

## Getting Rid Of Guilt

### **Our False Conscience**

We sometimes feel guilty over the smallest thing - painstakingly worried about something we have done that isn't really important; for example as children we might have been trained by our parents to follow certain rules like eating up everything on the plate and as adults we feel guilty if we don't continue this habit. Other examples of illogical guilt are when we say 'sorry' a lot of the time and unfairly criticise ourselves. Trying too hard to be liked we may feel easily embarrassed when asking for favours or doing anything that might displease others. These so-called guilt feelings come about from our worldly concerns like wanting to be well thought of and desiring popularity.

We can start to feel a little less uptight about our behaviour when we see the unreasonableness of some of these guilt-laden habits of thought and learn how to face up to them. For example no longer thinking that looking after oneself is the same as being selfish. If we can better accept ourselves for what we are – warts and all - then we will be less dependent on being looked upon well by those who know us. If we can learn to notice our strengths as well as our failings we will feel less bad about our mistakes. This is the way to discard some unpleasant guilt feelings and what Emanuel Swedenborg calls 'the false conscience' which goes along with them.

### **Our True Conscience**

This is not to say that all guilt feelings can be easily got rid of. After all with many of us there is such a thing as an inner conscience of what is morally right. This is formed from good ideas in which we are brought up. It represents a caring attitude to others, tolerance and following what is right and proper in life. It is for instance when we believe that civil and criminal law should be kept because it is based on principles of justice and social order. Another example is when we believe that professional ethics should be followed because they are based on high standards of work done for the benefit of clients.

Sometimes we do act against this inner conscience and feel bad about it. We may try hard to put the past behind us and forget about what we feel ashamed. But the past keeps coming back to haunt us and we end up feeling miserable. Sometimes we may want to be punished in the hope that this will put things right. Sometimes we yearn for God's forgiveness but cannot experience this because we believe we deserve only his judgment. We may hold the view that God is keeping a little book totting up our sins as well as our good actions and will reward us with hellfire or heaven depending on which list is longer.

### **Mistaken Attributions**

According to Emanuel Swedenborg good and bad impulses and thoughts can flow into us from what he calls 'the spiritual world'. We are inspired and tempted by them but not responsible for them. After all would be conceited if we were to think all the good things we do come from ourselves. The religious person believes that all what is good comes from God and we can claim no credit for it. He is the source of all virtue, tolerance, kindness, compassion etc. All we can do is try to choose to follow his way. Swedenborg points out in the same way we feel guilty when we believe all the bad things we do come from ourselves. He wrote that all what is evil comes from the hellish part of the spiritual world. We should accept no blame for it. For him, hell is

the source of all vice, intolerance, cruelty condemnation etc. All we can do is try to avoid hells way.

### **Harmful Teaching of Traditional Religion**

Unfortunately, the idea that we are guilty because of all what is bad in us, has been maintained by orthodox Christian theology. This is when mistakenly it teaches that God the Father only accepts us because of his Son's self-sacrifice on the cross taking the punishment we really deserve in our place. Not only does this traditional theology support polytheism but also represents a crude notion of the need to appease a wrathful deity. It does nothing to reduce the erroneous efforts of many to seek get to rid of guilt through religious ritual.

### **Swedenborg's Teaching**

Instead Swedenborg taught that God - the origin of all that is good and right - accepts us willy-nilly regardless of our wrong-doing. He so much loves us that he entered into the human plane of life to overcome the powers of evil by suffering the test of living in the world.

It is we at times who distance ourselves from the divine by following bad impulses which come our way. Yet God is ever ready to save us from our wrongdoing if only we would turn to him in repentance. For only by responding to the still small voice of our inner conscience can we hope to resolve to change. In a heavenly state of mind we can experience a guilt-free state of peace if we, like little children, innocently allow God to lead us in all we do.

### ***Further Reading***

**“Emanuel Swedenborg: Essential Readings”** Edited by Michael Stanley, 1-85274 026 4 Published by Crucible: The Aquarian Press: Thorns Publishing Group. See Chapter on Man's Nature

**“The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine”** by Emanuel Swedenborg. See Sections on Conscience, Merit and Repentance and the Remission of Sins.

**“The True Christian Religion”** by Emanuel Swedenborg translated by John Chadwick 1987. See Chapter on Imputation