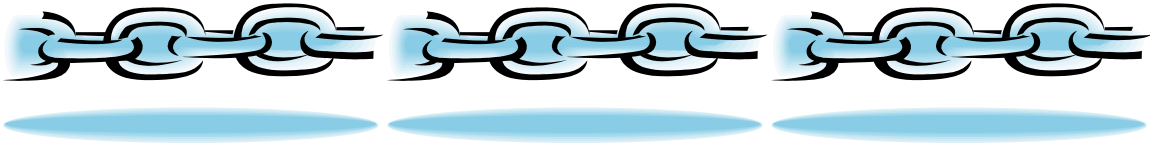


# Say Goodbye to Guilt

by Florence MacKenzie



I gasped in amazement at the vast array of purses and jewellery on display in the Fancy Fakes store. How could anything false look so much like the real thing? As I considered buying one or two pieces of jewellery, including a very convincing “gold” chain, I thought to myself, “Maybe no one will be able to tell the difference. After all, does it really matter if my jewellery is the real thing or false?”

There are, however, areas of our lives where it does matter if we can’t tell the difference between the real and the false. Take guilt, for example. Many Christians, including those in ministry, wear the unattractive chains of false guilt, yet they’re convinced it’s real. Sadly, such chains prevent them from fully enjoying their freedom in Christ. People reckon that because they *feel* guilty, they must *be* guilty. This isn’t always true. Certainly, there are times when our guilt is real, when our sinful attitudes and behaviours cut across God’s standards for living. When this happens, we know how important it is to admit our wrongdoing to God and receive his forgiveness. Yet, how do we recognize and deal with the chains of false guilt which, like the items in the Fancy Fakes store, look all too real? Let’s identify some “false guilt chains” and break them apart by applying a few guilt-busters.

## Chain #1: Not Meeting Expectations

Sometimes we feel guilty over something that doesn’t violate God’s standards, but fails to come up to meet our own or other people’s expectations. Take Alison, for example. She has very difficult in-laws who have been angling for regular invitations to dinner, but she just can’t face the inevitable bickering that will take place over the meal. So, she puts them off – again. This makes her feel guilty because she thinks she “ought to” ask them to dinner more often. Alison is allowing her in-laws’ expectations to inflict false guilt. However, at the end of the day, the decision about

how often to invite them to dinner belongs to Alison and her husband alone.

## Guilt-busters

- Appreciate that what you are feeling is not a result of wrongdoing on your part.
- Remind yourself that you have no need to feel guilty.
- Choose to believe God rather than your feelings.
- Write out those “non-sinful” things that make you feel guilty and put the words “FALSE GUILT – NO CONDEMNATION” in capital letters beside each one.

## Chain # 2: Remembering Forgiven Sins

Often we feel false guilt over past sins that God has already forgiven. Sarah had an affair with a married man that ended shortly after he divorced his wife. Not long afterwards, Sarah came into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and His forgiveness extended to every area of her life. However, the painful memory of her affair and the part she played in the break-up of a marriage continues to arouse feelings of guilt and condemnation in her.

Satan, the enemy of every Christian, loves to condemn us by reminding us of past sins that we’ve confessed and forsaken. But Romans 8:1 says: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Whenever we feel condemned, we need to recognize the malevolent work of our enemy who is trying to rob us of the peace that is ours through Christ.

Condemnation is not the same as conviction. While Satan loves to condemn us by heaping false guilt on us, the Holy Spirit convicts us of actual wrongdoing. So whenever we feel guilty, it’s in our interest to discern between the accusations of Satan and the promptings of the Spirit. Condemnation is often general or vague and presents forgiveness as being way out of reach. Conviction, on the other hand, tends to be specific about a particular sin and encourages us to go to

Christ for forgiveness. Ask God to show you which one applies in your present situation. Respond to real guilt with confession from a penitent heart, but refuse to bear the burden of false guilt by acknowledging it as such. Feelings of guilt may come and go, so take time to remind yourself that you have been forgiven. It's a done deal. Don't allow yourself to feel guilty over an issue that Jesus Christ has already dealt with.

### **Guilt-busters**

- Thank God for the fact that He has already forgiven you.
- Praise Him that He chooses not to remember the sin that He has forgiven.
- Believe that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you no longer are condemned.
- If, having unloaded your burden of guilt onto God, you find you've picked it up again, make a conscious decision to keep throwing it back to Him – over and over, if necessary.

### **Chain # 3: Unable to Make Things Right**

Even when we acknowledge that God has completely forgiven us for past sins, we might still feel guilty if there's no opportunity for us to make things right with the person we've offended. Joanne had a very difficult relationship with her sister, Eve. Things got so bad that she cut off all contact with Eve. Several years later, Joanne realized that she hadn't been entirely innocent in the breakdown of the relationship and considered trying to contact with her sister. Sadly, Eve died before Joanne was able to follow through on her intentions.

How can we deal with the feelings of guilt and regret that stem from not being able to make restitution?

### **Guilt-busters**

- When you really can't make things right between you and another person, make sure things are right between you and God.
- Learn to focus on God's forgiveness toward you, reminding yourself that this particular situation is fully covered by the blood of Christ.
- Develop an attitude of gratitude by regularly offering thanks to God. Make Luke 1:47 your own prayer of rejoicing, or get into the habit of frequently using some of the opening verses of Psalms 145 -150.
- Get involved in helping others. For example, if you've been through the trauma of an abortion, you might want to offer some of your time at a crisis pregnancy centre; if it's too late to make things right with a dying parent, you might "adopt" an elderly person in your church or neighbourhood.

Are chains of guilt holding you back from being all that you can be as a follower of Jesus Christ? If your guilt is real, then confess the sin, turn from it, and don't let Satan accuse you of it again. If your guilt is false, try using some of the guilt-busters to break the chains and move on in what the Bible calls "*the glorious freedom of the children of God*" (Romans 8:21). Say goodbye to guilt – you'll be glad you did!

**This article was first published in *Just Between Us* magazine, Fall 2008**