

# DOCTRINE OF SHAME

- I. Introduction.
  - A. There can be little doubt that the Bible speaks much about the matter of shame since the various Hebrew and Greek terms are found some 248 times.
  - B. While guilt and shame are often considered to be synonymous terms, they are distinct as seen in the following observations.
    1. Guilt is the emotion that is excited (or should be) when we have done something wrong; shame, on the other hand, is the emotion that says there is something wrong with me.
    2. Guilt is the emotion that acknowledges that I have made a mistake; shame says that I am the mistake.
    3. Guilt is the emotion that causes me to admit that what I did was not good; shame is the crippling idea that I am no good.
  - C. The Bible is quite clear on the fact that shame exists, and that there is a place for appropriate feelings of shame and disgrace in the lives of human beings. Ezra 9:6;Ps. 25:3
  - D. Many psychiatrists and psychologists recognize that there is a place for shame and state, *"shame is a complex emotional response that all humans acquire during early development. It's a normal feeling about ourselves and our behavior, not necessarily a symptom of an illness or pathology. In many situations, it's abnormal if we don't experience it."* Alen Selierian, M.D., Washington D.C.
  - E. However, other portions of modern culture have largely rejected the concept of shame, suggesting that shame is irrational, and that we should seek to eliminate it from our lives.
    1. This is the nature of many of the eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, which views guilt and shame as nothing more than wasted energy.
    2. Some indict psychoanalysis in particular for condemning guilt and shame as repressive, and for attempting to eliminate them in individuals.
    3. O.H. Mowrer argues that, on the contrary, neurosis is produced by this very failure to acknowledge shame and that psychological health is achieved only when the individual admits his faults and deals with them. IJn. 1:9
    4. Like Maslow, he believes that guilt and shame can be misplaced; therefore, he suggests that we therefore need to distinguish between them in their healthy and their neurotic forms
  - F. The fact is that shame and disgrace are appropriate for a rational person to acknowledge when it is deserved and should not be disregarded.
  - G. Having a little shame and a little guilt is a good thing since shame helps us control our unacceptable impulses and guilt kicks in when we have somehow failed to control one of those unacceptable impulses.
  - H. On the other hand, there is the type of shame that is self-imposed and is not a consequence of rational thought, but of some faulty thinking.
  - I. Therefore, we will attempt to clearly define what shame is appropriate and what types of guilt or shame are not to be entertained.
  - J. While shame is among the most complex experiences known to mankind, it is recognized that those that do not learn how to properly handle this emotion can exhibit a number of debilitating problems and live in pain, sadness, and not enjoy the the fullness of life that God desires.

## II. Vocabulary.

### A. Hebrew vocabulary.

1. בּוֹשׁ (bosh), verb, 127X, to be ashamed, put to shame, disconcerted, or disappointed. The primary meaning of this root is to fall into disgrace, normally through failure, either your own or the failure of an object of trust. While our English term stresses the inner attitude, the Hebrew term means to come to shame and stresses the sense of the physical, public disgrace. IISam. 19:5; Ps. 35:4
  - a. בִּשְׁת (bosheth), f.noun, 30X, shame, shameful thing.
  - b. בּוֹשָׁה (bushah), f.noun, 4X, shame.
  - c. מְבוֹשָׁה (mabhosh), m.noun, 1X, private parts, genitals. Deut. 25:11
2. כָּלַם (kalam), verb, 38X, to be ashamed, to be confounded, reproached, or hurt. This verb denotes the sense of disgrace which attends public humiliation. The Arabic cognate means to wound, which suggests the idea of wounded pride. Num. 12:14; PPro. 25:8
  - a. כְּלִמָּה (k<sup>e</sup>limmah), f.noun, 30X, shame, insult, reproach, ignominy, the loss of one's good name or reputation.
  - b. כְּלִמּוּת (k<sup>e</sup>limmuth), f.noun, 1X, shame.
3. קָלָה (qalah), verb, 23X, used in the niphal and hiphil only, to be lightly esteemed, disgraced or dishonored. This verb signifies the lowering of one's social position and is frequently found as an antonym of glory and honor. Deut. 25:3; Isam. 18:23
  - a. קָלוֹן (qalon), m.noun, 17X, shame, disgrace, dishonor. this noun represents the effect on the object when the action of the cognate verb is exercised. It denotes a state in which the person in view had a lower social position than he in fact occupies.
4. עָרָה ('arah), verb, 15X, the verb does not occur in the qal stem, but in the intensive and causative stems it is employed to communicate the idea of laying bare or exposing nakedness, which is viewed as a matter of shame.
  - a. עֲרָוָה ('er wah), f.noun, 54X, shame, nakedness.
5. חָפַר (chapher), verb, 17X, to be abashed or ashamed, to cause shame or put to shame. The idea of this verbal root concerns the loss of composure that comes about through humiliation, embarrassment, or confusion. It is used frequently with *bosh*, and may serve to amplify it in some contexts. Job 6:20; Ps. 35:4

