

*When Guilt Is Good*

In the final section of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud wrote that his goal was “to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization and to show that the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt” (p.134).

In his book *The Future of an Illusion* Freud said all religion is infantile and has basically four parts: ignorance, fear, fantasy and guilt. He thought the solution to getting rid of most guilt was to get rid of the false belief in God. In other words, get rid of the lawgiver and you’ll get rid of guilt.

The truth is, we often feel guilt because we are guilty. There is a lawgiver and when we violate His laws we feel guilt. That’s not a bad thing. That’s a good thing.

Even one of the most church-hating fathers of the Enlightenment, Voltaire, to whom Christianity was an “infamy,” found the influence of faith, and of Christianity in particular, useful: “I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God because then I shall be robbed and cheated less often.”

He was saying, “Faith in God as Lawgiver leads to better behavior.”

Sometimes guilt can be a good thing.

We’re studying the life of Joseph in Genesis and in our chapter for today we’re going to see God’s purpose for Joseph coming to a climax.

For 20 years Joseph had been in Egypt facing one test after another. He faced everything from poverty to prison to riches. In each case Joseph has been victorious over temptation because he has kept God first.

God was growing Joseph for a very important task. We may not always realize it but God grows all of us. We’re unique to God. There is a unique function that only we can fulfill.

God had promised to make Joseph’s father, Jacob a great nation. A hundred years before Jacob the promise had been given to Abraham that his descendants would be

innumerable.

But right now they only numbered 70. In the land of Canaan with its hostile people and perverted religion, there was the danger that Jacob's descendants would be annihilated or eventually absorbed into the Canaanite culture.

God's plan was to send them to Egypt in order to preserve them. Under the protection of the Egyptians they would be safe there.

Very quickly there was going to arise a Pharaoh that “knew not Joseph” and the Egyptians hatred would be unleashed against the Hebrews. They would become slaves, totally isolated.

It was God's plan to take Jacob's descendants to Egypt, where they would grow into a nation of people, and at the same time keep their uniqueness as the chosen people of God.

There they'd learn about civilization and industry. Under tremendous affliction they'd be consolidated as a nation and finally would be brought out of Egypt to return to the land of Canaan. In order for God to accomplish His purpose He needed His man in Egypt. Joseph was that man.

Many years later, God needed another man to lead the nation out of Egypt, and that man was Moses. Both of these men received their training in Egypt.

Joseph received his training through 13 years of suffering, Moses received his in the palace of Pharaoh, followed by 40 years in the desert. Both were men of God, chosen for specific tasks, but faced different tests as God prepared them.

Now you and I will probably never be a Joseph or a Moses in the sense of the fame or the authority, but that doesn't mean we're unimportant.

We're important to God. God has a place and a purpose for us in this world. As we yield to His testing and learn from His teaching we're being prepared for that responsibly.

Joseph was 20 years in the making and remember the key to the usability of Joseph in the hands of God was his faithfulness, even when he didn't know how things were going to turn out. And that is going to be the key in our lives too.

Little things might not mean much to most people but faithfulness in little things is a big thing with God.

Well, the time had come for God to begin the work of getting Jacob and his family down to Egypt. But God had more in mind for them than just their physical well being.

Jacob's sons, Joseph's brothers, were a shaky bunch at to say the least.

They had murdered, they had deceived, they had committed adultery, and yet they were God's chosen people.

Obviously some radical changes had to take place. Their hearts needed to be cleansed and so God worked through faithful Joseph to get the job done.

Joseph had learned explicit obedience through what he had suffered. He had learned to wait on God - especially to wait on God's timing in all the details of his life. Now this timing was going to become crucial.

As we go through our chapter, and highlight the events, I want you to be careful not to misunderstand Joseph's motives. He's going to treat his brothers harshly, and yet all the while there is not a hint of revenge in mind.

It's all Joseph can do to keep himself from throwing himself on his brothers and welcoming them

Again, Joseph controlled his feelings and waited on God.

Our narrative really begins at the end of Chapter 41 so **open your Bibles to Genesis 41, page 41**

**Read verses 56 & 57**

For seven years the Egyptians celebrated what they thought was the gift of Ra, the sun god. Every year the waters of the blue Nile thundered down from the highlands bring rich, fertilizing soil.

By August the Nile would rise in Egypt, crest in September and subside in October. By November planting would begin in the rich soil.

But now the predicted seven year drought had come. For seven good years under Joseph's direction, Egypt had been storing up grain. Now all the Egyptians, and even the surrounding nations, come to Joseph to buy grain.

That was the significance of the famine; to drive people to Joseph - especially his family.

Now the spotlight swings from Egypt to Canaan. God's real concern is with the family of Jacob and their future.

