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HOW TO HANDLE REGRETS (Guilt Trips)

A common problem that many of us face as believers in Christ is that we tend to "feel" guilty about the past sins we've committed, or mistakes we think we've made. These feelings are usually accompanied with negative complaints such as "I wish I never would have ...!" "If only I would have ...!" "If I'd only known...!" "I feel bad I've never finished...(what I started)". "Why did/didn't I ever...?" "I've drifted far too long, I've wasted so many years". "Half of my life is already over." "I've really made some wrong decisions." "I regret..." "I wish I had taken spiritual things more seriously." I'm sure that every one of us has made a statement like one of the above. However, if you've let your mind dwell on it, no doubt it's become blown out of proportion and brought regret, introspection and guilt. There are basically two types of regrets:

- (1) Those things which you do have control over, which usually result in guilt, and
- (2) Those things which you have no control over, which usually result in self pity, and/or bitterness.

Just think for example about the life of Paul. Look what he did to Christians. He persecuted, imprisoned and murdered them (Acts 7:59-8:3; 9:1-6). If anyone would have lived in regrets, it would have been Paul. Yet why was he such a powerful influence and testimony for Jesus Christ?

(1) Look at what he admitted. I Tim. 1:12-17 -

(2) Look at what he stated. Rom. 3:23-25 (find out what these terms mean because they are "key" in helping you to understand salvation and forgiveness.

I Jn. 1:9

II Cor. 10:13

(3) Look at what he purposed. Phil. 3:13-14

(4) Look at what he accepted and why. II Cor. 12:7-10

Very practically now, what were the truths of God that became the object of Paul's focus?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Write these on a 3x5 card and carry them with you, so you have a prepared planned response next time "regrets" or guilt plagues you.

In accepting the past mistakes and failures we can only reply on the sovereignty of God. The following verses will give some understanding of God's sovereignty and show that he is in control of all that happens.

Isa. 46:9-11

Acts 2:23

Eph. 1:4-5, 11

Rom. 9:14-24

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- Prov. 16:4
- 16:9,33
- Isa. 55:8-11
- Gen. 50:20
- Jer. 32:17-19
- Rom. 8:28
- Heb. 9:27
- Gal. 1:15=16

Very seriously, all of the following verses are just as vital to increase your understanding and acceptance of what God's allowed to take place, because it has been His secret decreed will (Deut.29:29)! Since God is in control and has always been in control, nothing surprises God or causes Him to switch to alternate plans B,C,D,E,F and G. Think of how ridiculous that would be, God to be unable to perform His ultimate plan because of one of our mistakes/sins throwing Him off schedule; what a frenzy heaven would be in. The God who "works all things together after a pattern of good also has said:- It is to your benefit to look these up:

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Job 40:7 | Ex. 7:3, 9:12-16 |
| Job 38 | Gen. 45:8 |
| Dan. 5:25a 26 | Prov. 21:1 |
| Jer. 51:12,25;13 | Isa. 53:10 |
| Isa. 40:21-28 | Acts 13:48 |
| Isa. 14:26-27 | Jer. 4:28; 33:2 |
| Eph. 3:10-11 | Acts 4:27-28 |
| II Tim. 1:9 | Ps. 33:11 |
| Eph. 2 | Lk. 22:22 |
| Mt. 11:25-26 | Jn. 1:18; Jn. 1:13 |
| Prov. 19:21 | Job 23:13-14 |
| Ps. 106:15 | |

This does not mean that God is responsible for your sin, failures or wrong decisions. We must assume personal responsibility for our sin; we can't "blameshift". Read Ps. 32; 71 and notice David's confession of sin.

- I Jn. 1:9
- Prov. 28:13

But what the sovereignty of God does mean is that He is omniscient - all knowing, the beginning to the end; omnipotent - all powerful and omnipresent - everywhere present. It is because of that fact along with His control over this world that we have the confidence, that what has happened in the past God had certainly allowed, permitted and decreed. He could have changed it, but His ultimate purpose for it was to make us more Christ-like. How do we become Christ-like? This is what Biblical Change (sanctification) is all about. We are to become more like Christ in our behaviour (actions, words, thoughts, attitudes and responses). This involves the process explained in Eph.4:20-32 of "putting off" (stopping the wrong habit patterns of thinking or acting) and replacing it by "putting on" (starting the righteous habit). This is what we're to be faithful with now. The things you've "messed up" or are presently suffering the consequences for, must be faced in light of Rom. 8:28! We must also see it in light of the forgiveness offered to us by Jesus Christ's sacrificial substitutionary death on the cross.

