

THE SIN OF SELF-CONDEMNATION

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In a blog, John Fuller reported:

“I grew up in a tradition that recognized the importance of feeling guilt over one’s sinfulness. And I’ve been around some folks who employ guilt as a motivator (it can be a very effective factor!).

“For many years, though, I’ve embraced grace as an operative in my life. God’s grace, His beautiful grace, covers my failures. Because he has forgiven me of my sins, I think I approach my shortcomings in a realistic and appropriate manner.

“Unfortunately, for some people there is just no way on earth they could forgive themselves for what they did — or what they didn’t do. The pain of that failure is too great, the memory too vivid, the guilt too overwhelming.

“Is that you? Do you struggle with letting go of the past and moving on with life? Are there things in your life for which you cannot forgive yourself?”

It is strange to see the affinity that many Christians have for self-condemnation.

Criticism or Condemnation?

A dictionary definition of this malady would be: Condemnation of one's self by one's own judgment.

Now, there is a fine line between self-criticism and self-condemnation, but also a wide difference. Healthy self-criticism can produce insight that helps us to know ourselves and leads to the possibility of change and growth.

In fact, self-criticism is absolutely necessary for emotional and spiritual maturing. Self-criticism is based on the understanding that we have been made in the image and likeness of God, but that sin still dwells in our flesh. Therefore, we can all improve to some degree. We can learn from our failures and grow.

No Love Lost

God loves us, regardless of our mistakes. He does not love us *because* we are good, or *when* we are good, or *if* we are good. He loves us because *God is love*.

However, there is no love lost between us and Satan. Satan has come to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Self-condemnation is one of his most effective tools. Apostle John calls Satan our “accuser.”

The accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die. (Revelation 12:10-11)

And we are told to “stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.” (1 Peter 5:9)

Self-condemning people may not be able to remember many other passages of Scripture, but they will likely know the chapter and verse that describe the unpardonable sin. An example may be found in Matthew 12:

³¹ “So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

The enemy deludes such people into believing they have blasphemed the Holy Spirit, and, in spite of Christ’s sacrifice and God’s unfailing love, there is no place of rest from their guilt and unfitness (spiritual uselessness). This is the miserable state of the self-condemning person. Some carry such guilt to the grave. This is a tragic waste of a life.

We must differentiate between the devil’s activity and the legitimate convicting work of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit faithfully convicts us of behavior that generates (true) moral guilt, which always has a biblical basis. The Holy Spirit will clearly define for us the behavior or the attitude that displeases God and remind us of the Scripture that spells this out for us.

The devil prefers to be vague, leaving us with a nagging feeling of guilt that cannot be linked to any specific sin, that renders us helpless to do anything about it.

The Holy Spirit never convicts us to torment us. He convicts us to bring us to repentance and forgiveness so we can be restored to the peace and joy of God’s favor. Once we confess our sin to the Lord, He always forgives us. The first time, every time.

If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. (1 John 1:9)

If we confess and confess and confess but still feel guilty, the Holy Spirit is not the source of that guilt. We are listening to the Accuser and condemning ourselves.

Making Yourself Judge

If God forgives you, who are you to condemn yourself? Are you greater than God? Are you wiser than God?

It is of no use, as is popularly suggested, to “forgive yourself.” Who can forgive sin but God? The accused cannot grant himself an acquittal.

Wouldn’t it be better — more appropriate and more effective — to confess to God your self-condemnation and receive His forgiveness for condemning yourself?

No Place of Repentance

Judas Iscariot, is an example of self-condemnation. He betrayed Jesus to those who sought to kill Him. Was this the world’s worst sin? Which of us has not betrayed Jesus also (regarded Him as a mere man, less than God)? But, like Esau before him, Judas “could find no place of repentance.”

And this is the grave danger of self-condemnation: finding no place of repentance! No one to whom I can apologize. In Judas’ thoughts, God had ceased to exist as the Forgiver! He was hopeless and helpless.

Paul came near to this place (read the tale in Romans 7). “Who shall save me?” Me? No way! Jesus Christ!!

Self-Atonement

Self-condemnation is nothing less than an assault on the finished work of Christ, seeking to punish ourselves for our own sins. This behavior implies that when Jesus declared, “It is finished,” He was wrong. This attitude of unbelief insists, “There is still something left for me to do – hate myself.”

Self-condemnation is one way that people seek to atone for their sins. Their rationale may be conscious or unconscious, but it suggests that if they are sorry enough, if they feel badly enough, if they offer up the sacrifice of genuine self-contempt, then God will forgive them.

While they may appear to be contrite, in reality their attitude demonstrates the worst kind of pride. They actually think that there is something *they* can do to produce their own forgiveness. Such a self-centered, pay-your-own-way-with-the-currency-of-guilt attitude is an affront to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” once and for all. If He didn’t succeed at that, then all our hopes are in vain. If He did succeed, then any attempt of ours to add one thing to what the cross has accomplished dilutes, and thus negates, its power.

It IS Finished

Not only is self-condemnation unnecessary and unhelpful, but it is a sin itself. Have you sinned against God by allowing yourself to entertain self-condemnation about your sins, past or present? Renounce your sin and run into the loving arms of your heavenly Father, giving up both your sins and your self-condemnation to Him. Lay it all at His feet and allow Him to simply love and forgive you. Judgment day for you is finished. It was over at the cross when Jesus declared it to be so. God no longer condemns you. Don’t struggle against Him; accept this truth.

“There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). You’re free from judgment. Embrace His forgiveness, rest in His acceptance, and get on with your life in Jesus Christ.

Steps Out

Regardless of the severity of the self-condemnation, it all comes from Satan. Once you recognize this, you have taken the first step in dealing with self-condemnation.

The second step involves realizing that the Lord forgave you the first time you asked Him. The first time, every time.

And the third step is, once you have received God’s mercy, that you recognize the source of your self-condemnation (Satan) and refuse to acknowledge it any longer. Remind yourself that Satan is “a liar and the father of lies.” Receive the truth, as it is in Jesus. That truth is that God accepted Christ’s death on the Cross as the sacrifice for your sins and your trust in that sacrifice sets you free.

Right now, come to God in prayer, confessing your unbelief and self-condemnation. Receive God’s mercy and forgiveness, and watch the devil retreat!