### B. Greek vocabulary.

1. ἀτιμάζω (atimazo), verb, 7X, lit. without honor, when used of persons, this root means to treat with disrespect, dishonor, treat shamefully; when used of the body, it means to degrade or dishonor through immorality. Mk. 12:4; Rom. 1:24
2. αἰσχύνω (aischuno), verb, 5X, to be ashamed, to feel ashamed or embarrassed; passively, to be disappointed, disillusioned, disgraced, or put to shame. Lk. 14:9
  - a. αἰσχύνη (aishune), f.noun, 6X, as a feeling it means shame, embarrassment, or humiliation. It is also used of ways or deeds that cause shame, shameful things.
  - b. ἀσχημοσύνη (aschemosune), f.noun, 2X, lit. shamelessness, a shameless deed, indecent behavior; being without proper clothing to cover private body parts, nakedness, shame.
  - c. κατααἰσχύνω (kataischuno), verb, 13X, to bring to shame, to disgrace, or dishonor, to humiliate or bring to ignominy.

3. ἐντρέπω (entrepo), verb, 9X, lit. to turn back; in an active sense, to put to shame, to make someone ashamed; passively, to be put to shame, to feel shame. II Thess. 3:14
  - a. ἐντροπή (entropē), f.noun, 2X, what is caused by a sense of failure, shame, humiliation, reproach.
4. παραδειγματίζω (paradeigmatizo), verb, 1X, to publicly disgrace someone, make an example of them by holding them up to contempt. Heb. 6:6

### III. Definition and description.

- A. Webster defines the noun as the painful feeling or emotion excited by a consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, impropriety, or of having done something unworthy.
- B. Further, this emotion may be kindled when one exposes that which modesty prompts him to conceal.
  1. This is why we teach our children early in life to have an appropriate amount of shame about their bodies or they would be pretty busy showing off their genitals to whoever wanted to see them.
  2. In that regard, most normal segments of society recognize that while there is nothing wrong with our bodies, they should be kept covered outside the context RM/RW.
- C. The verb has the sense of making one ashamed, exciting in him a consciousness of guilt, impropriety, or unworthy conduct.
- D. There is a public sense in which one can cover another with reproach or ignominy, dishonor, or disgrace, and so harm or even ruin the reputation.
- E. The full biblical definition of shame, which incorporates the various concepts of the vocabulary words involves the following:
  1. Shame is an emotion that arises when one is mentally disgraced by his own failure or by the failure of an object of trust, and involves the loss of mental attitude composure.
  2. It may involve public exposure, along with the attendant feelings of humiliation (wounded pride), and can often result in a reduced social status.
- F. This doctrine will not only serve to establish a biblical definition of shame, when it is appropriate, and how to deal properly with it.
- G. Since sin has consequences of guilt and shame when we fall short of God's glory, it is important for us to know the definition of sin, how to deal with it when we have sinned, and how we are to relate our failures to God. Rom. 3:23
- H. Secondly, we must acknowledge that our own thinking can mislead us; therefore, we should attempt to think in a manner that is compatible with what the Scripture teaches. Rom 12:3; II Cor. 10:5

