

## Crushed By Guilt

by Michael W. Lee

Recently, I have had the opportunity to observe the incredible crushing power of guilt in the lives of people that are close to me. Let me explain.

An elderly couple that I know is parents to six children. Four of the children are girls and have grown up to be decent women who are what I would call responsible citizens. They are not perfect by any means, and, unfortunately, they are all not believers in Christ, but nonetheless, they have all graduated at least four years of college, gotten married, and had children.

The two boys in the family have grown up quite differently. In fact, you could say that they have never grown up. Both attended college but never finished. Both have fathered children out of wedlock. Both have used drugs and alcohol. Both have been in trouble with the law. Both are spiritually dead. Both have broken the hearts of everyone around them who has tried to help them turnaround from their ways over the years (repentance!).

Unfortunately, these two boys, who are now 30 something and 40 something years old, have also learned how to use people and use our system of laws and government to suck the life out of everyone and every system, so they continue to live lives of wickedness. They have lied and cheated employers, the government, and health care providers. They have sued anyone they can over fake injuries and other ailments. They make up the very lowest form of our culture. And even worse, they bring illegitimate children into the world and teach them how to be just as wicked if not more so.

Have you seen this type of person in our society? I am sure you have. It is one of the clearest evidences of the ravages of sin in a nonbeliever's life. When I see it, I feel a conflation of righteous anger and compassion.

The parents of these two boys (now grown men) have lived with years of emotional torment. They feel responsible for what these boys have become

and how they leech on society. Both the mom and dad are fine people. They are solid, upstanding, loyal, generous, and kind individuals. The dad has been a Christian for many years, and the mom came to know Christ as a senior citizen. They raised and loved the boys as they did the girls, yet something apparently went wrong along the way.

Are the parents responsible for the behavior of these men? Almost certainly yes, and almost certainly no. What kind of an answer is that? Let me explain.

Almost certainly yes because God has placed parents in the position of being responsible for the teaching and training of children. We also know from the Bible that we will give an account to the Lord for both everything that we have done and the things that we should have done but didn't.

But you may object and say that you have seen even the "best" parenting produce some of the worst children, and I would say that I have observed the same. While Biblical parenting principles generally produce children that are decent, productive citizens, there are exceptions. Conversely, "horrible" parenting generally produces "horrible" children, but there are also exceptions. What, then, is the difference?

The difference is a gracious God Who sovereignly rules and overrules over the affairs of men. There are two things that are certainly clear: God has given us Biblical instructions on how to raise children, and God also has every right to bring dire consequences for failure to obey His instructions. Yet He is also gracious, and this grace has been made manifest by the simple fact that we have ANY children growing up and becoming fine adults in light of the fact that we all have "dropped the parenting ball" many times.

Back to the question: are the parents responsible for these two boys that are now men? I say almost certainly no. Am I flip-flopping? No. The fact is that these boys also must bear the responsibility for their own sins - their own decisions as they

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grew up in disobedience to God in so many areas. This is true when they are young, but it becomes absolutely true when they are old enough to leave the home and are no longer under the supervision of the parent.

However, the parents that we are talking about here in this “Perspective” are still behaving as if these two boys, now grown men, are their responsibility. They have paid for their medical bills, their lawyers, their rent and even a house for the last 10 years. They have bailed out (literally out of jail) both their sons and their “women” who have born them children. They have provided them with cars, tried to help with their addictions, bought them food, and cared for their illegitimate children. They have gone to court with them and paid for their lawyers.

Do they hate all of this? Yes. Why do they keep doing it? Guilt. They are living under the crushing weight of guilt. Guilt perverts a person’s thinking. Guilt drives a person to despair. Guilt blinds a person to truth and reality. Guilt obscures discernment. Guilt will cause a person to put their own life in jeopardy. Here are a few distortions from guilt:

Lie: I am helping them because I love them.

Truth: You may love them, but the primary motivation for helping them is that you feel responsible.

Lie: I am helping them because they are helpless.

Truth: They are not helpless. They are manipulating you, and you are enabling them to continue sinning.

Lie: We keep working on it; maybe they will change.

Truth: They will never change unless you let them hit rock bottom and they cry out to Christ for deliverance from their sins and sinful life.

Lie: I am being generous with my money.

Truth: After years of trying to help them, you are squandering God’s money and thus being a bad steward.

I know many parents that are living with the crushing weight of guilt from past parenting mistakes. I know many people who are living with the crushing weight of guilt from other things in

the past. Why is this so? How can one escape?

If you are a Christian, Believe. Believe the gospel. Believe that you have really been forgiven for your past sins and that there is no way that you can make up for them anyway. You will never be free from the crushing and perverting power of guilt until you lay hold of the fact that Christ died for ALL your sins - yes, ALL your sins. Look at these beautiful words from the book of Romans, chapter 5:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

“And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

God says that we, the sinners who could not save ourselves or impress God in any way, have peace with God because of what Christ has done on the cross. He has paid the price for ALL of our sins including bad parenting, being a crummy spouse, an unfaithful worker, a wicked gossip, a porn watcher - ALL of them. When we allow ourselves to be pummeled by guilt from past sins, we do in effect not believe the gospel.

Instead, rejoice in the reconciliation. Be set free from guilt and live and think Biblically. Don’t be afraid to tell your children about your past sins (maybe not all of them) and tell them that it is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Yes, there are consequences for past sins but there is no longer guilt if we are in Christ. Let them learn the power and beauty of what Christ has done so they too may believe on our great gospel!

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.” (Psalm 30: 11-12) ■

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