

GUILT

Guilt sometimes suggests the breaking of the law, but it can also be a sense of having committed an offense. If you take something that belongs to someone else, you may have a sense of wrongdoing – this is guilt. When you are accused and convicted of theft – this is being guilty. When you have a prevailing sense of guilt or wrongdoing from the past, you have remorse. Another word similar in nature, shame is a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt. The definition and distinction of these words gets very confusing; but, the words are very important in the context of the primary word, guilt. The information below comes largely from L.A. Rounds via the Web site: www.soaringhigher.org.

Guilt can be:

- Real - having been accused and indeed having committed an offense
- Implied - having been accused with allegations – that are not true or proven
- Imagined – having thought you committed an offense – but not certain

Guilt is described as an *outward* condition or circumstance that can be forgiven through the desire/action on the part of the offender or accused, and/or on the part of the offended by like desire/action. For example, I said something that really hurt someone's feelings. Having realized the consequences of my action, I ask for forgiveness or I apologize. They (the offended) could also describe their hurt to me and ask for an apology from me. Ideally, forgiveness is sought by the offender, and accepted and granted by the offended – this leads to reconciliation.

Shame is a sense that you are deficient, inadequate or *can never measure up*, defective, worthless or otherwise deceived of your value and worth. Sometimes *shame-based* discipline or control is exercised by those closest to us, and can occur as verbal abuse and a general attitude that *you will never measure-up* to their standards; consequently, you may develop a poor or low self-esteem. With low self-esteem, you are more prone to seek acceptance from anyone and everyone, more prone to poor decisions and choices, and more prone to mistakes and failures.

Hope, healing, and freedom from shame can only occur through a relationship with God. Remember that God accepts us, loves us, and has a purpose for us – each and every one! The unconditional love and acceptance offered through God alone is the remedy for the tired, deprived and abused shame-based individual. No longer bound by the conditions that created the shame in the first place, you are released or set free. Yes, mistakes and wrongdoing do occur; but God has put in place a process for forgiveness and reconciliation – all the long, still loving us more than we can every comprehend.

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