

# How to Deal With the Guilt of Sexual Failure for the Glory of Christ

by John Piper

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*John Piper addresses the issue of guilt from sexual failure and emphasizes the importance of understanding justification and faith in overcoming it for a life of purpose in Christ.*

**Duration:** 46:44

**Scripture:** Micah 7:7-9, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:3, Colossians 3:6

**Topics:** "Sexual Purity", "Guilt Redemption"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sexual chastity and its biblical foundation. He expresses his desire for individuals to avoid the pain and agony that can come from sexual misconduct and instead experience the powerful presence of Christ. The speaker also highlights the need to not let failures define one's life and waste their potential. He encourages the audience to engage in theology and deepen their understanding of God's word, particularly in the book of Colossians. The sermon concludes with catchy headings that emphasize the power of theology in conquering biology and the importance of trusting Jesus with guilt.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from DesiringGod is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Let's pray together. Father, we want you to make us brave, broken-hearted, brave men and women.

And so to that end, I pray that you would come and help me to be faithful to your word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And we want to be people filled with faith.

When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him.

Until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me, he will bring me out to the light and I will look upon his vindication. So Lord, for the morning after the failure, I pray for liberty. I pray for power.

And I pray that you would come upon this gathering in these two sites and do a work that will ripple to the end of time and to the end of the world. In Jesus' name, amen. The closest that I have ever come to being fired from my present position as a pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church for the last 26 years where I have

served is in the middle 80s when I wrote an article for our church newsletter entitled, Missions and Masturbation.

The article didn't come out of nowhere and I don't mention it simply to get your attention. It relates deeply and directly to Colossians 1 to 3 that many of you have been studying. And it relates directly to my dream for your global significance in this world.

I had just returned from a missions conference in Washington, D.C. where George Verwer, crazy George Verwer, was speaking and his burden burdened me. His burden was that there is a tragic number of students, high school students, college students, many of them just like you, who have dreamed a dream of being radically significant in the world, doing something, laying down your life, sacrificing anything to spread the renown of Jesus Christ to the cities and the nations and the campuses. And then you lost it.

And one of the huge reasons he said that it was being lost was that there was so much guilt and a sense of unworthiness because of sexual, sexual failure, that the guilt and the unworthiness finally bled down into a gnawing sense of spiritual powerlessness yielding the dead-end street, the dead-end dream of middle class, American, comfortable, secure security. And thousands were walking away from the dream they once dreamed for global impact because of sexual sin in their lives and sexual failure in their past. In other words, what seems so tragic to George Verwer as it does to me is that so many young people are lost to the cause of Christ.

I mean, aggressive engagement, not just filling a pew, but aggressive engagement are lost because they have not been taught, perhaps you have not been taught, how to deal with sexual failure in your life. Notice how I'm saying it. Notice what the issue really is.

I'm not saying you haven't been taught how to avoid sexual failure. That may or may not be true. That's not what I'm focusing on.

I'm focusing on the issue not of how not to fail, but how not to have your life made into a total waste because you have failed. That's my biggest concern here. The great tragedy, the great tragedy of Christian young people's lives is not masturbation, it's not fornication, it's not being a peeping Tom or a curious Kathy on the internet.

The tragedy is that Satan uses the guilt of all those failures to strip you of your once radical dream and to put in its place a life that is happy and safe and secure, American, middle class, filled with superficial pleasures so that you someday die on your lakeside rocking chair, wrinkled and useless and leaving a big fat inheritance to your middle aged children to confirm them in their worldliness. That's what he wants to sell you because you failed so badly. And the only alternative is that instead of what you once dreamed for Christ and his kingdom.

And I have not come here to waste your time or my time. I have come with a passion that you not waste your life. My aim is not merely to cure you of sexual misconduct.

I would like that to happen. I'm a dad. I've got four sons, one daughter.

I like very much sexual chastity. That's a good idea. It's a biblical idea.

It will spare you much pain and much agony and bring Christ home to you in powerful ways. I want that to happen. That's not why I came.

I came because I don't want Satan to take the failure and make you a waste because of it. I don't want you to waste your life because of what you did last night. You know what the real meaning of Do Something Now is? 20,000 towels for Atlanta shelters.

