

Romans 5:15-17  
Exhibit B: Forgiveness  
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Walking up the steep incline in my freshly pressed khakis, green golf shirt tucked properly, I was ready for my first day at my first real job at Olympic Hills Golf Club. It was close enough to my house that I could walk, but it was a very different place from where I lived. I was nervous.

After orientation, I was given my first assignment: bag room attendant—had a nice ring to it at the time. There I stood at my post—back straight, chin high, shoulders back, yes sir, no ma'am. I would retrieve bags of members heading out for a round, and receive them again when they were finished—cleaning them and returning them to their locker.

It was my job to care for the equipment, finest in golf: Taylor Made, Ping, and the new and oh so coveted *Big Bertha*. Every club worth more than a week or even a month's paycheck.

Things began well enough, even though I'm sure I was visibly terrified by each exchange. That is, until I faced my first challenge: the bag that was too large for the locker, and the driver that was too tall for the locker. It didn't fit. What do I do? Instead of stopping and logically taking the club out of the bag, which was the best option, I came to a different conclusion: wedge the bag in with brute force and expect that the club would acquiesce to my desires. Snap.

Oh no, I haven't even finished my first day and already I'm already underwater. What do I do? So, I set it aside, closed the locker, and hoped that no one would notice that day. What I didn't consider was that as soon as the section of lockers were opened by my co-workers, out the club would fall in two pieces.

At the end of the shift as my boss was recapping the day us, he asked us what we would do in the event we made a mistake. I would confess, I would own up to it, I would come to you first. None of which I chose to do that day. Then he pulled out the broken driver and asked if anyone knew anything about this. My head slouched and my hand went up.

For the next few shifts, I had the pleasure of washing golf carts, a muddy, messy job.

If I could just have that day over. If I could just make a different choice. If I could just have owned up to it from the beginning.

Guilt does this to us. Guilt makes us look back and say, "If only..." Guilt is a hope killer. Last week, we looked at the hope killer of suffering, and this week we're going to look at another experience that challenges our hope: guilt.

As we look for hope in Jesus Christ, we are invited into a posture of relentless honesty. I hear people ask questions like, why do we feel so guilty? And the answer is, because we are. Hope in Jesus Christ does not explain away our guilt as a product of circumstances or our upbringing. We are guilty, and we feel it. But the Bible wants to equip us with the resources to deal with our guilt, but

more importantly, the Bible introduces us to the one who sets us free from our guilt. Because you'll never be a person who has hope if you are captive to guilt.

The Apostle Paul invites us to look with him at Exhibit B, in his Case for Hope—the hope we have because in Jesus, there is forgiveness.

I invite you to stand with me, as you are able, and let's listen to God's Word from Romans 5:12-17.

**But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.**

Living a life with hope involves a unique orientation to the future. Guilt, however, means that we are gripped by the hurts of the past.

In this passage today, you can imagine a courtroom scene in which Paul calls two witnesses to the stand. The first is Adam, the first human, the man we meet in Genesis 3. And the reason I think Paul chooses Adam is that, unlike our reflections on guilt, Paul doesn't just go back to our mindset when we made that poor decision, he doesn't just look at the circumstances that led us to the choice, he doesn't just look at our childhood or family of origin dynamics that influenced our behavior—these are not unimportant considerations, but Paul goes back even further, back to the beginning.

Adam, if you recall from Genesis 3, is the first man, but the word *Adam* is really just the Hebrew term for humanity, Adam is humanity. Adam is you, Adam is me. And what we see is that when humanity chooses to live apart from grace, when we are separated from the knowing and loving and gracious God, the only place we know to go when we're guilty is into hiding. This hiding place has an identity: shame. Shame is the act of living in hiding.

**When they had eaten the fruit, Genesis says, the eyes of both were opened and they knew they were naked. And they sowed fig leaves together and made for themselves loin cloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden.**

Adam, remember, was someone who was created and lived freely without shame in the garden. He and Eve were completely open, vulnerable, unconcerned with hiding anything from one another. But this act, what it introduced in them was the unnatural need to hide, it introduced shame into the equation.

Sometimes the greatest obstacle between us and a life of mercy, love, and forgiveness is not God, it's us. You don't know me, what I've done. Forgiveness is not for a person like me. I could never be anything other than... In our guilt, we choose isolation, dislocation, shame. We hide. And this is how death keeps us under its thumb.

Three times in the verse today, Paul says that **death reigned**. Verse 14 reads, **yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgressions of Adam.**

You see, I believe the way that death continues to reign over our lives and our communities is by wrapping itself in the almost impenetrable armor of shame. The problem is not that we don't know or haven't heard the good news of Jesus' abundant mercy and grace, it's that we don't allow that grace to penetrate through the shame. And so, we're stuck in our past, holding on, with our gaze firmly fixed on the rearview mirror. That is how death continues to reign and have dominion in our lives.

Brene Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston School of Social Work and she has written and spoken extensively on the issue of shame and guilt. She writes this in her book *Daring Greatly*:

I believe that there is a profound difference between shame and guilt. I believe that guilt is adaptive and helpful – it's holding something we've done or failed to do up against our values and feeling psychological discomfort.

I don't believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure. I think the fear of disconnection can make us dangerous.

We don't have to live our lives with this orientation to the past, thinking what has been can never be changed. Last summer, I went back to Olympic Hills. They were going through a complete overhaul of their course; their clubhouse was under major construction. And as I walked around the parking lot toward the bag-room where I first worked, everything was different, it had all changed. And what I realized in that moment was that there was no one on earth who remembered that silly incident with a 14-year-old kid accidentally damaging a piece of equipment, except for one person. The one person who would never let himself forget the shame of that moment: me.

So we're brought back to the courtroom, and to the realization that on the one hand, we need not hide in our shame, but on the other hand, sin must be dealt with. And we are not capable of doing it on our own. You see, it's not enough for us just to be relieved of our guilt by explaining or psychologizing away our sin. Our condition demands a higher court, our freedom requires a more authoritative voice than just our own voice of consolation. Our forgiveness is not based on our decisions, but on God's.

So a new man takes the stand, Jesus Christ. One who has a new decision. In verse 14 and following, it says that Adam was a type of the one who was to come. The Apostle sets out the comparisons of old and new Adam. Through one man's trespass many have died, but much more have grace by the gift of that one man Jesus Christ. **Judgment followed the trespass, but the free gift following many trespasses is justification. Because of one man's trespass death reigned, but much more with those who receive the abundance of grace reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.**

These two men are two types of the same humanity; we have a choice. Will we see ourselves through Adam or through Christ? Stuck in shame or radiant in hope? Jesus offers the hope of

justification. We still share these types: Adam and Christ. Only the question is, who will we look to? Will we remain in the past, or will we look to the future, to Christ, where grace reigns and righteousness leads to eternal life?

I think one of the real shifts in our society today is the shift away from the corporate (not business, but body) to the individual. To justify our own value or worthiness, we believe we need to stand out individually—become stars, achieve great feats individually. But the Bible is much less oriented to the individual; there are many examples of how one person can act on behalf of many.

Let me give you an example: sitting on the bench. This is a posture I became well acquainted with in college on the St Olaf Baseball team. In fact, I spent nearly 3.5 full seasons on the bench. But it is the players on the field who impact your destiny. When your team wins, you win; when your team loses, you lose. So it is with Adam the first human, and Jesus the second Adam. Adam's decision, the choice for dislocation and death, has global effect. But the same is true for Jesus the new man, Jesus' act of justification and mercy too has global impact.

Who will you allow to define you? Which man on the stand will be the decisive one in your life? In Jesus Christ, you are no longer a part of the dominion of death, death no longer reigns in you. You are a part of the new creation that God has begun in Jesus Christ. You are a part of the dominion in life, you reign in life because Jesus was victorious on the field for you—you're on his team. You are righteous in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

When the sins of old Adam creep in and say to you, "You're still the same, you're no different," then speak back. Preach to yourself, "I am the righteousness of God because Jesus Christ lived for me." When you get tempted to retreat into your shame corner, step out and speak to yourself, "I am a new creation through Jesus Christ, nothing to hide because that old life is gone, I am made in the image of God, I am an ambassador of the king, I am an heir to the throne, I have dominion in life."

Let's pray.