

# Are You Prepared to Put 2018 Behind You?

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*Psalms*

By Dr. John Street

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**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
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Thank you, soon to be Dr. Blackburn. So I understand you're working on your doctorate there at Southern so we're really excited about that. Pastor Ty and Pastor Jasper, it's a joy to be here. It's good to see so many friends.

We want to close this last Sunday in 2018 by asking you a question which is really the title of my message today, "Are You Prepared to Take 2018 and Put It Behind You?" Now some of you, I'm going to get a mixed reaction on that particular question but I want you to think about why I'm asking the question to begin with, and in order to get started this morning, please take your Bible and let's go over to Psalm 32 and we want to begin there because this is a good way to illustrate what we want to focus on from God's word this morning. This is a Psalm of David, a maskil, which really means in the Hebrew it was one of the teaching Psalms. It was one of the teaching Psalms. It was a maskil. David writes and he says,

1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! 2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! 3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. 6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. 7 You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. 9 Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, Otherwise they will not come near to you. 10 Many are the sorrows [or literally the Hebrew here is pains] of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him. 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

Now I'm absolutely sure as you look back on 2018, some of you have quite a bit of joys to look back upon and then you may be able to look back on 2018 with quite a bit of sorrow as well. I know it was in 2018 that I lost my mother back in April. She was living with us. She was 86 years old and God decided to call her home and this is the first Christmas that I've spent on this planet without my mother. So that was sorrowful. My own wife lost her younger brother just a couple of months ago just before Thanksgiving to death. So for us, 2018 has been a sense of funerals. Then we returned back to California and a man who I have for the last 20 years there at Grace Community Church served as an elder with, especially in the adult fellowship group known as Joint Heirs, just this past Friday lost his wife and, Bob, I would ask you to pray for Bob as I return to be a part of that particular funeral. So 2018 is a time of sorrow and in some cases it may also be a time of regret for you. What type of regrets do you have in 2018? If I were to focus in on anything in this particular message, I want to focus in on your conscience and how tender your conscience is about what has happened in 2018 and whether or not there are things that you need to make right before this year comes to an end.

Let me share with you an illustration and I'm taking this out of actually Chris Brauns's book, "Unpacking Forgiveness." He shares an illustration about two women in a church. They have nothing to do with any women here in this church, so don't, please, I'm not targeting anyone, alright? Listen to what he says. This is a church where he pastored and one woman was the name of Bev and the other one was by the name of Sue. He says Bev and Sue had been close, close friends for years. They lived two blocks apart and for the last 20 years they had attended the same church; they co-led a mother's Bible study for four years; their husbands fished together; their daughters were born a few days apart; they talked on the phone several times a week. Recently, however, their friendship broke. Bev suspected that Sue had been talking about her to other women in the church. In Bev's mind, Sue had always been a bit of a talker but she now wondered if Sue had been talking about things in Bev's life that Bev had shared in confidence. Bev thought about it over and over again. After tears, prayer and a lot of mental turmoil, Bev approached Sue. She hated to do it but she felt that it was necessary to confront Sue about her gossip. Bev was optimistic, she had little doubt in her mind that Sue would own up to her mistakes. Bev could not have been more wrong. When they sat down to talk over coffee, Sue blew up. With a red face and raised voice, she told Bev that she was being too sensitive and that others had mentioned to her that Bev was overly sensitive. When Bev asked who, Sue refused to tell her. When Bev suggested that Sue should have talked to her directly, Sue said that it was not worth it.

