

Alfred C.W. Davis
MBA, M.Div.

Many Christians say they feel detached, numb, alone and cut off from God. They often describe their situation as feeling like being in a prison, a pit, a box or some type of bondage. When I hear these words in a person's story, along with the descriptors of shame and self-criticism, I begin to listen for the condition of "guilt" that presents itself as a lack of self-forgiveness. I define guilt as: atoning for one's own sin through self-punishment. Leanne Payne describes it in her book *The Healing Presence* as "our failure to receive forgiveness from God" - P.82.

In our culture, we are taught to be responsible and performance oriented. We learn that we need to do things to take care of ourselves. When we experience a feeling of remorse, we intuitively start to do something to deal with it in our own strength. God's solution of confession, repentance and receiving the forgiveness of the cross seems too easy. So, we use our superior intelligence to complicate the process. Knowing that we are guilty, we begin down a destructive path of self-criticism, self-judging, self-accusing, self-condemning, self-blaming, self-loathing, and self-hating. This process is a form of self-wounding that leads to confusion, fatigue, headaches, hopelessness, depression, suicide and possibly death.

In 2 Corinthians 7:10 it is described in this way, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Judas is an example of how guilt works. In Matthew 27:3-5, it says, "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse"..... "So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself". Judas could not forgive himself and his way of dealing with his worldly sorrow was to punish himself by taking his own life. This is the extreme result of guilt, but even in less extreme forms, guilt still leads to spiritual death and a separation from God. Guilt is a form of unbelief that says "The forgiveness of the Cross does not apply to me." In a distorted prideful way, guilt leads the person into a process of self-justification through self-punishment.

Godly sorrow is the conviction that I need to get on my knees and confess to God my sin and inadequacy. In 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The problem is that guilt makes us believe that we are not purified and not forgiven. After confession, many people revert back to guilt and function out of the repetitive cycle of self-criticism, self-hatred and self-punishment. But, God's plan is better. He wants us to be free of the pain and hurtful feelings so that we will sin no more. His solution is to empower us so that we will repent and change and live a more holy life. Receiving the forgiveness of the Cross is the key to living a victorious life.

How does one overcome guilt? First, be aware of how the words of guilt create a self-imposed prison. Second, work through a prayer of self-forgiveness and lay down all the self-destructive words. Third, invite Jesus into the dark place where you have been





hiding and ask Him to lead you out. Fourth, accept the truth of the forgiveness of the cross of Jesus Christ and claim the benefits of freedom for yourself. This is God's plan for you, as it says in Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

