

Shame

Shame is an unpleasant, painful emotion. It is a fear that overcomes us when we offend decency or see it offended. Neil Postman defines it as "the mechanism by which barbarism is held at bay." Children used to be taught a sense of shame. Says Postman, "The inculcation of feelings of shame has constituted a rich and delicate part of a child's formal and informal education. Children, in other words, are immersed in a world of secrets, surrounded by mystery and awe; a world that will be made intelligible to them by adults who will teach them, in stages, how shame is transformed into a set of moral directives. From the child's point of view, shame gives power and authority to adulthood. For adults know, whereas children do not, what words are shameful to use, what subjects are shameful to discuss, what acts are deemed necessary to privatize." Shame used to operate as a moral restraint. Our Western civilization is declining because its increasing inability to feel ashamed.

Shame is one of the main features which disguises human beings from animals. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) called man "the beast with the red cheeks". We had acquired them because we had such frequent occasion to blush. Animals don't have a sense of shame. That's why the followers of Darwin, who attribute the origin of man to evolution, have great difficulty explaining the feeling of shame. Shame is purely a human feeling. An animal has no moral standards. It only knows desire and its satisfaction. It cannot distinguish right from wrong. Shame presupposes a moral standard. Man has dignity. Though fallen, he still is God's image bearer. He has the privilege and the duty to feel shame and guilt. He always stands in a responsible relationship before his Maker. Before their fall into", sin, Adam and Eve didn't have a sense of shame. It clearly states "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Gen.2: 25). After the fall, they looked at each other in a different way. They had lost their innocence. Their attitude towards each other changed.

Man can feel ashamed about all kinds of things. But God's people have always believed that a sense of shame and confession of sin will lead to forgiveness. Ezra prayed."O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). But when sin is confessed through Christ, God is not ashamed to be called our God (Hebr.11: 16).

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