

## Equipped to deal with false guilt

Have you ever visited one of these purse and jewellery stores that are stocked with fake designer goods? To the untrained eye, it's almost impossible to distinguish the fakes from the real thing! After all, they look like the real thing, they feel like the real thing, but they're not the real thing. Some guilt can be a bit like that. It might look real, and it certainly feels real, but it's not real - in fact, it's totally false.

### False guilt #1

Sometimes we can still feel guilty after we have done something wrong, even though we have admitted it to God and have turned away from it. The guilt is false because, by confession and repentance, we have received God's forgiveness for that particular sin. We are, in fact, no longer guilty, even if our feelings would try and tell us otherwise!

Our enemy, the devil, loves to condemn us by heaping false guilt on us. This condemnation is different from the conviction that the Holy Spirit brings when he specifically points out a particular sin and encourages us to go to Christ for forgiveness. Condemnation tends to be general or vague and holds out no hope of forgiveness. So, although we are *convicted* by the Spirit when we fail to confess our sins, we can be confident that we are no longer *condemned* for sins that have already been forgiven.<sup>1</sup>

### False guilt #2

The second type of false guilt is when we feel guilty over something that isn't wrong. We experience false guilt about a particular issue when this doesn't violate God's standards - and, therefore, isn't sinful - but we fail to come up to our own or other people's expectations. So, seeking God's forgiveness for something that isn't wrong will not remove our feelings of guilt. Too often, we have allowed ourselves to feel guilty because of social or cultural pressures that have nothing to do with biblical principles. Perhaps others have expected us to behave in a particular way and, if we don't conform to these expectations, we can end up carrying a heap of false guilt. If you can relate to any of this, you might find the following "guilt-busters" helpful:

- Appreciate that what you are feeling is not a result of wrongdoing on your part.
- Remind yourself that you are no longer guilty.
- Choose to believe God rather than your feelings.
- Write out those "non-sinful" things that make you feel guilty. You might find it helps to put the words "FALSE GUILT - NO CONDEMNATION" beside each one in capital letters.

### False guilt or true guilt?

If you're not sure whether you're dealing with false guilt or true guilt, ask God to show you which one applies in your present situation. Refuse to bear the burden of false guilt by acknowledging it as such, but respond to true guilt by confession from a penitent heart. Remember to be specific, naming your sin to God. Ask him to help you put **Romans 6:11** into practice whenever you're faced with temptation. This verse teaches us to think of ourselves as being dead to sin - and dead people don't respond - but living for God's glory. Then, remind yourself of **1 John 1:9** and accept forgiveness as a fact, even if you don't feel forgiven. It's a done deal. Don't allow yourself to feel guilty over an issue that Jesus Christ has already dealt with.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:1