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NAKED, YES, BUT NOT ASHAMED

By

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FOREWORD

Many of us find it hard to accept ourselves.
A pity ..., for this makes it hard to accept other people, or to be at peace with life as a whole.
Of course there are those who tell us it is easy. Just tell yourself constantly, 'I'M O .K ..,' and the problem will vanish. But something very real tells us deep down inside that we are definitely 'not OK.'

So we struggle on, showing in many ways that we are not happy with the person who looks back at us from the mirror every morning.

Maybe we put on a false front because we dare not be ourselves. Or we are always putting ourselves down.
Some of us do it more subtly, but self-rejection shows through as we work joylessly for the church as if we are trying to prove something, or as we constantly criticise other people.

But there really IS a way out of this impasse. Deane Meatheringham invites you to accompany him on a journey of discovery into the Scriptures.
Here you will find the way to be your true self with a glad heart and a quiet spirit. And it is a way that has nothing to do with wishful thinking or self-hypnosis.
So read carefully. This book might change your life!

Arthur Jackson,
Minister,
Blackwood Uniting Parish, South Australia.

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PREFACE

For me, one of the most stabilising consequences of being justified by God's grace is that it has enabled me to be myself. In more recent times it seems that an important element in Christian counselling and self understanding has been to help people accept themselves. This may include such things as loving oneself and ways to improve one's self-image.

A similar emphasis will also be found in much of the popular books and courses run by secular teachers and counsellors.

These things may be helpful. Maybe they should be as it is an effort to enable man to be what he should be. Also man yearns for these things as they are part of the essential nature of life.

My concern is that, in moving into this sphere of man's need, Christians can use Biblical language to substantiate this attempt at self authentication, yet without coming to terms with the essential nature of the Gospel itself. The result may be a religious form of self improvement, or self salvation, or merely God words. The results of this can be disastrous.

Lowell L. Nobel's1 anthropological, Biblical, and psychological study of shame has shown how shame affects people of all cultures including those which do not have the same emphasis on guilt as we do in the West. Hence shame is common to all men and the Bible describes its effects upon man, as well as shows how the Gospel frees man from his shame.

I am convinced that the Gospel of God is the power of God for salvation. This salvation is not merely an assent to the doctrine of justification, but a salvation which works the dynamics of that justification in the believer's life. This means we are rehabilitated by the Gospel to be all that God made us to be, but in a way which Adam and Eve never knew, because

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we can know God through the judgement of His grace manifested in the cross.

Therefore, my aim in this book is to examine the nature and effects of Shame, but to do so under the full orb of the cross. My contention being that to know this truth by the Spirit’s power in our lives stabilises us, making it unnecessary to play games with or about ourselves. The consequence of this for our relationships with God and His children, as well as for the church as it fulfils God’s purpose for the world is immense.

Deane Meatheringham.

CHAPTER ONE

NAKED AND NOT ASHAMED

How often do you hear the expression from a confused person, ‘I felt so ashamed!’ or ‘He shamed me into it!’, or ‘I didn’t know where to hide?’

Shame is one of the most vital affecting and sensitive experiences known to man. Its sense of loss, embarrassment and dishonour permeates and dominates the peoples of all cultures. We are frequently manipulated and inhibited by shame or the fear of being put to shame.

There are those who, because of their shame, have coiled up and turned into themselves. They have covered themselves in. Each is ashamed to let others see the real person he is. They can’t risk being exposed, often even to those who are closest to them.

Shame keeps us hidden behind our masks, fearful that some day, being off guard, we may let ourselves be seen.

For it to be said that ‘the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed,’ speaks of the uninhibited openness of this man and woman. This statement in Genesis 2:25, speaks of the completeness, the fulness and the glory in which man was reacted. These two people could be themselves - no more, no less. Their bodies, as they left the hands of God in the creative act had no defects that they should need to cover them, and so they rejoiced in their full humanity as persons created in the image of God.

If it is shame that closes us in and cuts us off from others, what a beautiful thing it would be to have nothing of which to be ashamed. In such a state we can be ourselves - fully! Our lives can be transparent. We can face ourselves and be faced by others.

This book is really about the open life. What a relief it is to
be open in our relationship with God, being known by Him and knowing Him without fear. The open life is the life of full relationships where we are open to each other and do not have to hide from another’s gaze. It also, and importantly, means being open to ourselves and knowing who we really are as children of God.

The promise of God is: ‘No one who believes in him (Jesus Christ) will be put to shame’ (Romans 10:11). This is the transition from shame to honour. There is no apprehension that some day the hidden skeleton in the cupboard will be brought to light confronting us and causing us to shrink in shame. We will not be disgraced. And because what is true for the future is also true now, so the person who is in Christ can accept himself as God has accepted him. This means he can begin to love himself, which is in fact to love what God has beautifully made and wonderfully redeemed. In turn this becomes the springboard for loving his neighbour, and the working out of full relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

SHAME IS LOSS OF PERSONAL HONOUR

Unlike guilt, which is defined by the law and conscience, shame is more that which is only known as it is experienced. This makes it more difficult to define, as a category. However, we know the experience even if we must express it in different modes and words. Shame is an inner thing, but nonetheless real. It is the experience of loss, the loss of self-honour.

Jeremiah expresses this experience as one of dishonour. Created as sons who would call God ‘my Father,’ the people of God had turned to other gods and faithlessly given their love and affection to idols. But this brought them loss. Instead of being free children they had become captives and so had demeaned themselves. This was their shame. ‘Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God.’ (Jeremiah 3:25)

The experience of shame may be one of being disgraced or of experiencing ridicule or rebuke in front of others. The Psalmist says: ‘Thou hast made us the taunt of our neighbours, the derision and scorn of those about us. Thou hast made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples. All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the words of the taunters and revilers, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.’ (Psalm 44:13-16).

This person feels shame as defeat. It is to be pulled down, demeaned and laughed at. We may feel the heat of this shame when someone close to us, perhaps a member of our family, gets into trouble. People talk about us. We feel the shame of it. We may find it hard to face people. We feel that people are looking at us, or talking about us. So we lose our honour and self-respect.

Often the Scriptures connect shame with being humiliated, confounded or disillusioned. (See I Corinthians 11:22, James 2:6, I Corinthians 11:4,5). In the story Jesus told of the dishonest steward, the steward knows that shame is an experience stemming from failure. He is about to be dismissed by his master for irresponsibility, so he considers his options for a future livelihood. He says, ‘I am ashamed to beg.’ His shame would be the revelation of his failure and having to do something which he considers below his status and dignity as a person. Others would see it, but he would feel it.

Summarised, we say that shame involves the loss of our own personal self value and self worth. Such can be an overpowering feeling for when satisfaction with ourselves is disturbed, it brings the disruption of our own inner harmony.
LOSS OF FACE

The disruption of our inner harmony can be reflected in our faces. To be shamed is to lose face. ‘Face’ describes man’s being, especially as he relates to other persons. What we are and what we feel is expressed on our faces. The face gives visible indication of our inward emotions. We can be sad-faced, tearful, pale. Our faces can change colour, they can be darkened, or blush. Often in the Scriptures the face of a person is synonymous with his presence.

Hence shame may be experienced by the blushing face. ‘O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens .... ’ and embarrassment, the inner disfigurement, the confusion and the consequent heat we feel inside are expressed in our faces.2

Interestingly, it has been suggested that blushing is the only human emotion which an actor can’t feign. If this is so, it helps to confirm that shame is one of the deepest human experiences.

So real is it when we know shame that we want to hide our faces. When have you wanted to cover your face with your hands, or to turn away from being seen?

To lose face is to lose part of us. It is to lose something which gives us a proper and open relationship with others. So in order to compensate, we put on a face. We wear a mask or we try to be someone else and so give an untrue

1 Man’s glory is his created mannishness. When he unmans himself or fails to be what he is created and designed to be, he senses his loss of glory. That is his shame.

Let us go back to man as he was created. This concept is hard for us to grasp because we view ourselves, and so man generally, from the vantage point of our shame. The very experience of shame testifies that we have failed to be what we are essentially structured to be. Created in the ‘image of God’ and made ‘very good’ is the reason why the ‘man and his wife  were naked and not ashamed.’1 Not only is man the climax and goal of creation but created in the likeness of God, he is thus created in the likeness of the very glory of God Himself. He has God’s glory. He reflects the love, the truth, the holiness, the freedom and the very weight of God, yet without being God. Hence he knows no shame because he has nothing of which to be ashamed.

