

## Is There Shame in the New Creation?

by Tami Jelinek

For awhile now I have been contemplating how to best respond to a particular accusation which has been repeatedly leveled at NCMI: "They teach [errantly] that Christians should no longer experience shame." Since the accusation is based on the false premise of the accusers, which is the gospel-denying, cross-disparaging belief that Christians *should* experience shame; it seems appropriate to thoroughly examine this concept of shame in the life of the believer in light of the whole teaching of Scripture on redemption and what it has truly accomplished. Not to reprove the scoffer, which Proverbs assures me would be fruitless, but rather for the benefit of those who may unwittingly be pulled back into the bondage of legalism through false teaching.

### **Who told you that you were naked?**

From the beginning, from the garden story, we learn that shame is the result of nakedness. And yet the story begins with this perplexing statement:

Genesis 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Why is this perplexing? Because from hereafter, nakedness is always associated with shame. From hereafter, one's natural response to being naked is to seek a covering. From hereafter, almost universally, people try to avoid nakedness for fear of exposure. The very statement that they were naked and not ashamed is made to enunciate an original state of innocence which was permanently reversed at the fall. It is made to point to the contrast which follows. It is in understanding this contrast, that we will gain insight into the metaphorical motif of nakedness and shame in the garden story, which will prepare us to receive a fuller understanding of our redemption in Christ and the complete eradication of shame it has provided.

Genesis 3:9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. 11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Before the transgression, there was no shame in nakedness; they lived in God's presence without a covering because their conscience was undefiled. They were innocent. But when they transgressed the law, they became guilty before God (sin was imputed to them) and in their naked state they had nothing of their own with which to cover themselves. Their efforts to accomplish this were of course insufficient (which pictures the futility of law-keeping); they knew it, which is why they hid. In a state of innocence, nakedness presented no obstacle to fellowship with God. But in a state of guilt, nakedness prevented them from dwelling in God's presence without a covering. The animal skins God provided (metaphorically picturing the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant) would serve as a continual reminder of their sin and their need for Christ until He came.

From this point on, God's people were aware of their nakedness. This was the awareness that, under the guilt of transgression, Adam and his wife, and all people born into the covenant world after them, were without clothing. They were guilty, and their guilt was exposed. No longer innocent, they were aware that they were without a covering for their nakedness; that is, they were without the righteousness of Christ. And apart from being clothed in that robe of righteousness, their uncovered, unatoned-for sin would forever separate them from the presence of God, and from the beauty of his holiness. Until, that is:

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Christ purchased these coverings for the nakedness of His people, when He bore our shame and reproach on the cross:

Hebrews 12:2 ...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame

Psalms 69:7 ...I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face.

Psalms 69:19 Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour...

The salvation all God's people from the time of Adam looked forward to was a perfect covering for their nakedness (the perfect righteousness of Christ), which would be a perfect and permanent remedy for their shame, and nothing short of it. It is this salvation which the garden story foretells. It is this salvation which was accomplished at Calvary. Jesus became naked and ashamed for us so that we would never be naked and ashamed again. God will *always* see us clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the beautiful garments of His salvation. To pronounce shame upon a Christian today, and to accuse a brother who has been cleansed of all unrighteousness and made the righteousness of God, is to derogate that righteousness, and to disparage the perfect work of the cross:

Jeremiah 51:10 The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

### **And such were some of you**

1 Corinthians 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians who are caught up in a works-based view of salvation, and will use a passage like this to promote the idea that commission of one of the *acts* referred to above would disqualify one from salvation. However what we see in the above passage is not a list of acts, it is a list of categories of people. In

other words, it is not a list of what people *do*, but rather what people *are*. First, in general, the passage is referring to a specific type of person: the unrighteous. Then it goes on to a more specific description of who some of these unrighteous are. Among them are: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Of course "the Scripture has concluded *all* under sin" (Galatians 3:22). *Some* of you were formerly members of a specific group on this list but a longer list would exclude no one. In other words, you were all defined by sin. You were all identified by transgression. Apart from the righteousness of Christ, not having any righteousness of your own, uncleansed and unforgiven, naked and ashamed, you were among the unrighteous who would not inherit the kingdom of God. But now you are washed, sanctified and justified. In fact, you have been created anew, and you have made the very righteousness of God:

2 Corinthians 5:17 if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (NKJV).

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Are we saying that since in Christ we have been made righteous and are no longer sinners in God's eyes, that it does not matter how we conduct ourselves? Are we dismissing the importance of morality, or in some way excusing immorality? That is absolutely not what we are saying (although we have been accused of that as well). In fact, Paul states in no uncertain terms:

Ephesians 4:28 Let him that stole steal no more.