11 wells for fresh water in Africa. College education for 20 international compassion students. New Testament translated for the Dela people of Indonesia.

Freedom Center for the Kurds in Northern Iraq. Life-changing surgery for kids in South America. Bibles for families in East Asia.

Liberation for those enslaved in sex trafficking. You know what the point of that is? The point of that is not what you do with your loose change. The point of that is what you do with your life.

You don't want to be always sitting high in your SUV dropping nickels into other people's dreams. Is that really where you want to go? Give me that favorite car. Give me that favorite house.

Give me that favorite wife. And I will drop nickels for the rest of my life into other people's dreams. I don't think you came to passion to get stoked for that.

What broke George Verwer's heart back in the 80s, what broke his heart back in the 80s and what breaks mine today is not mainly that you have sinned sexually, but mainly that this morning Satan said to you because of the failure at 2 a.m. on TV in bed, you're a loser. You'll never have a dream. Passion is totally over your head.

You are out of your element here. You may as well not go to worship this morning. What you should do is go back to school and get a real good practical education.

Get a good job. Get a big wide screen and watch sex till you drop. That's what Satan said to you this morning.

And what is tragic is that so many believe him because they've never been taught what to do about it. What do you do at 9 a.m. about 2 a.m.? So that's why I'm here to help you deal with the guilt of failure in your sexual life. Here's my plan.

Two pieces. I want to connect it to Colossians. That's step one.

And I want to go to Micah, the prophet, and find words to use for the morning after the failure. Some people like catchy headings. So here are a couple of catchy headings.

Catchy heading number one. Theology can conquer biology. Or here's another way to say catchy heading number one.

Justification can conquer fornication. So mark that down. We're going to talk about that for a while.

And then catchy heading number two is trust Jesus to the hilt with gutsy guilt. Trust Jesus to the hilt with gutsy guilt. Okay, that's where we're going.

Here's number one. Did you notice in Colossians chapter 3, verse 6, the backdrop of everything that's happening in Colossians 1 to 3? The backdrop is the wrath of God. You got that clear? If nobody has told you that yet, I'm telling you.

I'll read it to you. Colossians chapter 3, verse 6. On account of these, and he just listed a bunch of ugly sins, including yours. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

That's the background to Colossians 1 to 3. All the salvation, all the transformation that you've been pondering is to help you avoid that. That is the most fundamental issue in salvation. Salvation is not mainly about getting your life cleaned up.

It's mainly about not being incinerated by the wrath of the Lamb when He comes. You know Revelation says people, when they see the Lamb, who haven't trusted Him, they will ask to be crushed by rocks. That's better than facing Jesus on the last day.

That's what this text is about most urgently. How to help you not be burned alive forever by the just and infinitely holy wrath of God. Now, what's distinctively Christian about Colossians 1 to 3 is that the solution to the problem of the wrath of God is that God Himself, the very One who is angry with us in our sin, that very God interposes His own Son to shield us from His own wrath.

And He does it historically outside of us, before us, so that when we eventually are born and come to trust in Him, we add nothing to the sufficiency of what He already did to shield us. We add nothing to the sufficiency of what He did to help us deal with our sins. It's all there outside of us in the cross.

And so, I'm sure you have seen verses 13 and 14 in chapter 2. So that's where I want to look for a few minutes. If you have a Bible, you might want to look at it with me. Colossians 2, 13 to 14.

It goes like this. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This, He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Now those last words, this, let's make sure we know what this is. The record of debt that stood against us. So there's a record.

There's a record of everything you've ever done, good and bad. And the record of your bad is very long. It's sufficient to damn you.

That's why it's there. It is a warrant for your arrest and execution. And this text says this, this record of your debt to God, He, this God, who is the executioner, nailed it through His Son's hands onto the cross.

Now when did He do that? Not yesterday, 2,000 years ago. This is historical, objective salvation work. God took the warrant for your arrest and your execution with all the sins that you'll ever commit on it, and He nailed it through His Son's hands on the cross, outside of you, 2,000 years before you came into existence.

It didn't happen with any of your help at all. Now make sure you see the glory of this objective salvation. We're a debtor, wrath hangs over us, and instead of holding up that warrant in front of our face, saying this is why a just God may sentence you to hell, He takes it away from your face, and He puts it in His Son's hands, and He puts the nail on the warrant and He drives it through His Son's hands for us, all the sins that we have ever, ever committed.

