

**March 22, 2009**  
**Riverside Covenant Church**  
**Daniel S. Teefey**  
**Hebrews 10: 1-18 – Not Guilty**

I am always telling you that I believe it is important that we are real and authentic before God and each other. Well, to hold up my end of the bargain, I want to tell you about a mistake I made.

When I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, one of the prettiest girls in my class at St. Mary School was a girl named Jennifer. I wasn't really sure what pretty was at that age, but I just knew that I would be real cool if she thought I was really cool. So, myself and the other guys in my class spent most of our free time trying to show her how cool we were. We said cool things around her and demonstrated our remarkable 4<sup>th</sup> grade feats of strength in various ways.

One day in P.E. during a game of dodge ball (back in the day when you could still play dodge ball in school with balls that left marks) I was convinced that I could demonstrate my coolness through the ferocity of my dodge ball throws. Every chance I had I grabbed a ball, wound up and fired at human targets. Sure I aimed for the legs or at least the body, but on that day the balls were floating towards heads . . . and for that matter targets I was not necessarily aiming for. As I wound up for one particularly forceful demonstration of my manhood (which wasn't much given my current stature), I could feel a power burst coming and I let it go. I watched in amazement as the ball screamed off of my hand, but then watched in horror as it floated in slow motion towards the face of Jennifer. There was nothing I could do but hope that she had some how saved, thus far unseen, catlike reflexes for a moment like this. Nope. Direct hit. The ball slammed into her face and down she went. I immediately turned around, as if to say, who did *that*? Not very effective in a class of 12. It was obvious. I could see the cool points I had worked so hard to accumulate being cried away on Jennifer's face. Immediately, my stomach tightened and I wanted to crawl up into a ball and hide. I felt an overwhelming sense of regret. All of a sudden, the urge to be cool seemed so vain and silly. I had acted recklessly without regard for the possible consequences and now my conscience was telling me that I had done something wrong. I tried to pretend there was a way out, but it was obvious.

There was nothing that could make me feel better other than to simply go up to Jennifer and tell her how sorry I was . . . and I really was sorry. I regretted what I had done, but I also desired to make our

relationship right again. And it wasn't even because she was the cutest girl in class anymore, it was because I wanted her forgiveness.

This guilt is what I want to talk about this morning. **Guilt affects us nearly all the time.** We feel guilty when we do something we shouldn't. We feel guilty when we have thoughts that we shouldn't. But we also feel guilty for lots and lots of other things too. A teacher feels guilty when a student doesn't understand a subject they are teaching. A builder feels guilty when something doesn't work when a construction project is done. A child feels guilty when they don't tell their parents the whole truth. Parents feel guilty when their children misbehave. We all feel guilty about various things all the time.

This past week Dana **and I went shopping for some groceries** and as we entered the store a couple people were outside asking for donations for the American Red Cross. I honestly had no cash in my pocket and only had my debit card. I simply said I am sorry, but thank you for raising money for a good cause. And as we walked into the store I felt an enormous sense of guilt.

Guilt surrounds us. And it compounds. That story I told you about my 4<sup>th</sup> grade dodge ball game happened 20 years ago and I can still remember the guilt I felt.

I felt guilty for a long time about an incident that happened a couple years after that too. **My brother and I and our neighbor were sitting outside our house throwing rocks into the street.** Pretty harmless, we weren't trying to hit cars or anything, just trying to hit the street. Well after about 5 minutes the game (remember I am from a very small town and we had to entertain ourselves) the game went from hit the street with rocks, to hit the neighbors driveway with rocks, to hit the neighbors porch with rocks, to see how close you could get to the neighbors window without hitting it. Brilliant idea! Sure enough my neighbor hit the window and we ran. The lady that lived in the house came out and we told her a car drove by and must have thrown a rock. I apologized years later when I was in high school. She did not even remember the incident but it had compounded to such an extent in my heart that I could never forget hit. **Guilt compounds.** And it is worse when we do nothing about it. So we feel guilty about our mistake and then we feel guiltier that we never admitted to it or told anyone. We carry a double burden of guilt.