When you were a thief, you stole. That is what thieves do. But you are not a thief anymore in God's eyes; that is, you are not a thief by status, so don't act like one. But when you do, remember who you are in Christ, and be comforted by His mercies which are new every morning. And comfort one another with the comfort you have received:

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

There is no place for shame in the comfort of Jerusalem. The God of all comfort has borne our reproach upon Himself, and removed our guilt. But it is important to be clear here, lest we be misunderstood as advocating some type of antinomianism, or claiming there is no righteous standard for our behavior. In fact when we behave in opposition to that righteous standard (which Christ summarized with two commandments: love God and love others), we will be inclined to *feel* guilty and ashamed, even though in God's eyes our guilt has been removed. Behaving

antithetical to the character of Christ, whose image we now bear (1 Corinthians 15:49), will and *should* cause us sorrow and lead us to repentance. But the glory of completed redemption is that when fail in our behavior, we are reminded of the cross and the forgiveness that is *already* ours. And so we return to that cross, bowing our heads in thanksgiving, rather than hanging our heads in shame. The blood of Christ shields us from all accusers, whether from without or within. David expressed it this way:

Psalm 3:3 But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

### **Proof-texting shame**

A response to the accusation that we are *falsely* affirming the removal of shame for all those in Christ would not be complete without addressing the specifics of the "proof-text" based arguments against us. Proof-texting is a method used by the exegetically lazy and the intellectually dishonest and is easily countered by a faithful adherence to the analogy of Scripture, which is simply the principle that Scripture determines the meaning of Scripture. And we cannot rightly handle the word of truth by isolating one passage, or as is done in cases of the most blatantly grotesque proof-texting, isolating a single word out of context to support a premise born out of humanistic reasoning, disregarding other passages, which, if added to the argument would prove the premise to be false. "Let God be true, and every man a liar," as the oft-quoted saying goes.

I recently heard another Christian state, in the context of his criticism of the ministry of NCMI, that "the Bible speaks plenty about Christians needing to feel shame for things." First, before addressing the "proof" which was offered for that statement, let's just look at it on its face, in light of just one thing that we know beyond all doubt to be true:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

*Now* no condemnation for what? Is this not speaking of the previous condemnation we were under for the *things* which would cause us to *feel shame*? Remember in the words of our contrarian, there are *things* for which *Christians* need to *feel shame*. Predictably enough, a companion complaint is often voiced that we teach there is no longer a need for Christians to ask God to forgive them. (Please see: [1 John 1:9](#)) This teaching of course would be a problem for one who believes, as does our accuser, that there are sins for which Christians have not yet been forgiven (hence the need to repeatedly ask). Therefore, they are still under condemnation for those sins (those *things* for which they must continue to *feel shame*). Yet this sadly and tragically rejects the analogy of Scripture:

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 25:6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a

feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. 7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. 9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Zephaniah 3:11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain.

It is significant that in the above passage from Zephaniah, the removal of shame for God's people coincides with the removal of the self-righteous from authority and influence. We should soberly remember this when we encounter finger-pointers in our own Christian community, who would use shame and condemnation toward other Christians to position themselves as teachers in authority.

Jesus said to the woman, humble and contrite before him, caught in adultery, "Where are your accusers?" In Christ there is no condemnation because "the accuser of the brethren is cast down." (Revelation 12:10) In Christ there is no shame because "He has taken away our judgments," (Zephaniah 3:15) and we are "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Colossians 1:22).