Bev was upset. After a couple of sleepless nights, she and her husband met with an elder of the church. She knew that in Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus said that Christians should first privately confront those who sin against them, then if the person will not listen, then the offended one should take one or two others along the next time so Bev and her husband asked the elder to go with them to talk to Sue. The elder listened patiently to Bev's concerns. He asked Bev for permission to pray about it and a few days later the elder called Bev and suggested that she drop the matter. He told her love covers a multitude of sins, 1 Peter 4:8, and that in this particular case, he believed that Bev need not to take it to

the next step. The elder also warned that a number of young Christians in the church would be hurt if this disagreement were to be pressed further. He reminded Bev that she and Sue had significant influence and told them that if they continued to have an unresolved difference, many people could be hurt. Bev and her husband decided not to push it but the damage was done and Bev's wounds were deep. Bev and Sue did their best to avoid seeing each other. When they were forced to be in contact at all, they barely spoke.

So I wonder what you would do if you were in Bev's shoes, whether or not you would push the matter a little bit further. Let me continue the story. Then tragedy struck. A mutual friend called Bev with the news that Sue's only daughter, Rachel, had been killed in a car accident. When she got the call, Bev's knees literally buckled. She sat down in a chair and sobbed. She loved Rachel. She remembered holding her in the hospital. She had rocked her and watched her grow up. Bev could not imagine how Sue would deal with this and she wondered what she should do given all that had happened and the tragedy in Sue's life. Wow, that complicates matters. This unresolved issue in terms of gossip and then Sue loses her precious daughter, Rachel, to a tragic car accident. I'm wondering what you would do. Maybe there has been a similar circumstance that has occurred in your life in 2018 and in this particular case, you're not sure what you should even do about it, in fact, it's really something that plagues your conscience.

David had a conscience. We can see that in Psalm 32. If you still have your Bible open, take a look at it. By the way, in our story the elder who used 1 Peter 4:8, I'm sure meant very well but he totally misused the verse because covering a sin does not mean looking the other direction. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that, in fact, in verse 1 we can see that. Psalm 32:1, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!" In Hebrew parallelism, as we have in poetic verse here in Psalm 32, to go through the process of forgiveness is the same thing as covering. It's not looking the other direction, it's not ignoring the issue, it's actually going through the process of forgiveness. That's exactly what it is and, in fact, you can see this one additional time in the book of Psalms. If you go over to Psalm 85:2, here the Psalmist lays it out clearly again in Hebrew parallelism, "You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin." Here covering has to do with the process of actual forgiveness, walking through the forgiveness process when there has been a difficulty. It doesn't mean ignoring it. It doesn't mean looking the other direction. It means to actually deal with the problem.

Then notice back in Psalm 32:2, "How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!" Let me ask you a question: can you say that about your life in 2018, that in my spirit there is no deceit? It's really interesting here that oftentimes you find that, "Blessed is the man who obeys," in Scripture but in this particular case it says, "Blessed is the man who fails and yet is forgiven." Blessed is the man who fails and yet is forgiven. "When I kept silent," David said, verse 3, "about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me." In other words, God, in a sense, has to pain David into submission. Maybe God has done that to you in the past, he's had to take you and pain you into submission. "My vitality," he says in verse 4, "was drained away as

with the fever heat of summer." This is what God brought into David's life when he found deceit in his soul that he had not dealt with. His conscience was heavy in him. God's hand was heavy upon him and as a result of that, David's life was miserable. To the degree that you ignore sin in your life is the degree that it will rob your life of joy and you will be miserable. You cannot avoid sin.

As you look back on 2018, what is it that plagues your life? And the reason why this is so important to me is because when I read what's going on in our culture today, I realize that our culture today is on a warpath against guilt. It is on a warpath. Let me read to you an example. It's written by Karl Menninger, probably the greatest psychologist that America has ever produced and in a book that he wrote entitled "Whatever Became of Sin?" Menninger writes this, "In all the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of sin, a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word, once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in our troubles? Sin with an 'I' in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything, guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal or asleep? Wrong things are being done, we know, tares are being sown in the wheat field at night, but is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge and even vague guilt feelings, but has no one committed any sins? Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it." That's a great question. What has happened in our culture when it comes to this?

