



Daily Verse and Comment

Numbers 15:31

(31) Because he has despised the LORD's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.'

New International Version

This verse defines guilt as breaking God's commandments. Guilt is a condition, a state, or a relationship. It is the result of two forces drawing different ways. At one point stands righteousness, and at the other, [sin](#). In the [Old Testament](#), the ideas of sin, guilt, and punishment are so interwoven that it is impossible to describe one without mentioning the other two. Sometimes one word is used interchangeably for the others.

The apostle John writes, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” ([1 John 3:4](#)). The Greek word for “sin” is *hamartia*, an archery term for “missing the mark.” We could say that sin is not just making an error in judgment in a particular case, but missing the whole point of human life; not just the violation of a law, but an insult to a relationship with the One to whom we owe everything; not just a servant's failure to carry out a master's orders, but the [ingratitude](#) of a child to its parent.

The state of sin is a surrender of freedom; it is like being enslaved to a drug. Like a chemical addiction, sin can become an unshakable habit, so that every next time makes it easier to absolve ourselves of guilt. Even petty sins, if numerous enough, can immobilize us until they completely harden our hearts.

A couple of examples of guilt will help clarify its effects. One is Cain's despondent complaint to [God](#) after he had slain Abel. “Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!'" ([Genesis 4:13](#)). The word “punishment” includes both the sin committed and the guilt attached to it. Guilt assures us of eventual misery.

Another example is that of Joseph's brothers, who were late to recognize their guilt in selling Joseph into slavery. They probably felt their guilt in varying degrees all along, but it was not until they felt threatened by receiving the consequences that they admitted it. “Then they said to one another, 'We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us'” ([Genesis 42:21](#)). Their guilt had separated them from God, their brother Joseph, and even from their father, Jacob.

In the Psalms, it is apparent that willful and persistent sin can never be separated from guilt or from consequent punishment. Notice [Psalm 69:27-28](#): “Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.” David writes of the wicked in [Psalm 109:7](#), “When he is judged, let him be found guilty.”

Ignoring guilt does not make it go away. A penalty of sin must be paid. Unless we submit to God and accept Christ's [sacrifice for our sins](#), we will pay the ultimate price—our lives!

— Martin G. Collins

To learn more, see:

[Should We Ignore Our Feelings of Guilt?](#)

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