. They come in all shapes and sizes. But guilt can be pathological, too – or damaging.

There's a woman I know, who was telling me recently about her niece. Her niece thought it was okay to lie, cheat or steal to get what she wanted, and had done so all her life. They had known her since she was an infant, and they saw this tendency in her when she was three years old. Now she's in her, I think, mid-twenties. She's always felt as though everybody else was against her, and always asked others to take care of her, and to give her things that she hadn't earned, and saw no need to repay her debts, was a master at running up credit cards and evading the bill collectors, and all of those things, always manages to stay in a new car and somehow never has to pay for it – and has had many cars repossessed in the middle of the night and finds a way to go out and get another one. She told me that she'd never seen her help anybody except when she was being manipulative to try to get something out of them. She'd never seen anything wrong with any of it. She just thought that was a great way to be – that she deserved all the things she got and so did the other people – that they deserved to be ripped off and taken advantage of.

Lack of guilt is a sickness. Can you imagine what is in store for a person like that? Those people wind up in prison. And if not in prison, then alone. Because people won't put up with it for long. So there's quite a lot about that kind of person in the Bible actually – the wicked.

But then there's another category of people who *have* a conscience, but keep going contrary to it. Let's look in 1 Timothy 4, verse 1.

**1 Tim. 4:1** – *But the spirit explicitly says that in the latter times, some shall fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars, seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and believe and know the truth.* So, it's possible to do things wrong to the point that our conscience just becomes numb to it. We don't hear it anymore.

Politicians, it seems to me, are in danger of this. You know, they'll spin a story, and alter the truth so as to make it more like what they'd like it to be, and then they tell it so much that after awhile, they don't even remember that it's a lie. I think about the *No Spin Zone* on Fox News. I'm not sure that he's able to go without spinning himself, but that's a reaction to how much people do this in politics. We can think about most of the people who have run for office, in the last fifteen years, have had things in their background that were not to their credit, and so they spin some kind of story about how it was actually a good thing.

But if we continue to do wrong, after awhile, our conscience becomes muted and we give in to it. We're creating anxiety and all those feelings have to be repressed, which is very unhealthy for us.

We had a sixteen-year-old in our clinic who had been in a gang. And he'd done a lot of bad things to people, even to people he'd cared for. When I first heard him talking about this, I thought, "Yeah, yeah, this kid doesn't look this bad to me." But he told me, after I had been talking to him for awhile, that one weekend he was feeling better because he was on medication, and he went out with some of his old friends. So there were these four boys in this car, and these three guys talked him into going and meeting some of their new friends. Well, they were all gang-bangers. And while he was at their house – and they were all drinking beer – they decided they were going to go kill somebody to get revenge for something that had been done to their gang. And he was afraid to say, "I don't want to go with you," for fear that they would kill him. He finally convinced his friend to drop him by his friend's house on the way to kill this guy. From there he called his mother and she came and got him. And his three friends went on minus him. Well, those guys are all in jail right now because of what they did. I don't know what they did, but I know that they were all picked up by the police and put in jail.

When he was talking about all this stuff, he was not kidding. It was pretty serious stuff he was into. He had done a lot of bad things to people, even to people he'd cared for. He felt *extremely* guilty, but he kept on doing it. And he became so anxious he started having panic attacks. He couldn't go out of his house for fear he'd have one. And he started to lose the ability to stay connected to reality. I would ask him about things that he was talking to me about – "When did that happen?" – and he didn't know. He would, a lot of times, say, "I'm not even sure it happened." I mean, he was losing it. He was overcome by night terrors. His personality was splitting – hearing voices in his head. You know,

there was the good one of him, and then there was the other one – that he kept talking about – how he had to pacify this bad one. What it reminded me of was what God told ancient Israel. He said that if they would obey His law – which would give you a clean conscience, right? – then they would be blessed, and if they *disobeyed*, they would be cursed. And do you know what one of the curses was? It was *madness*. When your personality starts to split, you can't tell the difference between truth and fiction. That's madness. That's where he was.

So, what I do a lot of times, in mental health and in ministry, is help people line up their behavior with their conscience so that they don't feel so anxious. Isn't that interesting? And just because I'm a minister doesn't mean that only ministers that are therapists do that. All the therapists I know are in that business. We try to reduce people's anxiety by getting them to live congruently with their conscience.

Now, there's another thing that we have to think about here, too. Sometimes, people feel guilty when they haven't done anything wrong. In fact, that's a big thing in our society. I'm not talking about when I was a kid and felt guilty for going to church on the wrong day. That was just a conscience education issue. Right? My conscience was working. But I'm talking about the kind of guilt that some people feel when they feel guilty, even though their conscience tells them they're not doing anything wrong.