### *I. Guilt Can Blind Us*

#### **Read 42:1-2**

The family of Jacob was caught in the disaster too. God's people have no guarantee that they'll escape the disasters that come upon the world from time to time.

I have to believe the chosen family was confused at the extent and the severity of this famine. Why should it affect Canaan? Weren't they in the promised land? Why did God allow such things?

They were going to find out soon. Their own sin, that they'd tried to bury away in their minds and cover up was about to be exposed.

It seems that the news about grain for sale in Egypt must have just come to Jacob. There hasn't been any discussion on this before. But now others are beginning to make the journey to Egypt and so Jacob says to his sons, *Why do you look at one another*. Why are you standing around waiting for someone to make the first move, go.

I think that this was the first little nudge that God gave to the conscious of Joseph's brothers. God's got his ways of working on his children to change their hearts when they're in rebellion against Him. Now its down to Egypt, the place where they had sent Joseph 20 years before.

#### **Read verses 3-8**

The brothers are led in before the governor of Egypt. The second most powerful man in all the world.

All along the way I can imagine that they have looked for Joseph. In every group of slaves, in the fields or along the roads, wondering if they would meet the brother they treated so cruelly.

But they didn't expect to meet Joseph in Pharaoh's court. So as they stood before this

clean shaven man arrayed in Egyptian clothing and ornaments they didn't recognize their brother.

And just as Joseph's dream had foretold they bowed themselves down before him. They came looking to buy grain. They were directed to a man named Zaphnath-Paneah, and awed by his magnificence they bowed down before him.

God was pointing them to Joseph, but in their blindness they didn't recognize him for who he was.

So many times Joseph stands out as a type of Christ. The finger of God points Israel to Jesus. But many Jews fail to see Him as their Messiah. As Paul said in Romans 11, blindness has happened to Israel.

Notice Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them. They were full grown men when Joseph had last seen them, there were 10 of them, and they were dressed in the same type of clothing as before.

Joseph looked at his brothers and recognized them, but notice *he spoke roughly to them*.

I think there are 2 false ways of looking at that statement.

The first would be to assume that he was bitter with them. The other would be to assume that he was doing this all for their good and that he had no hard feelings at all.

I'm sure Joseph wrestled with his feelings just as we would. He was a human being, not a super man.

He had named his first born Manasseh (*nashah* means "to forget") He said, *for God has made me forget all my toil and my father's house*. (Genesis 41:51)

Now he couldn't forget. His father's household was standing right there in front him, and he had the power to make them suffer for what they had done to him.

See why God put Joseph through all that He did before this? He had to be ready. He couldn't be clinging to bitterness and hatred but he had to be submissive to God.

And I take it at this point that some more pieces of the puzzle fall into place for Joseph. Now, he understands that God intends for him to take care of his brothers.

Jacob and his descendants would not become that great nation in Canaan. God's plan

was to send them to Egypt and so he sent Joseph ahead to make the way. Joseph must have been humbled to realize how God was using him in His eternal plan.

It was God the Holy Spirit in Joseph who enabled him to love his brothers who were his enemies and to minister to them.

Are you excited about God fulfilling His purpose through you as an individual? God is working with things that matter for eternity and he is using every believer who's submissive to accomplish those things.

If Joseph had allowed his luxurious surroundings to cause him to think only of himself, God's plan would have failed. We'd better be on our guard, that we don't get sidetracked from God's eternal purpose.

More than 20 years had passed since Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. Their consciences had become dulled with sin. But now the time had come for God to use Jacob's sons to found a nation.

God had to bring them into a right relationship with Himself. So he took them from plenty to famine. Their security was suddenly shattered. God often does that.

*I. Guilt Can Blind Us*

*II. Guilt Can Suppress The Truth*

### **Read verses 9 - 13**

*One is no more.* Their stock answer for 20 years has been that Joseph died so they repeat it here.

They wouldn't name Joseph or acknowledge him. They'd prefer not to think of him at all. They weren't going to say anything about what they had done to him, nothing at all about their rejection.

Joseph was an awkward fact of history that they would prefer not to face up to.

But, Joseph wasn't going to let them off so easy. He accused them the 3rd time of being spies and locked them up in prison for 3 days.

You can imagine their confusion at this point. They were deathly afraid of this mysterious Egyptian who was demonstrating what absolute power he had over them.

*I. Guilt Can Blind Us*

*II. Guilt Can Suppress The Truth*

*III. Guilt Can Direct Us To God*

The question in Joseph's mind was, where was Benjamin. (Rachel only gave birth to two - Benjamin and Joseph and Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin). If he became the favorite after Joseph was sent away who knows what they did to him.

So he says... **Read verses 19, 20**

Now in verse 23 we are told... **Read verse 23**

They didn't know that he could understand what they were saying so they spoke freely. Finally, after these long years comes the confession.

