

**"THE CAGE OF GUILT"**

Philippians 3:12-16

Today we are in part four of our 6-part series where we are seeking to chase, what the 5<sup>th</sup> century Celtic Christians- those Christians over in Britain, Ireland and Scotland, called the Holy Spirit. But in their Gaelic tongue it came out *An Geadh-Glas* or Wild Goose. For the benefit of those who might be new to this series the first Sunday we talked about breaking out of the Cage of Responsibility; the second Sunday we talked about breaking out of the Cage of Routine; last Sunday we addressed the Cage of Assumptions; and today we focus on the Cage of Guilt.

Let me ask a question: Do you believe that we are consciously or subconsciously conditioned? I mean, for those who are older, do you ever find yourself saying or acting out like one of your parents only to later catch yourself and say something like I responded or I said something that was "just like my Dad" or "just like my Mom." And it sort of scared you. Does the name Pavlov mean anything to you?

Ivan Pavlov was a Russian psychologist and physician who won a Noble Peace Prize for his research. Now we all know that dogs have a habit of salivating when they see food, and yet Pavlov wanted to know if, using another stimulus other than food, would the dogs salivate? As a part of his research he conditioned dogs by ringing a bell before feeding them. What he was able to prove was that just by ringing a bell, the dogs would salivate, minus the food. This is what Pavlov called **conditioned reflex**.

The point is this- to some extent, some more than others, we all have conditioned reflexes. We are all conditioned to some extent or another because of the environment that we have been raised in, or our family, or the place we work- there is this idea that, to some extent, we are products of our environment. And so how we behave, how we think can be affected by those conditioned reflexes.

So let me bring this discussion home to the topic at hand- guilt.

Whenever we “mess up,” whenever we sin, the feelings of guilt can really be seen as a healthy, yes, a holy reflex. Because when we come face-to-face with our guilt it can lead us to the throne of grace and repentance. And folks, once we have repented of our sin, then that sin is forgiven. God’s Word says so. It says in I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And yet if we have been conditioned to, somehow believe, consciously or subconsciously that what we have done, said, not done or not said is unforgiveable then we have handcuffed ourselves. And we can walk around as emotional, relational, and spiritual basket cases who are trapped. Forgive someone else- OK; forgive ourselves- no way. And if we cannot forgive ourselves then our wings are clipped and there is no chance of us chasing the Wild Goose because of the guilt. And that is where Jesus can step in and reprogram our minds and recondition our guilt reflex.

This morning we want to talk about breaking out of the Cage of Guilt- and I am sure if we had a big old boiling pot and each of us could put in that pot the guilt that some of us are carrying around with us that we need to let go of, we might find more in that pot than we want to acknowledge. So let us see how we can break out of this cage.

First, **going forward requires us to ACCEPT REALITY**. (Phil. 3:12-13) Someone once said that guilt is like the red warning light on the dashboard of the car. You can either stop and deal with the trouble, or break out the light. The only problem is that if you break out the light the issue, the guilt is still there.

I wonder, have you done things, said things in the past that you wish you could do over, take back? We all could sit here and wallow in the regrets of the past. Do you want the "good news" or the "bad news" first? Well the "bad news" is that we are all in the same boat- we all are. The "good news" is that the boat hasn't landed yet. There is still hope.

That is what is so great about what Paul writes in Philippians 3:12 when he says, "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal." Folks, the Christian is a "work in progress"- none of us have arrived yet. The thing we have to focus on is the here-and-now and the future and leave the past behind.

Folks, I encourage you to read about the man who wrote this letter to the Philippians- his name is Paul. His name before he became a Christian was Saul. Let me share just a few verses that can begin to paint the picture for you regarding Paul but this is when he was known as Saul. Look at Acts 8:1, the verse that follows chapter 7 when Stephen was stoned to death. It says, "And Saul approved of their killing him [him meaning Stephen]." Then jump over to Acts 9:1-2. We read, "Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound

to Jerusalem.” Folks, this one known as Saul who, after his conversion to Christianity became known as Paul, was, in his former life, a persecutor of Christians. Do you think he had a lot to be forgiven of? You bet, and so do we. Do we have to come to terms with the past? You bet. We cannot just move along our merry old way as if it didn’t happen. That is where acknowledgement of our sin or sins is crucial and then repentance. For I believe this with my whole heart- **we will never truly understand and accept the grace of Almighty God until we come to terms with the fullness of our own sin.** The trouble today is no one wants to take responsibility. Listen to this- In 1980 a Boston court acquitted Michael Tindall of flying illegal drugs into the United States. Tindall’s attorneys argued that he was a victim of “action addict syndrome,” an emotional disorder that makes a person crave dangerous, thrilling situations. Tindall was not a drug dealer; he was merely a thrill seeker. And then there is the famous “Twinkie syndrome.”

Attorneys for Dan White, who murdered San Francisco mayor George Moscone, blamed the crime on emotional stress linked to White's junk food binges. White was acquitted of murder and convicted on a lesser charge of manslaughter. Nowadays, nobody's guilty of anything. We are a nation of victims. If we are going to break out of the cage of guilt we must accept reality.

Second, **going forward requires us to ACCEPT HOPE** (Phil. 3:14-15). Friends, there is always hope with Christ. Saul who became Paul met up with the risen Christ who spoke to him on the road to Damascus, He embraced the Christ, whose followers he once sought to kill, and Paul's life was changed forever. From that moment he accepted Christ he went forward to serve the risen Lord. Paul had to be open to what his life could become as a result of saying YES to Jesus and he had to move forward with hope. Out of the ashes of our lives God can bring about good; God can redeem us for His glory.

