



THE DEATH OF SHAME

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Greetings and welcome. I'm glad you're here for our bible study today and I hope we can talk about some things that will make you think and apply the scriptures to your life. I want us to go to the book of Jeremiah today and read a passage of scripture that could just as easily have been written in our own generation. Jeremiah was a preacher with a broken heart. It grieved him to see his people turn away from God and turn to sin. And God commissioned him to cry out against the wickedness of the nation and prophesy of their coming doom if they didn't repent. There was plenty for Jeremiah to weep about — even before the destruction of the city and the coming captivity. God's people were in a sorry spiritual condition and should have been ashamed of what was happening, but they were not. In Jeremiah 6:15 the prophet says, *"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD."* I wonder what Jeremiah would say if he were alive today. Our lesson today is titled: The Death of Shame.

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines 'shame' as a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior. God designed our conscience to bother us when we do evil. If the conscience is performing as it should, we should feel ashamed when we sin. The bible teaches that Adam and Eve lived in a state of innocence and had no reason to experience shame until the devil tempted Eve and the pair sinned. Suddenly, they realized they were naked, they were ashamed and hid themselves. They became aware of right and wrong and ever since; mankind has had an intuitive sense of shame and guilt when we do something that violates God's moral standard. What happens though when the conscience is working like it should? What happens when our values and our sense of right and wrong become perverted? When that happens, we lose the ability to be ashamed. The sense of shame diminishes as our conscience becomes hardened.

The bible teaches that the ability to be embarrassed and made ashamed of wrong behavior is a virtue. But we're witnessing the death of shame in our modern culture. In fact, we're even seeing its demise among Christians. In Jeremiah's day, God's people were committing idolatry and immorality. Their

hearts were turned from God to wickedness and Jeremiah says they should have been ashamed of themselves but, instead, they were not ashamed and had lost the ability to blush. I don't know of any ancient indictment that applies any more to our world today than that. We are witnessing the death of shame.

It appears there is hardly a sin that has not been brought out of the shadows and into plain view today. We now celebrate what a few generations ago, we were embarrassed to even talk about, much less practice. Things that used to make people blush to see or even mention, we now think little or nothing of them. Jeremiah says: *"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination (which means something detestable)? Nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush."* That's a stark contrast with Ezra who prayed about Israel's sin in Ezra 9:6 *"And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."* The sin of his day so distressed the heart of Ezra that he couldn't even look up to God. It made him blush to think about the evil the people had committed. The apostle Paul even warned the church in Philippians 3:19 about those who had made themselves enemies of the cross of Christ *"whose GLORY is in their SHAME."* In other words, they were proud of the things that were shameful and that should have made them blush.

Today, sin is not only overtly practiced — it is openly paraded and flaunted in the face of God. In the opinion of some, it is appropriate to shame those who don't share the same political views; or those who don't embrace and celebrate the same things they do; but we're told that sin is not something to be ashamed about. In fact, if you paint sinful behavior as shameful then you are made out to be the wicked person. As the prophet Isaiah said, *"Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil."* (Isaiah 5:20). Losing the ability to blush is one of the symptoms of a rotting and sin-hardened culture. Zephaniah 3:5 says: *"The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame."* Our world today knows very little shame, if any. What a seismic shift has occurred in how certain things are viewed in our society. My, how far we have fallen in how we perceive things today -- compared to how we viewed them just a few years ago. If the people of 50 and 100 years ago could come back from the grave — wouldn't they be shocked to see the world as it is today? You may say, "but these things have always gone on. We've always had sin in the world..." Yes, but at least as far as modern times are concerned — things are different. Whereas sin once slunk in the shadows... today it is on full display — and we sin without any sense of shame.

First, we have witnessed the death of shame when it comes to immodest and indecent dress. It's appalling how people dress in public today. Our culture has been steadily lowering the standards of modesty until people now have no sense of embarrassment about being seen in public in revealing or tight and suggestive clothing. I, perhaps like you, shake my head at what I see people wearing in the department store, in restaurants, in the airport or just walking up and down the street. We've become desensitized to it today but, again, what would people who lived just a generation or two ago say if they were to come back and see people in the public square today? I would suggest that we have reached a point where there are no standards of modesty left no matter how little clothing a person is wearing. If so, what are they? Now, the bible teaches that people interested in pleasing God should have a sense of shame concerning how they dress. When Jesus rebuked the lukewarm and indifferent church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17-18, He said they were spiritually naked. He urged them to repent *"that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear."* Now, the Lord is talking about a spiritual state — but for the metaphor to have any meaning — there must be truth in the literal statement as well. In other words, God considers it a shameful thing for a person to appear naked

before others. And this goes back to the beginning of time. It doesn't bother a baby to be unclothed because they are innocent. Impure thoughts don't enter their innocent minds. But when we mature, that changes. When Adam and Eve forfeited THEIR state of innocence by sinning, the immediate result was that they realized they were naked and were ashamed. Genesis 3:7 tells us that they attempted to cover their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together and they hid themselves in the garden. When God confronted them, their meager efforts to cover their nakedness were not enough and God made them garments or tunics from the skins of animals to cover them.

Now again, here we have a spiritual application intended by the writer of Genesis... but for the metaphor to have any meaning, the literal statement must be true as well. People should be ashamed to parade themselves in front of others inadequately and indecently clothed. The tunics that God made in the garden covered much more than fig leaves did. Yet, fig leaves cover about as much or leave about as much to the imagination as some of the apparel we see today. Is there not a lack of shame when people wear clothes that barely cover their bodies? Shouldn't we be embarrassed by the tight, revealing, and suggestive clothing we see today?

