

Bite Size Bible Study

Shame #126

By Pastor Lee

Recently I have been thinking a lot about Honor/Shame and learning that there is a lot more to the subject than I had originally thought.

When we in our western culture think of Shame we often think it is to put someone down, lay guilt or ridicule them. However in the collectivist cultures of the Middle East and in the Bible we find a wholly different use for Shame.

There are several types of shame and they can be used for good or misused.

One type of good shame is when we would feel shame about lying to our parents. In this case the shame keeps us from doing something that could strain the relationship with our parents. We have done nothing wrong and shame keeps us from following through with the wrong actions.

Another type of shame is when one person shames another but it is done in a manner to point out a deviation from a cultural norm. It is not meant to degrade a person but to restore them back to the community norms. This is best done on a one to one basis so as not to embarrass the person being shamed. However if the person is unwilling to change their behavior then more people are going to know the infraction.

Then there is a third kind of shame, one where one person shames another to build himself or herself up over the shamed person, thereby trying to make themselves more worthy than the other. This is the misuse of shame.

In the first example of shame we see that this is internal. No one knows but us. It comes from a moral conviction that a certain behavior is unwise or unacceptable. It could be a behavior that will hurt someone else or cause them grief because of what we might be contemplating. It is our conscience, kind of like Jiminy Cricket was to Pinocchio (if anyone remembers the story). He was always looking out for Pinocchio to do his best and not get off track.

All this is incumbent on us having had a good moral upbringing. Even those who haven't may still be open to the second type of shame.

Now the contemplated action is either communicated to another person or the action has been completed. Now the one who knows right from wrong is responsible to bring that information, in private, to the one who had acted inappropriately.

This person should communicate the inappropriateness of the action and what the consequences might be for all those involved. This might include community disapproval or possible the hurt that could be caused to others involved. The shame is intended to keep the person from either doing it or doing it again. It is to be restorative not punitive; consequently, the fewer people that know about it the better the situation.

The third kind of shame is what I call – ladder climbing. It is when one person shames another in order to be more important than the one shamed.

This is probably the most common use of shame in our culture, and we find it in all parts of our society.

In any type of political arena, digging for dirt on an opponent is commonplace in much of our society when one feels the necessity to shame his or her opponent. There seems to be no limit as to the ways one can use to gain popularity over an opponent. Winning the election or position is more important than ethics and moral correctness. We find this attitude in schools, business, news, politics, and even in churches.

In our news reporting it is not the facts that generate the viewership or readership, it is the sensationalism of the report. It doesn't matter as much whether the news is good or bad, it matters whether it will emotionally intrigue the viewer or reader, and it doesn't matter so much what emotion it garners so long as the viewer is engaged. Top ratings are important and that brings in the commercial dollars.

It is no wonder that when someone mentions SHAME, we automatically are drawn to the third kind of shame.

But shame has a positive aspect to it, preventing us from making mistakes or repeating them over and over. The right use of shame builds community and is the glue that binds people together in a loving way.

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