- Rom. 5:8
- II Cor. 5:21
- Jn. 1:12
- II Cor. 5:17
- Ps. 103:12

If the above is true, then we as Christians should never focus our energies on the past. Nothing can change it. It can only be forgiven! Since the future is not here, we can do nothing to change that either. The only thing we can do is to prepare ourselves for it. Where does that leave us? In the present! It is right here and now that God says we can and must change! We need to get caught up in the revealed will of God and faithfully involve ourselves in the work of the Lord now!

The following verses tell us what we need to engage our energies in:

Phil. 4:11

4:13

Heb. 12:1-2

Matt. 6:31-34

Phil. 4:6-9

Therefore in dealing with those situations (sins, failures and wrong decisions that you now regret), you should:

1. Learn to benefit from the past (focus on it positively)
 - a. I Cor. 10:7-11
 - b. List those things which have happened that bring "regrets" or guilt
 - c. Deal with it/them on a "once and for all" basis as Paul did (1st page) and then:
 - I Jn. 1:9 -
 - Ps. 103:12 -
 - Prov. 28:13 -
 - II Cor. 5:17 -
 (and many of the other verses above)
 - d. Next write down the lessons which you've learned from these events, from Scripture, God and others. God has taught me _____.
 - e. Use some of these lessons "learned the hard way" to Ps. 51:13.
2. Learn to accept the present "consequences" (if any) as reminders of God's mercy and forgiveness and warning to others of Gods chastening (I Cor.10:7-11); Ps. 51:13; Heb.12:5-15). Remember Paul learned contentment. It didn't come automatically. He continually filled his mind with God's wisdom and used his life to serve God rather than become "burned out" because of the past.
3. Learn to channel your energies productively in the present
 - a. Make a daily schedule of what you'll be doing every hour of the day
 - b. Organize and plan out weekly and monthly schedules
 - c. List the projects or things which you've wanted to do but haven't started or finished
 - d. List the things that you must do regularly
 - e. After identifying all these tasks, make up a chart to keep in perspective and priority what's to be accomplished. For example:

JOB/PROJECT DESCRIPTION	1,2,3,4 PRIORITY	DATE TO BE FINISHED	DONE	
			YES	NO
Do one job at a time as unto the Lord (Col.3:17-25; I Cor.15:58)	sort out priorities	write in even the time to be done		

This is to refocus and rechannel yourself away from the past and bring you to the Biblical command, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness" (I Tim.4:7). Discipline doesn't come automatically. You must begin to do it over and over again:

- the power comes in the doing! (Neh.4:6)
- finish what you've started (Neh.6:15)
- get your eyes off yourself and on meeting the needs of others (Phil.2:3-4)
- go against your feelings (Gen.4:7a). Act right - Feel right.
- remember you have more to look forward to than back to (Phil.3:13-14)
- the only thing the past should do is motivate us to live for God in the present

Put the above five statements on a 3x5 card to remind you about these truths.

Some other Bible studies out of Dr. Wayne Mack's "Homework Manual, Vo. 1" may be helpful, such as "Guidance", "Usefulness", "Vocation", "Self-Control (Discipline)", "Anxiety/Worry", "Blameshifting", "Depression", "Work", "Love", "Planning and Priorities", "Also some earlier Bible studies which I have written on "Dealing with Mind Build-ups" and the "Thought Life", "Forgiveness", "God's Perspective on Trials", "Motives/Motivation" and "Meditation" may also be of value to spiritual growth.

DATE TO BE FINISHED	PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION
write in even the time to be done	sort out priorities	Do one job at a time as unto the Lord (Col.3:17-25) I Cor.15:58