

Ashamed of Christ?

What is this thing called, “Being ashamed of Christ”? What does it mean, and why do we do it? It is when colleagues at work or schoolmates laugh at Christianity or God, and we are silent, hoping more than anything we won’t be found out, or that the conversation would change topic.

It is when God’s name is used in vain in our presence, and we look away, feeling the reproach, but preferring not to say anything. It is when relatives make off-colour jokes or remarks, or likewise blaspheme His name, and rather than make a scene, we swallow our convictions, and reason that they don’t know any better. It is when we know we ought to tell someone about Christ, but are embarrassed of what they will think of us, or how they may react.

It is when questioned about our faith, we feel nervous and self-conscious, and feel the need to defend our choice, if not explain it away. It is when we can go for months, even years, at a particular place of work or education, and no one ever knows that we are Christians. When they find out we are believers, they are shocked: “You’re a Christian?” – because we were ashamed of Christ.

It is when we wish to join unsaved friends and family for some get-togethers on Sunday, but blush to remind them we can only be there later, because we quickly mumble, we will be in church in the morning. It is when we feel ashamed of the name of Christ, and feel the need to try make Christ seem like a respectable choice to those who reject Him – for the sake of our own reputation. It is when we love the world, whose approval we secretly desire.

It is when the church at large tries to mimic the world, tries to appear cool, sophisticated and frankly – worldly, so as not to be looked down upon by the world. It is when the church craves the approval of society over the approval of God, and does everything in its power to try and make its message, its appearance and its activities compatible with the unsaved, and palatable to their thinking.

Ashamed of Christ. Embarrassed to be identified as a believer, as a born-again, blood-washed saint. Afraid to tell the world of our identity, shy to let others know who we truly are. What’s going on inside us when we do this? How can we at one moment rejoice to be believers at church, and then be terribly shy the very next day to tell colleagues what we were supposedly so happy about yesterday? What is this thing called, “Being ashamed of Christ”? Let’s begin by looking at:

1. The name of our shame

What is shame? What does it mean? The concept first appears in the Bible in **Genesis 2:25**, regarding the unfallen Adam and Eve: *“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”* This first mention of shame helps us understand what it is. There was no self-

consciousness between Adam and Eve. Though naked, they did not feel what we would today, in that situation.

If shamed, we would feel guilt or disgrace. We would feel our name or our reputation was being degraded. We would feel self-conscious, vulnerable, exposed. We would feel deeply demeaned, that we've been made an object of scorn or reproach. Shame is a black mark against your name. When you are ashamed, you have noticed yourself, and feel embarrassed for yourself. You see yourself, perhaps even momentarily, as humiliated, dishonoured, ruined.

When Adam sinned, the first thing that happened was shame. He and his wife became aware of their nakedness. Suddenly, Adam loved his own appearance more than Eve, and vice-versa. There was self-consciousness, where there had been none before. There was a feeling of guilt, a blushing at what they were, and had become.

From that day, shame entered our world. It enters our life on every level. From the schoolchild who is teased, and feels shame, to the revealed scandal of a high profile celebrity, who feels shame. From everyday moments that cause us to feel deep regret, and pain over past sins or experiences – shame is in our world. Sometimes shame is brought about by pride – our inflated love of self – making us touchy, defensive and self-protective. But other times shame is necessary.

Indeed, shame is necessary over sin. Sin is something to rightly be ashamed about. If shame is a painful feeling of self-reproach, that ought to be the case when we sin. We ought to have deep sorrow and repentance over our sin, and feel the black mark it is against our name, and cry out to Christ to cleanse us. Do we not speak about a brazen sinner as being 'shameless'? There is no virtue in having no shame at all.

In a world filled with sin, we ought to feel deeply sorrowful when we sin. We ought to feel injury to our honour and name when we sin, in the form of shame. But here we are speaking about being ashamed of Christ. So let's take our definition of shame and apply it to being ashamed of Christ. This would mean that we feel deep regret to be associated with Jesus Christ.

It would mean we feel that being saved by His blood is an injury to our honour and reputation. It means we feel guilty for being saved, we blush at the thought of being a child of God. We feel deeply degraded, even defiled, to be known as a Christian. It is a black mark against our name to be carrying His name. Being ashamed of Christ is to regard Him as a disgrace. That leads us to consider:

2. The shame of our shame

Can we be serious? Can our hearts truly be so deceived as to feel these things over God? Do we think it is an injury to be known as His child, a disgrace to be associated with Him, a regret to be part of His family? But that is what we feel when we hide our identity, refrain from making Him known, refuse to defend His name, shy away from declaring the Gospel. We blush at the idea of being God's child.

Were we to step back and think hard, we would see – there is shame in this kind of shame. It is a shameful thing to be ashamed of Christ. It is a thing of disgrace to be ashamed of Christ; it is a thing to blush at – to be known as shy of the name of Christ. Because what it amounts to is this: we esteem ourselves first, the opinions of others second, and God last.