John MacArthur several years ago wrote a book called "The Vanishing Conscience," and in it he gives several illustrations. I want to give you a few illustrations myself. That's just what's going on in our culture. Some of you probably remember Katherine Power. She was a fugitive for more than 20 years and in 1970 during the heyday of the student radicalism, she participated in a Boston bank robbery in which a city policeman, the father of nine children, was shot in the back and killed. She was pursued by Federal authorities for murder and Ms. Power went into hiding. For 14 years she was one of the FBI's 10 Most Wanted Fugitives and finally in 1993 she surrendered to authorities. In a statement she read to the press, Katherine Power characterized her actions in the bank robbery as, listen to this, "naive and unthinking." What motivated her to surrender? "I know I must answer the accusation from the past in order to live with full authenticity in the present." Katherine Power's husband explained further, quoting, "She did not return out of guilt. She wanted her life back. She wants to be whole."

In a very perceptive piece about Katherine Power's surrender, the late Charles Krauthammer wrote this, he said, "Her surrender for the sake of 'full authenticity' was a form of therapy, indeed the final therapeutic step toward regaining her sense of self. Allan Bloom once described a man who had just gotten out of prison, where he had undergone 'therapy.' 'He said that he had found his identity and learned to like himself,' writes Bloom, 'a generation ago he would have found God and learned to despise himself as a sinner.' In an age where the word sin has become quaint, reserved for such offenses against hygiene as smoking and drinking, which alone merit 'sin taxes,' surrendering to the authorities for armed robbery and manslaughter is not an act of repentance but of

personal growth. Explains Jane Alpert, another '60s radical who served time for her part in a series of bombings that injured 21 people," quoting her, "Ultimately, I spent many years in therapy, learning to understand, to tolerate and forgive both others and myself." Do you have any problems with that? Learning to forgive one's self? "Very important," Krauthammer writes, "nowadays for revolutionaries with a criminal bent."

So it's not uncommon in the day in which we live to hear all kinds of people talking about people learning to forgive themselves, but the terminology is very misleading.

Forgiveness presupposes an act of guilt or an acknowledgment of guilt and most people nowadays who speak of forgiving themselves explicitly repudiate the notion of personal guilt. Katherine Power is a typical example. She only wanted to feel better about herself, to answer the accusation from the past in order to be whole. That's what she wanted to do.

So it's obvious today that an admission of guilt is clearly considered incompatible with the popular notion of wholeness and the need to protect yourself from the fantasy or the need to protect the fantasy of a good self. This is why we say as I said earlier in our message, that our culture has declared war on guilt. The very concept is considered medieval, obsolete, unproductive. People who trouble themselves with feelings of personal guilt are usually referred to therapists and it's the task of the therapist to boost their self and image, or as my kids when they were growing up used to describe it as boosting their selfish-steam. No one, after all, is supposed to feel guilty. Guilt is not conducive to dignity and self-esteem. Society encourages sin but it will not tolerate the guilt that sin produces.

Dr. Wayne Dyer, I have this book in my office, wrote a book many many years ago entitled "Your Erroneous Zones." Some of you probably are old enough to remember that book. He was one of the most influential voices to decry guilt altogether. He named guilt as the most useless of all erroneous zone behaviors. According to Dyer, guilt is nothing but a neurosis. Guilt zones, he wrote, must be exterminated, sprayed clean, sterilized forever out of our lives. How do we do that? By renouncing the sinful behavior that makes us feel guilty? By repenting, seeking forgiveness from those whom we have harmed? No, no, not at all. Not according to Dyer. In fact, his remedy for guilt is about as far from the biblical concept of repentance as you can get. His advice to readers suffering from guilt is, listen to him, quote, "Do something which you know is bound to result in guilt feelings. Take a week to be alone, if you've always wanted to do so, despite the guilt engendering protestations from other members of your family. These kinds of behaviors will help you to tackle that omnipresent guilt. In other words," Dyer says, "listen, defy your guilt. If necessary, spurn your own spouse and your own children, attack the sense of self-disapproval head-on, do something that is sure to make you feel guilty and then refuse to heed the cries of the conscience, the duties of family, and responsibility or even the appeal of your own loved ones. Why? Because you owe it to yourself," he says. Wow.