**There are two types of guilt that we experience in our lives: false guilt and true guilt.**

Often we feel guilty about something because we should. **If I walk over and for no reason punch [you]** in the face, you would say there is something wrong with me if I did not feel guilty for it. I should feel guilty because I have done something wrong. If I throw rocks at my neighbor's window or if I throw a dodge ball at someone's face . . . I should feel guilty . . . that is true guilt.

**From the beginning of the world, true guilt has accompanied sin.** It is God's way of letting us know we have fallen short and compelling us to repent. The first sin ever was accompanied by guilt. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve are in the garden and they do the one thing God asked them not to do, we find that their immediate response is one of shame and guilt. The Bible says that after they ate the fruit they were not supposed to, they became self-conscious, they recognized their nakedness and covered themselves . . . and then they went and hid. That is guilt at work. That is true guilt . . . guilt that responds to doing something wrong.

**False guilt is something entirely different.** If I walked into our building today and there was only one donut hole left and I ate it and I felt guilty, that is false guilt. If I went to the grocery store without cash and there were folks outside raising money and I didn't give, I shouldn't feel guilty. I did not do anything wrong. That is false guilt. That is not guilt that is caused by sin, but guilt that is caused by our own insecurities.

False guilt has no basis in an actual sin. In Christianity we come up with all sorts of sources for false guilt. I have heard people apologize for missing our worship service because someone in their family died or because they were sick. That is false guilt. I still feel guilty when I place another book on top of the Bible on my desk. That is false guilt. I committed no sin, but still feel guilty.

**We are going to primarily discuss true guilt this morning** because false guilt stems from a misunderstanding of what God wants from us. False guilt elevates a social taboo or some other unbiblical rule to an authoritative place in our lives. It says that putting other books on the Bible is wrong, or that Christians are never supposed to be sad . . . without any basis in the Bible or God's sense of right and wrong. False guilt arises when we make up our own rules about stuff. It is not beneficial to us.

True guilt is beneficial to us though and stems from our failing to live up to God's standards for us. If sin is falling short of God's ideals for us. True guilt is the real emotion/result of falling short. And everyone

feels it regardless of whether they believe in God or not. Now we can and often do rationalize our way out of guilt and over time suppress the feeling of it, but it does not change the fact that guilt is a universal and basic human response to not doing what God would desire from us.

In Hebrews 10, the author wants to help us understand that while we may experience guilt, for those that are in Christ, **we do not have to feel guilty forever.** In fact, if we still feel guilty after we have repented of our sins, we deny God's power to forgive and Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Hebrews 10 begins with reference to the fact that under the Old Testament law, **the Israelites and the priests had to come again and again with various sacrifices** to demonstrate that they were sorry for their sins. Their sacrifices demonstrated the severity of their sin and the level of their repentance . . . but they always had to return again and again because they were always sinning more. Their conscience was always riddled with the guilt of their sin and they would return to the temple for more sacrifices.

This is an important point that I am not sure I have made clear enough as we have studied Hebrews. A few weeks ago we discussed the odd nature of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament. It is important that you understand that **sacrifices in the Old Testament were not made to make God happy.** There were not made to appease an angry God. There were many pagan religions at the time that practiced sacrifice and other things to appease their gods or to make them happy, but this was not the point of sacrifice in the Old Testament.

**The point of Old Testament sacrifice was for the Israelites to recognize the gravity of their sins.** Last week we pointed out that sin leads to death, separation from God. Israelites understood the life of animals to reside in their blood and thus when an animal was sacrificed and its blood was spread on the altar, it was a real and grave expression of the consequences of their sins. And based upon their repentant hearts God would forgive them, but then they would sin again and again and sure enough they would be back at the temple with more sacrifices. The law, all 613 of them, were given to God's people so that they could see how desperately far they fall short from God's standards. The sacrifices helped them to see the consequences of their disobedience. Their repentant hearts brought them to the altar, and God forgave them.

But again, this was only a temporary fix . . . there was only so much the Israelites could do on their own. And each year they returned to the temple again and had to make the decision to either repent of their sins with sacrifice or die with them. As the author of Hebrews tells us the blood of bulls and goats, the lives of the bulls and goats, simply did not have the power to remove their sins permanently.