### IV. Biblically appropriate forms of shame.

- A. As alluded to earlier, we must distinguish between shame that is a normal and accepted part of any society that desires to function smoothly, and shame that is irrational, or self-imposed.
- B. In an objective sense, shame is a component of God's judgment on sin and is not something to be disregarded, but something that is designed to work on our behalf as God conforms us to the image of His Son. Phil. 2:13
- C. The following are clear biblical examples of situations in which a normal person should experience shame in regard to the issues of modesty and sexual activity.
  1. Following the fall, God recognized that the human race would not be able to function without clothing and instituted the first set of garments for mankind. Gen. 3:21

2. From that time forward, it has been the will of God and the understanding of normal people that God wants them clothed; public nakedness should produce shame. Gen. 9:22-23; Isa. 47:3; Rev. 3:18
  3. Homosexual activity is actually defined as the **shameless deed**. Rom. 1:27
    - a. Likewise, incest was recognized as a disgrace among normal people. Lev. 20:17; IISam. 13:11-12
    - b. The adulterous person will reap the reward of shame and disgrace. Prov. 6:32-33
    - c. Since this is the case, the Bible encourages young women (and men) to remain chaste and the ideal is that they remain virgins until their wedding day. Deut. 22:14,17; Matt. 1:19
- D. The Bible has much to say about shame with respect to the manner in which we conduct ourselves in the Christian way of life.
1. All that forsake the Lord of the armies and engage in the worship of anything (particularly idols) will be put to shame. Jer. 17:13; Isa. 44:9-11; Jer. 11:13, 51:17
  2. The believer that does not maintain the priority of Bible doctrine and the application of it via Divine good production will be exposed to shame. Rev. 3:18, 16:15
  3. The believer that did not maintain the priority of staying in fellowship during his Ph<sub>2</sub> will experience shame at the rapture. IJn. 2:28
  4. The person that rejects the discipline of good spiritual advice from his authorities will be reduced to shame. Prov. 13:18; Jer. 8:9
  5. Believers in a local church should recognize that they should be ashamed when they pursue cosmic, legal remedies to minor church problems. ICor. 6:1-7
  6. Those that will not work and do whatever is necessary to support themselves are brought to shame by those that will not tolerate such behavior. IIThess. 3:14; Pro. 10:5
  7. In that regard, one ought to demonstrate the willingness to withdraw his fellowship to arouse a sense of shame in those that will not comply with this marching order.
- E. Those that have been established as communicators of the truth must be aware that they can be brought to shame.
1. Communicators that resort to anything other than the strict teaching of the doctrines in the Bible, by watering them down, compromising them, merchandising them, etc. are candidates for shame. IICor. 4:2; IITim. 2:15
  2. Church leaders should fear public exposure of habitual STA activities, which would bring them to shame. ITim. 5:20
  3. In that regard, we would acknowledge that there should be a normal, sanctified fear of experiencing public humiliation.
- F. Believers should be aware that those that conduct themselves in particular ways will experience shame.
1. Those that resort to lies and falsehoods in order to advance themselves will be publicly disgraced. Prov. 13:5; Lk. 14:9
  2. Shame is the lot of those that do not think before they speak, as well as those that comment on issues without giving them a full hearing. Prov. 18:13, 25:8
  3. The parents that will not effectively deal with the sin nature of their children will find that they are candidates for shame. Prov. 29:15
  4. Those that engage in criminal activity are brought to shame when they are caught. Jer. 2:26
- G. When one suffers a catastrophic military defeat he is put to shame. IIChron. 32:21; Jer. 46:24, 48:1; Zech. 10:5

H. Those that engage in fornication (physical or spiritual) are said to love shame and bring it upon themselves. Hos. 4:18

V. Biblically inappropriate forms of shame.

A. The following examples in the Word of God delineate times and situations in which human viewpoint promotes a false sense of shame that is to be rejected.

