

“What Am I Ashamed Of?”

I read about a revival happening in Korea, and the vigor and strength of United Methodist Churches there. One observer said, “Koreans love to share their faith” – they are often heard discussing Scripture on street corners and in markets. Then the observer said, “They’re not embarrassed to be Christians!” *They’re not embarrassed to be Christians!*

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Rome in the first century he writes about the obligation he feels to preach the gospel to everyone. Then he goes on: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). *I am not ashamed of the gospel!*

Are you ashamed of the gospel? If you’re a follower of Jesus, are you ashamed to let others know you’re a Christian? It is hard sometimes to let people know we’re a Christian, isn’t it?

Think of how hard it must be these days for a Christian young person. For instance, it’s Monday morning, checking in with your friends. “What did you do over the weekend?” One kid says, “Oh, I had a soccer tournament.” Another: “I went to a friend’s birthday party.” Still another: “I hung out at home and spent a lot of time on my phone talking to friends and searching the internet.” Imagine one of the teenagers saying, “I went to Sunday School and church and we had this really neat program in youth group Sunday night!” *Right!* How do you think the non-church kids would respond? Maybe, “Wow, isn’t that exciting...” (deadpan, or sarcasm in their voice).

It’s hard for some people at work, in their jobs, not to be ashamed of the gospel. I overheard 2 guys talking about their weekend plans. One of them remarked, “There’ll be plenty of beer!” In a lot of workplace settings, a major topic of conversation toward the end of the week is what everybody’s got planned for the weekend, how much partying and drinking they’re going to do. How many Christians are willing to say, “Boy, our pastor is in this series of sermons, and they’re just great! I’m looking forward to this week’s message!” And if someone is willing to admit their excitement over something spiritual planned for the weekend, what kind of response might he or she get? “Oh well, to each his own” or “Sure wouldn’t interest me.” I worked at Armstrong one summer, and I’ll never forget the razzing this one man took from other guys, simply because he attended Rawlinsville Campmeeting. *It’s hard sometimes to let it be known we’re a Christian at work, in our job.*

In our normal day to day activities we can easily be ashamed of the gospel. We can talk about the weather, about sports, about other people, about our kids or grandkids, but at the same time be reluctant to talk about God or spiritual things. Some of us, for example, might be timid about saying grace over a meal when we’re eating out. It can be an uneasy situation when we’re eating with people who don’t normally say grace. So, some of us have come up with a game plan! We can “say grace” in less conspicuous ways! “The Dunker” (head down and up quickly as we whisper “Thanks, Lord”). “The Hand Across the Mouth” grace (demonstrate). Or the “I Pray Silently With My Eyes Open While I’m Talking” method. The Apostle Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16).

You can tell a lot about a person by knowing what that person is ashamed of. *Sometimes we can be ashamed of the wrong things.* In my early teens I hung out with 4 or 5 friends who didn't go to church. I didn't want them to think I was a goody-goody, so, I thought I had to curse and talk dirty like they did. *How stupid and gutless is that!*

On the other hand there are lots of things we are not ashamed of, and ought to be! An ad once appeared in the personals column of a newsletter. It read like this: "Married, professional man, 47, with problems in home, seeks dalliance with a married/unmarried, intelligent woman." The ad had been written by some researchers – who were curious about who would respond to such an ad. To their surprise, they were deluged with responses.

Another ad went: "I am interested in the same things you are. I am 36, married. Discretion is very important to me. Please call only between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m." And then this ad: "I'm intelligent and married. I live in a deeply wooded area along the river where deer are an everyday occurrence. I could see you during the week, but never on weekends. I am tall, slim, and decent looking. *You could be seen with me without shame.*"

You can tell a lot about a society by looking at what that society is ashamed of, and what that society is not ashamed of. When Elvis first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, the cameras would only show him from the shoulders up. When Clark Gable uttered a mild oath in *Gone With the Wind*, it created a nationwide sensation. Compare that with what we see on TV, in movies, and on the internet, where there are almost no boundaries in terms of taste and morals. When film star Ingrid Bergman abandoned her husband to live with Roberto Rossalini, her film career in the U.S. plummeted. Today such behavior is hardly looked down upon, and is little more than juicy gossip on programs like Entertainment Tonight.

Perhaps the worst judgment that can happen to a culture is to lose its sense of shame. Abraham Heschel, the Jewish author, in his book *What Is Man?* writes, "I am afraid of people who are never embarrassed by their own pettiness, prejudices, envy and conceit, never embarrassed at the profanation of life. What the world needs is a sense of embarrassment."