And God can take our past- the things we have done or not done, the things we have said or not said and redeem them for His glory. A sign of Christian maturity is going forward with God. That is why Paul says in verses 14-15, "I strain forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you."

Let me share a story of a friend of mine who embraced hope when there appeared to be no hope. I've shared this before but I'd like to share it again. His name is Chuck. We went to Junior High and High School together; played on the High School Basketball Team together. He had a slew of older brothers and if there was any disturbance in town or fighting between the kids from Bellevue and those down the road in Avalon or Avonworth, Chuck's brothers were in it.

I still remember the time that he and I exchanged words in Mr. Petrone's 8<sup>th</sup> grade geography class and I thought I was headed for a fight in Bayne Park after school-the place everybody met to fight- with half the school standing around watching. I'll never forget when Chuck appeared in the weekday released-time Christian Education program that occurred at a local church where, if the student signed up, they would go there during study hall for Bible Study. After that first class people were saying, "What is Chuck doing here? As if only we good, righteous kids should be. Anyway, Mrs. Bloomer was our teacher and she had a son, John, who was my friend. Chuck and I always seemed to get along, after our almost brawl, and there were a few times we hung out together. After High School and college we lost touch and years later John Bloomer contacted me to tell me about Chuck. Chuck married and one day his wife left him. And he went home not knowing what to do and even thinking about ending his life.

When on a shelf he saw a Bible and opened it up and out fell a bookmark that Mrs. Bloomer had given him in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Weekday Religious Education and there was written on it words of encouragement and hope. And right there, that night, Chuck gave his life to Christ. John was calling me to tell me how the guy I grew up with whom I wouldn't have been surprised to find out would have ended up in prison accepted the hope that only Christ can give and turned his life around. Today, Chuck is remarried to a wonderful Christian woman, he is deeply involved in Christian ministry at his church and, at my mother's funeral we reconnected and we talk every now and then.

The point I want to make is that when Chuck's first marriage failed he could have lived his life in a cage of guilt and remorse and regret. But he didn't go there. Rather he stepped into the loving arms of a Savior who welcomed him and embraced him and gave him hope, gave him life. Chuck experienced the amazing grace of God.

And third and finally, **going forward requires ACCEPTING**

**SECURITY**. Paul says in verse 16, "Only let us hold fast to what we have obtained." Paul wants the believer to have consistency in their lives- for our conduct to be consistent with our commitment.

Let me ask you- do you honestly think you or I could do enough good deeds, good works to earn our eternal security? Given that we first talked about coming to terms with our sinful nature, do you honestly think anyone could earn their eternal salvation? The answer always, always will be NO. And that is why you or I should not be trying to live trying to earn God's love and acceptance. We should be living because Jesus Christ earned it all for us, when He died for my sins, for your sins. It is when you and I go forward in hope that we show our confidence in the one who suffered and died for our sins, that one is Jesus Christ.

Let me just wrap this up by saying that the day we die we will stand before the judgment throne of God. And what we really deserve is God to

swing his gavel and declare us "Guilty." But because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He, out of His love and mercy, took our sins on Himself and, in a way, destroyed all the evidence that could be collected against us over our entire lifetimes. And think about this, not only does Jesus pay for our sins out of His account, but He credits all of His righteousness to our account. The writer of our study book for this series, Pastor Mark Batterson puts it this way, "It is as if Jesus says, 'You give Me all of you sin, I'll give you all of My righteousness, and we'll call it even.'" Now that is a deal, isn't it? But that is the unbelievable, the unfathomable, the amazing Grace of God, in Jesus Christ.

Do we really want to live in the Cage of Guilt? We don't have to for God has provided a way out. Think of it this way: **SIN-GRACE= GUILT**

**SIN+GRACE=GRATITUDE** And it is that GRACE that makes all the difference when it is factored in against SIN.

And it is that Grace that frees us from the Cage of Guilt and lets us chase the Wild Goose. Break out of the Cage of Guilt, chase the Holy Spirit and live. Amen.

## "THE CAGE OF GUILT"

Philippians 3:12-16

Introduction: Do you believe that we are consciously or subconsciously conditioned? Ivan Pavlov and his research with dogs- seeing food and salivating; ringing a bell and salivating—this is what is called a **conditioned**

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Guilt- can really be a healthy, holy reflex I John 1:9  
 Forgiving someone else- OK; forgiving ourselves- no way

Breaking out of the Cage of Guilt

First, **going forward requires us to ACCEPT** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Phil. 3:12-13)

Saul who later became known as Paul

We will never truly understand and accept the grace of God until we come to terms with the fullness of our own sin

Second, **going forward requires us to ACCEPT** \_\_\_\_\_(vs. 14-15)  
 Saul/Paul's experience...

Out of the ashes of our lives God can bring about good; God can redeem us for His glory

Third, **going forward requires ACCEPTING** \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 16)

Not only does Jesus pay for our sins out of His account, but He credits all of His righteousness to our account

**Sin – Grace= Guilt**

**Sin + Grace= Gratitude**

Conclusion: Grace frees us from the Cage of Guilt and lets us chase the Wild Goose. Break out of the Cage of Guilt, and live.