B. Communicators are to reject any sense of shame for their faithfulness to the Word of God.

1. We are to exhibit fearlessness with respect to the Word of God and not be tempted to compromise God's word in any way by denying its contents. Mk. 8:38

2. Communicators must hold fast to the good news of salvation and not be ashamed of its simple message. Rom. 1:16; ICor. 1:20-21

3. We should not feel ashamed when we fall under undeserved suffering; however, we should make certain that our suffering is not the result of our own failures under the sin nature. IPet. 4:15-16

4. We should not feel any shame if we or those around us are suffering for the cause of Jesus Christ; that suffering is actually viewed as an honor. Acts 5:41; IITim. 1:8,12,16

C. Crucifixion was considered to be the most shameful of deaths during the 1<sup>st</sup> century, reserved only for the most shameful of people. Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:8

1. Jesus Christ did not submit His thinking to what the world thought of Him, He rejected the shame of the cross and submitted to the Father's will.

2. He dismissed the power of shame and refused to yield to the force of public opinion; in fact, by despising shame, He robbed it of its power and transformed shame into glory. Acts 5:41

3. In that regard, Jesus Christ is not ashamed to acknowledge those that are His. Heb. 2:11

4. God is particularly proud of those that live their lives by faith and heartily expresses His approval of them. Heb. 11:16

D. Physical nakedness is not a cause for shame in the institution of RM/RW, and is to mirror the emotional rapport that expresses itself via sex. Gen. 2:25

E. As believers, we are to exercise sound judgment and not fall into the trap of guilt or shame that we take on ourselves for inappropriate reasons.

1. Self-imposed shame may come upon a person that has decided that he should have done something but didn't, or did something that may have caused hurt to someone else.

2. Thus, self-imposed guilt means that a person has a measure of mind-reading going on, a mental attitude judgment that an action, thought, or even word caused harm to another.

3. Further, we are not to feel guilt or shame because we cannot meet all the needs in the world; God has not ordained us to bear every burden. Gal. 6:5

a. Jesus Christ taught that the poor would be with us always, which logically indicates that we cannot eliminate every need. Matt. 26:11

b. It is wrong to feel guilty because you have more than others or because they are suffering; do not be tempted to play God since you do not know what people need to advance spiritually.

c. Some believers simply fall into the trap of feeling guilty because they cannot endure the thought of others suffering.

F. One should recognize that it is unacceptable to feel shame over the failures of another, no matter serious their failures may be; the person that failed should experience the shame, not the person that was wronged.

G. In that regard, the Word of God clearly teaches that there are those that do not have the normal, spiritually healthy emotions of shame and conduct themselves in a horrible fashion.

1. Negative unbelievers, who attempt to infiltrate the church and destroy the morals and faith of believers, are viewed as being continually restless and their shameful lifestyle is viewed as the filthy scum that is deposited on the seashore. Jude 13
2. Negative believers that have left the straight and narrow are often proud of the very things of which they should legitimately be ashamed. Phil. 3:19
3. The Jews of Jeremiah's day had hardened their hearts to the point that they did not have the normal shame that should characterize God's people. Jere. 6:15