Man is regal. He is made to have dominion over the creation. As such he derives his whole being from God and relates to Him as a son to his heavenly Father.2 Hence we are told that God has crowned him with glory and honour.3 God has made us ‘upright’ with high integrity, without fault or any deficiency of being. (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

I Corinthians 11:7 states that man still is ‘the image and glory of God’, i.e. fallen man. We cannot cease to be what we

2 W. Delitzsch. Quoted in Article on Shame by T. G. Tasker. ‘The Dictionary of the Bible.’ Ed. James Hastings. P 840. (This is not an exact quote, but the thought is clearly from Delitzsch.) For other Biblical references for shame as loss of face see: 11 Sam. 19:5, Jet. 51:51, Psalms 34:5, 44:15, 69:7, 83:16, Isaiah 50:6, Ezek. 7:18, etc.

3 Psalm 8:5 cf. Heb. 2:7
are created to be. But when we refuse to be what we am created to be, we fall short of God’s glory, and that’s our shame. (Romans 3:23). When we reject God’s loving authority over us, we reject ourselves as sons. That is loss of glory. Such loss is felt as shame.

Shame is falling to be what we are created to be. Failure to be fully a man or a woman. Failure to be a true child of our parents, true parent to our children, true brother or sister to our brethren, true husband to our wife and true wife to our husband, and so on.

So shame is the experience of loss of honour and glory. We hang our head and lose face for we know we are not what we should be. This gives us a poor view of ourselves, which may express itself in an obsession with ourselves. Because of our innate shame and inferiority we have to make more of ourselves or make a name for ourselves. Psychiatrists and counsellors are constantly trying to build up people’s self images, because such people dislike and even hate themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAME AND COVER-UP

We have already noted that the immediate reaction to loss of face or embarrassment is to hide our faces. Central in the whole dynamic of the experience of shame is the reaction to cover it up.

Take the example in Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve. Immediately they break their relationship with God we are told, ‘then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.’ Now they feel their nakedness in a way they had not done previously.

Obviously, their bodies were unchanged. Nakedness is now threatening. Nakedness here is not merely confined to physically not being clothed, but they are ashamed of what they are, so that now there is a drive to hide their whole selves from the other’s gaze.

It’s interesting how we avoid direct eye-contact with another person for too long. We may feel that people can see right inside us. Hence we drop our eyes, or turn away.

So too Adam and Eve hide themselves from God. Adam says to God: ‘I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ Now man cannot stand God’s gaze. He fears exposure. It is painful to be discovered. Shame is too painful to remain uncovered. So painful is it that we hate to be exposed to our own selves. As our own observers we can be all the time covering up ourselves from ourselves. This may be by acts and attitudes known only to ourselves. Before long the process of continually covering ourselves becomes a way of life so that only at sporadic intervals do we see ourselves as we really are.

We cover up in many ways. We do it by diverting attention from ourselves. This may be through joking, or anger, or self-justification. We can divert attention from ourselves by criticism of others and the many ways in which we put other people down. Sometimes we do it by not exposing our thoughts in conversation, or by being habitual talkers, all the time keeping a screen around ourselves.

Religion is a good cover for shame. The Pharisees, good moral conservatives that they were, wore mash. Christ’s gaze was too penetrating for them to endure. Jesus called them hypocrites. ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.’ Matthew 25:27f. The word hypocrite itself means play-actor. Such play acting prevents us from being transparent and open to God, to ourselves, and to other persons.

Religion is also a powerful force as a means of obtaining
honour. These same Pharisees, with piety, coveted the best seats, the acknowledgment of others for their endeavours, and the status which comes from achievement.

Much of what men call honour is little more than a cover for their dishonour and shame. These are people trying to get to the top of the ladder, or perhaps even Christians crippled by a drive for success. Ambition, power, status and fame - all these are drives for superiority each stemming from shame.

There can be no open life in this. We become fugitives from ourselves, and experience self alienation, with all its spiritual grief. ‘It is as though you were standing in a swimming pool, holding down a number of inflated beach balls and feeling that if one ever reaches the surface it will be disastrous. At the same time, you are trying to carry on a conversation with people around the edge of the pool. The psychic energy used in the game of repression is unbelievable. Small wonder that we are so tired and preoccupied, so tense and anxious, and fearful of something unknown.’ (Cecil B. Osborne)

SHAME AND GUILT

The relationship between shame and guilt has already been mentioned. Often the differences between sin, guilt and shame overlap, yet they can also be viewed as three aspects of the one whole. Anthropologists have pointed out that all cultures experience shame, and they have noted that this is especially true of those cultures that do not have the same emphasis on guilt as we do in the West.

We have noted also that sometimes we feel shame for what other people do. Some of the verses already quoted in this book indicate that there is not necessarily a direct link between personal sin and shame. We may experience shame because of an infraction of societal etiquette, and not necessarily from moral guilt against God.

Shame then holds us captive. The advertiser gets a grip on people by working on inferiority produced by their shame. We can be morally blackmailed through fear of our shame being exposed. The enemies of God and man manipulate people by their shame, their sense of failure and a felt need for honour.

Guilt should not be confused with guilt feelings. Much of what may be called ‘existential guilt’ by Western psychiatrists may be shame at its deepest level. By reason of our disobedience, before God we are guilty. This is an objective fact. We are guilty whether we feel it or not. (Romans 3:12, 19, 23; I John 3:4, 5: 17, etc.

Sin and guilt, though not themselves shame, nevertheless work shame. It is the judgement of conscience that makes us aware of guilt. We as created beings are structured for obedience. The moral law of the universe requires obedience, as does the conscience. When we disobey, we know guilt. The guilt brings shame. Caught by that shame and inferiority, we become captives to cultural law, as well as the moral law. Failure to obey the law only intensifies the guilt and inflames the shame. Even in those cultures without the emphasis on guilt feelings such as we have in our society, it is shame that tyrannises people to society’s variety of conformity patterns.

We need, then to be freed from our shame. Can we ever again be naked and not ashamed? We try to rationalise our guilt and tell ourselves and others that what we have done is not wrong. Hence, when people have been immoral they may say: ‘But I don’t feel guilty about what I have done, I don’t think I was wrong.’ Yet they experience the shame, and so feel confused without necessarily understanding the cause.

The Bible often indicates the experience of shame as being the experience of punishment.

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FREEDOM FROM SHAME

We are freed from shame when we experience and know the total forgiveness of God Himself. This must be a forgiveness that views the guilt of man so seriously that it acts upon it in judgement to destroy it. Such forgiveness must reach and cleanse the conscience of all disobedience and impurity. The experience of the love which accomplishes this will be at the same time the experience of the Father’s acceptance of us as sons of His. Such sons that do not need to be ashamed. Such love will also liberate from the shame imposed on us by other forces, such as the law, Satan, the world, and every cultural legalism.

Such forgiveness and liberty comes to man by the cross of Jesus Christ. The person who is suffering from the shame brought to him by another person (or persons) will know that Christ has not only borne his sins, but also the sins of that other person as well. He frees us all to face others afresh. Prior to this he frees us to face God, to face ourselves and to know that all failure and disobedience has been cancelled out, and so carried away to extinction in Christ’s cross.

‘I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.’ (Isaiah 43:25).

CHAPTER FOUR

HONOUR WITHOUT SHAME

If shame is dishonour and disgrace, then to be shameless is to know the true honour of our personhood. Some are always seeking honour to make up for their sense of shame. If however we have no need for shame, then we do not have to hang our heads or climb the self-esteem ladder. We can simply be all that we are made to be and rejoice in it.

Maybe this sounds preposterous and even presumptuous. We may also be rightly on our guard for anything that makes too much of man, especially if we have reacted to those theologies which have sung, ‘Glow to Man in the highest.’ They make man to be God. However, man’s true honour is in being the dependant creature he is designed to be. Seeing that the whole physical and natural creation has a glow and honour in being dependant, then true man has no less.

In Romans 10:11 Paul quotes from the prophet Isaiah, ‘The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” He sees these words as having their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. In the previous verse, he says that the person who believes in his heart and confesses with his lips that Christ is raised from the dead is justified, and so, saved.

Justification is salvation from shame, because it is salvation from guilt. In the judgement of God believing persons are not condemned, but acquitted of all guilt. They are accounted by God as righteous. That is the new status which God gives them - and it is the ungodly that He declares righteous (Romans 4:5). This means that they have nothing held against them. Their guilt is no more because, in Jesus Christ, it has been fully judged in his death, the sentence which has been passed upon him. Hence, those who believe in him need be in no fear. Christ’s resurrection demonstrates that the judgement has been executed, effective and completed. Thus none will be put to shame in the judgement of God, but each can stand naked before His all-seeing gaze.