Back several years ago, my sister-in-law was a nurse. She worked in a Christian hospital. While she was working there, parents and a young lady of about 18 years of age came into the hospital. This young lady had gone to a Christian camp, sort of fallen in love

with a young man there at that camp. She and he slipped away, spent time together, as a result of that, she got pregnant and the parents who were Christians, obviously were not open to any kind of an idea of abortion thankfully, so they brought her to the ob-gyn there at the hospital to have an evaluation. The ob-gyn evaluated her and said, "You're healthy. The baby is healthy. There is nothing wrong here. Your problem is guilt so I'm going to give you a prescription to go and see the Christian psychologist here in this hospital." And my sister-in-law was assigned to be that young lady's nurse to go with her, because the parents could not go with the therapy sessions, only the licensed nurses could go in the sessions to make sure this young lady made it to her sessions.

So this young lady went to see the hospital psychologist. In the second session, and this psychologist, by the way, had been trained in Skinnerian behaviorism, he turned to the young lady and said to her, "You know what your problem is, your problem is guilt. That's your problem." Then he said to her this, "You need to go out and have as many sexual relationships as you can until you don't feel guilty about it anymore." My sister-in-law about fell out of her chair. This guy was a man who claimed to be a Christian and yet his Skinnerian behaviorism was overriding his Christian morality.

Now the question is: would she, if she did that and took the psychologist's recommendation, would she no longer feel the guilt anymore? The answer is, yes, it would work. Why? Because the Bible says you can sin to the point that you sear your own conscience, you don't feel anything anymore. You can sin to the point that you don't feel bad but does that necessarily mean that the guilt is gone? No, that doesn't mean that the guilt is not gone, the guilt is still there in God's eyes because guilt is not a feeling, guilt is a fact. It's how we have transgressed God's law. It's a fact, it's not a feeling. Sometimes there are feelings of guilt that we have and sometimes there are not feelings of guilt. I remember years ago when I was a pastor, we had a ministry to those that were on death row in the local penitentiary and every man I ever talked to who supposedly had committed some kind of murder, every one of them were innocent. Everyone was there under false pretenses. Now I realize our judicial system can make mistakes, there may be people there that are there under false pretenses, but every one of them? And they didn't feel guilty for what they had done?

That means that their conscience was seared and your conscience may be like that. How do you re-tune the sensitivity of your conscience before you step into 2019? How do you do that? That's a great question. David gives us a clue in Psalm 32 in dealing with this and the first thing that you have to do, like David has done, is you must take guilt seriously. You must take guilt seriously. Why is that so important? Because guilt is rarely treated seriously anymore. It's portrayed as an annoyance, as a nuisance, as one of life's little aggravations. Maybe that's the way it's become with you, the guilt in your conscience is a nuisance. It just keeps bothering you.

There is an article that ran in a paper featured on guilt, it was a light-hearted piece dealing mostly with small secret indulgences like rich foods over the holidays, French fries, sleeping late, other "guilty pleasures," as the article called them, and it quoted several psychiatrists and other mind experts. All of them characterized guilt as, listen to this, "a

useless, groundless emotion that has the potential of taking all the fun out of life." Wow. A useless, groundless emotion that takes all the fun out of life. Really?

There is another article that appeared in a column, a blog, entitled "It's Not Your Fault." That caught my eye because I remember when our kids were growing up, they had this little saying, "It's not my fault!" Your kids had the same saying, didn't they? And in this article a woman had written to say that she had tried every form of therapy she knew and still could not break a self-destructive habit. "The first step you must take," the columnist responded, "is to stop blaming yourself. Your compulsive behavior is not your fault. Refuse to accept blame and, above all, do not blame yourself for you cannot control what's going on. Heaping guilt on yourself only adds to your stress, low self-esteem, worry, depression, feelings of inadequacy, and dependency on others. Let go of your guilt feelings."