I was talking to a friend a few weeks ago, who said, "I'm just starting to read the Bible, and it seems to go contrary to the things I learned in therapy that have been so helpful to me." And I asked her, "What things?" And she said, "I'm learning that we should love people, but my therapist always told me that I'm too nice a person, and I don't stand up for myself enough. And I learned that I'm an enabler." And I said, "Why don't you give me an example of something that you're struggling with right now, and I'll show you what you've learned in therapy and what you're learning in the Bible actually fit together." She said, "Well, my brother called me up the other day. He's coming to visit and we're trying to have some things lined up for him when he comes so it will be a good visit for him, because we've been estranged for quite a number of years. And he got all upset when I told him what we'd planned. He used the "F" word about fifty times while he was yelling at me over the phone." And she said, "I know I should love him, but I just don't want him around my family if he's going to talk that way." So I said, "So you feel guilty if he comes over and your kids hear all the filthy talk, and yet you also feel guilty for not loving your brother because you don't want him to be in your house." She said, "That's right." Have you ever heard people say things like that – you know, no matter which way they go they're going to feel guilty about it? So what I said to her was, "Do you remember where Jesus said that we should love others as we love ourselves?" And she remembered that. And I said, "So actually the core of loving other people – the foundation of that – is taking care of yourself first. If you don't take care of yourself, after awhile you're not going to be able to take care of anybody else. Right?" She understood that. We have to take care of others, but we also have to take care of ourselves. Right? Right. Okay. So I said, "God says that He hates it when people use crude language.



Right?” She said, “Yeah.” I don’t think she knew where it said that, but it does. And I said, “And you can’t control your brother most of the time. You know, he’s off using the ‘F’ word whenever he wants to – when he’s not around you – and you can’t do a thing about it. But when he comes to *your* house, you *can*! It’s your house. You have an obligation to protect your children first – and also to not have to listen to that yourself. And you have every right to say, ‘You can’t talk like that here.’” And I said, “Do you remember in the Old Testament where God told the Israelites to keep the seventh day holy?” And she said she remembered that. And I said, “Did you know that they were not to let anybody in their household – even foreigners that didn’t keep the Sabbath...that they had to keep it when they were in their house? It’s the same thing. So when you won’t let your brother break the law of God in your home, you are actually taking *care* of him – even if he doesn’t know it. When he’s there and he’s not using all that bad language, he’s not offending God, is he?” So she really is taking care of him, even if he doesn’t know that.

So sometimes we really do have to choose who to take care of, and usually, if something is bad for one, it also affects everyone else in a negative way. So sometimes we have to be the first person to take the bull by the horns. In her case, I think she’s probably the first person in her family that has brought her brother’s bad habit to his attention. So, who knows where that will go? It will be good for her family and it’s going to be good for him while he’s there, but maybe he’ll start noticing how good it is to go without that for a while. You just don’t know.

So I said, “Your therapist is actually teaching you to stand up for what you think is right, when in the past, you allowed things that were wrong in order to please everybody else.” So she understood from that there was really no conflict between what she’d learned in therapy about standing up for herself and what God tells us about loving others. You know, what’s good for one is good for the other. It’s almost always like that.

The next question is, how did she get that way? How did she become an enabler – somebody who allowed herself to be taken advantage of for the sake of acceptance? It has to do with our childhood when that happens to us – in her case, what she learned from her family.

You may recall that we did a series some time ago on *Spiritual Growth and Human Development*. And in that series we showed that humans develop in stages. One stage in which we began to develop a conscience, and consequently feel guilty, was called *initiative versus guilt*. And that happens, roughly, between four and six years old. It’s the tension that goes between industry and guilty. Parents of small children might say that they start feeling guilty earlier than that, but actually what they’re feeling, in most cases, is shame. And we’ll talk more about that later.

So, here’s how it works. There’s this man, named Erickson, who first came up with this whole idea. And he used a term from embryology to explain what he was talking about.

He used the term *epigenesis*. It's a principle that says that development occurs in sequential, clearly defined stages, just like embryos do. And that each stage must occur satisfactorily before a person can become well-adjusted as an adult. So, as children approach the end of their third year, they develop motor skills so they can get around and do things, and they have more intellectual capabilities than they had when they were two. They can start to think a bit more abstractly. They begin to develop a moral compass at that time. And, if they're allowed freedom to explore their environment, and, if they are allowed to have intellectual curiosity – if that's encouraged – then that *initiative* side of that equation is reinforced. They learn to become creative, and exploratory, and they go out and conquer the world. But if toddlers are made to feel inadequate about their behavior or their interests, they start to emerge from this stage feeling guilty about their self-initiative. And that's just not something that well-adjusted people feel guilty about, is it?

Her initiative to tell her brother that he couldn't talk that way in her house was stunted in her somehow as a child. She knew what she needed to do, but she felt guilty for doing it – probably because she was over controlled as a small child. You think, “Well, is that the only time when we're affected by these issues?” Well, no. All that comes back around later. We have to keep reprocessing as we develop more capability mentally.

