

This week, Pastor Andy presents the third of the six installments in his new series "To Forgive...Divine." Today many of the popular books on self-improvement and many popular television personalities, emphasize the importance of being able to forgive yourself, Andy points out that it is surprising the Bible never tells you to do this. From cover to cover, the Bible tells us that we need God's forgiveness for our sins. The Bible tells us to forgive others just as God forgives us, but it never tells us to forgive ourselves! So, how do we handle feelings of guilt?

Pastor Andy points out that you can be free from the circumstances which hold you captive, but you can still be imprisoned by feelings of guilt. Many people struggle to forgive themselves and free themselves from feeling of guilt.

Popular misunderstandings about the nature of forgiveness add to the confusion about finding freedom from guilt. These misconceptions include making "restitution" for the wrong to gain forgiveness. Sometimes people think that, if they feel badly enough about what they've done, they can gain forgiveness. Others think that they must punish themselves for the wrong and, by doing so, they can gain forgiveness and freedom from guilt.

None of these approaches frees you from guilt. What does the Bible say about forgiveness? First and foremost, only God can forgive sin. It was for this purpose that He became incarnate as Jesus and died on the cross, taking our sins on himself, so that He could righteously forgive us. When He forgives, He also forgets the sin. Believe His Word; He will never bring up a confessed sin again. Our job is to accept the forgiveness Jesus provides. Guilt was washed away by the blood of Jesus.

How does one obtain this forgiveness? Begin by confessing your faults to God. Be honest. Call your sin what it is without making excuses or sugar-coating it. God already knows exactly what you did, and why, but He wants us to agree with Him about the nature of our sins, which is that we chose to place our own desires above what we knew He wanted us to do. There are no "little" sins or "big" sins in God's eyes. Sin is sin—all sins are unacceptable and are against God's nature. These include the sins that other people see on the outside as well as those sins they cannot see on the inside.

When you confess your sin, God promises to forgive, so take Him at His Word and accept that forgiveness. He forgives you. You do not have to forgive yourself. You need only to believe God that He forgives you. One of the worst sins you can commit is failing to accept God's forgiveness and hanging on to the guilt. Once you have received forgiveness, you have no need for guilt. The sin erased, and it's as if you never sinned in the first place.

An often neglected weapon in our arsenal against guilt is confessing to another believer who can then pray for us and reassure us of God's promise to forgive. This person must hold what you confessed in a sacred trust between himself, you, and God. God forgave your sin when you asked Him, but this additional step serves to remind you firmly of your forgiveness. Guilt no longer has a foothold to limit your freedom in Christ. If you can make reparations to the person you wronged without causing any further injury, it is a good thing to do.

Are you holding onto guilt? Have you asked for His forgiveness, but you still "feel guilty"? If so, take God at His Word today. Believe that He truly loves you and forgives you, because He does!