

GUILT

with Particular Reference to Pregnancy Counselling

by Jon Garvey

One day I'd like to write a book on the Law of Moses (or preferably to get someone else to!), because Christians today have largely been misled into the false ideas that Jesus abolished it, that Paul saw it as the opposite of faith, and that "compassion" means setting it aside when it causes pain.

We do not realise that when Paul wrote "the Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith", he did not simply mean that the Jews had to suffer all those harsh and arbitrary regulations before Jesus came to sweep them away, but that **each** of us needs to be schooled by the Law before we can truly find Christ as Saviour. For the Law - not just the 10 commandments, but all 600+ of them - teaches us God's eternal, uncompromising standard of justice and love. Jesus said that "love God and love your neighbour" sums up the Law - it doesn't replace it.

If we fall short in the least of these commandments, we fall short in both justice and love. If a doctor's "compassion" for a pregnant girl causes him to set aside God's command to do no murder, then we have replaced God's perfect (James 1²⁵) expression of love with what we fondly think is more perfect. Is that likely?

My particular burden here is the way we counsel people. God, in his mercy, has given us a conscience which responds to his Laws. Even the least religious experience it. A girl recently, who would take no notice at all of my counselling about the abortion she wanted, nevertheless had nightmares every night the week before the operation, and remorse afterwards. This is God's doing, and he intends it to bring people to a realisation of just how abhorrent their sin is to him, and how much they need his forgiveness in Jesus.

A Christian's job in dealing with such a situation is to give shape to that guilt by making clear in what way God's ways have been offended, and then (and only then) to show how Jesus' blood can cover the sin, and how it can be crucified with him by faith. Our natural human tendency, however, is to assuage the discomfort by saying "it doesn't matter - you did what you thought was right - put the past behind you - Jesus was there in the situation with you".

But do you see what we are doing? We are saying that sin was no sin, or at least insignificant sin, which amounts to the same. And if it was not sin, it doesn't need to be nailed on the cross by faith. And if it is not crucified with Christ, it is not forgiven. Our "compassion" denies the sinner salvation. What's compassionate about that? It's Devil's work.

More often than not, people's consciences are already sick - they have already excused their sin in fact, if not in name. How many Christians, even, are willing to pray the sinner's prayer, but angrily deny they are guilty of any particular sins! Psalm 36 says, concerning the sinfulness of the wicked, "There is no fear of God before his eyes, because in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to discern or hate his sin."

How many of us "hate" our sin? In practice, don't we see it as just a theoretical state which, we accept, technically separates us from God? I've known adulterers who claim to have repented, and then say they couldn't help it, and that they need compassion, not censure. When we truly repent (and it's only true repentance that saves), we take full responsibility for our deliberate rebellion against God, and consider any chastisement of God or man less than we deserve. To have found forgiveness in our Jesus makes any such burden light, and gives us such a grateful heart that our lives are on fire for him. He who is forgiven much loves much.

How can we get a better view of our own guilt, so that we may be used in saving others (this is the true meaning of the parable of the speck of dust and the beam of wood - not that we can't criticise others because we too are guilty, but that we should deal with our guilt and then deal with theirs)?

Firstly, we can pray that God will show us our sin. This is dangerous, because God answers it and we get more than we bargained for! But then, opening your mouth for the dentist is risky too.

Second, read God's Law - yes, I mean those first 5 books of the Bible. "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth," said Joshua. "Meditate on it day and night." This actually means spending daily time with God (as opposed to talking about doing so). It is because this has become so unfashionable (they say it's "legalistic" - I hope they don't have the same attitude to spending time with their children) that so few are able to counsel the guilty effectively. But the Christian who has faced up to the full reality of his guilt before God is the one who is able to lead the guilty, with the help of God's perfect Law, to faith in Jesus who is the end of all guilt past and future, and the source of eternal peace and freedom.