I was talking to a little girl some time ago that I was seeing. When I first started working with her she was in the fourth grade. It wasn't the reason she came in, but she had no friends at school. She was a very sad child. As I got to know her better, I learned that her mother and father had divorced because her father had an affair with their minister's daughter. I mean, this guy was a real “wing nut.” I mean it was one of the biggest churches in town. If I called the name up, you'd all know which church I was talking about. Her mother went to church, but she didn't seem to know what was appropriate either. She would come dressed in some of the most outrageous clothing – and real tacky. She'd been promiscuous all her life. After working with this little girl for almost a year – she had progressed into the fifth grade and she was starting to get a lot happier and more outgoing, in spite of the family stuff that was going on around her – and, because she was more outgoing and really, really a pretty girl, she was making friends and started becoming more popular. One day she did a sand tray about the kids at school – the girls at school. She chose a figure for herself that was very conventional. I think she had a dress on. She had long hair and all that. For the other girls, she chose figures of women who were in bathing suits, or had low-cut dresses on, short pants – stuff like that that showed a lot of skin. It was hard for her to find enough of the right kind of figures to get the point across. But she told a story about a girl who wanted to dress stylishly, but modestly. And she even used that word – *modest*. I think she probably heard that at church, because she sure probably never heard it from her mother. I was watching this take place, and right before me was this little girl, who had no parental role models of sexual morality, and no role model for appropriate dress...she's processing what she's going to be like as a

female in society. Would she be modest? Or would she be like her mother and some of the many girlfriends that were at school?

Some people think that kids are just carnal little creatures – you know, rotten to the core. But I've just seen too much. They *are* spiritual beings. How did that little girl come to that decision? With the kind of background she had? I think, probably, she learned some of that at church. But while I was watching her, it struck me that, while she was dressing stylishly, she wasn't dressed like so many of the other little girls I'd seen when I was working at public school. It starts really early these days! And they know all about the birds and the bees – from the third grade on – a lot of them! Even though she had a terrible role model, she had achieved a modern, yet modest, look. She was always appropriately dressed. Everything matched up. She always looked good. And yet she wasn't, in any way, inappropriate. I don't see her anymore – I'm sure that issue is going to come around again for her as she gets older and has more brain power to process it – so I don't know where she's ultimately going to go with that, but it was so inspiring to see her working her way toward a healthy view of herself and having a well-educated conscience – free of guilt about what she thought was the right thing to do.

Now that we've covered the bases on what appropriate and inappropriate, and healthy and unhealthy guilt is, let's talk about something related to this festival. How should a Christian feel about the things that they have done wrong in the past? Should we feel guilty? Or should our consciences be clean, even though we done things against it?

Let's go to Hebrews 9, and verse 11. I think, maybe, we read right over this sometimes.

**Heb. 9:11** – *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of good things to come, He entered through the great and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands – that is to say, not of this creation – and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled those who have been defiled, sanctified to the cleansing of the flesh, how much more would the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

We've all got plenty of skeletons in our closets, but we have been washed clean and our *conscience* can be clean, too. We don't have to feel guilty about our past. Now, what does that mean? Well, Paul said – and here's the man writing this – that he was the biggest sinner in all the church. He had not forgotten the wrongs that he had done in the past – persecuting the church in a very harmful way. So it's not necessarily that we forget. So what did he mean?

Well, let's go to Philippians 3 and take another look at what he said. He said:

**Philp. 3:12** – *Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Jesus Christ. If anybody could say that Jesus Christ laid hold of him, I guess Paul would be the one, wouldn't he? Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do – forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead – I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

So, what I'm thinking is, maybe he meant that he had to let go of the bad things he'd done in the past, and not think about those – not dwell on those things – but focus on the things that God wanted him to do *now*. You know, you can't unring a bell. God does not erase all the things that we've done wrong out of our memory banks. They're still there. We can stop dwelling on all those things, knowing that they are covered by Christ's blood, and that we can go forward to do what God wants us to do.

**1 Pt. 3:18** – *For Christ also died for sins once for all – the just for the unjust – in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.*

Then in verse 21:

**V-21** – *And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

We can appeal to God for a good conscience. And Jesus Christ is appealing to God for us for a good conscience. And we can forget those things that are past, because they're history, and it's all washed away and we can go forward.

So we see that if we feel guilty over things we've done, we can go to God and appeal to Him for a clear conscience. And we see that God has offered us a way to get away from the anxiety that comes from our past sins – a way that we can be spiritually healthy – and emotionally healthy, as well. We don't have to be hindered by our past. We don't have to repress and feel anxiety because of it. And that's because we're free in Jesus Christ from the curse of the law, as Paul said – not free from following the law, for that's what our conscience tells us to do, doesn't it?

When we start to really look into the Bible and see what it says, and we know that the law *is* our moral compass that our conscience works off of, how foolish to think that we could do away with the law! That would be like saying we don't have a conscience anymore! Crazy! Madness! But we're free from the *penalty*, which is a guilty conscience and which is death.

Let's look at a promise from God in Hebrews 10:22 to kind of close out here.

**Heb. 10:22** – *Let us draw near with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering – for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

Once we accept Christ’s forgiveness for our sins, we have a clean conscience. And that opens the door to all kinds of good things for us – no barrier between us and God anymore. No little voice saying, “You’re not good enough.”

And we can come to church and feel good, too. It feels good to come to church when we’ve been cleaned up. And when we come to church, what does that do? Well, it encourages all the other people that see us there. So we can be free to take care of others in this way. You know, every time we come to church, we’re encouraging other people. That’s a good thing. We’re taking care of them. And that opens the door to closeness with others, as well as with God. We have clean consciences now.