

**CATHOLICS ANONYMOUS**  
**Hebrews 9: 11-22 – October 30, 2016 –Reformation Sunday**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

This is not an anti-Catholic sermon. This is an anti-guilt sermon. No, what this sermon is about is guilt, life-sucking, soul destroying, morbid guilt. The sermon title comes from a humorous discussion I once had with a dear Roman Catholic friend of mine about the similarities between the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church in the guilt department. Because we Presbyterians are no slouches in the guilt department. We load ourselves up with tons of unnecessary and unhelpful guilt. So I'm having this funny, funny conversation with this delightful Catholic woman and she's telling me about some sister in the Roman Catholic Church wearing a big black nun habit, scaring her. And then she laughed. Then I shared with her about the wall of oil portraits at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where each former professor seemed to try to scowl the hardest, as if one's piety was linked to the depth of one's frown; the holier you were the angrier you looked; it was scary to walk by professors weaned on a pickle. See, Catholics and Calvinists have a lot in common in the guilt department. Laughing so hard at one another's similar stories, it was then and there this Roman Catholic coined the phrase: "What we need is a Catholics Anonymous Meeting in order to get rid of our guilt."

Or maybe it should be called a Presby-Catholic Anonymous meeting. Or a Catholic-aterian Anonymous meeting. Because just like the literal word "catholic" means "universal"; morbid, life-draining soul-sucking guilt seems to be something that is no respecter of denominations and can be present in almost every church, if we let it.

**Healthy guilt** is when we are convicted by the Holy Spirit of something we have done or said that is not right; and Healthy Guilt is then brought forward to the Lord, forgiven, and washed clean by the blood of Jesus. And then it is GONE. It is no more. "*I have remembered your sins no more.*", says the Lord. "*As far as the East is from the West...*", your sins are forgiven. "*Though your sins be as scarlet (in Jesus Christ) they are washed as white as snow.*" I love when we say "The Assurance of Pardon", where we are reminded in the words of scripture, that "FRIENDS, BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL. IN JESUS CHRIST WE ARE FORGIVEN!" Healthy Guilt is when we've erred, bring our error before the Lord and are reminded that everything about Jesus Christ is GOOD NEWS. The GOSPEL is Good News and it is Good News because it is about forgiveness. The past is in the past. The Lord remembers our sin no more. When we are IN CHRIST and CHRIST is alive in us through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit then it is through HIM we are forgiven and freed to NEW LIFE in HIM!

By contrast, **UN-healthy guilt** is when we HOLD onto our guilt after we have been forgiven. Unhealthy guilt is giving guilt away to Jesus and then taking it back. Unhealthy guilt is an attitude like "If I'm too happy right now I must be doing something wrong." Unhealthy guilt is an attitude like, "If I feel guilty all the time I must really be holy and spiritual" Unhealthy guilt makes us morose and dark and unsmiling, wallowing in it, fixated upon it, never letting it go. It fills us with darkness and melancholy and

gloom. Beloved, it robs us of our joy, of the JOY that Jesus came into the world to bring. An unhealthy fixation on guilt is not Christianity.

- Christianity is “*Now there is no longer any condemnation in Christ Jesus our Lord*”.
- Christianity is Jesus saying: “*I have come to bring you life and life abundantly.*”
- Christianity is Jesus saying He has come to bring us Joy and “*that your Joy might be complete.*”
- Christianity is Jesus saying: “*Be of Good Cheer. I have overcome the world.*”
  
- Unhealthy Guilt turns the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel into the BAD NEWS of mere religiosity. Healthy Guilt ALWAYS leads to forgiveness in Christ Jesus and the guilt being washed away in the Blood of the Lamb.
- Unhealthy Guilt beats us up with religion. Healthy Guilt leads us to new life in a wonderful relationship with the Lord of Life.
- Unhealthy Guilt cements us into our past mistakes. Healthy Guilt liberates us into a joyous, life-filled future.
- Unhealthy Guilt enslaves us. Healthy Guilt sets us free in Jesus’ name. And when we are set FREE in Jesus, beloved, we are FREE INDEED!