And nearly every kind of guilt can now be off-loaded. One writer said, "One of the most painful self-mutilating time and energy-consuming exercises in human experience is guilt. It can ruin your day. It can wreck your week if you let it. It turns up like a bad penny when you do something dishonest, hurtful, tacky, selfish or rotten. Never mind that it was the result of ignorance, stupidity, laziness, thoughtlessness, weak flesh or clay feet, you did wrong and the guilt is killing you. Too bad but be assured, the agony you feel is normal. Remember guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it in our world." In other words, it's pretty obvious here you shouldn't let yourself feel bad when you do something dishonest, hurtful, tacky, selfish or rotten, think of yourself as good, ignorant, stupid, lazy, thoughtless or weak perhaps, but still good. Don't pollute your mind with the debilitating thoughts that you might actually be guilty of something.

Now why am I going to all that extent to illustrate this to you in our culture? Why am I doing this? The answer is very very simple: we are like the proverbial frog being boiled slowly in the pot. We're swimming around really happy and we don't realize that our culture is boiling us to death because when you remove guilt out of the culture, when you remove the concept of sin out of the culture, then it drives words like "repentance, contrition, atonement, restitution and redemption" out of Christian discourse. You don't hear people talking about those things anymore. If no one is supposed to feel guilty, then how can anybody be a sinner? How is that possible?

So modern culture has the answer: everybody is a victim. Everybody's a victim. Victims are not responsible for what they do. They are casualties of what happens to them, so every human failing has to be described in terms of how the perpetrator has been victimized. We're supposed to be sensitive and compassionate enough to see that the very behaviors we used to label as sin are actually evidences of our victimization. That's the reason why and victimism has gained so much influence that as far as society is concerned, there is practically no such thing as sin anymore. There is no sin. Anyone can escape responsibility for his or her wrongdoing simply by claiming the status of being a victim. It's radically changed the way our society looks at human behavior. It's radically changed it.

So let me define this for you. As we take a look at Psalm 32, I want you to look very carefully at what David says when he talks about the fact in verse 3, he says, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer." It's really interesting, then he says in verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide," it's interesting, that word "hide" is the same Hebrew term up in verse 1 to mean "cover." It's the same word for cover, it's the same Hebrew word. Hide is covering. "I did not cover it. I didn't try to ignore it. I didn't try to turn the other direction."

Then he says in verse 5, he said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." That is a huge change. I'm not going to hide it. I'm not going to cover it. I'm not going to claim a victim status. I'm not going to do that. "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave." The word there, "forgave," is the same word that's used in verse 1, "whose transgression is forgiven." It means "to lift; to take away the guilt of my sin." The Bible gives very clear instruction on how to have a clear conscience.

So let me define it, if I could. If I were to take all the passages in all the Bible and boil those passages down on the way the Bible defines guilt, it would be this, listen carefully: it is a legal liability or culpability to punishment. It is a legal liability or culpability to punishment. Now the term "guilt" properly denotes the fact of liability and it's not necessarily the feelings that often accompany the guilt. Negative feelings are a result of guilt so we can truly be guilty but not necessarily feel guilty. It's like the man who slows down from going 60 miles an hour to 30 miles an hour in a school zone. He feels really good because he's going half the speed through that school zone but the police officer is still going to pull him over and say, "Do you realize what speed you were going through the school zone?" And the guy says, "Yes, I was going 30 miles an hour at the school zone. You know, officer, I should get credit. I had been going 60 but now I'm at 30. Alright, don't I get credit for that?" And the officer says, "No, no, no, it's 20 miles an hour," and still writes out the ticket. "Wait a minute! I don't feel bad about it. I slowed down." Now I'm a victim to what the officer has done to me. No, no, no, you're still guilty.