This is a reversal from shame to honour. ‘Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion, instead of dishonour you shall rejoice at your lot; therefore in your land you shall possess a double portion; yours shall be everlasting joy.’ Coming from Isaiah 61, these words follow those quoted by Jesus in Luke 4, where he sees himself as the One anointed
by the Spirit to effect the total liberation of enslaved humanity, much of which cringes in its shame. The ‘double portion’ is the inheritance received by a first born son. God reinstates us as full sons of His. He honours us as His own, and we inherit the riches of sonship.

All this is a consequence of the great finished act of God in justifying us. It is, to use a helpful phrase, ‘just as if we had never sinned.’ It is a once-for-all, never-to-be-repeated event, having effect for us now and reaching to all eternity. In his Epistle, John says, ‘And now little children, abide in him (ie. Christ) so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.’ (I John 2:28). This confidence is a boldness. It is the opposite of ‘shrinking ..... in shame’. This is our assurance that there is no need to hide or to cover ourselves, because, as John goes on to say, When Christ appears, ‘we shall all be like him.’ We shall be blameless before the presence of God. (I John 3:2).

Some people talk of a God who saves from guilt, but are themselves still subject to shame and even bound by it. There is little flow of life from them and little openness in their relationships. We easily slide into moralism. As Paul Tournier says, ‘Judgement appears. Anyone who does not subscribe to certain standards is suspected of infidelity and hypocrisy... everyone... seeks to appear better that what he is and begins to hide his faults instead of confessing them .... Moralism has returned and with it the breath of the Holy Spirit is stifled.’

This tendency to moralism is related to the painfulness of shame. Hence forgiveness of guilt may be viewed as a kind of gratuitous article of faith. Or many sense it as a religious trick, ie. ‘How can God forgive me when I keep on doing the same things over again?’ God is seen as someone who simply ‘winks’ at sin, or kindly sweeps it under the rug and away from sight.

But, as we know, this does not get rid of our shame. In fact, it pushes us back into a religious hypocrisy which God cannot tolerate, and which also repulses our consciences. ‘Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be made known,’ says Jesus (Luke 12:2). Paul tells us that God will judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ, on that day when all masks are stripped off and all that we are is revealed to God and to ourselves (Romans 2: 16, I Cot. 4:5).

Peter uses the same quotation of Isaiah 28:16 as Paul. He knows that the One who saves us from shame is very valuable, like a precious jewel that for years lies unrecognised so that men through familiarity cannot see its great worth. Rather, they are offended by Jesus. This shame makes them blind. But, by faith in this One, men are saved from shame. ‘For it stands in scripture: ‘Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a comer stone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame. ‘(I Peter 2:6).

CHAPTER FIVE
GLORY IN THEIR SHAME

In Philippians 3:19 Paul writes of the enemies of the cross who ‘glory in their shame.’

How does one glory in his shame? Shame, as we have seen, is a loss of glory. We are speaking of a glory which we can know without shame.

It can mean being unashamed of shameful behaviour. Jeremiah asks: ‘Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed: they did not know how to blush.’ (Jet. 8:12, cf Zephaniah 3:5). Such people have no apparent feelings of shame. They seem to be those who can boast of their immorality and brag of their deceitful ventures. Such is a way of being honoured and receiving glory by means of sin.

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Our seedy culture has popularised this principle in many forms. It can be seen in certain forms of music, entertainment and advertising. The ‘nasty’, ‘mean’, and ‘wicked’ advertise themselves as superstars. The Bible speaks of those who are heroes at drinking wine, or ‘who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter’. (Isaiah 5:20 23).

Looking at this from another angle, to glory in their shame, some people turn their failure to live into virtues of success. They are proud of their irresponsibility or boast of how they have not made the grade. We as faulty persons are constantly under pressure to justify ourselves, our actions and our misdemeanours. This perverse principle however, is a process of reversal. It is really an attempt to deal with shame and even to justify it. ‘Perpetual failure is so shameful, so traumatic, that failures are rationalised into phantom successes and weaknesses magically transformed into strengths.’ (L. Nobel). 1

Again, in Romans 1 :26 - 27, ‘shameless acts’ are linked with ‘dishonourable passions.’ This is humanity rejecting the truth for a lie and rationalising its new false system of life and responsibility. In verse 32 of Romans 1, Paul says that these people not only do such things, ‘but approve those who practise them.’ All this comes from the constant action of man ‘suppressing the truth’ (v. 18) which is too painful for man, in his shame, to live with.

We are seeing shame operating in a morally reverse way by attempting to cover the experience of shame with rationalisation and self justification.

An unknown French actor captures this when he says: ‘Nakedness is what the theatre is all about. Every good actor stands naked before the audience. But to communicate your nakedness by actually taking off your clothes - that’s too much of a costume.’ 2

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1 Lowell L. Noble. 'Naked and Not Ashamed' P.13
2 Ibid P. 2
BEING MADE ASHAMED

It seems that ordinarily people turn from their shameful ways when they are ashamed of their wrong actions and their sinful lives. Jeremiah bemoans concerning his people, ‘They were not at all ashamed.’ If they were ashamed this would lead to their repentance and a new life. Their shame actually keeps them covered up from the truth. Their masks hide them. Again shame works to destroy with its duplicity, its inferiority, and its resentments. All the pain of conscience and body derive from shame. This is why the Bible sees the experience of shame as an experience of punishment and judgement, with all its destructive effects on human personalities and relationships. (Romans 1:18 - 32, Psalm 81:12, II Tim. 3:1 - 5).

How do we come to be ashamed of ourselves so that it leads, positively, to a change of heart and mind? Mistakenly, we consider that people are made ashamed by exposing their guilt. It is true that we must see our guilt and take responsibility for it if we are ever to be free of it. But we must remember that the vitality of covered shame is such that the more it senses shame, the more feverishly it works to cover up.

The lonely woman brought to Jesus by the Pharisees is one of the many examples in the New Testament of the power of shame. She was at least on this occasion, promiscuous and had flouted God’s law against adultery. Her accusers endeavoured to make her, and Jesus, aware of her shame. But even if they had succeeded in their prosecution, would she have been ashamed of her actions? No! She was paralysed by her sin and had no will to change. Not anyway because of exposure of her sin.

Jesus says, ‘Neither do I condemn you, go and sin so more.’ In the encounter of Jesus’ all-knowing eyes she was captured by a love so true that she knew she was forgiven. Sin’s power was broken by forgiveness, and so there began a new life, and one which was ashamed of the past.

One of the most terrifying and dreaded experiences is to be brought to see ourselves. Hebrews 4:12, 13 tells us that the word of God penetrates to the depths of our thoughts and intentions. ‘And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.’ The positive purpose of shame is to reveal and expose what a person is like, with the implication that he ought to change. Then, in true repentance, he will be ashamed.

In Ezekiel 36, God promises His people a new heart and a new spirit by which they will have a new obedience through the action of the Holy Spirit (verses 26, 27) God will free them from all their moral pollution and their guilt. ‘Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves for you iniquities and abominable deeds’ (verse 31). Now they are ashamed. Paul, in Romans 6 describes the acquittal and release from the power of sin through the death of Christ. In verse 21 he says that it is these who are freed who are now ashamed of those things which worked shame and death.

Being the power of God, the word of the cross works such a transformation. (Romans 1:16, I Corinthians 1:17, 18). In that cross we are given a revelation of the judgement of God’s love which works forgiveness and clears our guilt. This enables us to face ourselves so that seeing ourselves in the full beam of God’s love, we feel no need to cover up but, rather, to know all that of which we are now ashamed has been judged, destroyed and completely forgiven.
CHAPTER SIX

THE SHAME AND THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

THE CROSS WAS A DISGRACE

Conditioned by years of Christian culture and symbolism, this fact may be difficult for us to accept. We see crosses in places of respect - on buildings, on the graves of our loved ones or as pieces of expensive jewellery, and so on. But to die on a cross was to enter the depths and the experience of total ignominy and disgrace.

True, the Romans crucified thousands, but in Jesus’ day crucifixion was the lot only of those who were slaves or scum.

In the Bible, to be nailed on a tree was to be cursed by God. (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13). Jesus’ disciples were always filled with anxiety and fear when he spoke of being crucified. The cross was a sign of excommunication, it was the act of God’s judgement for ridding the land and his people of the pollution and evil of sin.

