

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit --‘When Feeling Guilty is Good’

Today guilt is often spoken about as: 1) Something that is inherently bad; and 2) Something we should get rid of. While the second statement is certainly true, the first isn't *always* true. Sometimes feeling guilty is good -- like when we *are guilty* and need to confess our sins *in order to get rid of them*¹. You may have personally experienced the pain and frustration of someone's stubborn refusal to admit that they've done anything wrong. Therefore, it's important to consider how God must feel when people won't acknowledge their sins. Like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable (Luke 18:9 – 14), many people remain guilty before God because they can't see beneath the façade of their own self-righteousness. But like the tax collector in this same parable, Christians have been made right with God *because we have confessed our sins and received Christ's forgiveness*. Therefore we should be thankful that one of the first (and ongoing) supernatural works of the Holy Spirit is enabling us to see that we need Christ's forgiveness. With this in mind, reflect on the verses and questions below.

[Jesus said] *“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...”* (Jn 16:7 – 8)

- Why is it to our advantage that Jesus went away and sent the Spirit to do this work?

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19 – 21)

- Why do these destructive and sinful life-patterns disqualify those who insist on living in these ways from inheriting God's kingdom?

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other...” (Gal 5:16 – 17. Also see Romans 7:19 – 8:2)

- Why is the spiritual conflict that the Holy Spirit introduces into our lives so vital?

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:24 – 25)

- The Holy Spirit's conviction is not something that only happens when a person first becomes a Christian. It is also an ongoing work in us. What does it mean to crucify our sinful nature and keep in step with the Holy Spirit? (Also see Luke 9:23)²

¹ This 'good guilt' can be compared to the physical symptoms of an illness that, while uncomfortable, let us know that something is wrong.

² Biblical scholar John Stott compares Paul's (and Jesus') spiritual symbolism of crucifying our sinful nature with physical crucifixion: Both types of crucifixion are slow and painful, and yet our sin must die and not be shown leniency (BST 'The Message of Galatians'. IVP: 1968. Pages 150 – 152)