Romans 14, just for a moment if you want to grab your Bible. Let's go over to Romans 14 and look at verse 23. Here Paul says this, "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." So we can be guilty in transgressing or trespassing God's law as David clearly outlines in Psalm 32, or we can be guilty of transgressing what we think is God's law but it's not God's law. We can still be guilty of that because if we can't do something in faith, then it becomes sin for us. Are you following me? If you can't do something in faith, then it becomes sin for us.

I remember when I was a young teenage boy, I grew up in a culture and setting where Christians don't go to movie theaters. Christians don't do that. Well, in 1969, I went with a couple of other Christian friends to see Billy Graham's film, "The Restless Ones," at a Christian movie theater and I don't remember anything in that film because I remember sitting there thinking to myself, "God is going to send a lightning bolt from heaven and



fry me right there in the seat!" Now there was nothing in the Bible that said going to a movie theater was sin. Nothing in the Bible said that. I know you can pull out all these arguments, "Well, Hollywood is a very wicked place," and stuff. Well, there are very wicked people preparing your kale so you shouldn't eat that either, alright? I mean, you have to deal in a world of wickedness, okay? Hollywood, yeah, it's a very wicked place but the idea is there is nothing in the Bible that says that it's wrong to go to a movie theater, that's not the problem, but I thought it was wrong and so I acted against my conscience. Now did I sin? Absolutely I sinned, not because I broke what I knew God's law was, I broke what I thought God's law was. Do you see? Because I was searing my conscience. Whatever I cannot do in faith now becomes sin for me. If I think it is God's law and I break it even though it may not be God's law, then it's still a sin for me because I'm still searing my conscience. This is really key.

So Romans 14, you have broken the law if what you do is not in faith. So a man may feel better since he slowed down from going 60 miles an hour to 30 miles an hour in a school zone but he's still guilty of breaking the law. Even if he doesn't feel like it, the guilt is still there. That's why we say guilt is not a feeling in the Bible, guilt is a fact. It's a fact. You can feel guilty about it and you may not feel guilty about it, but the question is are you transgressing what God has said. In David's case, he did. He transgressed what God had said.

Now we have this whole idea in our culture about false guilt, right? False guilt. You've heard it. "Oh, that's false guilt." Somebody will dismiss them, "Well, that's just false guilt." Actually you're not going to find a shred of evidence about false guilt anywhere in the Bible. It doesn't exist. False guilt is an oxymoron. It's like military intelligence or jumbo shrimp. It's an oxymoron, alright? False guilt was coined by Sigmund Freud in his development of the id, the ego, the super-ego, and the idea is that the super-ego represses the id in sexual drives of a person and produces false guilt, is the idea. But you cannot have a false fact. Those are mutually exclusive. You can't have a false fact. Either you are guilty or you're not guilty. There is no such thing as a false fact. Then it's not a fact if it's false. You can't have a false fact.

Guilt is a fact. The Bible doesn't talk about false guilt at all. It doesn't talk about it, but you say, "Okay, but can't you be guilty and feel terrible about things that are not?" Listen, is something bad in the Bible? Yes, absolutely. I gave you an illustration of that. That's not false guilt, that is guilt because your conscience is trained – listen to this – to an unbiblical standard. Your conscience is trained to an unbiblical standard. In and of that fact, you are guilty but you don't feel guilty about that. You feel guilty about transgressing a false standard but that's not false guilt. Guilt is always a legal liability and culpability to punishment. That's really key.

So how do you deal with guilt? How do you deal with guilt? Well, number one, we must never ever minimize the fact of guilt but we find a lot of Christians doing that. We train our counselors never to do that. Don't minimize the fact of guilt. When somebody comes into counseling and says, "Oh, I just feel horrible. I feel guilty," our natural human response is to throw our arms around them, "Oh, you shouldn't say that about yourself.

