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# *Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates*

From the desk of....

**Bob Good**

Sexual Addiction Group Meeting

Starting May 27<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm

Location: SCA office

**Dear Educator and Ministry Leader:**

Over breakfast one morning, a woman said to her husband, "I bet you don't know what day this is." "Of course I do" he indignantly answered, going out the door on his way to the office. At 10 A.M. the doorbell rang, and when the woman opened the door, she was handed a box containing a dozen long-stemmed red roses. At 1 P.M., a foil-wrapped, two pound box of her favorite chocolates arrives. Late, a boutique delivered a designer dress. The woman couldn't wait for her husband to come home. "First the flowers, then the candy and then a designer dress!" she exclaimed. "I've never spent a more wonderful Groundhog Day in my whole life!"

There is no emotion so slippery, so controlling, so unshakeable as guilt. Sometimes guilt is a reminder of past mistakes, regrets, failures. And, sometimes guilt is an accuser. It tells us that we've fallen short of expectations, that we've failed our loved ones and family. Eric Fromm, the famous German psychologist and author, wrote "It is indeed amazing that in as fundamentally an irreligious culture as ours, the sense of guilt should be so widespread and deep-rooted as it is."<sup>1</sup> The fact that guilt is an emotion also places certain demands or expectations upon us. That 'deep-rooted sense' impacts the conscience of each and every person to the extent that it can become a chain of pain psychologically, physically, and spiritually. Though the possibility exists for reminding us of past transgressions that we haven't yet come to terms with still many people are convinced that they have drifted too far away emotionally and spiritually to make any significant change in their life.

As counselors we may use terms like reconciliation and redemption with our counselees. But, as good as those truths are there are times when people are not looking to hear the euphony of our erudition especially when they feel powerless. The Devil tells his young protégé in *The Screwtape Letters*, "We thus distract men's minds from Who He is, and what He did. We first make Him solely a teacher... a merely probable, remote, shadowy, and uncouth figure, one who spoke a strange language and died a long time ago. Such an object cannot in fact be worshipped."<sup>2</sup> In sharp contrast, the Bible presents a view of Jesus Christ that shows His love and the freedom He gives to all from the chains that bind the conscience of our counselees. A recognition of guilt leads to encouraging and remarkable transformation in both the young and the old. Therefore, in dealing with the subject of guilt this month's article will focus on the possible causes developmentally as well as the consequences of guilt followed by the spiritual cure or treatment. Then, next month's issue will deal with false guilt followed by August's edition on forgiveness-receiving and extending forgiveness to others. As we look at the diagnosis may we in the spirit of humility and genuine sensitivity initiate a prognosis that exudes a fresh liberating sense of joy and hope in the lives of people we counsel!

Sincerely,  
Bob Good

Note: Bob is available this summer to speak at church camps or Sunday Evening church services.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Fromm, *The Sane Society*, (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston), 1962, c 1955 p. 181

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Glasgow, Scotland: Collins-Fontana Books), 1942, p. 118

## Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

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### ■ Acquiring a Sense of Guilt

As early as age 4 or 5, a child begins to discover what kind of person he or she is. The key *characteristic* at this stage is the child's growing capacity to *initiate* actions, thoughts, and dreams: their personality is centered on the idea "I am what I can imagine I will be." They can make judgments and initiate plans that, in the past, someone else had to do for them. Within this stage, they can play with toys and create their own world that they could not possibly enact in "real life".

From play, there emerges a sense of comfortability or a coping mechanism of feeling of what they really *want to be* and *can realistically be*. In other words, the child discovers what they *can* do and what they *may* do. In addition, the child learns to cooperate with other kids. They emulate desirable models like teachers and parents.

**Note:** To be denied the opportunity to develop a sense of discovery of what they can and what they may do could possibly force young children and adolescents to *impersonate* a variety of role models – some that may serve as poor examples of behavior. The reason: because they lack a genuine commitment to focus on one particular role model. Conversely, parents, peers, and social support play important roles in preventing adolescent/drug abuse.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, when the child enters into adolescence, the

identification from what they knew must bridge the division between childhood and adulthood.

Since there are so many roles modeled in our society the adolescent may aimlessly search for a role because there was no permanency in his/her past. Hence the "identity crisis." The opposite of an *identity crisis* is "being at one with oneself." The loss of a sense of identity can be expressed in an angry and snobbish hostility toward the roles that were once offered to him/her by family members, church, school. The adolescent will choose to become everything that parents and teachers said was undesirable. Interestingly enough, many adolescents would rather be nobody or somebody bad than to be not - quite somebody. Young people are highly susceptible to negative feelings about themselves. A study of church youth found their number one cry to be the cry of self-hatred. Distress over personal faults (self-criticism) and the lack of self-confidence (personal anxiety) confirm the negative feelings they have. The lower their self-esteem, the more they tend to hate themselves.<sup>4</sup>

### ■ The Need for Self-Esteem

How we feel about ourselves is the driving force behind many of our thoughts and actions. Self-esteem is the emotional component of identity. I've had clients tell me that they can intellectually give me chapter

and verse on their adoption as God's child according to the scriptures. Though intellectually they know their position, it becomes very difficult for them to express their feelings or emotions as a child of God. "How can anyone love me? Even if I don't love me?" Therefore, if a young child receives love and senses that he/she is an important part of someone's life a process of trust will naturally develop. Failure to meet that need inevitably produces feelings of inferiority and helplessness. Such negative feelings can result in discouragement at the very least and **guilt** at its worst. Guilt seems to be a more intensive, longer-lasting experience, usually accompanied by a feeling of bad or wrong behavior, with a general tendency to be coped with in privacy and consciously. In the case of the feeling of guilt, it is the individual in question who is his/her own judge (inner source), whereas in the case of shame judgment seems to come from the outside (i.e. other people).

