

Shame: The ‘Master Emotion’

From chapter 2 (“Do Not Be Ashamed”) of Michael Youssef’s new book, *Never Give Up*

Paul continues his message of encouragement to Timothy—a message that still speaks to young and old alike in the twenty-first century:

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

-2 Timothy 1:8-18

Paul tells Timothy, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner." The word "shame" has been turned upside down in our time. Things we used to be ashamed of we now speak of with pride. And things we used to take pride in are now considered shameful.

Our culture has rejected biblical definitions of shame, replacing them with worldly definitions. This change began in the 1990s. In the February 1992 edition of *The Atlantic*, psychologist/psychoanalyst Robert Karen observed, "Thirty, fifty, a hundred years ago, shame was a part of our common conversation. The literature of the nineteenth century, from Austen to Tolstoy, was full of it. Parents warned their children about anything that might incur it—adultery or illegitimate pregnancy, cowardice or failure, bad manners, laziness, dirty underwear. When shame struck, it was typically a feeling akin to being caught out in the open and desperately wanting to hide."

By the 1990s, Dr. Karen noted, the subject of shame was everywhere in psychological literature and was seen as "the master emotion," the invisible regulator of our emotions. He explained, "Current research identifies shame as an important element in aggression (including the violence of wife-beaters), in addictions, obsessions, narcissism, depression, and numerous other psychiatric problems. Many psychologists now believe that shame is the preeminent cause of emotional distress in our time."

How did the psychology and psychoanalysis community respond to this new view of shame as "the master emotion"? They claimed that if we could just remove shame from people, we could cure violence, addiction, and other psychiatric and social ills. So the psychological community focused on eradicating shame. Accordingly, many people no longer feel shame while committing shameful acts. Instead, they take pride in what the Bible

condemns as shameful.

Believing a Lie About Ourselves

How does the Bible define shame? Biblically, shame is a healthy response to sin. When we sin, a healthy conscience listens to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit provokes a healthy sense of shame in us. That feeling of shame drives us to repentance—a sincere change of heart that leads us away from sin and back toward God.

There is healthy shame and unhealthy shame. Healthy shame comes from the realization that we have violated our conscience and we have sinned against God. Healthy shame can be instantly cleansed through a prayer of confession and repentance.

Unhealthy shame is a result of a person's inability to accept the grace and forgiveness of God. A person experiencing unhealthy shame doesn't merely say "I failed," but says "I am a failure and I don't deserve forgiveness."

Ultimately, unhealthy shame is the result of believing a lie about ourselves. People with unhealthy shame reject themselves and respond with self-hate and self-reproach. Unhealthy shame leads to self-destruction. It drives us to alcoholism, food addiction, drug addiction, pornography addiction, and other addictive behaviors that we use to silence the voice of shame within us.

A person with healthy shame rejects sin and responds with repentance. Healthy shame leads to repentance, forgiveness, joy, and fulfillment. Healthy shame brings life and healing.

But it's unhealthy to be ashamed of the gospel. As Paul would tell you, "Please do not be ashamed of biblical truth. Please do not be ashamed of biblical morality. Please do not be ashamed when the godless people of this world persecute you and call you names. Please do not let this fallen world shame

you for believing in what is good and godly and true.”

As we look at this passage, it’s important to understand that shame, fear, and timidity are cousins. They are part of the same family. We saw in the previous chapter that Paul is writing his last legacy from a lowly Roman dungeon. He is telling Timothy and us to never give up on biblical truth, never be afraid to stand up for God’s truth, and never forsake the gospel to win favor with other people.

Paul tells Timothy in verse 8, “So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”

Embarrassed “Christians”

There are many self-described “Christians” today who are ashamed of God’s truth, so they have substituted human wisdom for God’s truth. They are embarrassed by the Lord’s teachings about judgment and hell, so they have invented a lot of new teachings that have eliminated judgment and eternal punishment. They think they have invented a new form of Christianity that will be more palatable to worldly thinking. But all they have done is pollute the gospel, leaving nothing worth believing in.

Some are embarrassed by the miracles in the Bible. They are ashamed of the claim that Jesus was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead. They say, “This is the twenty-first century! No one believes in miracles anymore. Let’s just focus on the good things Jesus said and try to live by his teachings.”

The problem is that Jesus taught primarily about Himself, about sacrificing Himself for our sins, about his death and resurrection, about coming again to judge the human race. If you are ashamed of the miracles of Jesus, then you must be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus—and you are left with nothing to believe in.

As we will see later in this letter, Paul speaks of people who have “a form of godliness but denying its power.” He adds, “Have nothing to do with such people” (2 Tim. 3:5). These are people who say to the world, “Are you ashamed of the teachings of Jesus, the teachings of Paul? Are you ashamed of the miracles in the Bible? Well, so am I! Let’s just cut all of those embarrassing parts out of the Bible and only focus on the parts of the Bible that are relevant today, the parts that are consistent with a secular political, and social agenda. It won’t really be Christianity, but we can still call it Christianity and pretend it’s the real thing.”

These false Christians use many different labels for themselves and their false teachings: progressive Christians, postmodern Christians, emerging church, generous orthodoxy, red letter Christians, post-evangelical Christians, and on and on. They think that by watering down Christianity to make it more palatable to worldly thinking, they are doing the gospel of favor. But the apostle Paul begs to differ.

Paul appeals directly to Timothy, you, and me when he writes, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.” He is telling us, in effect, “Do not sell out! Do not compromise biblical truth! Do not be embarrassed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not be ashamed of the Word of God. Do not repackage the gospel to make it more acceptable to ungodly people. Do not back away from the gospel truth regardless of all the persecution, ridicule, and hostility this world throws at you.”

The Bible does not waste words. If Timothy had not been tempted to compromise the gospel, Paul would not have given him this word of exhortation. I believe Paul even had to deal with the temptation to compromise in his own heart. That’s why he felt it necessary to boldly proclaim in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (emphasis added). I believe Paul

made such a strong point of not being ashamed of the gospel precisely because he had wrestled with this temptation, faced it, and conquered it.

Jesus fully understood that his followers would be tempted by feelings of embarrassment and shame regarding the gospel of salvation. That's why he warned us in Mark 8:38, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The Christian gospel calls us to transcend our fear and embarrassment and to boldly confess before men and women that Jesus Christ is Lord. It may mean we will be ridiculed. It may mean we will be persecuted. It may mean we will lose our jobs. But what did the gospel cost our Lord?

For more information about Never Give Up, check out [. {eo}](#)

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