- VI. Human viewpoint methods employed when attempting to deal with shame are nothing more than reactions that fail to accept the grace of God.
- A. Shame is an unrelenting feeling of not being worthy, or of being unworthy of being wanted or loved; this can occur whenever you believe the lie that you are worthless.
  - B. At this point, we become threatened with being exposed and feel in danger of being humiliated and rejected by others, which we may think we deserve.
  - C. Since excessive shame is a prison, it can keep a person trapped in feelings of worthlessness, self-hatred, and even despair and depression.
  - D. Therefore, many resort to inappropriate techniques to deal with shame since it is something that one may seek to avoid at all costs.
  - E. The excessively responsible or controlling response.
    1. Because the person feels shame about various things that have or may happen, he seeks to make life right by overworking, constantly giving to others in the attempt to make everyone happy.
    2. Because it is less shame and guilt inducing, or it assuages shame you already have, you can become obsessed with "serving others first", unaware that shame and guilt are the motivators for such generous behavior.
    3. We are not advocating any doctrine that suggests that believers are not to serve one another (Gal. 5:13) or that they should not be generous (ITim. 6:18); we are stating that guilt and shame are inappropriate motives and will disqualify the application as Divine good production.
    4. True Christian love should be the motivation behind all service, without which any overt application is hollow. ICor. 13:1-3
    5. Some people may exhibit a tendency to control others since they have experienced shame through a loss of control.
  - F. Some attempt to avoid shame by becoming excessively sensitive or hypercritical.
    1. This person can become obsessed with the words or deed of others, especially when any implication of any wrongdoing is intimated or suggested.
    2. This type of person can read harmful/hurtful intentions into the most benign of comments, engaging in mental attitude judging that imputes the worst to others.
    3. They are certain that others are constantly judging them and unfortunately believe that another's judgments are the chief concern.
    4. They fall into the trap of always trying to save face, wrongly believing that how others perceive them is as important as how God perceives them or how they perceive themselves.
    5. On the other hand, the critical person engages in trying to avoid shame by giving it away; they fall into the trap of believing that they are better than others and seek to avoid any feeling of shame by feeling or acting superior.
  - G. Some cave into the shame and become withdrawn and/or paralyzed.

1. People can become so overcome by the fear of doing, acting, saying, or being wrong that they eventually collapse, give in, and choose inactivity, silence, and the status quo.
  2. Others withdraw from situations and run away; they choose to seek out private and secure places where they can withdraw into their loneliness.
  3. The problem with attempting to withdraw or run from your shame is that the STA is with you wherever you go and running away never solves anything.
- H. Some react to shame by making bad decisions or refusing to make decisions at all.
1. One should evaluate his decisions and ask why he is choosing this action or path in life; very often it may relate to the point above and it is always a bad decision to run away or to isolate oneself.
  2. Others come to believe that it is so important to always be right in their decisions that they become unable to make a decision lest it be a wrong one.
  3. These types can easily succumb to the pressure of becoming a perfectionist, who cannot allow failures lest he add to his own shame.
- I. Rage and anger are another method in which people deal with shame.
1. Very often, the shame they feel is due to the actions of another, and one way to fight the humiliation is to attack the attacker.
  2. Rage and anger also make the victim feel empowered, not realizing that they are letting their shame control them.
- J. People can allow shame to make them irrational.
1. Because many irrational beliefs lie behind shame and guilt, people may be unable to sort out how they actually feel.
  2. It is important to be objective with yourself when you are experiencing shame and guilt; be sure that your decisions are based on sound, rational thinking.
  3. Since your life ultimately becomes the decisions you make, it is critical to make sound doctrinal decisions as you go.

- VII. Theological issues related to the manner in which God deals with guilt and shame and how we should deal with it.
- A. The righteousness of God demands that He judge all sins and all sinful conditions at some point in the angelic conflict.
  - B. Like the Father, we should seek to engage in righteous judgment. Jn. 7:24
  - C. When one sins, he contracts guilt or violating God's righteous principles, which makes him accountable to God for his sin.
  - D. Since mankind could do nothing about atoning for its sins, God judged all the sins of all the members of the human race of all time in the body of His Son. IICor. 5:21
  - E. God's righteous demands against sins were satisfied (propitiated), and He judicially disposed of humanity's crimes against Him. Rom. 3:25
  - F. The reconciliation, which was effected on the part of all men, is offered to all men, and is accessed on the simple condition of faith in Christ. ITim. 4:10; IJn. 2:2; Rom. 5:10
  - G. However, the believer continues to possess a functional and active sin nature that eventuates in personal sinning after salvation. IJn. 1:8,10
  - H. God has established a grace method by which the believer that sins and loses fellowship with Him can be restored simply on the basis of confession of said sin(s). ICor. 11:31; IJn. 1:9
  - I. When the believer confesses his sins, God does the same thing every time and forgives that believer, removes the sin and associated guilt, and restores the believer to fellowship.
    1. When God forgives, He forgets as well. Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:34

