

Shame and the Cross

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March 28, 2024



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When we think of Christ's work to bring salvation to the world, we rightly focus on how Jesus reconciles us to God by freeing us from the guilt we have because of our sin. On Good Friday, Jesus took our sin upon Himself and bore our punishment on the cross. On Easter

Sunday, He rose again and conquered sin and death. At Pentecost, He fulfilled His promise to always be with us by sending the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to love and follow God.

In the midst of all of these true and wonderful things about our salvation, we may overlook or even forget another crucial part of redemption that we each desperately need. By His work, Jesus not only takes our guilt and exchanges it for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), but He also takes our shame and exchanges it for His honor.

This aspect of the Gospel is especially important in a culture so obsessed with erasing the very notion of shame. Earlier this year, at the Grammy Awards, the red carpet was full of “sheer” fashion pieces. In fact, see-through dresses, shirts, and pants that display nudity are the new celebrity fashion trend. This trend is not only odd, given the basic purpose of clothing, but it reflects a “flaunt what you got” attitude aimed at eliminating the notion of shame associated with our nakedness after the fall. Of course, it’s not just body shame but other forms of shame as well—moral, physical, or vocational—that are now seen as bad and must be removed.

Shame is a reality after the fall, a sign that something about us is not the way it’s supposed to be. Shame entered the world because of sin. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed. After they broke God’s commandment by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they covered their nakedness and hid from God, ashamed.

The cultural push to get rid of shame altogether is deeply problematic. The solution to our shame is not to become shame/less, nor to redefine and normalize those things that bring shame as if they are, instead, a source of pride. For one thing, as we now are seeing, the normalization of what is shameful leads to the normalization of even worse things, such as the sexualization of children.

None of our human attempts to deny, disregard, or redefine what is shameful will work. In fact, not one of our attempts can make things even *better*. Shamelessness brings more problems. Immodesty makes us more vulnerable to the brokenness of ourselves and others. Covering or eliminating the consequences of our bad behaviors leads only to riskier behavior.

The only antidote for our shame is found in the shame Christ endured on our behalf that first Good Friday. On the cross, Jesus not only bore our guilt; He also took on our shame. He was shamed. He was spat on, beaten, unclothed, and mocked. All of which was part of God’s plan. Long before, Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah, “I hid not my face from disgrace.”

God clothed our first parents with tunics of animal skin to cover their shameful nakedness, but that was a temporary, incomplete solution. On the cross, God in Christ was stripped, exposed, and shamed so that we could be clothed with His righteousness. Because of His shame, we can escape the shame endemic to the human condition after the fall.

Our human solutions to shame can never save us. They are an illusion. They may temporarily cover our shame but can never take it away. Only in the cross of Christ—where Jesus endured our shame—can our shame be dealt with once and for all. Only with His righteousness can we be truly clothed, not with garments that wear out, but with the same glory as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

This *Breakpoint* was co-authored by Jared Hayden. For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to breakpoint.org.