

Check Your Bags
How to Reflect and Resolve as a Christian
Romans 4:7-8

Introduction:

I have come to the conclusion that baggage adds to the stress of holiday traveling. Have you ever tried to get the baggage for six people, entertainment and food for six people, plus a truck-load of Christmas presents into a mini-van for a 16 hour drive? I hate baggage!

I want you to identify with this one truth – baggage weighs you down to the point of exhaustion!

Chances are that each of us has undergone some of the same mental and private conversations this past week as we have spent time reflecting and resolving. That is what this week is all about. Today is New Year's Day! Therefore, I find it appropriate to address this question today: *How should Christians reflect on past mistakes and what should Christians resolve?*

End of year reflection can bring you to the point of exhaustion – even despair and hopelessness if you do not know how to reflect biblically upon your baggage.

Perhaps a comic strip will better identify what I want you to see this morning.

I recently read of a comic strip called *Cathy*. Cathy appears to be a single woman in her thirties. In this particular cartoon she is sitting at home, alone with her thoughts.

Things I should have done at work, she thinks to herself. Things I wish I'd said to Irving, things I promised myself to never do again but I did anyway. Ways I made myself miserable that I could have avoided.

Her look of depression deepens.

Things I could have done for my family, my puppy, my friends, my coworkers, my neighbors, my finances, my home, my closets, my diet, and millions of people in need whom I've never met.

In the final frame, Cathy summarizes her plight: "Even when I'm not going anywhere, I have three hundred pounds of luggage with me."

- In counseling, we call this baggage shame.
- In theology we call this baggage condemnation – the declaration of "guilty".

And we do not need others to declare our guilt. We are quite ready to declare our guilt ourselves.

The simple truth is that you and I are sinners laden with the knowledge of our sinful hearts. Each of us can and should refer to ourselves as the "chief of sinners" because we only know for certain the depth of the evil that is in our own hearts.

The evidence is stacked against us – everything from children who have gone astray because you weren't there as much as you would have liked – marriages broken that you beat yourself up over –

stress in marriage because of past failures – relationships hindered because of your temper – broken promises – blown plans.

In his book, *The Cross Centered Life*, C.J. Mahaney, gives four descriptions of individuals who live a life plagued by the baggage of condemnation and guilt. See if one of these diagnostic questions describes you. He asks:

1. Do you relate to God as if you were on a kind of permanent probation, suspecting that at any moment God may haul you back into the jail cell of his disfavor?
2. When you come to worship do you maintain a “respectful distance” from God, as if He were a fascinating but ill-tempered celebrity known for lashing out at his fans?
3. When you read Scripture does it reveal the boundless love of the Savior or merely intensify your condemnation?
4. Are you more aware of your sin than you are of God’s grace given to you through the cross?

No one in history has been more plagued by the baggage of guilt than Martin Luther. He tried everything from sleeping on floors, flogging himself, walking up staircases on his knees – doing whatever he could to come to peace with God. His teachers at the monastery told him he was doing more than enough to be at peace. He was not at peace. His sense of sin was too deep.

Scripture reading made it even worse for Luther. Every time he read of the righteousness of Christ he saw red. He read it as the punitive righteousness of God that makes him just in punishing sinners. Like #3 above, every time Luther read scripture he became more intensely aware of his sin and condemnation. What a burden to carry.

What do you do with all this guilt? What do you do with all your guilt?

Answer – you learn to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified to yourself every day! You must make Paul’s words in Roman 8:1 your morning mantra, “Therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Jerry Bridges is right when he says “we must learn to preach the gospel to ourselves everyday.”

You must learn to dwell on what is real and not on what you feel until what is real affects the way you feel. This is the prescription for true heart-felt worship. (Repeat) The man who ponders the weight of his sin will feel depressed and burdened. But the weight of your sin is not real. Your sin has been dealt with. It is on Christ. Thus, the man who dwells on the reality of mercy and grace will begin to feel joy, deep security, contentment and happiness toward God. He will bound forth with praise.

The opposite of being weighed down with condemnation and guilt is having the burden lifted and experiencing happiness and contentment. Burdened vs. Blessed. David understood this in Psalm 32. He was weighed down with the guilt of his adulterous sin with Bathsheba – so weighed down that he was suffering from depression, “day and night his strength was dried up” (32:4). But he learned how to preach to himself. Listen to vv. 1-2:

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.*

The Apostle Paul, in his great treatise on justification by faith alone in the book of Romans quotes Psalm 32:1-2 in Romans 4:7-8:

*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sin is covered;
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.*

Makarios is the word “blessed” that Paul and David use. It means to be in a condition where you are deeply secure and content and happy in God. The gospel that you must learn to preach to yourself daily is the good news that is designed to make you blessed – deeply secure and happy and content in God.

