

Guilt.

Guilt is a universal problem. It's also a spiritual problem. Paul Tournier said, "Guilt is present universally in the human soul, and we cannot deal with guilt without dealing with the religious questions it poses". In other words, guilt can't be understood apart from man's relationship to God his creator. The experience of guilt and release from it depends on this understanding. The Bible helps us to do this. Guilt, in the Bible, is a position before God before it's a feeling. Feelings arise out of the condition. Every person born into this world is guilty before God. God declares everyone in Adam guilty. We've all inherited Adams fallen nature. We are in Adam positionally. Romans chapter 5 verse 19 tells us, "Through the disobedience of one man many were made sinners". Before we trusted Christ as our Saviour we behaved like Adam and we disobeyed God. We read in James chapter 2 verse 10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point is guilty of breaking all of it". God's standard is perfect obedience. We haven't given that to him so we stand guilty before him.

What brings about the inner feeling of guilt? It's the result of the work of conscience. Conscience is that part of man that's on God's side. George Swinnock described it as, "the deputy deity in the little world man". Conscience condemns the bad things we do and commends the good we do. It functions in that way because we're made in the image of God and reflect his moral standards and nature. Paul explains this in Romans chapter 2 verse 15. He says of the Gentiles, "Even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them". It was this fact that resulted in the Christian conversion of C.S.Lewis. He wondered why it was he felt good or bad according to what he did. He came across the moral character of God and studied the Ten Commandments. He noticed that when he did good and felt good it was when he acted according to God's moral character. When he did bad and felt bad it was when he acted against God's moral character. This convinced him that he was really and truly made in God's image.

Maybe you're looking for relief from an accusing conscience. Many people

are. There are two ways to find relief. Some choose to silence the voice of conscience. The Bible calls this a seared conscience. We read in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 2, “..Whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron”. By constantly arguing with your conscience, stifling it’s warnings and muffling its bell you will arrive at the point where conscience no longer bothers you. The beneficial voice of the conscience is suppressed and ceases to function. This is the soul damning way to respond to conscience. But there’s another way. C.S.Lewis decided to find out why his conscience worked as it did and as a result he found Jesus Christ as his Saviour. You see, when you trust Jesus Christ as your saviour you move out of your position in Adam guilty and condemned. You move to a new position in Christ guiltless and free. In other words, you move from a position of guilt to guiltlessness before God. For the Christian, guiltlessness is a position before it’s a feeling too. We read in Romans chapter 8 verse 1, “Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”. How does this happen? First you must ask God’s forgiveness for your sin. You’ve fallen short of God’s standard by failing to obey his Law. You then accept his provision of salvation in Jesus. You repent of your sin. This means you tell God how sorry you are for it. You then place faith in Jesus Christ as your only hope for salvation, and welcome him as your saviour and Lord. That’s how the Christian life begins. At that moment God becomes two things to you. He becomes, as it were, a tailor and a judge. As your tailor he gives you new clothes. He clothes you with Christ’s righteousness. You have no righteousness of your own to offer God. Remember, you’ve fallen short of God’s standard. Imagine that I place £10,000 into your bank account. You’ve not earned it. You may not have deserved it, but I’ve given it to you freely. That’s what God does when you trust Christ for salvation. You didn’t earn it because you have no righteousness of your own acceptable to God. You certainly didn’t deserve it because of your disobedience. God takes the perfect righteousness of Jesus and clothes you with it. He does that freely because of his mercy and grace toward you. After that he sees you in Christ standing holy and acceptable to him. As your judge God declares you forgiven and therefore guiltless before his sight. The Bible calls this Justification. We read in Romans chapter 5 verse 1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Jesus took your guilt and shame on the cross. He was punished in your place. When you receive Jesus as your saviour, God turns his anger away from you. When you’re clothed with Christ’s righteousness and

justified in Christ you are in the rock of ages. You're safe, and you're freed from Guilt toward God. That's a real blessing!

But what about the feeling of guilt that troubles you from time to time after you've trusted Christ for salvation? God always requires an honest admission of sin. We read in 1 John chapter 1 verse 9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". God is faithful because he will keep to his agreement that whoever comes to him will find forgiveness. He is just because he has punished your sin in Jesus Christ on the cross so he won't punish you again for it. Providing you've confessed and forsaken your sin, you don't need to carry the feeling of guilt around with you any longer. Whenever you're inclined to feel guilty as you remember your past sins say to yourself, "I'm in Jesus Christ! His righteousness is my righteousness! God no longer sees me as guilty and condemned! I'm justified and acquitted by God from every crime against his holiness! Who can lay a charge against God's elect!". The answer to guilt is to believe the promise that he has forgiven you on the grounds of your repentance and confession. When you do that then the feeling of guilt is replaced with the feeling of peace and joy. Through faith in his promise you'll experience the peace of God that passes all understanding. In Adam there's guilt and condemnation. In Christ you are free and guiltless. The feeling of joy will arise in your soul when you believe what God's word says about your new standing before him in Jesus Christ.

I love the words of the hymn by Nicolaus Zinzendorf. Let me quote them to you as we finish:

"Jesus thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through thee I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame".