

Greetings!

Are you a sinner? No, I'm not asking for your confession, I just wonder what you believe about your sins. Are you innocent, or are you guilty?

Alleged Sinners

I was surfing the Internet when I saw the headline, *Alleged Abuse at Pig Slaughter Plant*. I was a little confused, and then amused, as I broke into a chuckle. Now, before you get mad at me, I understand the principle of innocent until proven guilty but, give me a break - it's a slaughter plant! Bear with me please. I'm not going to write about animal cruelty or in defense of eating bacon (the vegetarians may now relax). I was amused by the term "alleged" used in connection with "slaughter" plant.

As the news media reported the shooting at Fort Hood, they described that the "alleged gunman" killed 13 and wounded dozens. Officers dispatched to the scene shot the "alleged gunman" as he continued his shooting rampage.

In an effort not to appear judgmental, or jump to a premature conclusion, we refer to the "supposed" guilty party as "alleged". As I said previously, I understand the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" and I'm grateful that our legal system practices this concept. However, I've come to wonder how the term *alleged* has influenced our thinking about guilt.

How we deal with our guilt can either destroy our lives, or bring about a needed change. The Biblical response to guilt is repentance, which is a turning away from the act that brought on the guilt in the first place and a confession of the sin. If we deal with our guilt correctly, then God offers forgiveness and removes the guilt of the offense. Biblical forgiveness is a wiping away of all evidence of the offense in God's eyes.

God's approach to our offences, when compared to our legal system, is - we are guilty until made innocent through His forgiveness, not innocent until proven guilty.

During the early years of our church, one of our church leaders died from AIDS. As one of the first churches in our area to experience this, we found ourselves caught up in the controversy of AIDS in the church. Asked to speak at a pastor's conference on the subject, I found myself saying during my presentation, "God doesn't know how Ron got AIDS and I'm not telling." Suddenly, a sense of dread swept over me as I realized what I had said. Approximately 150 ministers looked straight into my eyes as if to say, "God doesn't know?" Thankfully, my next words were, "Ron's sin is as far from God as the east is from the west. It was thrown into the sea of forgetfulness, never to be remembered anymore." You could see their faces relax instantly as they realized the power behind the scriptures I quoted.

God chooses to "forget" based on how we respond to our guiltiness. First, we have to admit our guilt, and therein lies the problem. We've taken an "alleged" approach. We have become "alleged sinners", and are no longer looking to be "*made*" innocent as much as we are endeavoring to be "*proven*" guilty.

As a minister I've run across those who, rather than acknowledging their guilt of sin, would tell me, "I'm a good person and don't need forgiveness." There's an old gospel song that says, "They'll be no 'good' ole boys in heaven", and the Bible says that there is not one *good* person, that all of us have sinned. In other words, there are no "alleged sinners".

I'm not asking you to walk around with guilt; I'm showing you the way out of it. By acknowledging our sin in confession to God, it brings about the wiping away of the evidence of our sin in God's courtroom. But, if we stand before him and proclaim our innocence, we are left with the assumption that the judge will then be forced to prove our guilt.

God already knows our sin - we were caught holding the smoking gun. The question now however, will we confess it, or will we take the position that we are "alleged" sinners?

And that's just a thought . . .

My Final Word

Guilt is a terrible thing when left unchecked in our lives. If allowed, it will drive us constantly to feel that we must defend ourselves, both to God and to those around us. It can cause low self-esteem and keep us from achieving the best God has for our life.

On the other hand, if our guilt forces us to make a needed change in our life, and brings us to a place of forgiveness, then it has served its divine purpose.

Living in the freedom of forgiveness is a wonderful feeling!

Guilty but Forgiven,

Chris

