**Read Hebrews 10:1-18**

Kevin Carter – the picture I am about to show you won him the Pulitzer prize – Oscars for photography[[1]](#endnote-1).

Sudan 1993, tiny emaciated child had walked for who knows long to find food. Now we see her, alive, just, but collapsed with exhaustion. In the background the vulture looks on, waiting…

Carter waited 20 minutes for vulture to spread its wings so he could get the perfect photograph depicting human suffering. It never did, so he took his picture, chased the bird away, and left.

A few days after the picture was published in the NYT, letters poured in, asking what had become of the child. Carter didn’t know.

3 months later, overwhelmed with guilt because of all the suffering he had witnessed, and had failed to alleviate, Carter killed himself.

Guilt. Lots of ways to deal with it – and all of them don’t work except one: Jesus. Show you how precious Jesus is this morning because he is the only one who can deal effectively with our guilt.

Big problem: Estimated 85% feel guilty about something[[2]](#endnote-2). Remaining 15%: two alternatives

* Completely numbed conscience[[3]](#endnote-3) – on the way to being a psychopath – don’t care
* Having a great day and have a clear conscience

What is guilt? To most people – feeling – feel bad. Why? Done/said/thought something that was wrong. How do we know it was wrong – broke a rule – something deep inside us that cries out that we did wrong. Conscience. Nags at you – tugs at you – lies there deep underneath the surface[[4]](#endnote-4) – weight – perhaps don’t think about it specifically – there – heaviness.

85%

* Said – “reckless words pierce like a sword”[[5]](#endnote-5) – hurt someone
* Done – behaviour / actions / failure to act/protect - laziness
* Thought

“Weighs heavily on your conscience”. What do we do with that? How do people deal with guilt[[6]](#endnote-6)?

**Bury it**

* obvious ways – drink, drugs. Less obvious – music – distraction:
* Saul – 1st King of Israel. Started off OK – quickly became pretty bad. Envy, disobedience to God – pretty disastrous reign. Saul felt bad. “Whenever the [evil] spirit … came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Music – helped him feel better – took his mind off it – bad feelings inside – ignore them a while. But never solved the problem – Saul’s heart.
* Other ways: food, anesthetise yourself with TV, games; life & soul of the party – party animal – afraid of the stillness, quiet.
* Burying guilt never fixes guilt.

**Minimise it**

We all do this[[8]](#endnote-8).

* “I’m a terrible dad, I don’t spend enough time with my kids” – guilty feeling. “No, no you’re not a terrible dad. It’s hard for everyone”. Denial. Guilt is real – deny it – no help to that person. Better to say, “What do you think makes you a terrible dad?” – dig down & help. Maybe the solution is repentance – change.
* Husband > wife: “I’m really sorry I stormed out of the house the other day” She replies: “Oh, don’t worry about it, not a big deal; forget it”. Minimise someone else’s guilt, maybe because that’s what we’d like them to do for us too.
* Minimise like this: well, what I did – everyone else is doing it – not just me – can’t be that bad. Everyone swears at the TV / shouts at their kids / over-claims on their benefits / under-claims on their tax return.

**Make up for it**

Feel bad about this area of my life – make up for it in this area.

* Been a terrible spouse – try to be the best parent. My kids mean everything to me – because I know I have not been a good spouse and I want to make up for it somehow.
* Done something bad – atone for it by giving to charity, going to church, reading the Bible, praying. Surely God will forgive me if I do enough good things – see *I AM* a good person!

Problem: None of these approaches to dealing with guilt actually work.

* Bury, minimise, make up for it – if you do enough it can alleviate guilt. Plasterboard prop.

Thank God there is a better way – in Jesus!

Passage: Heb 10:1-18 – 3 observations & wrap up.

1. **Guilt is caused by sin (v2)**

* People... “felt guilty for their sins.” (v2). Not “felt guilty because of their social conditioning…because they had an oversocialised Superego – Psychology- Freud[[9]](#endnote-9) – you are a victim of your parents and church imposed oppressive rules on them. Psychobabble.
* Guilt caused by sin. Mechanism God put there to lead us to him for forgiveness of sins. We feel guilty because we are guilty.
* False guilt – Satan accuses us - no time – LG?
* In general, guilt is not the enemy. Bad conscience is a good thing[[10]](#endnote-10) – at least better than no conscience. Feel bad because you’ve done bad – know you’ve broken God’s laws. That’s why minimizing guilt is never helpful. “Everyone does it – you’re not that bad” – leads us away from the Saviour[[11]](#endnote-11). Forgiveness comes in response to confession – repentance. Sorry & change. Minimise guilt – I can handle this – don’t need God’s forgiveness.