To be crucified was to experience a wretched death, where the victim was deliberately humiliated and exposed for all to see. This shame Jesus experienced when he became a spectacle, an offence and a folly to the world.

THE CROSS WAS A PLACE OF JUDGEMENT

Shame, as we have seen, is experienced as the reflex of sin. It is sin’s judgement. Sin itself is a shameful thing, a perversion of the good. It is deceitful, corrupting, and despoiling, without right to even exist. In choosing to find life and fulfilment independently from God, man is given over to his sin, which works itself out in the judgement of the sinner. This is really the judgement of sin itself as a person is caught up in it.

Isaiah 64:7 tells of the judgement of sin itself as it not only defiles us, but destroys us. ‘There is no one that calls upon thy name, that bestirs himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast delivered us into the hand of our iniquities.’ (cf. Jeremiah 14:16, Isaiah 9:18 f, Hosea 7:2, I Thessalonians 2:16). Romans 1:18 - 32 describes man being given up, or over, to his sin. This is the living, actional experience of God’s wrath. Wrath is the torment of our shame, the knowledge of our loss of personal being, the fear and the pain of failure, the destruction of personal integrity and, with this, the outworking of shame and sin in our minds and bodies. Wrath works itself out in the dreadful breakup of human relationships.

The emotional and psychological consequences are well known. It ‘manifests directly through irritability, bad temper, apathy, depression, psychosomatic troubles, and so on. In other cases it expresses itself through interior tension, provoking a deep uneasy feeling with continual suffering and fear of some coming catastrophe. These latter expressions are deeply associated with a necessity for punishment.’ (Jorge A. Lean)1

The conscience demands punishment. We are not saved by avoiding judgement, or by going around it, but always through judgement. Salvation is an act of righteous judgement. 2

Sin must be judged. The enemies of God and man must be judged. We must be judged. God’s righteousness demands judgement on all evil. 3

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2 The following scriptures are some of those which link salvation with judgement. Isaiah 1:27, 11:4, 9:2-7, 26:7-15, Matt. 3:2, 10, 12, John 1:29, 12:31, Rom. 3:24, 25, 8:1-3, Colossians 2:15, I John 4:10, etc.
Such judgement exposes shame.

Christ’s cross was one of judgement. This is where sin and evil are judged. John 12:31 records Jesus saying, ‘Now is the judgement of this world, now is the ruler of this world cast out.’ The world is judged as this true Son of God and head of the human race takes in his own body the actual sins of the race (John 1:29, I Peter 2:24). He bears them to judgement and, in bearing them, he bears the judgement and so takes their shame.

**JESUS SHARES THE FAMILY SHAME**

We are told that Jesus, the Son of God, is an elder brother to the sons of God. He relates to us totally, and with us, and he is not ashamed to call us his brethren. (Hebrews 2:11). Christ fully brothers us. He makes himself one with the whole family of humanity, not coming to condemn us, but to save us (John 3: 17). This One through whom all things were created, the One who holds the whole creation together by the word of his power, comes to his own home as a servant (John 1:11, Mark 10:45). He does not disown us or reject us, neither does he put us down, but he serves us, giving up his life for us.

As one with the whole human family, Jesus feels the shame of that family. As we sometimes feel shame because of what members of our family or community do, so by the unity of his love for us, Jesus Christ feels the smart of our shame. He bears our reproach, he suffers our loss of face and he takes our dishonour and our disgrace.

We are blood relations with Jesus Christ. Yet it goes wider and deeper than this. In identifying with us Jesus lets himself be treated as a sinner. In his baptism, Christ makes himself to be on our level, becoming ‘sin for us.’ (II Corinthians 5:21). He feels sin’s horror and shame as only one who is holy could - as God did.

**JESUS SUFFERS SHAME NOT ONLY WITH US, BUT FOR US**

‘Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame...’ (Hebrews 12:2). The shame did not stop Jesus from giving his life for us. (Mark 10:45, I Corinthians 15:3, Romans 8:32). Rather, in his glad obedience to the Father’s will, Jesus takes the shame. But not in a bare, legal, substitutionary way. If we have only seen Christ as dying in our place, being punished for us (when we should have been punished), then the guilt of this grossly unjust action may only intensify the shame of the sensitive conscience.

In taking our sin, and in bearing our guilt, Jesus Christ took the evil, shameful us up into his cross. We should try to grasp this, because when we see it, we can cry with Paul: ‘I have been crucified with Christ,’ (Galatians 2:20).

When Christ died the sinful Paul was crucified, legally, in that judgement, and the judgement was that he bore Paul’s sins, with those of the whole world. (II Corinthians 5:21, Romans 6:6, II Corinthians 5:15).

The Son of God bears the shame, the ignominy and the contempt of the world. It is in his bearing it that Jesus’ nakedness is gazed at by the jeering, mocking crowd. His shame is expressed in the words of Psalm 69. ‘Thou knowest my reproach and my shame and my dishonour; my foes are all known to thee. Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.’ (cf. Matt 27:43).

Jesus’ despised the shame. His disgrace was something he did not deem worthy to be taken into account when it was a question of God’s great love for us. And Jesus’ will was to do the will of his Father. The true Son feels the non-sonship of a rebellious humanity. He takes it. He suffers it. He bears it away into death.
THE CROSS IS THE PLACE OF COMPLETE JUDGEMENT

This is seen in the climaxing words of Jesus from the cross, ‘It is finished.’ Christ is not let off. God ‘spared him not.’ This is where the world is judged. We were judged in that once for all event. Our guilt is all brought up into the cross, and burned up in the fire of God’s holy love. Faith sees it there and leaves it there. God sees it no more and remembers it no more. (Jeremiah 31:34). God is satisfied: we are justified. Faith sees this, believes it, and so the conscience is free of its guilt and disgrace. We can look up into the love of God and know ourselves to be free and clean. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,’ cries Paul. And with that knowledge, our shame is dissolved, we can look at ourselves, we are ashamed of our faithless deeds, and, like the prodigal son, return into the arms of the welcoming Father, to be reinstated into His eternal family.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

What is first viewed as an offence and a scandal is seen as a glorious revelation of the grace of God. With the apostle, we glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Galatians 6:14). Jesus saw it as that event which would reveal the Father’s glory (John 17:1 - 5). The place of shame is the place of glory. In his nakedness, Jesus identified with the naked, but he had nothing to hide. Clothing is often the symbol of hiding what we are ashamed to reveal. Jesus shows the innocence and glory of nakedness and of sonship. In that showing, the Son shows us the nature of the Father Himself.

In his identification with the guilty, Jesus is stripped on our behalf so that we may face our guilt, not in front of one who accuses or mocks, but in front of one whose righteousness has been made ours.

Here we see. Do you see? In seeing Christ, we are exposed to ourselves. But in seeing him, we see One who absorbs our shame. We are ashamed. But we can turn and live - naked, yet, but not ashamed.

‘He who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ No shame for us in the future, for our judgement is past. No shame now, for now we live in the good knowledge of having passed through the judgement. That is our glory. We have nothing to hide. We can be ourselves - and live.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SHAME OF IDOLATRY

The crowning shame in the Scriptures is idolatry.

‘As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed... who say to a tree, “You are my father,” and to a stone, “You gave me birth.”’ Jeremiah 2:26, 27.

‘All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together. But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.’ Isaiah 45:16, 17. To be confounded or confused is a man’s shame and demeans his manhood. This also is the shame which comes from idolatry.

‘You turned to God from idols, to serve a true and living God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.’ I Thessalonians 1:9, 10. This deliverance from future wrath is a present fact for the believer who has been freed from the lies and deception of idolatry. The action of the truth in Jesus Christ accomplished this deliverance from shame ‘to serve the true and living God.’

Do we need deliverance from idols in our time, or is
idolatry is one of the most perverse and powerful thrusts of modern man’s dilemma. It pervades and captivates man’s whole thought-world, his values, his world view, his understanding of history and his behavioural patterns.

