

Despising the Shame – Hebrews 12:1-2

The Treasure that is Your Life in Christ #11

Introduction – Guilt and shame are closely related. We have already seen that the Gospel takes away your guilt and establishes you in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. What we also need to understand is that the gospel has swallowed up your shame and established you in the glory of Jesus Christ. Guilt and shame have the ability to cripple a Christian's present experience of freedom, hope, and joy in Christ. But the Gospel is the way out of guilt *and* shame. This is Good News not only for those who have sinned; this is Good News for those who have been sinned against.

Despising the Shame (Heb 12:1-2) – These verses charge us to run the race of faith just as the faithful before us have done who are now in the stands in some sense watching us. In order to finish this race, we must put off certain weighty things so that we might run with endurance, and we must set our eyes on the One Who perfectly ran this race. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith and so He is the author and finisher of this race we are running. He endured the cross and now He has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, and we seem to know what that means. But what about this phrase: “*despising the shame.*”

Shame, Broadly Considered – When Adam and Eve sinned, they became ashamed of their nakedness and hid from God in their guilt (Gen 2:25, 3:7-8). Shame is not the same thing as guilt although it often accompanies guilt. Shame can be used to bring someone to Christ (Psalm 83:16). Shame is that experience of being an outcast. Rejection, humiliation, disgrace, and dirtiness are all connected to being ashamed. But what is really distinct about shame (as opposed to guilt) is that we can suffer shame by someone else's sins. A lazy son causes his father shame (Prov 10:5). We can suffer shame when we take a stand for righteousness and are despised by others (Psalm 69:6-7). And one of the most severe experiences of shame seems to come when someone is abused and violated. This was the case with Tamar when her brother raped her (2 Sam 13:13, 19). Shame has the power to smother us with humiliation, rejection, and disgust.

The Shame of the Cross – The crucifixion of Jesus is a story of shame. The Romans considered crucifixion to be a ritual of humiliation, something sub-human, and Roman citizens were exempted from this form of execution. Jesus not only bore the guilt for our sins; He bore the shame of every sin we did or had done upon us. The way of the cross was for Christ a great reproach and a terrible shame (Psalm 69:7-10, 19-21). There is more. Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirement of Leviticus 16:27 that the carcasses of the animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement be burned outside the gates of the city. Jesus was crucified “*outside the gate*” (Heb 13:11-12).

Shame Despised – Jesus knew that He was going to bear our guilt and that He would have to do so bearing our shame as well. “Despised” means to care nothing for, to disregard, to consider something not important enough to be concerned with when evaluated against something else (the joy that was set before Him). He took our shameful, disgraceful reputation upon Himself, and just like our sins, He buried them in His shameful death.

Your Shame on the Cross – “*He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in it*” (Col 2:15, ESV). In His shameful death, Jesus put your enemies to shame. Jesus is pictured as the victorious warrior, leading a procession of his captors and putting them to public ridicule and shame. Jesus was answering the laments of many Psalms (Psalm 25:2-3, 35:4, 83:17, 70:2). John Owen described the work of Christ over our guilt as “the death of death in the death of Christ.” In the same way we can understand the work of Christ over all of our shame as “the shame of shame in the shame of Christ.” Here is the Gospel with regard to your shame: the weapons meant to harm you have been swallowed up in Christ's death and in His resurrection you sit with Him in glory at God's right hand. Shame makes us feel unworthy, unwanted, untouchable, and unloved. But God says that your identity is neither in your sin nor in whatever anyone else has ever done to you. Your identity is in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus who endured it all for you. Now, in the heavenlies, God is singing over you with delight (Zeph 3:17).

Off with the Robe of Shame; Put on the Robe of Glory – You are ashamed, and perhaps you have turned your back on God for you assumed He has turned His back on you. In rebellion you may have now committed additional shameful sins, only making your problem worse. You have accepted your shame as your unchangeable identity and you live as an outcast, shut down emotionally, isolating yourself so you never have to be hurt again. You numb your pain with drugs, sex, power, success, abuse of others, whatever enables you to stop feeling the shame. But it keeps coming back like a recurring nightmare.

Jesus went to the cross and, bearing your sin and shame, He cried out “It is finished!” The infinite expanse of God's mercy and grace is bigger than you are, bigger than anything and anyone that might come against Him. He can take all of your guilt and justify you. He can take all of your shame and grant you the riches of His glory (Eph 1:18). And now, like Jesus, run the race, despise the shame for the joy set before you. Count it as nothing. Put on His glory.