Old Testament prophets had some interesting things to say about these matters. The prophet Jeremiah, for instance, lived in a time of moral and spiritual decay. People had turned away from God. There was personal depravity and public injustice, and it had even infected the ranks of priest and prophet. Look at how Jeremiah described the situation: "For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. They acted shamefully; they committed abomination, yet they were not ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 6:13-15). Note: They were not ashamed. They didn't know how to blush! The prophet Ezekiel said to the people of his generation, "Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel" (Ezekiel 36:32).

Check out how the Hebrew priest and scribe Ezra reacted when he saw how God's people had

turned away from God: “Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the Lord my God, and said, ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens’” (Ezra 9:4-6). *Ezra is too ashamed and embarrassed even to lift up his face to God. It’s a sign of health when we are ashamed of the evil things!*

I’m certainly not suggesting that we ought to live a shame-filled life. There’s a toxic kind of shame that goes to the core of our being. It’s rooted in childhood, where we somehow got the message that we’re inherently no good and worthless. That’s sickness. But when we’re ashamed and embarrassed over things we’ve done that are wrong, things we ought to be ashamed of, that’s health!

For instance, there are some things we ought to be ashamed of as a nation: abuse in our families; how much we waste and throw away; the filth available through the internet and cable TV; the millions of dollars spent on political campaign ads; wasteful government spending and the outrageous national debt. If we can blush over the right things, it might motivate us to correct these abuses. But let’s not be ashamed to be people who pray and believe and seek to do what’s right!

Why aren’t *Christians* the ones taking the offensive? A Christian young woman, a contestant in a beauty pageant, talked about her faith in Christ. Someone interviewing her asked, “Aren’t you afraid of peer pressure?” I love her answer! She responded: “I am peer pressure!” When we believe in Jesus and try to do right, we don’t have to be on the defensive! The Bible says, “The way of the wicked will perish...” (Psalm 1:6), but, “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43).

This huge lion was stalking the jungle, bored and looking for trouble. He grabbed a tiger and asked, “Who is the king of the jungle?” The tiger, trembling, answered: “You are, O mighty lion!” The lion moved on, grabbed a bear, and said, “Who is the king of the jungle?” “You are, O mighty lion!” yelled the bear – intimidated and afraid. Next, the lion met an elephant, pushed at him, and said, “Who is the king of the jungle?” The elephant grabbed the lion with his trunk, whirled him around and threw him against a tree, leaving him dazed and bloody. Slowly the lion got up, limped over to the elephant, and in a very meek voice said, “Just because you don’t know the answer doesn’t mean you have to be so rough.”

The world and ungodly people can be intimidating to followers of Jesus. Like the lion, they can strut around and roar: “The Church. Hypocrites. Goody-two-shoe Christians. Weaklings, who can’t make it on their own, they have to lean on God.” But we don’t have to cower in fear and timidity before them! We’re on the winning side! We’ve got the Power – the power of God, the power of the gospel. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; *it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16).

What are we ashamed of? The gospel offers hope and salvation to the world! It is Christ alone who can heal the sin problem and bring us back to God. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It’s Christ’s love in us that can replace the hate and bitterness in the human heart. It’s the Bible, and the words of the prophets and Jesus, that when rightly understood, provide the motivation to seek justice, to stand up against the social evils that destroy people and the goodness of life. *We’re ashamed of this?*

What we often forget is that people are hungering for God and spiritual things. Of course, some people resist, but not as many as we may think. Church pastor and sociologist Reggie McNeal maintains that there is a tremendous spiritual hunger in our American culture today, and that many non-Christians are more open to talking about religious and spiritual things than Christians are!

Listen to the words of Jesus: “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” (Mark 8:38). If I’m ashamed of Jesus and His message, He will be ashamed of me when He returns, or when I face the Father in heaven.

A little girl’s mother had a big scar on the side of her face. It made the little girl very embarrassed. She never wanted her mom to come inside the school with her. She never wanted to go shopping with her because people stared at the scar on her mother’s face. At night when the mother would kiss her little girl, she would close her eyes so she wouldn’t have to look at the scar.

It began to really bother the mother so she asked her little girl one day as she was putting her down to bed. “Why don’t you ever want to go shopping with me?” The little girl said “I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but people stare at you and it embarrasses me, and I’m ashamed to go with you anywhere.” The mother said, “I think it’s about time for me to tell you how I got this scar. One night when you were just a few months old the fire alarm went off in the house, and when I opened my eyes the entire house was on fire. The only thing I could think of was you. So I ran to your room and scooped you up out of your baby bed. I was running and as I was running a piece of fire from the house landed on my face. I couldn’t get it off because I had you in my arms. So, I got you outside of the house and we were both safe, but my face was burned very badly.” The daughter began to cry, and she reached up to touch the large scar on her mom’s face, promising that she would never be ashamed of her mom again.

Why would we be ashamed of the One who’s got scars on His hands and feet and side because He was willing to suffer and die to save us?

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