Now, clothing styles and trends come and go... and different cultures have different expectations of dress but God's standards don't change! And God's word sets forth some principles that we need to apply regardless of what age or culture we live in. We don't apply the culture to God's word; we apply God's word to the culture, and we change to conform to God's standard. Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, *"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."* A woman's apparel should reflect shamefacedness (or the ability to blush). It should portray a right inward spirit and it should reflect godliness. That can't be said of much of the clothing we see today – by a long shot.

In the Old Testament, Moses reminded the people of a principle that goes back to the creation itself in Deuteronomy 22:5 *"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God."* Men and women are to dress distinctive from each other. Because it comes from the women's section at Belk or Dillard's doesn't necessarily mean that it pertains unto a woman either. In today's dress, there is very little difference between what men and women wear and Moses said that such is an abomination to God. Yes, there are other things in the Old Testament called abominations (which means something detestable) but notice that here, he says it is an abomination to GOD. That's different from those things that are called abominable to the Israelites. This is something (like the things mentioned in Proverbs 6 such as pride and shedding innocent blood) that is detestable to God – offensive to His person and His divine wisdom and creative order. But today, the lines have been so blurred that it's becoming hard to tell the difference between men and women. Now, our culture makes fun of these ideas and sadly, many professing Christians ridicule and reject these ideas but God is concerned with how we dress. We need to have the ability to be embarrassed and we should blush over the indecent and immodest dress that characterizes our society today.

We've also witnessed the death of shame concerning sexual immorality. The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:3 *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."* The Hebrew writer said in no uncertain terms in Hebrews 13:4 *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."* God sanctions the marriage of one man to one woman and says this is honorable and there is no sin involved in such a relationship. Anything outside of that arrangement, however, is wrong

and sinful in God's sight. But people today think nothing of living together OUTSIDE of marriage, sleeping around, or leaving their spouse for someone else. And that's not even mentioning many of the shocking situations and behavior we hear about on nearly a daily basis.

Now, again, sin is not a new thing. There has been sexual immorality in the world since nearly the beginning of time. And sexual sin is always wrong in God's sight regardless of the who, when, where, how, and why. Sin is sin. What is different today than from a few years ago is that immoral behavior used to belong in the shadows and it was scandalous to even talk about it – but today, it's on our television sets; it's in most movies you watch; it's in most of the songs you hear; it's in our own families, our neighborhoods, and even our churches! Paul said it should not be named ONCE among us who are saints. Paul said in Ephesians 5:11-12 *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a SHAME even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.”* What has happened to our ability to even be embarrassed by the immoral conduct of our world? When we can no longer be embarrassed by sin and ungodliness, it is a foreboding sign of how far a society has fallen into sin. And when nothing shocks us anymore, we are in a moral freefall and there is no limit to how depraved and tolerant of sin we will become.

And then, what about the insobriety of our world today? Have we no shame about the drunkenness and the obsession with drugs and alcohol that characterizes our modern society? Again, what once was seen in bars and back alleys is now everywhere you turn. Our culture is nearly in a drunken stupor and drugs are not only being legalized – they're being promoted and glorified. Alcohol and drugs destroy minds, bodies, careers, families, and lives. Yet, more and more people are indulging in them. No longer do you have to find a liquor store in a seedy part of town; alcohol is promoted in nearly every restaurant, even in fast food establishments; and in nearly every venue you can imagine. Everywhere you turn you find all kinds of people, young and old, men and women, all classes of people indulging in strong drink until our culture is saturated with it and people are almost obsessed with it. The word of God, on the other hand, depicts it as a destructive thing that destroys lives and souls. *“Wine is a mocker, and strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”* (Proverbs 20:1). Intoxication is condemned by the scriptures and is a process that a Christian who is interested in godliness and holiness does not allow him or herself to begin. And the results of the drug and alcohol culture around us should cause every Christian to blush and to run away from it – not become a part of it.

And finally, we can see the death of shame in the way we talk today; in the impure and filthy speech that increasingly dominates our discourse. I'm truly shocked by the vulgar, filthy, and irreverent language that we hear nearly everywhere we turn today. There are words that were shocking to most people just a few years ago that are now spewed in almost every movie, even in news broadcasts. They bleep it out, but you can hear enough and see their lips enough that they might as well go ahead and play it. I overhear people in the grocery store, in the restaurant, walking down the street, who casually use filthy and blasphemous language in even the most mundane of conversations. And it's not just men – it's men; it's women; it's children; it's elderly people. It was scandalous a generation ago to use words in the public square that now don't even phase most modern people. Where are the mothers who used to threaten to wash their children's mouths out with soap? I'll tell you where many of them are: they're right there using the same language and filthy speech.

Listen again to Paul now in Ephesians 5:3-5: *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and*

of God.” Colossians 3:8 says: “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” It’s nothing to most people today to utter the name of God in an oath or to blasphemously use the lovely name of Christ as a byword or as a curse word. Movies, television shows, videos on social media; sometimes even statements from our politicians; the news; common everyday conversation is now laced with filth and vulgarity and inuendo and we think very little about it! Parents, please think about the language you’re teaching your children to use. Think about the lack of shame you’re raising them to have. Because if you think society is bad now when we can hardly blush at what we see right now; how we dress right now; how people are living right now; how people talk NOW – pray tell where will we be twenty or thirty years FROM now? Young people listen, preserve the innocence of your children as long as you can.

Many of us need to open our eyes and see just how desensitized to sin and evil we’ve become. Teach your children to blush. Many of us need to get back in the word of God and reclaim that virtue ourselves -- of being able to be embarrassed. It is a virtue and it means we have a conscience and that conscience is operating like God intended for it to. *“Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?”* Jeremiah asked, *“Nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush.”*

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