It means we love ourselves so much that we are trying to forge an identity for ourselves apart from Christ, and therefore feel threatened if people's opinion of Christ is not favourable. Our aim is to be worshipped, and so we carefully try to arrange the relationships in our lives so as to be in favour with everyone.

If someone else is a Christian, we rejoice to tell them we are too. But if someone else is not, we are silent, because we crave approval from everyone. The problem is not, as some will tell us, that we don't love ourselves enough and need self-esteem; it is that we love ourselves too much, and lust after the approval of man. And here is the thing – man's approval and God's are most often at odds.

Jesus said in **John 5:44**: *"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"* In **Luke 6:27**, Jesus said: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."* John's commentary on the Pharisees is simple in **John 12:43**: *"For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."*

The bottom line is this: you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve the master of self, seeking the worship of all and sundry, and also serve the true God, who demands you love Him with all your heart, soul and mind. You cannot be hot and cold at the same time – you cannot be zealous for God's name, and for your own name. The shame of our shame is this: God is, quite literally, the last person in the universe to be ashamed of.

Consider this: would you have been ashamed of God when He threw the stars into place, laid the foundations of the world, held the sea back from the land, created the ordinances for the universe, such that **Job 38:7** tells us: *"When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."* The angels certainly weren't ashamed to know Him on that day!

Or would you have been ashamed to know Him when He flooded the whole earth? When the Red Sea parted and rose like walls on either side of you – would you hesitate to identify yourself with Him then? When He caused the walls of Jericho to fall down, when one Israelite soldier was like a thousand, when a youth with a slingshot overcame a giant, and when 185 000 Assyrians were killed in one night by God Himself – would this cause you to feel guilty to know Him?

When Christ was on the earth, what exactly would it have been about His character or conduct that would cause you shame? When He spoke to the winds and waves, and the weather obeyed Him? When He could say to a corpse – arise, and life came back? When He could approach legions of demons possessing a man and have them cry out in terror?

Maybe His wise answers, His compassion, His tireless devotion to human wellbeing, His amazing words and teachings – perhaps these are the things that should cause us to feel embarrassed to be known as a Christian – a follower of Christ? Which one of His attributes makes us feel embarrassed to know Him? His sovereignty – that He rules everything as He pleases – He is the King of the Universe?

Is it His omnipotence – that nothing is impossible for Him? His omniscience – that He knows all that is knowable? His omnipresence – that He is everywhere present? His eternality – that He is before beginnings, and after the end? Are we shy that He is infinite – without limits, ashamed that our Father is so perfect as to never have to change? Or are we blushing that our God is the great I AM – He needs no one to exist, He is perfect in Himself, He is the centre of all things?

Perhaps we feel guilty to know someone whose nature is love, goodness, longsuffering, gentleness, grace, mercy, justice. Maybe it is His infinite wisdom that makes us feel foolish to call Him our Father. Seemingly the seraphim do not feel that way – **Isaiah 6:3** tells us they cry out night and day: *“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.”*

What about the future? When Christ returns to reign in glory – when His enemies’ flesh literally melts where they stand, when He lands on the Mount of Olives and it splits in two, simply because His holy feet have landed on it – when the mountains flee away from Him – will we be ashamed of Him on that day? When He reigns in the most glorious kingdom this world has ever seen – will we deny King Jesus then? Isaiah tells us who will be ashamed on that day:

Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

Isaiah 24:23

And above all, consider the cross. There, the Eternal Son of God is crucified in a shameful way, bearing our sins. There He is, carrying the weight of our sins, with their shame. He could have called the legions of angels to destroy those Romans, He could have answered the mocking challenges to come down from the cross, but He did not. The only thing that nailed Him to that cross was His love for you and me. Are we ashamed of that? Do we disown him at Calvary?

There He is, dying publicly for us – bearing our shame – do we now try to discreetly absorb the benefits of the cross, and remain ashamed of Him and what He has done? Truthfully, there is nothing more shameful than being ashamed of Christ. The deep shame of our shame is that we choose our feeble little human reputations over being associated with the God of the universe.

The shame is that we are such selfish creatures, that we choose to nurse and protect our little names from the reproach of another little human, instead of throwing open our hearts to be rewarded with His name. Our blind souls cannot see that the only thing that could ever bring worth to our name is the name of Christ, the very thing we think we ought to hide from other humans. That leads us to see the choice we must make:

3. The claim of our shame

Here is the thing: the one who is ashamed of Jesus thinks that by denying Him or avoiding mentioning His name, they are escaping shame. They think they're avoiding being embarrassed or shy. But here is why this is untrue: firstly, because by being ashamed of Christ – there is already shame in that. There is guilt over feeling ashamed of Him – and so you have gained nothing. Secondly, shame is unavoidable in this world.

