First Christian Reformed Church of Lynden
From Generation to Generation for the Glory of God
God's precious and exceedingly great promises in hard times

*Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Here is another guest devotional while I am on vacation. I have been aware for a long time that our culture has an unbiblical view of shame. Take to heart this good word by Gary Thomas.

Is it Time to Resurrect Shame? By Gary Thomas

https://garythomas.com/2020/08/26/is-it-time-to-resurrect-shame/

Shame died about thirty years ago and I'm wondering if the health of our nation depends on its resurrection.

Psychologists, self-help gurus, and educational experts began warning that the *real* problem isn't shameful behavior, but *feeling shame* for our behavior. Feeling shame, they argued, leads to all kinds of psychological ailments, reinforces addiction, and rips up self-esteem. We should just get rid of shame, they said, and we'll solve many modern ills.

How has that worked out for us? Is our society getting better without all that "awful shame" our parents' carried?

From a biblical perspective, shame isn't the enemy—bad behavior is. Shame is actually a friend if it leads us to repent, fall on God's mercy for forgiveness and the strength to change, and get motivated to live differently. God was frustrated when his people felt nothing in the face of their evil: "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all. They did not even know how to blush." (Jer. 6:15)

Listen to Blaise Pascal's bold take: "The only shame is to have none."

I get that there's a difference between feeling shame for who you are and feeling shame as your response to a *particular action*, but we seem so eager to prevent the former that we've neglected a necessary check on the latter. I can't remember the last time I've watched any news cast without seeing egregiously shameful actions and words from people of all walks in society—and the persons behind such behavior and words appeared to have cold, dead consciences. *That's* what scares me most. We all have bad days, but feeling no shame for our bad days? That can't be healthy or bode well for the future.

Biblical Shame

Wicked behavior rightly brings shame and disgrace (Prov. 13:5). Paul says we should live in such a way that we have no need to be ashamed: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed…" (2 Tim. 2:15) Paul's desire to *not* be ashamed is clear motivation for him to live a courageous life in Christ (1 Phil. 1:20). The apostle John likewise used the desire to not be ashamed as motivation for continued life in Christ: "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28) **John is keeping the fear of future shame alive to amend his present character.**

Whenever shame is rejected, it's solely because we should not be ashamed of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) or our Lord (2 Tim. 1:8). The Bible doesn't reject shame as a response to immoral behavior, or call shame illegitimate when it's the result of cowardice and the rejection of our need to be active ministers of the Gospel. **On the contrary, shame is a legitimate, appropriate response to immoral, obnoxious, selfish behavior. Rather than run from it, we should allow it to motivate us toward godliness.**

In this sense, shame is a God-created, God-designed emotional response intended to keep me from sliding even further away from his will when I act in an abominable, or even just an inappropriate way. It's a "check"—sort of like those truck ramps placed on the downhill side of mountain highways. When we're morally running out of control, and our normal conscience brakes aren't working, shame is God's gift to make us think twice: do I really want to live this way?

Shame as a response to poor living isn't the problem; it's part of the cure. It's God's intention to point us back to him.

Unassailable Character?

A mother once defended her son to me because, even though his behavior had been deplorable, his character was "unassailable." In a world where we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2), I'm not sure *anyone's* character is "unassailable," much less a teenager who is learning his way in the world. Yet we are so fearful of shame (or shaming our children) that we act like admitting an error is a greater evil than committing one. How can we grow if we don't admit we've done something shameful and learn from it? Won't we just repeat it?

Because of grace, I don't need to fear shame; God can *use it.* There are times when I let food get the best of me. I inhale my food with the force of an industrial vacuum, in a way that is rude and yes, shameful. While I was watching a football (pre Covid days, of course), my wife cut up some fruit and berries. Maybe it was the intensity of the moment, but I all but swallowed that bowl of fruit whole, never even really enjoying it. Lisa walked down the stairs, saw the empty bowl she had just placed in front of me, and her mouth dropped open in astonishment. I've also been known to drink a venti chai tea in about three gulps.

If I'm excited about a topic, I can dominate a conversation, more eager to share my opinion than to learn. I hate it when I do this, and I'm rightly ashamed of it. Afterwards, when I become aware of it, I repent, ask God's forgiveness, and try to be more mindful of it the next time I'm in such a situation.

I don't expect myself—or others—to be perfect. Even people far more mature than I am occasionally do shameful things. **When I do shameful things, I *want* to feel shame because that's part of the process of change.** After repentance and forgiveness, I accept the Gospel truth that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Walking in grace, however, doesn't mean I shouldn't feel shame when I act shamefully; it means that after admitting my shame, I can be released from the guilt of my actions, encouraged by God's acceptance and love, and rest in his promised help and empowerment so that I can act in a less shameful way in the future.

***Living* in shame leads to all kinds of psychological ills and destruction; *passing through* shame can lead us to God, spiritual health, and even psychological balance**. I don't want to grow up "feeling no shame" if that means I can act in a deplorable manner and just accept it as part of who I am.

Growing up in the sixties, we kids often heard, "You should be ashamed of yourself." That phrase has all but disappeared in modern child-rearing—to our society's great detriment. Shame *can* be destructive, but it has a healthy place. **We should be fans of healthy shame.**

If you're ashamed of how you've been living, embrace God's conviction, repent of your past lifestyle, receive God's forgiveness, and then rest in his acceptance. Let the bitterness of your previous shame spur you toward a new life, knowing that you never want to taste that shame again.

But don't run from shame as an *experience*. Run from it as an *identity*.