**IDOLATRY IS SUBSTITUTING THE TRUTH OF GOD FOR A LIE**

This is idolatry’s most simple form. Expanded, it means giving to a thing or a person the worth or the trust that rightly belongs to God. We take the definition of truth as being things-as-they-really-are. We mean that man as a man is designed and enabled to live as an authentic person in the universe as it actually is. This is where he finds purpose, meaning fulfilment, and the enrichment of loving relationships. Man’s personhood and drives for these things derive from his being made in the image of the personal God, who is the true author of the universe. Hence man is made to relate to God as a person. Here he finds himself and knows who he is as a creature. Moreover, God has revealed Himself as the Father of His creation, which means that man in knowing God, knows himself to be a son. This means that he can relate to other sons as a brother or a sister. Furthermore, it means that the earth is his home where the Father provides for him, and that the whole creation is structured to fulfil the Father’s purpose. Man has a place in God’s purpose, to see creation come to its full goal as man’s home.

Idolatry occurs when man rejects God from being God. It manufactures substitutes for God, and worships those in the place of God. So man ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature (or, creation) rather than the Creator.’

The truth finds expression in the law of God where God’s will is revealed for man, ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ This is followed by ‘You shall not make for yourself a graven image’ to bow down to, to worship or to serve. (Exodus 20:1 - 6). The commandments are the writing up in visible words of what is already written into the very fabric and structure of creation. Therefore, to go against the law of God is to go against the true nature of the universe as it is. It is to run counter to our created humanity. To do this is to live against love, against God, against ourselves, against the creation and so against the truth.1

**IDOLATRY OF THE ABSTRACT**

Modern technological man may consider that he has freed himself from the tyranny of the gods and superstitions of the past. He may recognise the folly of believing in many gods (polytheism) and deduce that his belief in one God (mono-theism) testifies that he is not an idolater. However, this is the deception of idolatry.

Sophisticated peoples like the ancient Greeks also saw the folly of having many gods and philosophically or metaphysically developed the view of one sole god. But their god was an intellectual abstraction. It was an attempt at a higher level of rationalisation of man’s being in the universe. But their god was a kind of ground of being, and so, merely a formula. Abstract monotheism is no nearer the truth than animistic polytheism. It is merely the deliverance from bondage to non-existent gods to the tyranny of abstract and invisible forces. Monotheism was simply the idol of necessity and chance.

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While in the Greek city of Athens, Paul’s ‘spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.’ (Acts 17:17). The tyranny of an unknown god, fate or theological abstraction still gives way in practice to many gods. Our society is full of idols. This is the worship of our chrome-plated or plastic materialism in its many images, accompanied by superstition, hedonism and false religion.

IDOLATRY AND THE IMAGINATION

Idolatry shapes up visibly from the pictures of our imaginations. Chapter 8 of Ezekiel describes the idolatry of the people of God in a series of visions. These scenes portray the profaning of the Lord’s temple by the practice of idol worship. The series culminates in the portrayal of Israel’s elders with their backs to the sanctuary and their faces turned to the east, worshipping the rising sun. (v. 16). This despairing and vain worship comes from the elders’ imagined picture of the nature of God, which in turn affects their whole world view. God says to the prophet, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his room of pictures?’ (verse 12).

Man shapes his idols and draws his pictures of God, of the universe, of himself, of history and of life from the way he pictures these things in his imagination. These pictures are idolatrous. They are the gods of man, or a god made in the image of man. The images (idols) are outward expression of the human heart. From these images (or an image) man attempts to construct, systematise and shape up his world view or ideology.

Behind the idea of every ideology or religious philosophy there lies, in the imagination, a picture of the universe.

Marxism pictures the world as the work-out of dialectical materialism. Under the guidance of the material life process. Marxism has its picture of history, man and society.

The Bible sees man’s imagination as ‘only evil continually’. (Genesis 6:5).1 This does not need to be taken to mean that man has lost all recognition of good, but his imagination is coloured and slanted by his rebellion, guilt, pollution and fear of God, and from this distortion of life, he shapes his gods.

Connect this truth with Paul’s statements in Romans 1:18 - 32 where he says that in rejecting God, man exchanged the truth for a lie. This means that man must live his lie and, because his mind is darkened, he cannot know the truth. Man is alone. His insecurity and pain of having to live in the world as he is and in the world as the world is, means he must refashion the universe, reformulating it to suit his own rebellious picture.

This is man’s shame, and it shames his whole being as a man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOW IDOLATRY SHAMES

An idol of itself is a thing of shame. We have seen that shame is a loss of personal honour, the experience of losing face, or of being disgraced. This is what idolatry brings to man. His gods bring him shame because as soon as he moves from God he loses his glory as a man. This in turn affects the whole range of man’s relationships, working to destroy them and bringing accompanying enmity and bitterness.

IDOLS SHAME BY THEIR DECEPTION

The shame is that a person cannot see he has been deceived.

‘He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”’ (Isaiah 44:20). Idols are unreality; are nothings. (Isaiah 44:9). Yet the idol devotee builds on a lie, he trusts in a false-bottomed hope, he leans on an image which he has invented to be his god, but which, by nature of the case, can never be God.

Romans 1:18 - 20 shows the shame that this lie of idolatry brings. Man is given over to his lie, which, for one who is created in the image of God, is a degrading thing. Yet not only does the lie of man’s idols cause him to turn the universe into a lie, but it also gives man a false and perverted view of himself. He is given over to myths. As a newspaper journalist said: ‘In our inability to come to terms with reality we’re becoming cosmic-cargo cultists.’

The false view leads to a loss of knowing who we really are and who our neighbour is. Even the distinction between male and female is lost, with its accompanying effect upon our sexuality. Thus man is given over to ‘impurity, to dishonouring of their bodies among themselves.’ This is ‘because they exchanged the truth about God and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.’ Hence man is given over to ‘dishonourable passions’ or it could be translated, ‘passions which bring dishonour.’

What this means is that the lie of idolatry brings dishonour to our persons. It shames our masculinity and feminity. It turns human sexuality into a form of selfish exploitation. Man as man is de. fried and takes the pain of it in his conscience and his body. He becomes enslaved to base desire and is unable to free himself from its perversion.

This dishonour and shame is so powerful that man must use the falsehood and the baseness to cover his shame, or to justify his acts. But in so doing, man’s idols degrade him all the more, hence, ‘God gave them up to a base mind and to

improper conduct.’ With this comes the frightening break-up of human relationships, resulting from the consequent acceleration of repressing the truth and of worshipping a lie.

One example of this can be seen in Judges, chapters 17 to 21, where idolatry bring ruin to society captivated by its idols. This ruination is its shame. The confusion and anarchy which it brings is the experience of shame for a people who reject the truth and who cannot see that what they hold close to them is a lie.

LIKE IDOLS, LIKE WORSHIPPERS!

Idolatry brings shame by making its worshippers like the idols they worship. Psalm 115:8 has it that: ‘Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.’ The context of this verse in the psalm compares the sovereign freedom of the living God who cares for this universe with the immobility and impotence of man’s idols.

The man who makes an idol does so because of the insecurity brought about by his rejection of God. The loneliness caused by sin causes man to seek security and develop an opiate for peace. Yet all idols are made in man’s own image, and from a perverse and rebellious imagination. These idols are dead, and keep man in death. As seen by our modern efforts, the idols of man do not bring life. Dissatisfied with materialism, man searches the psychic, occultic and demonic. He uses drugs for sedation and stimulation to find purpose, happiness, joy and peace of mind. Man is dead to God and so dead to his real self. When we remember that, as a creature made to be a fountain of living waters or a spring of life he is now dead then this death is man’s shame.
ABJECT SLAVES

Man is created to be the slave of nothing. As God is free, so man was made to reign in life and have dominion over the whole creation. Man’s idols captivate him, making him an abject slave. Isaiah cries, ‘O Lord our Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us.’ These are the idols of self worship, materialism and money, authority and power, pleasure and ambition, religion, the occult and Satan himself.

Idols get their power over man by reason of his guilt, his fear, and with it, his shame. (Hebrews 2:14, 15, I Corinthians 15:56, I John 4:18, John 8:34). This debases him. He is cemented into the world system. (Galatians 1:4, II Corinthians 4:4, Revelation 17, 18:19 - 13, etc). He is gripped by the conformity pressures of these powers. His gods of luck and chance mesmerise him in a fatalistic and hopeless universe. Man’s idols blind him and deafen him so that he cannot receive the truth. Yet the idols never build: they only destroy. They exhaust. They torment. The drugs of escape and the idols of illusion capture people by the fear of death, the sense of inferiority and by the feelings of personal inadequacy.

All this makes man in his own eyes to be an unclean thing.

LOSS OF SELF IDENTIFY

In his rejection of the truth man loses his own personal identity. Sometimes he is not sure if he is a person at all. Perhaps all he is is a flow of consciousness, a machine, or a mistake in this vast universe. He asks ‘Who are we?’ The answer is that when God is rejected as Father, then we lose ourselves as sons. Who will tell us what we are? We analyse ourselves psychologically, biologically and socially, which is in some measure helpful, but all we may end up with is our self-analysis.

