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R. C. SPROUL

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Chapter One

Guilt and Guilt Feelings

During my career as a seminary professor, I frequently have been called upon to teach courses on Christian apologetics. The term *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means “to make a reply.” Thus, the discipline of apologetics is not concerned with apologizing for being a Christian, as the term might suggest. Rather, its aim is to provide a rational, intellectual defense of the truth claims of Christianity and to answer objections that people raise to the faith. This can be a very abstract, philosophical enterprise.

What Can I Do with My Guilt?

As I engage in apologetics, I often converse with people who are not Christian believers; some of them are indifferent, while others are openly hostile to Christianity. For this reason, when I have these discussions, I often encounter questions about various truth claims. I think, as Francis Schaeffer used to say, that it is the Christian responsibility to give honest answers to honest questions, as far as we are able, so I try my best to do that.

Sooner or later, however, particularly in discussions with skeptics and people who are philosophically hostile to Christianity, I pause from my attempts to give answers and raise a particularly pointed question of my own. I say: “We’ve discussed the abstractions, the rational arguments for the existence of God and so on. Let’s lay those aside just for a moment and let me ask you this: What do you do with your guilt?”

This question often provokes a dramatic shift in the tenor of the discussion. It touches on something that is a visceral matter for many people, something that affects them at an existential level, so it moves the discussion beyond the abstract realm. In most instances, the person with whom I am speaking does not become angry when I ask this question. Sometimes the person will say that he has no guilt or that guilt is simply a term invented by religious

Guilt and Guilt Feelings

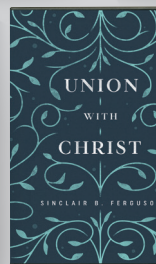
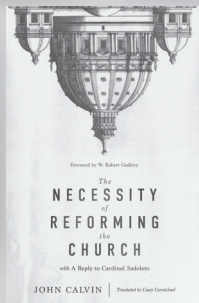
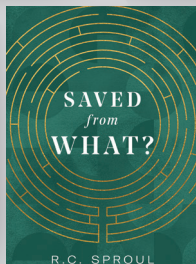
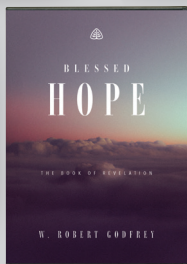
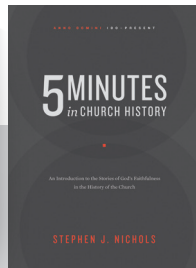
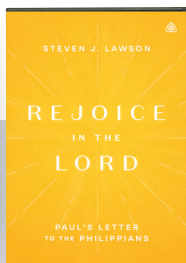
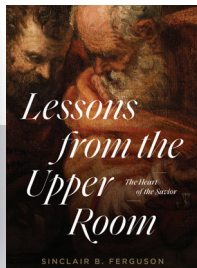
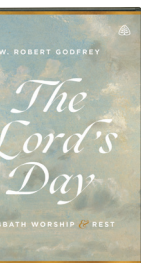
people. Usually, however, the person treats the question seriously and tries to explain how he is dealing with guilt. This, I think, is evidence that every human being knows what guilt is. Every human being, at some level and at some point in his or her life, has to deal with it.

Guilt: An Objective Reality

What is guilt? In the first place, we have to say that guilt is not subjective but objective because it corresponds to an objective standard or reality. That leads me to the simplest definition of guilt that I can compose: Guilt is that which a person incurs when he violates a law.

We understand how this works in the criminal justice system. If someone breaks a law, a statute that has been enacted by a government, and that person is apprehended for having broken the law, he may have to appear in court. The person may say he is not guilty, in which case he is entitled to a trial, frequently a trial by jury. At such a trial, evidence is produced and testimony is heard. At the end of the trial, the members of the jury come to a verdict. They decide whether, in their judgment, the person is, in fact, guilty of breaking the law he is charged with violating.

We want to see men and women
around the world connect the deep truths
of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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