"Guilt says I've *done* something; shame says there *is* something wrong with me.

Guilt says I've *made* a mistake; shame says I *am* a mistake.

Guilt says what I *did* was not good; shame says I *am* no good."

Shame is a wound felt from the inside, dividing us both from

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<sup>3</sup> Reifman, A (2001). *Models of Parenting and Adolescent Drinking*. American Psychologist.,56, pp. 170-171

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<sup>4</sup> Strommen, M.P. *Five Cries on Youth*, NY., Harper and Row, 1974, p. 14

ourselves and from one another.<sup>5</sup> In one study, possible factors were investigated concerning what may influence an individual's likelihood for taking responsibility for something they did not do. Participants in a laboratory experiment were led to believe they crashed a computer when in fact they had not. Participants from 3 age groups were tested: 12 and 13-year-olds, 15 and 16-year-olds, and young adults. Half the participants in each age group were presented with false evidence indicating liability. Additionally, suggestibility was investigated as a potential individual-difference factor affecting vulnerability to admissions of guilt. Results showed that younger and more suggestible participants were more likely than older and less suggestible participants to falsely take responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

### ■ Psychological Guilt

Definition: The experience of being rejected or shamed by someone.

It involves: 1) self-rejection ("I'm not worthy"); or, 2) self-shame ("I always blow it"). "There's no way I can be forgiven for what I did." "I feel terrible about not being able to help out." "I'll never be free from this guilt, or from this behavior." "I don't want to do this, but I'd feel awful if I said no." "How can I even look him (or her) in the eye? I know what I've done!"

<sup>5</sup> Kaufman, Gershen (1996). "The Psychology of Shame, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.," Springer Pub:NY.

<sup>6</sup> "Taking responsibility for an act not committed: the influence of age and suggestibility", Redlich AD, Goodman GS., Law Hum Behav. 2003 Apr;27(2):141-56.

Note: Nowhere in the Bible is psychological guilt approved of. When you have feelings of guilt even when you didn't do anything wrong this would be called psychological or false guilt. In next month's July newsletter edition we will focus on this type of guilt – its emotional causes, consequences and ultimate cure. But for now, let it be said that false guilt usually comes from a conscience that is overactive. It's that inner voice badgering and pushing one to believe they have no confidence until their self-image is run into the ground. It nags: "You call this acceptable (work, behavior)? This isn't enough! There's a lot more that you haven't done!" The problem with a badgering conscience is that it seeks out the expectations of others. In other words, to gain the favor of others...looking for people to please and rules to be kept...one must continually prove their worthiness to others. I have found in my practice that clients who present with psychological guilt are those who take on more duties, more responsibilities, and more roles in their individual and married lives as a way of accumulating enough evidence of goodness to escape the accusation that they are worthless. Conformity, compliance, and perfunctory ritualism become the mainstay of their existence with no passion or emotional connectedness to the people around them. Indeed, these may be people in our churches and businesses who manifest a compulsive drive to please others whether it's teaching a Sunday school class or working extra hours because performance and/or achievement defines their sense of worth. The following three (3) manifestations are

guidelines to help identify those who know that they have value and dignity created in God's image but feel unworthy as if they must prove themselves at a moment's notice:

### ■ Three (3) Different Manifestations of Guilt

#### Belief that God is an angry and rejecting God

The belief is that they must do everything to try to get back into His good graces. The result is one of panic or fear as the individual tries to earn God's favor through works. On a relational level, this type of person believes that, "if you love me, you won't hurt me." Thus, they feel compelled to be self-sacrificing, compliant (tendency to remain submissive and compliant while allowing someone else to control and dominate), sympathetic, and dependent (they tend to cling to another for nurture and emotional input to provide a sense of security from the identity of the other person). In a passive way, he will suppress in himself any reaction that might signify ambition, vindictiveness or a seeking after his own advantage.

#### Belief that everyone is hostile and must dominate, manipulate, or exploit others

Any sense of true guilt or remorse is covered up by the neurotic need to control, have his way, shun affection, sympathy, view trust as a sign of weakness, afraid to admit to error or imperfection. He sees himself without limits, superior

to others who are viewed as competitors. For by controlling others one can ward off the fear of being hurt, rejected, or humiliated by them. Therefore, guilt is covered up by a rebellious “I don’t care attitude” manifested by an attitude of justification for their invulnerability and cynicism.

### **Belief to avoid guilt at all cost so as not to feel vulnerable**

Retreating behind huge emotional walls that shut others out. Therefore, life in the fort though lonely, gives one the feeling of being invulnerable and superior to others, providing a false sense of security. If there is no effort to deal with this manifestation of guilt they may eventually:

- 1) Suffer with a persistent resignation to avoid all kinds of activities;
- 2) Suffer with a passive resistance to any form of societal interaction;
- 3) Exhibit shallow lifestyle activities including indiscriminate sex superficial social relations, and all over active in all manner of causes.

### **■ Proper response to Guilt II Cor. 7:10**

Definition of Theological guilt: The breaking away from God’s laws with the consequent feeling of having failed in one’s relationship with a just and holy God.<sup>7</sup> Because an individual’s viewpoint may be limited regarding their internal self-perception, it is quite possible

therefore, that they may continue to feel guilty about their own condition before God, from the point of view that the ground and giver of values, has changed in their life. We exist in a grace-filled, unconditional love relationship with One Who unconditionally values us for who we are. How one temporarily feels about oneself is different from whom one is before God.

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<sup>7</sup> T.C. Oden, *Guilt Free*, Nashville:Abingdon Press, 1980, p. 117.