Man’s idolatrous image of the universe gives him a false view of himself. To find out who he is he may look into himself, yet still he must do this from his own concept of truth. If he has a picture of the universe that is based on an impersonal chance, plus matter, plus time-view, then he must eliminate himself as a person with a purpose to fulfil. There can be no basic purpose in his universe.

The pain of many in our generation is that they don’t know who they are. They, like the prodigal son, have lost themselves in a land far away from the Father and His family. They become alienated from themselves. They do not know what it means to be a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a son or a daughter. By the lie of idolatry, man’s relation with himself becomes impersonal. He finds it increasingly difficult to live with himself, and thus even more difficult to relate and live with others.

Our shame is when each is brought to being as a ‘non-son’. We get not only a false image of ourselves, but also a poor self image. Experiments have shown that very few people can accept themselves as they are. Many have a loss of self-value. This element affects our relationships with other people. It is of little use trying to work out relationships or talk about open relationships with others until we know ourselves and know our neighbours.

Trapped by our legalism, gripped with our fears, deluded by our facades, living in moral, spiritual and psychological uncertainty or chaos, we can only cry with the preacher of old, ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!’
CHAPTER NINE

IDOLATRY PUT TO SHAME

By this we mean that God puts idolatry to shame by showing its inability to fulfil its promises. Also its lie is exposed and its power broken in the judgement of God. Consider again these words of Isaiah 45:16, 17. ‘All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols (images) go in confusion together. But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.’

‘The scripture says, “No one who believes in him (Christ) will be put to shame.”’

‘You turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God.’

This is liberation. It is emancipation from the lie and the power of idolatry. It is restoration to God as Father and to the truth. Those reconciled find their true selves and, in a restored innocency, have nothing of which to be ashamed.

IDOLATRY IS PUT TO SHAME BY ITS JUDGEMENT

For man to be released from idolatry, its power must be shattered. This God promises to do in judgement. In that judgement the shame of idols and those who worship them will be exposed. Truth will confront and expose the lie. The facade will be demolished and a shameful nakedness revealed.

The destruction of idols must not be thought to be merely iconoclast that is the literally wrecking of physical images of gods. Maybe this will be one outcome, like the action of believers at Ephesus, who, when they were liberated, burned their books of magic. (Acts 19:18 - 20). Somehow the power of idols over men must be broken and the shame which gives idols their power must be dissolved.

Because of shame we cannot see the truth. Rather, the truth is feared by us as persons because it will expose the darkness and the perversity of our lives. So God’s truth must penetrate through the layers of our rationalisation and self-justification. It must break through the deceit of sin, and by a revelation of the truth as it is in Jesus, cleanse men of their uncleanness.

THE FULL REVELATION OF THE TRUTH

This is totally shown in Jesus Christ. We are told, ‘Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.’ (John 1:17, cf 4:21, 1:13, Colossians 1:5, Acts 15:7). In Jesus we see that truth is not merely intellectual speculation nor a philosophical system. Nor is it even a set of theological abstraction or ideas about God. In Jesus Christ we see that truth is personal, and not even ethical, monotheism. This revelation shows us that as truth is. ‘things-as-they-really-are,’ so the universe is not an impersonal fatalistic, gamble, but is the creation of the personal God who cares for His creation and who guides it all the time to its predetermined goal. To see the truth as it is in Jesus is to see the true nature of the universe where the Father Creator ceaselessly cares for His creation.

As the Son of God, Jesus shows us what it means to be a man. He is the true man. He shows us what it means for each man to be a person in his dynamic humanity. There is no shame in Jesus’ humanity. He is not trying to erase himself or withdraw from the world as it is. He has nothing to hide. He is fully himself - no more, no less. People come close. They rub shoulders with him, and find that he is beautifully transparent.

In this revelation as a man Jesus also teaches and shows the true nature of the Father. ‘In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.’ (Colossians 1:19), so that Jesus is the
showing forth of the being and character of God. (See Hebrews 1:3, Matthew 11:27, John 1:1, 14, 18, 14:1 - 11, etc). What we mean is that to know the Son is to know the Father, and so to be restored to the Father is to see the world as it really is, and to know ourselves as we have been made.

THE TRUTH IS NOT STATIC

In Jesus Christ the lie of idolatry is not only exposed, but defeated. We see this during Jesus’ earthly ministry when he confronts hypocrisy and comes into conflict with idolatry. Yet it is at the cross where the truth prevails climactically and overcomes the He of idolatry. Here the truth attacks the lie and defeats it.

Jesus engages the lies of idols, the ideologies of man, the world system, the antagonism of man and the deception of Satan at the cross. He engages them and battles with them. All are judged there. (John 12:31, I John 3:8). We have seen that idols get their power over man by man’s shame, his guilt and his fear. In the cross Jesus, the true one, takes the sin and the perversity, the lies of man bearing them away to extinction. (See I John 3:5, John 1:29, I Peter 2:24, II Corinthians 5:21). Man no more needs his idols to cover his shame. In that action the great lie of the whole world is exposed, i.e. the lie that man can live independently from God. The security offered by idolatry comes to shame. It is seen that idols can never cleanse the heart, never liberate man, never regenerate his nature and never enable him to find himself. They can never bring him to the Father.

At the cross the lies which are spawned from man’s imagination and image - his idolatries, ideologies, religions - and give expression to his egoism now vent themselves against the One who shows us the Father. But this One, the living truth, conquers them in his love and by his death, breaks their power. By this act the lie of the world system will be ultimately shamed and destroyed. (See Ezekiel 28, Revelation 18).

The truth, which was personal in the person of Christ, and which was the source of all thing, fully showed itself at the cross in all its glow. For us now the Father is here seen - at the cross - the Father of truth and justice who shows His true being in the defeat of the devil’s deceit and the destruction of man’s idolatry.

THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS

‘Grace and truth’ take into themselves the guilt, shame, hate and lostness of man. These latter elements expend and exhaust themselves in Jesus. Jesus defeats them by absorbing them and in his powerful death, consuming them to destruction. Paul says of Christ, ‘He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross.’ (Colossians 2:15). This is where idolatry is put to shame. Its evil and vileness is put to shame so its hold over man is broken.

The resurrection of Jesus is a demonstration of the power of his death. By the act of the cross Jesus is Lord over all evil powers, having conquered them. (Acts 2:36, Philippians 2:11). Now, as Lord and in the power of Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ confronts us with himself, bringing us a revelation of that truth which bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8, 9). This effects forgiveness, liberation and regeneration in us so that we do indeed turn to God ‘from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us (Now) from the wrath to come.’ (See I Thessalonians 1:9, 10).
CHAPTER TEN
THE OPEN LIFE

We come to see what it means to live without shame. This is open life. It is being open to life in its full range of relationships. We can be open to God and with full assurance be embraced in the fellowship of the Father. We can be open to ourselves and, in finding ourselves, be at peace with ourselves. The open life means being transparent in our relationships with other people. This means knowing each other in innocent and guileless bonds of love. This is eternal life, life itself, when we can be ourselves and be at home in the universe that God has made.

We will begin to work out what it means to be naked, yes, but not ashamed. We may have been tempted to operate on this principle from the beginning without having to work through the material of the earlier part of the book. We could attempt all while being caught in our images of what man is and who our neighbour is, but we would fail badly. We must first come under the truth and realise the cleansing of the cross in total reconciliation if we are ever to be naked and not ashamed. So often, in fact too often, relationships are reduced to group dynamics where we may ‘get it all out front,’ be waned up by interrelating, while still not knowing who we are, in which case we are unprotected from exploiting one another with our so called ‘openness.’

1 John 1:7 says: ‘If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.’ Light and darkness are absolute opposite comparisons repeatedly used by John. Darkness is the sphere of sin, disobedience, hate and death. Shame; with its masks, belongs to the darkness, with its deceit and self-interest. Light is the sphere of obedience, life, innocence and openness. To walk in the light is to have open fellowship with God. It is to live in the light of God’s presence, and means ‘absolute sincerity ..... to be, so to speak, all of a piece, to have nothing to conceal, and to make no attempt to conceal anything.’ (Stephen Neill).

We can add to this the words of Hebrews 4:13: ‘And before him no creature is hidden, but all are laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.’ Only now, because of the Cross, this is realised in an openness which is without fear and without shame.