My sins and yours. All those sins for all those people who despair of saving themselves and throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus. There's a name for that.

I want to name it because it's being scorned today, and I don't know if you've read the books that are scorning it, or you've sat under teachers who are scorning it, or you yourself may be scorning it. But the name for it is substitutionary atonement. Whose hands did the nails go through? Not yours.

Christ's. Whose warrant brought the nail into His hand? Not His. He had no sin.

Yours. That's called substitution. And if you ever hear anybody mocking the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, don't walk away in tears or show them the Scriptures, but don't be sucked into these modern ideas that there is no wrath, God doesn't have wrath, and therefore there's no need for any penal punishment substitution.

All that is old-fashioned stuff. It's not. It's Colossians 2.14. Clear as day for those who are not afraid to embrace the whole counsel of God.

So I put the name on it. It is substitution of Christ for you and your sin on Him. Here's another text, if you want to put two in your head.

This is Romans 8.3. What the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, God condemned sin in the flesh. Whose flesh bore the condemnation? Christ's.

Whose sin was punished? Yours. I don't think clearer words can be spoken than to say, God did what the law could not do, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. It was the likeness, because He had no sin.

It was our flesh minus sin. And in that flesh of Jesus Christ, the man who ate and drank and touched lepers, in that flesh, God condemned my sin when He died. That's the substitutionary atonement.

Embrace it. Build your life on it. Don't let anybody take you away from it.

Now, the next verse in Colossians, verse 15, is surprising, perhaps, to you. I don't know. It was surprising to me.

And the question is, how do they relate? Here's the next verse. This is Colossians 2.15. God disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame by triumphing over them in Him. Now, how does the triumph over the devil and his demons, how does the triumph over the devil, in verse 15, relate to the nailing of the warrant for my arrest to the cross, to the hands of Jesus, in verse 14? Because surely we know that the devil is quite alive, roaming like a lion, seeking those whom he may devour.

So in what sense is he defeated? How did the cross result in the triumph over the devil when, in fact, 1 Peter 5.8 says he roams around like a roaring lion? The answer is this. Verse 14 is back to back with verse 15 for a reason. He nailed the record of our debt to the cross and in that way defeated the devil.

How so? Because even though the devil has many weapons, he can beat you up, he can taunt you, he can tempt you, he can make you see weird things on the walls of your room, he can throw you into prison, he can kill you, but he cannot damn you. And the reason he cannot damn you is because there is only one instrument of damnation, unforgiven sin. Only one thing sends people to hell, unforgiven sin.

And that weapon has been taken out of his hands 2,000 years ago. He cannot use unforgiven sin against those who trust in Jesus. I know that hundreds in this room, these rooms, I know that hundreds of you see

so little glory in the cross of Christ that what I'm saying can only sound to you like a license to go on sinning.

That's all you can hear me say. Ha, cool. All my sins, past, present, and future, nailed to the cross so that I bear them no more.

Let us sin that grace may abound. That's all you can hear because you see so little preciousness and value and beauty in Jesus Christ. And, of course, the Bible is quite aware of you and speaks directly to you in Romans 3, verse 8, and says their condemnation is just.

Here's the reason why you would be condemned. If you hear me talk about sins being nailed to the cross and all you see is a license to go on sinning, it would be just because the only way you become united to Christ so that his death becomes your death and his life becomes your life and he bears your sins is faith. And faith is a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior and treasure of your life.

Faith is not a performance. Faith is not improving upon what Christ accomplished. Faith is a seeing it, being stunned by it, counting it as infinitely precious and welcoming it as the treasure of your life.

That's what faith is. And when faith does this, when faith sees glory in the cross, when faith reaches out and empty-handed receives what Christ has done on the cross, faith becomes a fighter. It fights everything that would dim the glory of my Savior.

It fights everything that would diminish the Lordship of Christ in my life. It fights every treasure that would threaten to become an alternative treasure to Jesus Christ in my life. So if all you see in the cross is a license to sin, you don't have saving faith.