That's terrible. You're a much better person than you think you are." Why is that so bad? Because you're minimizing the fact of guilt. I never say that to people. I say to them, "Well, there must be a reason why you feel that way. Tell me why you feel that way. Why do you feel that way?"

Never minimize the fact of guilt. Maximize God's justice. If you're guilty, then you ought to feel guilty, then repent. Don't soft-pedal guilt. Guilt is universal. You've got to understand that because sin is universal. Romans 3:19, Romans 3:23, sin is universal. Guilt is also serious because our God is a holy God. Romans 1:18, Romans 2:5-6. I know some of you when you read, for example, Samuel 6 about Uzzah, you remember he was following the ark of the covenant and the ark started to slip and Uzzah naturally put his hand out to steady the ark so it didn't fall to the ground, and God struck him dead. You say, "Oh, my goodness, he had a good intention. He's trying to save the ark of the covenant from falling to the ground and getting dirty and soiled and broken. Why did God do that?" Well, it's simple, you see, this all has to do with the way we view ourselves because he had the audacity to think that his sinful human hand was more holy than the dirt that the ark was going to land on. He had the audacity to think that and every last one of us would have done the same thing and God would have struck us. Every last one, that our sinful human hand is somehow more holy, more clean than the dirt of the ground. Not true. Not true.

You've got to understand that guilt remains even if it's explained away or if its effects are somehow lessened and where guilt remains in God's eyes, then punishment will be inevitable. Go back to Psalm 32. Look at that in verse 4 where David says, "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me," that's why I made that comment that God pains him into submission through his guilt. This is really key: you must never ever minimize the fact of guilt, but then there's a second thing that I think is really important here and that is this, you must never ever minimize the feeling of guilt either. You must never minimize the feeling of guilt because there is always underlying reasons for guilty feelings and taking them seriously provides great hope for change and that's where the hope comes in. We must never ever minimize the feelings of guilt.

Then, thirdly, I want you to see this: we must never minimize the fact of guilt, never minimize the feelings of guilt, the third thing, we must never underestimate the effects of guilt. Never underestimate the effects of guilt. As you look back on 2018, what is your conscience bothering you about? With your spouse? With your friends? With your children? With your parents? What is your conscience bothering you about? Psalm 32 here, verses 1 through 5, David lists the effects of his guilt in very strong language.

Go over to Psalm 38 just for a moment. I want you to take a look at verse 1. Here is David again, "O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester Because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. For my

loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart." Wow, literally that word for "agitation" in verse 8 is "growling." It's the Hebrew word "growling." The growling of my heart. I groan because of it. Wow.

So you can see how the devastating emotional and physical effects that guilt can have upon a person. If that's true of David, it's certainly going to be true of you. You know that well over 60% of the people that come and their presentation and problem in counseling is depression, 60% of them, they're dealing with guilt. Guilt. Unresolved issues in their past. Conflicts that they've had with other people. Hardships. But in our culture today, guilt is our enemy. Let me ask you a question: what happens in your household when in the middle of the night your fire alarm goes off? You go and get a ladder and a hammer and you climb the ladder and you smash the fire alarm, right? No. Or if you're driving down the road and a red light comes on in the dashboard of your car, what do you do when that happens? Pick up a hammer and smash the red light, right? That takes care of it. That's the way our culture deals with guilt. No, no, no, you pull the car over, you get out of the car, you open the hood, you see what the problem is, the source of it which has to do in the heart. That's what you do. What's really going on? Why is that guilt there? You take a look at it. You don't smash it.

