

How to Handle Shame, Guilt and The Gospel in An Outrage Culture

Donald Trump is a tragedy. Not in the sense that he is an unfortunate event, but rather because he begs consideration. In a tragedy, mourning is often coupled with investigating. The underlying thinking goes that understanding tragedy will somehow effect healing upon the hurt. Trump has proven worthy of consideration and investigation. For each member of the media, three opinions circulate as to how he is doing what he is doing.

Donald Trump is a leader. Whether he is a good or bad one is not my purview, but he is leading. The other candidates, who once dismissed him as a passing trend, now follow him down a mudslinging dirt road. They emulate him in his shaming of others. They join him in assigning guilt, regardless of its veracity.

"He is a loser."

"He is a con man."

"He is a fragile soul."

"He has small hands."

"He doesn't want to make America great again, but orange again."

Somehow, along the way, this election has become less a battle of ideas and more an attack on identity.

Donald is leading, the other candidates are following, and we the populace are trying to keep up. It is exhausting and partially numbing trying to keep abreast of the news because

of the sheer quantity of it. What once shocked us now lands expectedly upon us. With fewer gatekeepers and more tweets than ever before, we have grown increasingly accustomed to the shaming of others and indictments of guilt.

Shame and guilt are not new to American culture. The fact that we use the terms somewhat tongue in cheek testifies to their longstanding presence. We have grown accustomed to their existence to such an extent that we jokingly use them. We have always had guilty pleasures, such as ice cream and *Real Housewives of Atlanta*. It's a shame, a crying shame, that we have lost the power of someone saying "shame on you."

But using them satirically and out of context does not lessen their power. What is guilt? What is shame?

Guilt is a recognition of wrongdoing—whether accurately or not. Guilt can be thrust upon someone from the outside or arise inside of you. The power of guilt does not come from the accuracy of the claim, but from believability. It can take the form of an overwhelming emotion or a deafening accusation, but it always comes as a result of an action.

Guilt says I made a mistake.

Where guilt comes from an action, shame results from evaluation. No action is necessary to feel shame; existence is sufficient. Shame is often a result of comparing one's self to perceived expectations or societal standards. This powerful emotion literally comes from the phrase "to cover."

Shame says I am a mistake.

No one has been left unstained by the guilt accusations and the shame in this political campaign season. Accusations of guilt and coverings of shame have come from issues such as the support of amnesty, association with the establishment and dealings with Iran.

While voters will continue to go to their precincts to cast their ballot, God has already reached a decision relative to guilt and shame.

Guilt says I made a mistake, and shame says I am a mistake, but the gospel says I am more than my mistakes.

God, in his abounding grace and unending love, sent his son to take on our guilt (Is. 53:4). Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus went to the cross in order to take the penalty for our past mistakes, current mistakes and future mistakes—once and for all (1 Pet. 2:24). Though he was without blemish or sin (1 Pet. 1:19), he covered himself in our shame so that we might be lavished in his grace (Is. 53:2–3, Eph. 1:7).

The beautiful tragedy of his sacrificial death is worth not only investigating, but also accepting.