The author of Hebrews began this chapter by saying that, **“the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves.”** In the law system the Israelites were getting just a glimpse of what was to come later when God became a sacrifice himself in Jesus.

Verses 6-9 are in reference to Psalm 40 in the Old Testament. They say, **“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.**

**Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.'"**

**First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made).**

**Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will."**

**He sets aside the first to establish the second."**

The point of the Old Testament laws was not God’s fun. God was not sitting up in heaven dreaming up silly ways to get humans to do weird things. God wanted obedience. He wanted his people, the Israelites to do what would be most beneficial to them . . . **he wanted them to simply follow the rules he had laid out for the proper ordering of their lives.** But God did not just want them to go through the motions, he wanted them to be obedient and he wanted them to see the magnitude of their disobedience. The real sacrifice to God was not the Israelites legalistically following the ritual because it made them feel better about themselves, the real sacrifice was the giving of their lives over to God and God’s law in obedience.

That is why in verse 9 and 10 we find what Jesus did as a contrast to the old way. It says,

**“Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second.**

**And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”**

The Israelites were called to be obedient to God and always failed. But **Jesus comes to do God’s will and to do it perfectly.** The Israelites sacrificed animals and other things to demonstrate their obedience to

God, but it was always imperfect obedience because by the time they walked down the street from the temple they were sinning again and needed another sacrifice. But Jesus never sinned and he did not sacrifice the best of the stuff he had, but he sacrificed himself, his own life. His sacrifice was the absolute perfect demonstration of obedience to God.

**God came down to earth, put on our skin, walked on the very ground we walk on, strapped our sins to his back and died with them.**

The author of Hebrews is telling us that no longer do we have to suffer the consequences of our sins. No longer do we have to endure the pain that comes with being separated from God . . . the pain and separation of guilt. In verses 11 and 12 the author is saying no longer do the priests of the Old Testament have to sacrifice animal after animal for our repentance . . . Jesus, the highest of all high priests, sacrificed himself . . . and he doesn't have to do it again. Verse 12 says that Jesus **"sat down at the right hand of God."** It is done. While the priests stood and performed sacrifice after sacrifice, Jesus sat down. It is finished. That which separated us from God, our sin, is now gone. We have access to God through Jesus Christ forever. (sacrifice was pass to get through the sanctuary . . . Jesus is our eternal pass into the presence of God)

The author of Hebrews concludes with,

**"Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool,  
because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**

**The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:**

**"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."**

**Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."**

**And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin."**

We have been made perfect through Jesus Christ's sacrifice of himself. He took every sin we have and walked into death with them. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to. And because he was the only one who could come out the other side alive. And the author of Hebrews tells us that God's law is no longer on the books, but in our hearts and minds. In relationship with God, God's standards will be revealed to us.

And perhaps the most powerful part of it all, our “sins and lawless acts [he] will remember no more.”

**Our guilt is designed to compel us towards repentance**, but when we repent it is designed to disappear. Our guilt is designed to lead us towards telling God that we recognize we have made a mistake and that we desire to be forgiven for it. We desire to be obedient to God and recognize the magnitude of our mistake. And we don't remain guilty, because if we truly confessed our sin, not out of a formality, but because we are truly repentant . . . it is forgiven. It is gone. Remember, Jesus strapped it on his back and destroyed it.

**If we still feel guilty about something . . . it is because of one of two reasons.** Either you have not really repented . . . you have not really confessed the sin to God, taken credit for it, recognized its magnitude and given it to God . . . or you simply don't understand what Jesus did when he bore your sins for you. You don't understand that you don't have to bear their weight any longer . . . yes, you might have to face some consequences of your actions here on earth . . . but in God's eyes . . . that sin is gone, forgiven . . . forgotten.

Guilt is God's way of letting us know when we have fallen short of his standards for us. It lets us know of that part of the human condition that separates us from God . . . but it also points us towards the cure. We do not have to feel guilty any more. 1 John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**

I want to end this morning by reading you a story, it is kind of long, but I think it helps us grasp the significance of the sacrifice that God made on our behalf. This is why you can be free from guilt. This is love. This is what God did for you.

References consulted:

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