

GUILT AND SELF-JUSTIFICATION

I have been taught:

Romans 6:23a *For the wages of sin is death, [NRSV]*

This is critically serious, because it betokens spiritual death: permanent eternal separation from God, from His mercy, from His goodness and from His life.

It is the opposite of eternal life:

John 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [NRSV]*

The total death imparted by sin — I realize — is not because of the cruel nature of God; rather, it is the natural consequence of His own perfection and of His will that His kingdom be perfect, as I did learn directly from the mouth of Christ:

Matthew 5:48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. [NRSV]*

Indeed, upon reflection, I cannot conceive that His kingdom be anything else but perfect: a kingdom where all sins and all transgressions ("big" and "small") are banned and are not allowed to creep in under stealth or cover.

Hebrews 12:10b *..... he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. [NRSV]*

If I am honest, I would not want any other type of eternal kingdom.

However, since I — as all of us:

Romans 3:23b *..... have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; [NRSV]*

I am overcome with shame, guilt and fear of punishment.

Thus, I am tempted to overcome — or at least lessen — my shame, guilt and fear by trying to diminish the seriousness of sin. To do so, I begin to search for or create excuses: this one was a little transgression and not a particularly heinous one ("I did not murder anyone"); my circumstances were new and exceptional ("I had never done so beforehand"); "other people were doing the same things or worse (and goading me with their example)"; "it was a slight oversight" of mine in not remembering the fine print (or it was a "non-intentional," momentary "lapse of judgment"),

We all are only too familiar with these stratagems and like schemes.

I do embrace my excuses, I rely on them and I do not want to part from their company and their

comfort and hope (although false) of a lesser punishment, lest I sink under unbearable guilt and fear.

In my carnal nature, I feel it must be one (guilt and fear) or the other (excuses and self-justifications).

This is where — with supernatural grace and love — the Savior intervenes powerfully and revolutionizes miraculously my situation by establishing the New Covenant of the Spirit,

Matthew 26:28 *For this is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. [HCSB]*

Thus replacing the former Covenant of the Law:

Acts 13:39 *and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. [ESV]*

This was not possible or even thinkable until Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, because:

Hebrews 9:12 *With his own blood — not the blood of goats and calves — he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. [NLT]*

And therefore,

John 3:18a *Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned. [HCSB]*

All that is required of me to be spared *condemnation* is to repent and to *believe[s] in Him*, so that the Lord will take away sin, guilt and fear and refresh my spirit, as declared by the Apostle Peter in Solomon's Portico:

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, [NIV]*

At this point, it is critical that I know that redemption from sin and being spared from condemnation is because of the Cross — and only because of the Cross:

Romans 3:28 *So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. [NLT]*

To suppose that my redemption and my being saved from condemnation are attributable — even in part — to my excuses and justifications is to imply that Christ's sacrifice is incomplete or insufficient: this is a blasphemy of His work, which He declared He had completed:

John 17:4 *I have glorified You on the earth by completing the work You gave Me to do. [HCSB]*

If it is necessary to reinforce the realization of my total and complete dependence on the Savior, I may remember His teaching of the "true vine":

John 15:5c because apart from me ye are not able to do anything; [YLT]

So that the Apostle Paul could thus summarize and distill the substance of his own ministry:

1 Corinthians 1:23–24 *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. [KJV]*

Hence, I no longer fret whether my good deeds (and my excuses) are sufficient to compensate for my sins: although God is pleased and His name is glorified by my obedience, my redemption is only based on the complete sufficiency of the Cross and of the Resurrection of Christ.

That is precisely how king David — a man with a life history of violence, blood and sin:

1 Chronicles 22:8 *"But the Lord said to me, '..... since you have shed so much blood in my sight, you will not be the one to build a Temple to honor my name.'" [NLT]*

but also a man "after the heart of God" —

Acts 13:22b *God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' [NIV]*

could, in his last song, at the end of his life, say:

2 Samuel 22:22–25 *For I have kept the ways of the Lord, And have not wickedly departed from my God. ²³For all His judgments were before me; And as for His statutes, I did not depart from them. ²⁴I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity. ²⁵Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, According to my cleanness in His eyes. [NKJV]*

because the prophet Nathan had

2 Samuel 12:13b said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." [NASB]

All his life, David trusted the Lord and His word — above all else.

Lastly: may I be tempted to "game the system" and engage in wholesale, wanton transgressions and sins, since I can always rely on an easy subsequent confession by rote and simply exploit the grace of God?

Yes and no.

Yes, my old nature could well do so: the Lord lets me be free to follow Him or not; free to accept Him and His testimony or despise and reject Him.

Revelation 3:20 *Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. [NRSV]*

The Lord does not unhinge the door nor tear it down; rather He waits for me to open it.

But: why would I want to "game the system," given what suffering my redemption cost the Lord? Do I want to crucify Him again?

Since,

2 Corinthians 5:17 anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! [NLT]

the new creature, that I am, does not want to do so — even if I can.

This is not the first time that this question has arisen and the Apostle Paul treated it clearly and powerfully:

Romans 6:1–2, 4–5, 10–11, 14 *Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ²Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*

⁵Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.

¹⁰When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace. [NLT]

Hence, I can be confident that the new creature that I am will not "game the system"; rather will want to trust and obey Him, my Lord, Whom I am learning to love more and more.

**EXCUSES OR GUILT? NEITHER, THANKS BE TO CHRIST.
INSTEAD: HONEST, UNFETTERED CONFESSION;
COMPLETE, TOTAL REDEMPTION BY FAITH;
DEVOTED CONSECRATION TO CHRIST.**