**Read verses 21 - 22**

Suddenly "the dreamer" is now called "our brother" and "the child." Some of that hard callous around their hearts was beginning to soften. They were still blind to who Joseph was, but now they were awaking to guilt.

Verse 21 shows 3 aspects of that awakening.

"We are truly guilty." *Conscience*

"We saw the anguish of his soul." *Memory*

"Therefore, this distress has come upon us." *Result*

The brothers were being brought to the end of themselves.

Joseph responded in two ways to all this, although his brothers noticed only one response.

1st verse 24... **Read thru "wept"**

He wept with a broken heart because of his love for his brothers, especially Benjamin and for his father.

2nd... **Read the rest of 24**

The brothers saw only the hardness that Joseph's hardness, they didn't know how tender his heart was underneath.

Well, from here Joseph sees the 9 home, but without them knowing it, has their money put back in their sacks of grain which they had just purchased.

### **Read verses 25 - 28**

Talk about a guilty conscience. Their immediate reaction was “what is this that God has done to us?” They had become sensitized to what they had done to Joseph. Now they interpreted every act as God punishing them for their sin.

In all of the biblical record this is the first time these guys mentioned the Lord. It seemed like God was far from their thoughts before this.

Violence, envy, murder, the selling of a brother into slavery, lying to their father; none of these things was modified by one word about God.

Back in Shechem they used the mark of the covenant to perpetrate murder, but didn't give a thought to the God of the covenant.

Now with their conscience stirred, their memory active and their fears, they saw God working. Now, remember they would have loved to stop all of this. They didn't enjoy what they were going through. The chastening hand of the God is never pleasant. But it is just what they needed.

Hebrews 12:11 says *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful.*

But Romans 2:4 reminds us that *the goodness of God leads us to repentance.*

The money in the sacks of grain was what turned their hearts to God.

Donald Grey Barnhouse commenting on this verse says, “Lord, may thine unknown goodness break us down.”

Their journey back home must have been over a distance of about 250 miles.

Presumably Jacob was still living in Hebron and Joseph's headquarters were most likely near the city of Memphis. The journey would take about 3 weeks.

### **Read verses 29 - 35**

When one of the brothers found his money after leaving Egypt they were frightened. The Hebrew literally says in verse 28, “in fear they trembled a man toward his brother and their heart went out.” We'd say “their heart sank in their chest.”

Now everybody's found money in his sack. Now the Egyptians will think their thieves for sure. The same men who sold Joseph for cash years before, who loved money - now hated the very sight of it.

It was cold cash to line their pockets when they sold Joseph, now it was red hot shekels that scared them to death.

Well, they finally poured out the whole amazing story to their father. At least almost the whole story.

They still omit mentioning what happened to Joseph years before. They might whisper that among themselves but they aren't ready to own up to it to their father.

God was at work. But they were still bucking the pressure that He was putting on them.

Realizing the trouble they were in, look what Jacob says to his sons.

### **Read verses 36 - 38**

For Jacob all faith was gone. All he could see was the immediate circumstances and as far as he was concerned there was no hope.

The son passed the tests better than the father. Joseph responded to hopeless sinners better than Jacob.

Our chapter closes with Jacob in despair and his sons in bondage to their guilt.

There is an answer to a guilty conscience. The answer is found in Proverbs 28:13.

A lot of us have experienced the first part of that verse - it says *He who covers his sins will not prosper...* That was certainly Joseph's brothers at this point.

What we need to do is put into practice the second part. *But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*

You see, Joseph had already forgiven his brothers for what they had done to him. They just didn't know it.

All the guilt, all the anxiety, all the pressure, could have been eliminated if they would simply have confessed their sin and got things right.

The same is true for us too.

God stepped into human history to provide forgiveness for our sins. Jesus Christ died and rose again in our place. By faith we are forgiven. Eternally the slate has been wiped clean. We are God's children.

But there are times when we are not faithful children. We disobey God and while we are forgiven in the eternal sense, our walk with God is disrupted. We need forgiveness. We are still God's children but we are not on right terms with Him.

I John 1:9 tells us the solution. Rather than to be burdened with guilt John tells us, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

God has already forgiven us. Just like Joseph, He weeps over our rebellion. Sometimes we only see His hard side though.

Sometimes we are uncomfortably similar to Joseph's brothers in our attitudes.

Maybe there's something that you need to get right with God today. Something that God has been prodding your conscience about.

Don't hold back. God says confess it. Agree that it is sin. Lay it out before God. He knows all about it anyway. You can't hide anything from Him. And then you'll find the peace that comes from restored fellowship with your heavenly Father.

The solution to guilt isn't to explain away the lawgiver. It's to realize that the lawgiver is also our Savior.