For our culture, guilt is our enemy. For the Christian, guilt is our friend. It's our friend. God has given us the faculty of a conscience to help you identify the presence of guilt. The word "conscience" in the Bible, syneidesis, is the word that means "a knowing with" and it's been defined as the soul reflecting upon itself, a knowing with, the soul reflecting upon itself. Our inner man uses the information it possesses to evaluate our thinking and actions much like a diagnostic program runs perpetually on a computer. In the very same way. Our inner man, that's our conscience, our knowing with. The conscience involves what we know or believe rather than what we feel. We may believe something is right but feel hesitant or even hostile towards it. We can feel good about what we know is wrong. Feelings are often a result of the operations of the conscience but they're not the same thing as the conscience. Two different things. Let me say it again: feelings are often a result of the operations of your conscience but they are not identical to the conscience.

This is why the Bible talks about the importance of a clear or clean conscience. If I had more time, we would go into Acts 23 and Acts 24 and 1 Timothy 1:19, Hebrews 13:18, that talk about a clear or clean conscience God wants us to have. If you don't have a clear conscience, what's David's answer to that? Go back to Psalm 32 and, by the way, this is the main verse of the Psalm, verses really 5 and 6, he says, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found." In other words, he's saying don't wait until 2019. "Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him."

You've got to understand now is the time to deal with it. Now there are variations of a conscience referred to in Scripture. Each person has one conscience but that conscience may respond to various issues differently because of the facts that inform it. Any of these

could be true of the same conscience in regard to different issues. For example, you can have, number one, let me give you four things real quickly. 1. You can have a seared conscience. The Bible talks about that, 1 Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:15, Ephesians 4:19. You can have a seared conscience. Now most of those passages are referring to unbelievers with seared consciences but oftentimes within the broader context it's referring to believers acting like unbelievers when they have a seared conscience. A seared conscience. That's the first kind of conscience you can have, a seared one, where you're not sensitive to any guilt.

2. You can have an untrained conscience. Leviticus 4:22-24, 1 Timothy 1:13, Hebrews 5:14. An untrained conscience. Your conscience needs to be continually trained to understand the whole counsel of God because you're culpable for your sins of ignorance as well as for ignorance itself. This is why being under the teaching and preaching of the word of God on a regular basis actually is a cleansing process for your conscience, and I know you get that here. I know you get that here.

So you can have a seared conscience, you can have an untrained conscience, you can have an overactive conscience. Romans 14:1-4, Romans 14:23. Sometimes you can believe the desire, thought or action is morally wrong when the Bible doesn't actually condemn it and in those cases you're required to act according to your conscience but you should also seek to retrain your conscience according to biblical standards. That has to be true. You have to retrain your conscience to biblical standards, therefore, listen to this, our conscience should never be our guide. Do you remember how the culture always says that to us? Let your conscience be your guide. No, no, no, the Bible doesn't teach that at all but it should be our guard. Let your conscience be your guard, not your guide.

So you can have a seared conscience, you can have an untrained conscience, you can have an overactive conscience, you can have, last of all, number four, a biblical conscience. A biblical conscience. This is a pure cleansed one. 1 Timothy 1:5 is a biblical conscience. This is the kind of conscience that David had where David when he realized he had guilt in Psalm 32:7 says to the Lord, "You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance." Only when he had confessed his sin of guilt was David actually freed from his guilt. God became his refuge, his place of joy. God became his place of joy.

You've got to understand the only true answer to guilt, as David has illustrated here, is forgiveness through repentance. God must remove the guilt of our sin through his appointed means, his appointed means of forgiveness. Understanding biblical forgiveness would be the next step but you're going to have to wait until I come back to see my grandkids.

Let's bow for prayer.

*Gracious Father, Your goodness is so evident in everything in our lives, especially in dealing with our past. As we look back upon 2018, are we prepared to leave this year behind? In our conscience, are there things that we need to do in terms of confessing sin*

*to You, cleansing our conscience, going to others whom we have offended and humbling ourselves before them? Father, I pray You would help us to do that before we begin a brand-new year. Help us to begin 2019 clean of conscience. This we pray in Christ's name. Amen.*