

# What Does the Bible Teach About Shame?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

- A. Why a lesson on shame? To address the Biblically unjustifiable extremes taught by misguided brethren on this important human characteristic.
  1. At one end of the spectrum are those who have imbibed the spirit of modernism and teach that all shame is bad and does harm, and that shame is a self-abusive byproduct of religion out of control.
  2. At the other end are those who have drunk deeply of the spirit of Puritanism and Calvinism and teach that all shame is morally good and healthy, and they have done severe harm to the hearts and souls of vulnerable, honest souls.
  3. I purpose to study what God has revealed to us about shame and its role in our well-being and salvation; and, I will not apologize for trampling on the memory and doctrine of well-meaning but severely misguided Old Brother So-and-so.
- B. Human beings deal with shame in many different ways, most of which are not helpful, and often harmful.
  1. A few instinctively or conscientiously use shame as the emotional condition that, based on past mistakes, moves them to make better moral choices in the present and future.
  2. Some persons allow their sense of shame to dominate their thoughts and feelings to the extent that they have a tragic and poor self-image; they do not believe that God or anyone else could love them because they see themselves as nothing but filthy and evil.
    - a. Do you believe all shame is good? It is shame out of control that makes families keep sexual abuse a secret; it is inflated shame that drives multitudes away from the faith; it is imposed shame that moves so many to promiscuity, substance abuse, and suicide. Still think all shame is good?
  3. Still many more persons elect to view shame as an unwanted barrier to unrestrained, selfish, or wicked behaviors. They break down their natural inhibitions and dismiss moral imperatives until they no longer feel that all choices, good or evil, have moral values and consequences attached. They forget their shame.
- C. Even some of the children of the world know this to be true.
  1. For a time, the mental health industry advocated that all shame is bad. In the past 25 years, they have developed an understanding that closely resembles Bible principles.
  2. "Shame breaks down into two main categories: healthy shame and toxic shame. Healthy shame describes the feeling of: "I have done something that goes against my core values and beliefs, and I feel badly about that," while toxic shame describes the feeling of: "I am inherently flawed and defective and therefore unworthy of love and

belonging.” Basically, this is the difference between “I did something bad” and “I am bad.” (Robert Weiss LCSW, CSAT-S)

3. “I never wonder to see men wicked, but I often wonder to see them not ashamed.” (Jonathan Swift)
4. “A man must not be without shame, for the shame of being without shame is shamelessness indeed.” (Mencius)
5. “The wicked fear the good, because the good are a constant reproach to their consciences. The ungodly like religion in the same way that they like lions, either dead or behind bars; they fear religion when it breaks loose and begins to challenge their consciences.” (Fulton Sheen)
6. “What is at the base of shame or guilt? It is the consciousness of an imbalance, or of an action in the past that has caused, and probably continues to cause, suffering.” (Darrell Calkins)

## **I. SHAME AND FORGIVENESS**

- A. Forgiveness is the dismissal of any debt or obligation incurred by the person or to the person
  1. We cannot forgive someone’s sin. This is only something God can do, because sins incur a penalty, which only God can and will enforce.
  2. God has told us how to obtain forgiveness and the means are merciful and gracious.
  3. We cannot forgive another’s sins committed against us, or against God, or against anyone else. Nor can we forgive our own sins.
- B. Forgiveness does not always remove the consequences of those sins.
  1. When God forgives us, we no longer face eternal punishment; the debt and the penalty are removed as if the sin never happened.
  2. However, the consequences frequently remain.
    - a. Murder, theft, lying, gossip, violence, assault, adultery have consequences in this world that leave marks and scars.
- C. Forgiveness will not remove the memory of what we have done and our feelings of shame for having done those things.

## **II. SHAME IN SCRIPTURE**

- A. When we violate God’s will, there should be a feeling of embarrassment that we weakened and fell to Satan’s trap - Gen. 3:10; Psalm 51:3
- B. Forgiveness does not erase the memory of our wrongs.
  1. Though forgiven and ordained as an apostle, Paul said of himself:
  2. Acts 26:9-11; 1Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1Tim. 1:15
- C. Paul was not a man who could not forgive himself; he was a man who chose not to forget himself.
  1. Paul did not harm himself with shame, even though he had fought against the Lord Jesus Christ. The forgiveness he received from the Lord was greater than Paul thought he deserved.
- D. God often uses shame as a wake-up call or an example - Psalm 44:13-15
  1. Is pain a bad thing; it is our enemy? In what way does pain protect and preserve us?

2. Then shame is likewise our friend and protector; it alerts us to spiritual harm and protects us from being lost.
- E. God wants us to have the right attitude towards sin - Psalm 51:17
1. That is why Christians are to dress with an awareness of behaviors and appearances that can become shameful - 1Tim. 2:9; Heb. 12:28
  2. Showing respect for our bodies and the proper use of them shows respect for God who made us in His Image.
  3. Ezra was ashamed of his nation's behavior - Ezra 9:5-10
  4. Joseph thought that Mary had sinned, so out of love for her, he planned to hide her shame - Matt. 1:19-25
  5. Ham, instead of being ashamed of his father's sin, tried to make a spectacle of him - Gen. 9:20-27
- F. Perhaps the reason sin is universal is that many have lost the sense of shame
1. Jer. 3:2-3, 6:15; Hosea 4:18
- G. Our sins should trouble us until they have been resolved
1. Sin separates us from God and sentences us to death. It must be addressed; shame moves us to deal with sin rather than ignore it
    - a. 1Tim. 4:2; Zeph. 3:5
  2. To love is to forgive and hide sin. We are not protecting the sinner in his sins, but the repentant sinner from the damage of long term unrestrained shame for his sin - Psalm 32:1
    - a. We do not make a mockery of a brother's weakness. We do not set up a brother for public ridicule - James 5:20
    - b. It is a part of being empathetic with brethren - Rom. 12:15-16

Conclusion:

- A. David's prayer Psalm regarding shame is the Biblical, comprehensive, practical, and healthy approach to shame - Psalm 25