

What would it take for you to stop feeling the pangs of guilt? Sure, the absolution is nice and all, but we all know that I'm going to be a sinning sinner still 10 minutes afterwards, likely, and I will feel just as uneasy over my sin, the exact same pet sins that I've confessed today, by this time tomorrow, and the next day, and honestly unless something drastic changes, in a month and still by Christmas.

They're the same sins it seems I've been confessing for a decade now, sure a few new ones added into the mix and a few others have fallen to the wayside—either I care about them less or by God's grace they actually occur less frequently, thanks be to God.

But if I could, by some feat of remarkable strength and determination, stop my lips when they want to share gossip, or if I could actually master my use of time and honour God with my work and my leisure, if I could avert my eyes from the beautiful things that others have, or tell myself what I enough when others have talents that I crave, if I could tell myself that God's Word is more interesting than social media, that praying is a better use of time than another nap, if I could just manage these things, then I'd barely have anything to confess each Sunday. I wouldn't have as much to beat myself up over throughout the week. (Note well, while this list is an honest glimpse into my confession, it is certainly not comprehensive. These are not the only sins that I'm aware of in myself).

It would be nice to prove that we've actually made some progress rather than simply spinning our tires in the same trenches. It would be comforting to be able to come on a Sunday and say "see, it wasn't so bad a week." And then feel like you're almost worthy of being here rather than simply entering as a charity case, welcomed by the pity of Christ, as per usual.

We've heard that it is our sin that caused Christ's death, our need that led Him to die, and so like the Jews on the day of Pentecost, the crowd we hear of in our reading, we ask "what then shall we do?" We are quite distanced from the idea of bringing an animal sacrifice to make up for our shortcomings, though that could have been on the crowd's mind when they asked the question. That's how they had been taught to deal with their sin up until that point. Understood and practiced properly, they knew that blood had to be spent for sin, and God had given them a system to substitute another's blood for their own. Understood poorly, give God something to appease Him.

And there's a part in all of us, even the most long standing Christians, that understands this poorly. We don't bring to God a calf or a lamb in order to calm down His wrath, but as we've discussed, I want to bring God my better life and prove my worth in the family. Or we want to bring money and prove that we're willing to sacrifice our possessions to give to God or charity—a little hush money often does the trick. But none of this can actually silence our guilt, thanks be to God, because none of it actually makes up for it. The best life we can offer is stained by sin, a part of this wicked, crooked generation; the best gift we can offer is still perishing like the rest of creation. Not time, talents, or treasure, not even the most wonderful piety can pay the price for our sin.

The answer Peter gives to the crowds is straight forward and much less demanding. "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus" He says. "For the forgiveness of your sins." You cannot do anything, in other words. You cannot go back and change what you've done. You cannot bring anything today—the slate of a good week, or an extra big offering, or devout acts of compassion or super serious prayers.

Simply forsake your ways, your ways of sin and the ways you thought you might make things better, and die to it all. Be drowned and raised again to new life apart from yourself and in Christ Jesus.

The One whom you crucified, God has raised and made Him both Lord and Christ.

Peter tells us, in his epistle today, that unlike us who would like to make a payment for our sins but cannot present anything of worth, Jesus paid our ransom not with gold nor silver, though as the Son of God He has access to all the glorious riches of the universe. Instead He paid the price of our sin with His own precious blood. He was the sacrifice that every lamb slain on altars of years past pointed towards; His was the last blood that would ever need to be poured out.

God made Him to be Christ, the Anointed One to save you by this victorious death. And since He saved you by this death, since His blood and agony paid for the cost of your sin, to save your soul, He is Lord too. Not just over all of creation, but over you.

What then shall we do?

You are presented once again today with Jesus who is both your Messiah and King, your Christ and Lord, and because of that you are invited to drop your hands and stop pretending that you bring anything but sin to the table—repent and be baptized, or repent and live in your baptism, for those of you who are baptized, and trust that in spite of your on going sin, you are forgiven.

That is what you do when you feel your guilt, when you realize that once again you have acted against God's Law, even though you know better, even after days of doing better. You receive God's forgiveness, won by the blood of Christ, given to you through the Word that endures forever. Don't cling to your own efforts to improve—make those efforts, for sure, but don't place an ounce of hope

in them. Don't even yearn for a day when you don't feel guilty, because on this side of your death, it isn't coming. You are a sinner who sins, and you have been from your birth and you will be until your last breath.

So feel guilty—because you are. Christ only died for the guilty. But die and rise He did, that you would be released from your guilt and given His life instead. He has indeed given you His Holy Spirit to enliven you today, tomorrow, and even on that day when death thinks it has the last say. But it doesn't—you will rise to eternal life because that is exactly what Jesus, your Christ and Lord, has already done.

Don't ever stop feeling guilt over the sins you commit—it means you're still in need of a saviour. But when the guilt arises, be honest about it; confess it, and trust that Christ wipes the sin and the guilt away. Christ is risen from the dead to be the exact forgivinga saviour you need.