2. While propitiation deals with the satisfaction of God's righteous demands, expiation deals with the removal of guilt and the punishment that violations of God's laws demand.
  3. Logically and doctrinally, if God has forgiven your sin(s), then you must acknowledge His viewpoint on the subject, forgive yourself, and move on.
  4. Therefore, the believer that has acknowledged his sin to God enjoys cleansing and forgiveness and should not continue to feel shame after that confession.
  5. However, on a personal level, the confession of wrong should be just as large as the circle involved in the wrongdoing. Lk. 17:3-4
- J. When you sin, Satan and other spiritual enemies will attempt to work on you so that you do not confess the sin by convincing you that you are so despicable that God wants nothing to do with you.
1. This attack is to be countered with the doctrine that we have complete access to God through Christ and can come to Him at any time. Heb. 4:15-16
  2. Is there a greater need than getting back into fellowship when you have sinned?
  3. Our confidence (the opposite of shame) is not based on our performance; it is based on the finished work of Christ and our position in Him. Rom. 8:1,34
  4. Satan spends his time accusing believers before God, emphasizing their sins and shortcomings and demanding judgment. Rev. 12:10
  5. Our Great High Priest acts in the capacity of our Advocate and obtains our acquittal based on His finished work. IJn. 2:1
- K. Since God created our emotions, there must be some positive reason why He allows the "negative emotions" to exist.
- K. Shame, or the anticipation of it, can serve as a deterrent to engaging in STA activity; failing that, experiencing shame can serve as a great catalyst to motivate us to change.
- L. When you feel shame and guilt and the discomfort they bring, you can use them as a barometer of the need to change things in your life and rid yourself of those things that cause the shame and guilt.
- M. In that regard, Paul writes about **godly sorrow**, a negative emotion that is designed to cause one to come to a change of mind with respect to certain activities. IICor. 7:8-10
- N. The key method for avoiding shame in the first place is orientation to the godliness code, which is designed to provide the believer with great confidence and bring shame on his opponents. Tit. 2:1-8; IJn. 2:28

### VIII. Conclusions

- A. There can be little doubt that the concept of shame in some ways is related to the working of the conscience in the individual.
- B. Therefore, it is very important to have a **good conscience**, which is one that is programmed with the norms and standards of God and not with human viewpoint. ITim. 1:5; Heb. 13:18
- C. The Word of God provides us with a perfect standard of right and wrong by which the conscience can be profitably established. Rom. 2:14-15
- D. When we violate the moral laws of God, we rightly contract guilt for our actions and may become ashamed of ourselves.
- E. In that case, we look to our Great High Priest for the cleansing and forgiveness that can remove our guilt and shame. Heb. 9:14
- F. Therefore, we do not fall into the cosmic trap of attempting human viewpoint methods of dealing with our guilt and shame as detailed in point "V" above.

- G. Further, a good conscience will protect us from falling prey to the insidious thinking that we are responsible for the actions of others and trapping us in inappropriate or irrational forms of shame.
- H. We must be careful to distinguish between deserved forms of shame, which come to us by virtue of our failures (Ezra 9:6; Dan. 9:7-8) and undeserved forms of shame, which may come to us by virtue of our application. IITim. 1:8,12; Heb. 12:2
- I. It is clear in both the Old Testament and New Testament that shame is something to be avoided, but it is the temporal and eternal lot of those that reject God and His plan. Ps. 31:17, 53:5; Dan. 12:2; Obad. 1:10
- J. Israel is promised an eternal future that will not be characterized by shame or disgrace for their negative volition in the past. Isa. 25:8, 54:4

*“For the Lord God helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced;  
Therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not  
be ashamed.”* Isa. 50:7