Beloved, no one beats themselves up more than I do. As a pastor if someone notes that one of the lightbulbs is out in the sanctuary I will find myself saying to myself: “If I were a better pastor no lightbulb would be out in the sanctuary.” Or if there are differences of opinions and one person says something meanly critical of another person I will say to myself: “If I were a better pastor no one in my congregation would say something mean about someone else.” Or whatever, or, or, or, or, and I will say to myself, “If I were a better pastor...” Guilt, guilt and more guilt. I hold onto it. I relish it just a little too much. See, I am indeed a good Calvinist and my picture complete with a stern expression could hang in the hallways of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. I even have figured it out over the years that it is my GUILT that takes away my JOY and it is my JOY that makes me a better pastor and Christian. Ouch! But that’s why we all need to hold one another accountable in a Presby-Catholics Anonymous Meeting that IS Church, hold ourselves accountable to let go of our guilt and to hold on to our joy.

I LOVE our scripture for today. It really distinguishes between mere religiosity that keeps us fixed and enslaved to GUILT versus a true Christianity that sets us free from guilt through Jesus Christ. Its all about temple worship where they would over and over again make sacrifices that never were able to take away our guilt or the stain of sin.

**What the blood of animals could never wash away the Blood of Jesus can.**

It says, “*Christ entered once for all into the Holy Place...*” (Hebrews 9:12) Once for all, Jesus died on the cross for our sin. Once for all, His blood has wiped the stain of sin away. What all our religious practices, what all our human religion attempted to do, what all our rituals attempted but never brought to pass, Christ accomplished through His death, and His blood and His cross. We are forgiven because of Calvary. We are set free from our unhealthy guilt by the blood of Lamb. The power in the blood of Jesus is

complete. He died ONCE FOR ALL; His death sufficed; the tiniest droplet of the blood of Jesus is effective to wash us clean, ONCE FOR ALL.

Here's the beauty of it –it is ONCE FOR ALL. It is ONCE. It is not over and over and over again. We don't have to keep going back. What Jesus did 2,000 years ago wiped our sin away today. No, Jesus died for our sin ONCE; it was finished; it sufficed; end of story.

It is FOR ALL. And this is an interesting construction in the Greek here. For all, what? Its like there's a blank space right after the "once for all". See, He died ONCE for all TIME. He died ONCE for all PEOPLE. He died ONCE for all SIN. He died ONCE for every sin we have ever committed in the past; He died ONCE for all sin we have committed this week, and O beloved, here is the REALLY GOOD NEWS, He died ONCE for all sin we shall ever commit, for all sin ever committed, for all sin that shall ever be, HE DIED ONCE FOR ALL. That which He did 2,000 years ago is still effective today and tomorrow and to the end of time.

He died once for all time. He died once for all people. He died once for you and for me. He died once for all sin. He died for the sin of our past and He died for the sin of our present and He died for the sin of our future. It is GONE. It is all GONE. **The moment you believe that what Jesus did, he did for you, it is wiped clean in the blood of Jesus, it is finished, it is gone!**

In his Book "*Young Man Luther*" Eric Ericson chronicles the epic and internal struggles of Martin Luther, the author of the Protestant Reformation, when as a young man he was a Roman Catholic Monk. Luther was the expert at the mortification of the flesh, denying himself in every way in order to attempt to feel forgiven. But he never felt forgiven. When Luther would fast and not eat for days at a time it was to deny himself in order to be forgiven. He became gaunt and dangerously emaciated. He almost died but he never felt forgiven. When Luther would go to confession he would sometimes confess for up to three hours at a time! But he never felt fully forgiven in Jesus. Finally, in the midst of his struggle he was studying in the Book of Romans that we are saved (and forgiven) not by holding onto our guilt, we are saved by grace through faith. He believed that indeed Jesus had died on a cross, once for all, once and for him. And in that moment the Lord took away all of his guilt and set him free. He realized the Good News of the Gospel really is GOOD...*Presbyterians Anonymous –we need to give up our guilt and live our lives out of the full forgiveness of Jesus.* On Reformation Sunday this is what we celebrate. Friends...BELIEVE the Good News of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven, *once and for all!* Would you be willing to let go of the guilt of the past in Jesus' name today????? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*