You are under condemnation. You will go to hell if you do not repent and put your faith in Jesus, even though all the sins are there covered for all the people who will embrace Him and have Him. Faith unites us to Jesus, and Jesus counts for us then in all of His punishment and all of His righteousness.

Now, I call this first point, Theology Can Conquer Biology. And then I gave it the subtitle, Justification Can Conquer Fornication. And I haven't said anything about justification yet, but I can't read Colossians 2.14, where my forgiveness is purchased at the cost of the Son's life, and my warrant for my arrest is nailed through His hands so that I bear it no more.

I can't read that without thinking of all the other places where this doctrine is filled out and completed under the banner of justification by faith. Let me define it for you. Justification is the act by which God declares you not only forgiven but righteous.

God requires two things of you. That your sins be punished and that your life be righteous. You cannot bear your own punishment and you do not have righteousness.

Therefore, in the abundant love that God has to shield us from His wrath, He sends His Son not only to bear our sins but to perform our righteousness. So Christ becomes my punishment and my righteousness. And Christ becomes my righteousness, and the righteous life that I'm required to have, I now have in Him by faith.

And the punishment I'm required to bear, I have borne in Him by faith. This glorious substitution works in both ways, justification and clemency or forgiveness. Theology can conquer biology.

And I know that when I'm done here, somebody will say to me, I know a PhD in theology who ran off with the secretary of the department. So, so much for you're all conquering theology. I know that.

And that's right. I'm not putting theology in the place of passion for Jesus. I'm saying the human soul, the whole soul, mind, heart, spirit, was created to be strong in the knowledge of Colossians 1 to 3. Our mind was created to be packed with glorious truth about Jesus Christ, about God the Father, about the Holy Spirit, about how He saves sinners by becoming their punishment and becoming their righteousness.

Our brains were made to hold these things. And too long, oh, let passion not be part of it. Too long we have preferred theology to passion or passion to theology.

Oh, let us sing and jump up and down, but don't teach us anything. Or, oh, teach us, but we're not jumping if it cost us a million dollars. I hope my prayer, the reason I like passion and Louis Giglio and have been here 11 years, is because I believe here is the potential to get it together.

Here is the potential for young people who come and they are told a passion for Jesus Christ and the spread of His renown is supremely important. And I suppose the reason I'm here is to say there is something else important, really important, and it's that your head not have stupid ideas about Jesus in it, but that it be packed with Colossians 1, 2, 3, with a true understanding of what it is about. The Bible wasn't written to be misunderstood.

It wasn't written to just get little buzzes of feeling from. It was written to be followed, clause on clause, phrase on phrase, until it glows with light as well as heat. And so, when I say fornication is conquered by justification, or theology can conquer biology, I don't mean it separate from a passion for what you see in your theology.

I think there are as many charismatic types who fall down sexually as there are doctrinaire intellectualistic types. They're both vulnerable because we were made to be whole. And we will triumph both before and if necessary after sexual failure if we see these things.

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. This is Hosea 6. Our people are laid waste with sexual temptation.

Why? Because our souls have shriveled up to the size of a TV sitcom. I mean, can you imagine soaking in front of soaps or sitcoms for hours on end and then going to a church where they don't give a rip about theology and thinking you're going to have any fiber in the tree of your faith. You're just going to get blown flat.

That's what's going to happen. And so find the right church and read your Bibles and read the right books. Theology, with passion for Jesus, can conquer biology.

And the last question is, what are you going to say to Him the morning after? I said I didn't come mainly to cure you of sexual misconduct. I hope that happens. I really believe that will happen if you understand what I'm saying.

That's not the main thing. I am mainly concerned that there not be the tragic loss, the bleeding of young people out of this building, these buildings, because you failed so badly sexually. No hope for me.

I couldn't do anything significant for Jesus. I'm a loser. I live at the level of a dog in heat.

So you may as well stop talking, Piper, because I'm only here for the vibes. What do you say to Him? What do you say to Him the morning after? Now if you have a Bible and you can find this little book of Micah, would you go there? I'm coming in for a landing here, and I want to give you two verses to talk to the devil. This is Micah.

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah. Does that help? Flop around in those little minor prophets until you find it. Micah is where I'm getting the term trusting Christ to the hilt with gutsy guilt.

Okay, if you're there, put your eyes on chapter 7, verse 8. If you're not there, listen carefully. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise.

