



# SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

## WHEN WE FEEL GUILTY

KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 43:25 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: John 3:16 | Acts 16:31 | Romans 8:1; 10:9, 13 | 1 John 1:9

### ► SUMMARY

#### Guilt is a powerful emotion.

It can leave people feeling depressed, ashamed, and rejected. They may feel isolated and unworthy of love. Many desperately try to prove they are good enough. Feelings stemming from false guilt can even cause people to feel burdened by impossible standards. The emotion can keep them away from a close relationship with the Lord and hinder their peace and productivity. Thank God that He has provided a way for us to find freedom from guilt.

### ► SERMON POINTS

The Lord graciously forgives us because of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross. There is no need for a believer to feel trapped in shame. Isaiah recorded that God forgives us so completely, it's as if He forgets our sins ever happened: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (43:25).

#### Why do people feel guilty?

##### ■ A wrong view of God

Many people develop their view of the Lord from observing their earthly father. If their dad is harsh or distant, they imagine their heavenly Father is that way, too. They steer clear of God or attempt to win His approval by keeping certain standards.

The church is another place where people develop a wrong view of the Lord. Some congregations focus more on rules than on developing a relationship with God based on grace. They may even go so far as to call

anything that is fun, "sin." Either way, people can be left with the sense that they are guilty, although they aren't quite sure what they did wrong. Or they may feel constant blame over their inability to perform perfectly to win God's approval.

In this view, the Lord is like a cosmic scorekeeper, tracking good and bad actions. On judgment day, every choice will be tallied to see who gets into heaven. This perspective rightly acknowledges the Father as a righteous judge, but fails to note He extends mercy to His children. The truth is that God is loving, ever-present, and made a way for us to be with Him forever in heaven through faith, rather than good deeds.

##### ■ The missing message of grace

Many people proclaiming the gospel will say salvation is by grace, but they preach that lives should change beforehand. However, a person doesn't get saved by cleaning up his or her life. Instead, repentance is a result of a changed heart after salvation.

Faith in Jesus makes it possible for an individual to be forgiven. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). We are saved through faith in Him alone (Rom. 10:9, 13; John 3:16).

If repentance must come first, then people must give up sinful habits as a prerequisite to salvation. This is backward. Only after we have invited Christ into our lives do we have the power to set aside worldly choices. Often, we no longer even enjoy the worldly things we once loved. Rather than cleaning up our lives to be acceptable to the Father, we are changing due to a love for Him and His ways.

## ■ Not knowing how to deal with sin

The Bible tells us to confess our sins to God. Remember, believers can never be under condemnation; we are already forgiven because of what Jesus did at Calvary (Rom. 8:1). However, confession releases us from a sense of estrangement from God. It is designed to clear us of feelings of guilt. (See 1 John 1:9).

This doesn't mean we won't experience the consequences of sin. What we sow, we will reap. For example, even though God forgave Adam and Eve, they lost their perfect fellowship with Him because of disobedience.

Don't think you have to grovel before God to try to convince Him to forgive you. Remember the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son? He ran to meet his rebellious son. That's the image of God we should have when we come asking for mercy. Confess your sin, thank Him for His forgiveness, and move on.

## ■ Can't let go of the past

Unfortunately, it's common for some people to feel guilty after they have confessed sins from their past. They may repetitively seek forgiveness—sometimes even daily—yet still feel shame.

The blood of Christ made us righteous, so even if our actions are not, our spirits are righteous in Christ. This truth has nothing to do with how good we are, but with the grace and mercy of God. Isaiah 43:25 expresses that He forgives so completely that it's as if He doesn't remember our sin. If God is no longer counting it against us, who are we to say we are still guilty?

If you struggle with persistent shame over your past, pray, "Father, You promised to remember my sins no more. Thank You. By faith, I release all of my past. It's washed clean by the blood of Jesus. Thank You that I am pure and holy in Your sight, not because of what I am, but because of who You are."

## ■ Can't distinguish between mistakes and sin

Sin is a deliberate, willful act done in rebellion to God. It's a decision we make, knowing it is morally wrong. A mistake, by contrast, happens in the spur of the moment. All of us have made slip-ups; choices made without thinking through them properly or considering the consequences.

Like sins, mistakes should be brought to the Father. Admit you made a poor choice, and thank Him for showing you the error you made. Acknowledge that you can't change what happened, and ask God to use the situation to shape you into the godly person He wants you to be. He can take all your failures and turn them into something good for His ultimate purpose.

## ■ Feel like they missed their calling

Some people struggle with guilt because they ignored God's leading many years ago. But just because an individual ignored His call in the past, doesn't mean it's too late now. The person should confess that sin, receive His forgiveness, and commit to follow Him going forward.

The Lord delights in fixing every broken place in us and giving us new beginnings. Some of His greatest witnesses are people who had made the biggest mistakes. One example is Paul, who was murdering believers before he became an apostle. He loves to redeem situations for His glory.

## ► RESPONSE

- Of the six reasons for feeling guilty, which one or ones have played the biggest role in your life? What principle(s) from the sermon struck you as most helpful for addressing your feelings?
- What might you say to someone who can't accept God's forgiveness for something they consider a "big sin" from the past?
- Do you feel guilty for decisions that really are mistakes, not sins? How does viewing those choices as errors in judgment help you move past the shame?

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