The chapter which begins with the statement that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ concludes with these comforting words:

Romans 8:33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

This should remind us again of Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery:

John 8:10 ...hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Now *briefly*, we will deal with the proof-texts used by the proclaimers of shame. These three passages were listed to prove that "the Bible speaks plenty about Christians needing to feel shame for things":

Romans 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly [shameful], and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

1 Corinthians 6:5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?

1 Corinthians 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the

knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

It must be understood, that in addition to the need for the analogy of Scripture in order to accurately interpret these passages, they must also be appreciated within their immediate contexts. Proof-texters ignore both of these essentials. Because we have already shown adequate evidence from the analogy of Scripture that the experience of shame is completely incongruent with the reality of forgiveness (in fact it would be accurate to say that as a Christian is one who has been forgiven of all sin, the phrase "ashamed Christian" is oxymoronic); we will simply acknowledge the general context of the word "shame" in each of the above passages, and see how the argument of the contrarian holds up.

We will first dismiss Romans 1:27 as a proof that Christians should experience shame for "shameful acts" as the passage is not addressing Christians at all. Of course sinful acts committed by those who have rejected Christ, and who are without His forgiveness, are shameful; and of course those who commit them will experience shame before God. Shame is a natural outgrowth of a guilty conscience. But it should go without saying that to apply a passage which is clearly about people upon whom the wrath of God is about to be poured out to any one of God's own children is not only theologically fallacious, but it places the accuser on par with an enemy of the gospel.

Secondly, 1 Corinthians 6:5 is an admonishment against Christians who, instead of judging civil disputes among themselves, were taking their disputes with one another before unbelievers. Paul spoke this admonishment "to their shame." The word is *entropay*, and its secondary definition, after "shame," is ironically "respect" or "reverence." Perplexing? Not really when we consider the context, and understand shame as a concept relating to public reputation. It is a noun referring not to the identity or character of the person, but to the perception others have of them. Our actions before others can influence our public reputation either negatively or positively, resulting in either shame or reverence. In the case of the Corinthians fighting amongst themselves in court, we should be reminded of Paul's words to the Colossians:

Colossians 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Concern over a tainted public reputation, which the behavior of the Corinthians would have certainly resulted in, was motivated by the single-mindedness Paul had toward his mission, which was to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians were (and still are!) encouraged to desire and cultivate a good reputation among unbelievers *so that* they would be ready to answer matters pertaining to the gospel. Taking brothers to court was to their *shame* (i.e., to the detriment of their *public reputation*) and would directly hinder their ability to witness Christ in that same court. The way the word shame is used in this passage refers to public reputation, and is in no way applicable toward a Christian's standing before God, and in no way supports the contention that a child of the king adorned in the beautiful garments of salvation should hang his head over that from which the blood of Christ has washed him clean.

*Entropay* is used only twice in the New Testament, the second time being in 1 Corinthians 15:34, which was offered as the third proof-text for shaming a Christian, and in which Paul repeats the same phrase, "I speak this to your shame." It is reasonable that all of the above points pertaining to public reputation and Paul's priority to spread the gospel apply in this passage, as the language is identical. But we will briefly address the specific context as well. It is, after all, our resurrection passage:

1 Corinthians 15:32 If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. 33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. 35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

Paul is basically saying, "why worry about our public reputation and preaching the gospel if there is no resurrection (literally, if the dead are not rising)?" We might as well live with abandon, and without regard for morality. Those he is addressing who do not have the knowledge of God are clearly those who either a) don't believe in the resurrection, or b) are misunderstanding its nature. Notice immediately following his chastisement, "I speak this [lack of knowledge about the resurrection] to your shame [to the detriment of your public reputation by your misrepresentation of the gospel]," he proceeds to answer the question, "how are the dead being raised?"

This is a rather poignant example of one of the most unfortunate consequences of proof-texting, which is of course that by pulling words and phrases *out* of their context in order to prove an erroneous premise, one misses their proper significance *in* their context.

### **The end of shame in the world without end**

When God formed the earth (the land in which He eternally dwells with His people), He designed it to be inhabited. In the beginning they were told, "be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." But they transgressed the commandment, their nakedness was exposed, they were put to shame, and expelled from the land of the living. And all God's people remained in exile, and ashamed, until the promised Savior came. Even David, in his unregenerate state, lamented, "My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me" (Psalm 44:15).

But everlasting salvation meant the permanent eradication of their shame, and ours; and fulfilled the purpose for which God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, to be His eternal habitation with His people:

Isaiah 45:17 But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. 18 For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited : I am the LORD; and there is none else.

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