As we said, in a sin-cursed world, shame is part and parcel of our lives. We ought to feel shame over sin. So the choice is not whether you will feel shame or not – it is how and over what you will feel shame. You must choose the shame you will have – you must claim your shame. See, when the apostles had been beaten by the council, **Acts 5:41** tells us: *“And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”*

The apostles were not ashamed of Christ; they were ashamed for Christ. We see they were willing to bear the reproach of their own reputations, the disgracing of their own names in the eyes of others, for the name of Christ. They were willing to feel apparent disgrace over being identified with Christ. They willingly took upon themselves the lowering of their names or reputations for the name and reputation of Christ. They chose their shame. Jesus said:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matthew 5:11:12

What this means is, we submerge our names, our identities, in Christ, and willingly absorb anything reproachful or slanderous others say, for we have lost our lives in Him. We are not hard-hearted people who just no longer care what people say, we are people who consciously desire Christ's name over our own. And there may be momentary pain at having others look down upon us, despise us, even persecute us, but overwhelmingly, there is the joy of full identification with Christ:

I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the On of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

There is an abandonment of self-protectiveness to embrace Him, and all that comes with Him. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: *“Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come”* (**Hebrews 13:12-14**).

Garbage, things that were vile, defiling, sinful and criminal were taken outside the camp. Jesus was crucified outside the camp, bearing every shameful thing on Himself. Bearing our sin, our impurities. Jesus bore everything we ought to feel ashamed about. The writer tells us – let us

then go to Him where He is, bearing His reproach. Since He has borne our shame, let us willingly embrace His shame – the contempt the world pours on Him, let us claim it as our own.

We have only two choices – to build our own name apart from Christ, or to lose our name in His. We can either seek to distance ourselves from Him and the reproach people have for Him, or gladly identify ourselves with Him, bearing His reproach. But there is no choice of whether or not to be ashamed. Shame is here – we must choose how we will be ashamed. Ashamed of Him – by denying Him, or ashamed with Him or for Him – by denying self. Jesus said:

For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:26

See, ultimately, a person deeply ashamed of Christ will turn out to never have been saved. The one who is ashamed of Christ tries to escape shame now by denying Him – but they have sacrificed the eternal on the altar of the immediate. They will find they actually end up ashamed for an eternity. No true believer will love their own name more than Christ's for a lifetime.

The one totally ashamed of Jesus confesses that they are not family with Christ, they regard the family name of God as foreign, and so reveals that they were never truly saved. While Christians may lapse into being ashamed now and then, ultimately, a believer must be increasingly identifying themselves with Christ, losing any sense of an identity or reputation outside of Christ, and denying themselves, not the Lord.

This is why Paul could say, *"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day"* (**2 Timothy 1:12**). Paul's eyes were focused on Christ – he knew Who he'd believed upon. He regarded it a shameful to be ashamed of Jesus. Instead, he openly embraced the shame and reproach the world pours on Jesus as his own, saying:

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

But this shame, he rejoiced to carry; it was an honour. He loved to carry shame for Jesus. He loved to lessen his own reputation – to have more of Christ. He learnt this through the thorn in his flesh, which led him ultimately to say: *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong"* (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**).

And this is the choice before us – claim your shame. Choose to be ashamed of Jesus, and you will have no fruit, in this life or that to come. Live for your own name, and feel the searing pain Peter felt when he had denied the Lord, and went out and wept bitterly. Live self-protectively,

and ultimately discover that the one who seeks to save their own life will lose it, and the one who loses their life for Christ's sake, will find it.

The other choice is to choose to be ashamed *for* Jesus. Willingly wear His name, and all that comes with it. Die to your own name, and live for His. Either be a pathetically self-centred creature, protecting your name, which is worthless anyway, by disowning God – the only One who can add value to your name, or give up your own name to be submerged in His.

Stop trying to gain the fickle approval of other creatures who will die, and whose opinion is passing, and surrender your name to Christ. And then bask in the joy of God's approval. Swim in the ocean of God's love, knowing the idol of self is safely on the altar, there is nothing between you and your Lord. You could think of it this way – someone ashamed of Christ denies Christ for the sake of their own name; but someone ashamed for Jesus denies their own name for the sake of Christ.

The name of our shame is a feeling of being lowered in others' eyes – to be disgraced. The shame of our shame is when we feel this over the One who is most worthy. The claim of our shame is to choose to bear His name over our own – to love His name more than our own, to increasingly see no difference between His name and our own. People who live like this are people of faith.

The faithful prefer the honour of God over the honour of men. Their eyes are on a heavenly prize, and so the idea of protecting a selfish reputation in the eyes of others seems like a very dry and empty thing. And here what the Bible says of such people in **Hebrews 11:16**: *"But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city."*

Perhaps the focus we need to have is this: will God be ashamed of *me*? Or is God proud to be identified with me? God is proud to be identified with people of faith, whose eyes are on Him, and who enjoy the praise of God more than the praise of men.