I don’t mean that you learn to overlook your sins. David did not overlook his sin. He acknowledged them (32:5) and confessed them. But he knew how to preach to himself that God could be trusted in that he has forgiven them. He will not bring them up with a charge of guilty again.

Romans 4:5 says, “those who trust him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Notice that word “justifies.” It is huge. It means that God declares ungodly people to be righteous. It is the opposite of condemnation. We need righteousness in order to be acceptable before God. What we have is sin – haunting sin. So God has what we need and don't deserve – righteousness; and we have what God hates and rejects – sin. What is the answer? The answer is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died in our place. **THE CROSS**. God lays our sins on Christ and punishes them in him. And in Christ's obedient death, God fulfills and vindicates his righteousness and imputes (credits) it to us. Our sin on Christ, his righteousness on us.

We can hardly stress too much that Christ is God's answer. It is all owing to Christ. You can't love Christ too much. You can't think about him too much or thank him too much or depend upon him too much. All our justification, all our righteousness, is in Christ. Listen to a few other passages.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 – “[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*.” (God's righteousness becomes ours in Christ.)
- Philippians 3:8-9 – “I count everything as rubbish that I may . . . be found *in [Christ]*, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 – “It is from God that you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness. . . .”
- Romans 8:1 – “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.” (See also Romans 5:19.)

Don't separate God's righteousness and Christ's righteousness. Think of the relation this way. God's righteousness was revealed in the faithful obedience of Christ even unto death. Therefore, Christ's righteousness is God's righteousness revealed. Therefore, to be in Christ is to be in God's righteousness.

So what is the answer to why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation? And why does the gospel lift burdens and give joy and make strong? It's because the gospel is the good news that our sins are laid on Christ and his righteousness is laid on us. The great exchange. The great imputation of our sin

to Christ and God's righteousness to us – called justification. Learn to preach that to yourself everyday. Ponder it. Dwell upon it until you are gripped with the right emotions of worship.

The Bible records a story of a very unusual dinner party that Jesus attended at the home of Simon the Pharisee. In this very tense and powerful scene, described in Luke 7:36-50, we're provided an important lesson about condemnation.

We're not told why Jesus was invited to this dinner, but we know tensions were high between him and the Pharisees. His host rudely and conspicuously withheld from Jesus all the usual social courtesies due a dinner guest: a kiss of greeting, washed feet, a drop of anointing oil. These glaring omissions were obvious to all present.

Then an unexpected guest appears. Into the room walks a known prostitute, a woman despised by her society. What happens next is unthinkable to those watching. As Jesus reclined at the low table, leaning on one elbow, his feet stretched out away from the table, the woman stands over him and begins to weep.

Can you envision the scene?

All conversations stop.

The sound of her weeping grows in volume compared to the swelling silence.

She drops to her knees holding her face in her hands. Her free-flowing tears wet Jesus' unwashed feet. She takes down her hair, and with it begins to wash Jesus' feet. Then, as if that were not appalling enough, she begins to kiss his feet and anoint them with a perfume that cost one year's wage. And she did all of it as an act of worship.

Can you feel the atmosphere in that room? No one eats. No one moves. They just stare with dropped jaws. But perhaps strangest of all is that Jesus does nothing to suggest that this shocking behavior from this sinful woman is anything but appropriate.

This is not the woman's first encounter with Jesus. She had repented of her sins previously. She had found in Jesus the hope of forgiveness and cleansing no one else was willing to give her. This is not the account of her salvation; rather, this is a beautiful expression of Christian worship rising in magnitude to match the amount of mercy already given her. She recognizes her sin and worthlessness and weeps deeply – not because of the weight of her guilt – but in response to her deep security and happiness in God.

Jesus' words to his impolite guest are that "surely this woman's sins, which are many, have been forgiven because she loves much." Then he turns to the woman to say, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Go in peace! No need to beat yourself up. All is well between you and God. But what about the condemning glares of the self-righteous onlookers? No Matter! They don't matter! All is well between you and God! You are the chief of sinners saved by grace. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound.

Preach the gospel to yourself. See the reality of your sins juxtaposed with the reality of God's declaration of righteousness. The more clearly you see your sin, the more deeply you will sing of God's grace.

“God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

John Bunyan writes in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* about Christian who is weighted down by the sense of his sin and guilt. But when Christian comes to the foot of the cross the cords that hold the burden of sin on Christian’s back are snapped and the burden falls from his back and rolls down a hill into an open grave never to be seen again. Bunyan then writes this: “Then was Christian glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, “He hath given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death.” In the original copy of the book are Bunyan’s personal notes in the margin. Next to this line is written, “When God releases us of our guilt and burden, we are those that leap for joy.” Christian then gave three leaps for joy and went on singing:

*Thus far I did come laden with my sin;
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither: what a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blessed cross! Blessed sepulcher! Blessed rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me!*

See your sin. That’s fine. Just know what to do with it. Throw it in the empty tomb and worship God!

Amen!