When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him. Until He pleads my cause and executes judgment for me, not against me, He will bring me out to the light.

I shall look upon His vindication. That's what victory looks like the morning after sexual failure. And my prayer is that without any kind of glib devil may care, it doesn't matter what you do attitude, you will be able to speak that into the face of your accuser.

So let me just walk through it in closing. Verse 8. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. You make merry over my failure, Satan.

You think you will draw me into your deception. Think again. When I fall, I shall rise.

Yes, I have fallen. I hate what I did. I grieve at the dishonor that I brought upon the king.

But hear this, O my enemy. I will rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

Yes, I'm sitting in darkness. You think that's news to me? I feel rotten, Satan. You're not telling me anything I don't even know.

I'm miserable. I feel guilty. I am guilty.

But that is not all that is true about me, my enemy. That's not all that's true about God. That's not all that's true about the cross.

The same God who makes my darkness sustains me. His light in this darkness is very dim right now. I'm tempted to doubt that it's there.

You're not going to help me doubt that it's there. He will bring me out. Verse 9. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.

Oh, yes, my enemy. You've got a few things right. This much you say is true.

I have sinned. I am bearing the indignation of the Lord. That's not news to me.

But there, your truth stops and my theology begins. He, it says, he, this very one who is indignant with me, he will plead my cause. That's what stunned me in this verse.

I mean, can you get this? Can you feel where I'm getting the term gutsy guilt? Does gutsy guilt sound to you like what's here? I will bear the indignation of the Lord. God is mad at you with a fatherly disciplinary

anger, not a damning anger. He's very, very upset with what you did.

He is indignant and darkness is all over you. Don't you realize guilt is to the mind like pain is to the body? If you didn't have it, you would have died a long time ago. You don't know when you're bleeding.

You don't know when you're infected. There'd be no fevers. You couldn't take any antibiotics.

Guilt is a glorious thing. Own it. Wear it.

It's a gift. And be gutsy in it. My God, whose son's life is my righteousness and whose son's death is my punishment, will execute judgment for me.

I was just blown away. I was just blown away when I saw that. I'm sitting under the indignation of God.

He's angry with me and I'm saying, I will sit here as long as my dear God appoints for me to feel rotten until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. Will God give you the grace after the sin to talk to the devil that way? That's why I'm here. I want that to happen for you.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, when you learn to deal with the guilt of sexual failure this way, with this brokenhearted boldness, with this kind of theology, this kind of justification by faith, this kind of substitutionary atonement, this kind of gutsy guilt, this kind of unshakable position in Jesus Christ, who died for you and rose again, triumphant, victorious over the devil, and put to naught the powers of darkness, when you learn to deal with your sexual failure that way, the morning after, I thought last night as I was getting this ready, to hell with the morning after pill. We need the morning after gospel. That's what I thought.

Own your guilt. Own the baby if you have to. I hate abortion.

And so does God. But he loves, he loves you. And he has a future for you.

He has a plan for you. And best of all, Satan will not be able to destroy your dream. This is not a sermon about helping Christians be squeaky clean people.

This is about significance in the globe, and the unreached peoples of the world, and the campuses that don't have Christian ministries. This is about the cities. This is about you not throwing your life away because of sexual sin in your past.

So, if you have heard me, and if God is at work in these rooms, then George Verwer will not have preached in vain. 1985, I will not have written my little, almost get fired, missions and masturbation article. I will not have come here in vain.

Francis and Beth and Louis will not have spoken in vain. You will not have sung in vain. All the breakout sessions will not have been done in vain because so many of you, by means of gutsy guilt, will now dedicate yourselves unflinchingly, no matter what sin, unflinchingly to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples, through Jesus Christ.

So God, please, would you come and perform this now. We want to run out of shame into your marvelous light. And so, Grant, I pray that when these words are taken on our lips, it will be with a new, fresh, deep theology by which we can conquer biology and justification by which we can conquer fornication and a gutsy guilt that gets in the devil's face the morning after and says, When I fall, I will rise.

Oh God, Grant, I pray that the cross would have its sway, that the glory of Jesus, crucified and risen, would conquer sin before and after in our lives. I commend us to your grace. In his great name.

Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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