1. **Guilt can’t be fixed by making up for it (v1-4)**

* Israel – big into religious service. Religion – how many people try to make up for guilt. Jews did more. Specific rituals to deal with guilt. Special day of the year – Atonement – goat[[12]](#endnote-12) – slaughter it – sprinkle its blood all over the altar 7 times[[13]](#endnote-13). National repentance every year. Imagine that in the UK! PM leads the nation in repentance and mourning over sin! Point is, they were really, really good at religious service. Problem: didn’t work.
* Repeated these sacrifices year after year. Couldn’t fix the problem of sin – couldn’t take away guilt. “If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”
* If these ceremonies could fix the problem of guilt, they’d only have to do it once. Instead of a solution for guilt, they were just a reminder of it – pointed to a better solution!
* Sin is caused by the heart – wanting to do wrong – enjoying it –desiring it. Religious ceremonies never have had the power to change anyone. Could never “make perfect those who draw near to worship.” (v1) Wouldn’t it have been good if you could attend the annual sacrifice – and it had such power that you didn’t want to sin again. But it didn’t. The people kept on the same – religious devotion never did change people inside – can’t change the heart.

1. **Guilt can be *more than* cured by Jesus**

* Solution: 2nd person of the Trinity – Son of God – comes into the world. V5 - “when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me – came in a body as a human being. God clothed in human flesh. `Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God. Jesus came to do the will of his Father – to live a perfect life that none of us can – to never have any guilt of his own – but to die, taking on himself all of our guilt.
* And Jesus, on the cross, takes the guilt of all our sin on himself – *all* our sin – our anger – our lies, our greed, our hurtful words, our abuse of others, our hypocrisy, our pride, our perversion, our pornography, our lust, our rage, our boastfulness. Jesus takes on himself the sins of murder and paedophilia and rape and drug-dealing and wife-beating and people-trafficking[[14]](#endnote-14). All that, and more, and worse. It all becomes his. Not mine any more – as if I hadn’t done those things!

*My sin not in part but the whole – is nailed to his Cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my Soul!*

* That’s a cure for guilt. No reason to feel guilty – forgiven! V17 - Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." … these have been forgiven

And it’s forever.

* The priests in the OT were kept pretty busy, v11- Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.
* Jesus did his once-for-all-time perfect sacrifice of himself – and sat down. “It is finished”[[15]](#endnote-15) This is THE solution for guilt – it’s THE way to be free of it. Forever. Come to God at the foot of the cross.

I say more than cured –

* Not only the guilt of sin is taken away – its power is broken too. There’s no power in trying to make up for guilt – doesn’t change us – doesn’t motivate us to do better – to love more – to hurt less. But Jesus’ sacrifice does change us. Something inside changes – first come to him in repentance and faith – HS comes to live inside.
* HS says: v16 - This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.
* Heart change – instead of the law being something that condemns us and points out our failures – it becomes a way that helps us please God more – delight to serve him. Want to do good – want to serve others – want to be more loving and kind and gentle and patient - out of love for him.
* Jesus is more than the cure for guilt. That’s what we’re trying to do in this series – Jesus is better – in every way – than what the world has to offer. All through the cross. Come to God – cure for guilt at the foot of the cross. Billy Graham library.

The world’s ways of dealing with guilt just don’t work:

* You can bury guilt – never fixes it
* You can minimise guilt – draws us away from the solution
* You can try and make up for guilt – doesn’t work
* Only Jesus can forgive sin, and change our hearts.

Discussion questions:

* Which of the 3 ways of dealing with guilt can you relate to best? (Bury it, minimise it, make up for it) Try to explain why each of these doesn’t ever deal with the problem of guilt effectively.
* Why do you think some Christians struggle with guilt over things they did/said/thought many years ago? Is there a solution?
* What do we mean by false guilt? Where (who!) does it come from? How can you tell when it’s false guilt and when it’s true guilt?
* Exactly how cool is the Billy Graham Library building?

1. <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2009/08/12/vulture-stalking-a-child/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ed Welch: <http://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/feeling-guilty-who-doesn-t> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 1Timothy 4:2 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. You don’t have to be a believer either. Romans 2:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Proverbs 12:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Some of these ideas are from <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/jesus-is-precious-because-he-removes-our-guilt> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. 1Samuel 16:23 - I’ve edited the text slightly because I don’t want to get sidetracked by the issue of the spirit being destructive (evil) – and from God (interesting though that is!) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Jay Adams talks about this a lot. He calls it “minimising”. Eg. Competent To Counsel, p112-113 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Adams, as one might imagine, has very little time for Freud! [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. That doesn’t mean our conscience is infallible – our conscience can be “seared” after much sin (1Timothy 4:2). Paul makes the point that God is our judge in the end, not ourselves - our own consciences (1Corinthians 4:4). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. 1John 1:8-10 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Actually 2 goats – the other one took away the shame of sin – that’s for another day! [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Leviticus 16:15-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. This point first struck me listening to a sermon by the rapper and hip-hop artist, Shai Linne. I’ve subsequently read something similar in Mark Driscoll’s book *Vintage Jesus*. Crossway, 2007. p114. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. John 19:30 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)