To walk in the light is to have fellowship with one another. The basis and power for this fellowship, for this open life of true relationships, is the blood of Jesus Christ. By his death, Christ ‘made purification for sins’ (Hebrews 1:3) once, and for all time, so that the effects of that unique action keep on cleansing us from all sin. It is the dynamic of this full flow-on of forgiveness that dissolves shame and enables the people of God to be united in an open fellowship of love and service.

We will come back to this in more detail presently. First we must see that the open life means being.

OPEN TO OURSELVES

To retrace our steps: we have said that it is the nature of shame to cover itself up, and that one of the most painful experiences we fear is to be so unmasked that we see the truth of ourselves. Therefore men hate the light, because it will uncover them. Likewise they love the darkness of death because their deeds are evil and the darkness covers them. (John 3:19 - 21).

We have seen that in the cross of Jesus Christ an ocean of light and love flowed over an ocean of darkness and death, expelling the darkness by the life of its pure light. This has

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happened. It has been done. Here we see the infinite love of God. The day it flowed over the ocean of darkness and death was when Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ What we must grasp is that, objectively and at a specific point in time, the act of purification took place. (Hebrews 1:3). It cannot be repeated, nor is there any need for this. (Hebrews 9:10). We cannot add to it by our loyalty, tears, repentance, faith, charity or obedience. In that cross the light flooded over all the darkness. All of our sins were carried by Christ into that judgement. His sacrifice was total and complete.

We emphasise this because it means that Jesus has freed us from all our sins. Thus we can receive forgiveness. Jesus’ propitiation for all our sins goes on being efficacious and effective. (I John 2:1 - 2). We are free from all the evil we have ever done, as also the shabby ‘us’ of the present has been taken up into the cross. The light has burned up the whole evil ‘us’: the evil of our whole lives. Therefore we do not have to hide from that a moment longer, because ‘your sins are forgiven for his sake.’ (I John 2:12).

Link this with the apostolic teaching that in Jesus Christ we are justified, justification is a once-for-all act. We are not on parole, but acquitted, legally free, and declared righteous by God. Therefore we are not guilty, and right now, we are free from all condemnation. (See Romans 3:21 - 26, 6:7, 8:1 - 3, 31 - 34). From another slant, Hebrews 10:14 says: ‘For by a single offering he (Christ) has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.’

To apply this, it means that we can now look at ourselves without being crushed by our shame. We are forgiven sinners. We are still sinners of ourselves, but sinners whose sins have all been forgiven in Jesus Christ. We don’t have to hide from ourselves anymore. We can come into the light and be honest about ourselves to ourselves, to God and to others.

This means that we don’t have to play games with ourselves or try to be someone else, or attempt to live up to an image (idol) of ourselves. No more is it necessary to use spiritual cosmetics on our faces. Now we can be transparent. What liberation and relief it is to be ourselves! We can live with ourselves, no longer being our own worst enemy. When facing criticism from others, Paul could say: ‘I do not even judge myself. He was free of that compulsion, not by excusing himself or by justifying himself, but because ‘it is the Lord who judges me.’ (I Corinthians 4:1 - 5).

The Samaritan woman who talked to Jesus at the well was enslaved by her shame. Coming as she did to draw water in the middle of the day, and not in the morning or evening when the other women came, would have been to avoid their looks and talk. Even if the other women did not do this, the Samaritan woman felt her shame. Rightly understood it was her shame which kept her captive to the men in her life. Then, after her encounter with Jesus who gave her the sweet drink of living water, the woman was free and even able to testify to her neighbours that Jesus, ‘told me all I ever did.’ (John 4:39).

The Samaritan woman was open to herself. Are we? We don’t have to spiritualise or rationalise away our failures. We can admit them for what they are, knowing that the blood of Jesus goes on cleansing us from all sin. In this freedom of grace, we can allow the Holy Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body. (See Romans 8:13).

**KNOWING OURSELVES**

By his rejection of the Father, man rejects the truth of himself and in his idolatry, develops a false or distorted view of himself. By his shame and deceit he cannot find himself. At best he may have an image of himself, but for the most part this is a poor self-image.
Now, through Jesus Christ, we are restored to the Father. In knowing the Father we find ourselves to be His Sons. ‘And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ’ (Galatians 4:6).

Let’s look at what this means. The Holy Spirit communicates this sonship to us. The Spirit we receive is spoken of as ‘the Spirit of your Father’ and the ‘Spirit of the Son.’ We know that the Son, by his Sonship, has fully revealed the Father in all that he was, in all that he said, in all that he did. Yet all that Jesus did, he accomplished by the Spirit’s power. The Spirit was present in the cross and the resurrection. Now the Spirit, the true Son is revealed to us and in us. In that revelation we know the Son, crying, ‘Abba, Father’ yet in him we know the Father and so simultaneously know ourselves, innately, to be sons, hence by the Spirit, we too cry, ‘Abba, Father’ (Romans 8:15). We are no longer slaves, but fully sons.

We may need reminding that in the story of the prodigal son, that while he was lost and dead to his father, his real pain was that he was a lost son. ‘When he remembered his Father,’ Jesus says, ‘he came to himself, or came back to himself.’ He found himself, and in being restored to his father, he found himself to be a son.

Many people are emphasizing that what we need, if we are to cope with life in a turbulent disjointed society, is a better self-image. We agree that many people, if not most, have a poor self-image, that low self-esteem from which many of our personal problems derive. This; however, may bring even more shame.

Those who know themselves to be sons of God don’t really need an ‘image’ at all. Factually and experientially they are sons of God - and that’s the truth. Our sonship is not dependent upon an image, least of all one which we or others draw for us. We are restored to being in the reality of the way things actually are. That’s truth. So we know our identity. We are not inferior persons, but sons of the Father, people created in the image of God, creatures dependent on a faithful Creator, yet those who do the Father’s works after Him in the creation.

Thus we can face ourselves as we actually are, and rejoice in the wonder of our full humanity.

ACCEPTING AND LOVING OURSELVES

Because God has accepted us as His sons in Christ, should we not then accept ourselves? God accepts us as sons, therefore not to accept what God accepts is not only damaging, but false. We are not programmed to be a machine, as some behaviourists tell us. Nor are we some form of advanced ape, as the humanist-evolutionists insist. We are not an absurdity in a nonsense world, as some existentialists believe. All these views denigrate our being in the image of God. Even if we do not subscribe to any of the above views, some see ourselves as inferior beings. These may be Christians who insist on their unworthiness because of sin, has caused them to see their whole selves in a demeaned manner. We are not minimising the seriousness, death-dealing and perverse nature of sin in our lives when we say that, in spite of sin and of our rebellion, we are still essentially what God made us to be. Paul says that sinful man still reflects the glory of God by his very created being. (I Cot. 11:7). David speaks of man’s nobility and his regality over the entire creation, when he calls out, ‘What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?’ (I Corinthians 11:7, Psalm 8:4). Each person has inestimable value to God, for God made him so. That value is not destroyed by sin. That is what
Naked, Yes, But Not Ashamed

makes man’s lostness so serious and his death so repugnant. While man deserves judgement for his sin, became he is responsible for his actions, yet nevertheless we have value because God loves us.

Seeing God, who has given his all in Jesus Christ to redeem us and to receive us back as true sons of His, should cause us to glory even more in the sonship he has given and to highly value the grace that has made it so. Also even in the face of those forces working in the world (and often, our weak consciences) we can affirm who we are, and rejoice in what God has made us and redeemed us to be.

This is the best context to look at Jesus’ words, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ Love yourself! We may be suspicious of the thought. We may remember Paul’s words when he warned that in the last days ‘men will be lovers of self ..... rather than lovers of God.’ (II Timothy 2:4). There is a warning here. Self-love can become self-worship, and a form of idolatry not unlike that spoken of in Chapter seven. Used loosely, the term love yourself can become a technique to support our own self-esteem. It can be justification of a proud drive to manage one’s own affairs.

We can agree that there is much inordinate and selfish self-love. We also know that the nature of true love is that which goes out sacrificially to do another person good, for his own sake. But we contend that the person who has a selfish love for himself, who is always trying to gain more or attempts to make himself superior and more than what he is, does not, in fact, love himself. If he did, he would not have to try to be more than what he is.

When Jesus says, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ it may not be a command to love oneself, so much as emphasising the command to love our neighbour with the same kind of love which we have for ourselves. This means that we can only love our neighbour with as much love as we have for ourselves. It does seem clear that we won’t be able to love our neighbour if we don’t love ourselves.

It was lack of self-love that made Zaccheus a self-seeking, and ambitious materialist. For him as for modern man, there was the problem of his appearance - he was a short man. There was the shame and inferiority which he experienced and which was intensified by his life-style. He felt the sneers of rejection of his kinsfolk as he was regarded as a traitor by them. All this increased his drive to exploit these same people. Perhaps he justified his actions on these grounds and more, seeing his actions and the conditions of his living as forced upon him by circumstances. Behind it all was a poor self-image, unacceptance of himself and even self-loathing. In Zaccheus’ encounter with Jesus, he knew acceptance, salvation came to him, and that love which forgives transformed him into a generous man. We see that his attitude to himself changed, along with his attitude to those he had cheated, and towards his poorer neighbours. We can conclude that Zaccheus had begun to love his neighbours as himself. (Luke 19:1 - 10).

Conditioned as we are by the shame-patterns of our society and as participants in the whole shame-experience, we learn from childhood to show that we are more than what we are. We are also put down and rejected by others, often by our families. By shame we are manipulated into giving others a good impression of ourselves. But this often results in, or is the expression of, self-dislike, self-depreciation or self-arrogance and ‘I am-ism.’

Jesus does not say we are to love our neighbours more than ourselves, or instead of ourselves, but as ourselves. The egoist is engrossed in himself. We may be overly self conscious, even when we call it shyness. God’s love breaks through

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Naked, Yes, But Not Ashamed

...this with the warm embrace of forgiveness and the sense of being known to him. In calling us by name, Jesus affirms us as persons. The Father disposed of our failures in Christ and we discover that in fact we are the Father’s chosen heirs and His glorious inheritance. (John 10: 14, 3, Galatians 4:9, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:5, 18).

The open life is being able to accept and love ourselves as we are. With our shame dissolved we can accept our bodies and personal features as they are, because that is what God has made us to be. We don’t have to wish we were another shape or another person. It also means that we will take care of our bodies and won’t abuse or wrongly use them, because we will love what God has made.

It can be added that it is often shame which is behind lewd stories and perverted jokes about human sexual behaviour. It speaks of an inability to come to terms with what we really are. Remove the shame and our sexuality can be viewed openly without prudery or the camouflage of the obscene. Remove the shame, and the dimensions of being ‘naked and not ashamed’ multiply.

Unlike the Buddhist, the Christian is not concerned with rubbing out himself or his T. Rather, his old ‘I’ or ego has been crucified in the cross of Christ and in Him he is a new man, and a new T. Paul says it. ‘I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.’ Galatians 2:20.

**OPEN LIFE OF RELATIONSHIPS**

‘The aim of our charge’, writes Paul, ‘is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith’ (I Timothy 1:5). Notice that love issues or flows from being dean, and that comes from freedom of guilt (a good conscience) and is linked with sincere faith, faith in the Lord who has borne our defilement away in the cross.

A person who does not love himself may not be able to do so because of his shame. He may place himself in a position where he is needed by others, or where he can do things for other people. He may see this as a service to or love for, his neighbour. Yet it may be a means to build up his own needs. W. Trobisch says, ‘Such a helper cannot really help for he needs the needy one more than the needy one needs him.’ And that’s not love.

Therefore, as we have been emphasising, to be able to truly relate to others, we must first be able to relate to ourselves. Many times it may be seen that the reason why two people in a marriage cannot relate to each other is because they cannot first relate to themselves.

Many people are afraid to love another person deeply because such love requires honesty and full exposure of themselves. The risk seems too high. Shame keeps them covered in and suffocates love. True love flows from an openness where forgiveness is known and can be given.

I John 1:7 told us that the open life is one of ‘fellowship with one another’. This is KOINONIA, which is a common sharing, a oneness and unity of love which we have in Jesus Christ. Fellowship cannot be known at a distance or merely through polite conversation. John also says that ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ’ (I John 1:3). KOINONIA with each other is in the Father and the Son. We not only know ourselves, but we know each other’s true identity as sons together, or brethren within the family.

Here is where we can be naked and not ashamed. Incredible? But such openness can only be truly known in a genuine knowledge of God’s Fatherhood and the Son’s Sonship. If we attempt such a relationship without this sense of God’s

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‘Fatherhood,’ then the dangers are that we will constitute too great a risk to each other. We will take advantage of each other and exploit one another. Also knowing each other this way is in the context of God’s accepting grace, so that those whom the Father accepts and forgives, we too can accept and forgive. It is to be a fellowship that is lived in this grace of forgiveness where suspicion of others has no basis and ‘love covers a multitude of sins.’

This is the miracle of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost there were clear signs that God’s grace was upon them all as the Spirit was poured out. Peter preached with power, and conviction came to those who heard. There was great praise, and wonders were done through the apostles. But by the Spirit all those who believed received the full impact of the cross with all of its liberation and so their hearts were filled with God’s love. In that climate Luke says, ‘all who believed were together and had all things in common.’ (Acts 2:44)

What we have said about openness in relationships affects a wide spectrum of encounters. It deepens the relationship with a husband and wife, because now there can be a true knowing of each other, and love can penetrate to the depth of that other. This makes for sweeter and richer communications and a greater trust. Also it is a bond between parent and children. God’s Fatherhood is not only ‘above all,’ but ‘through all and in all’ (Ephesians 4:6). So parents can open themselves to their children as the Father opens Himself for us. For us, it means that where we need to, we can admit we have done wrong, or misused authority. We do not have to be afraid for we know God has dealt with our failure, and our children find that they have ‘genuine,’ warm and open parents whose authority is not beyond them.

‘Far be it for me to glory,’ says Paul, ‘except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.’ (Galatians 6:14). Paul was freed from the idolatry of success and also the dread of failure. His shame was dissolved in the cross of Christ, and he did not have to build his own glory, but could glory in the Gospel. Of this Gospel Paul says he is not ashamed, for he knows it to be ‘the power of God’ (Romans 1:16). This is, he knows the message of the gospel is itself the action of the power of God in Jesus Christ.

It seems that, especially in the Western world, we have a propensity for reducing the gospel into a methodology. Like our sciences, it becomes a technique, or, as a Latin American Christian put it, ‘We have reduced evangelism to an exercise in technology.’ These thing may be a cover for our shame. We Christians get caught in the performance race, and even with our church growth programmes, we can soon be building our own kingdoms and our own names. Too often we become like the Judaizers who gloried in their circumcisions, we too glory in our statistics. (Galatians 6:13)

By the cross Paul was released from his idolatrous attachment to the world and its demands. Being freed from the world’s power, we too do not have to justify ourselves to the world, nor do we have to measure or compare our own service with the ministries of others. (Cf. II Corinthians 10:12). Moreover, we can say with Paul, ‘We have renounced disgraceful, underhand ways; we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.’ (See II Corinthians 4:2).

Our confidence is in the power of the gospel of God, by whose grace we are what we are. We can be open in our
witness and evangelism, not having to be ‘super-spiritual,’ but simply our real selves laid bare before the world. Fully justified through Christ, we can bear the abuse and, like Christ before us, the scornful shame the world pours upon us. In Romans 8:36 the apostle quotes from Psalm 44. In this Psalm the people of God were experiencing pain and ridicule. We likewise can only bear the carping criticism and the judgement of the world effectually when we are free of shame. Some of the accusations the world makes against us, we will find, have at least an element of truth in them, if not more. Here we are in our trembling weakness before the world and its derision, yet Paul sees it as ‘for thy sake’ that we are humiliated. Through Christ, he changes the words of the psalm from those of despair to ‘in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.’ It is in our weakness, in our openness that the power of the gospel is known. We are utterly dependent upon it. All our pretence and our support-systems are left behind, and in the Spirit’s power we preach ‘Christ and him crucified’, that weakness of God, which is more powerful than men.

This is to be naked, yes, but not ashamed, before the gaze of the world.

CONCLUSION

‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ The context of this statement shows that this is true for the present as well as for the future. We do not have to fear that a bogey from the past will one day be produced to shame us. All is forgiven, and we can say so. This frees us from the deception and grip of man’s multitudinous idols, including the primary idol of self. We are restored by the truth to be sons of God, and sons who do not need to hide their faces. We are sons able to live with ourselves and openly in fellow-

ship with one another. Now we are free to love. Now we glow in the gospel, unashamedly proclaiming it in the midst of those who will know that we are just like them. In this way we can openly display confidence in the Father whom we are glad to know, and who knows us through and through.