Truth for Today
The Bible Explained

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Freedom
Free from guilt and shame

[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Guilt versus Shame
The subject for today's talk is "Free from guilt and shame." Guilt and shame are often linked together in our personal experience but are really two very different things. Guilt is an objective external reality whereas shame is a subjective, internal experience. There is however an external aspect to shame where people who are opposed to us seek to heap shame on us. But it amounts to the same thing. Their hateful words are an attempt to make us feel shame internally.

A person becomes guilty when it has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt that he or she has broken the law. Once declared guilty according to the law of the land there is no escaping sentence and punishment. In this context we cannot speak of freedom from guilt.

The good news of the Gospel
We would have thought then that having broken God's law there would also be no possibility of our escaping sentence and punishment. But the Gospel is good news. As we can understand from the introduction by the Apostle John to the book of Revelation, God has provided freedom from guilt on the basis of the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross. John writes,

> To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood… be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation chapter 1 verses 5 and 6, ESV).

However, God's Word emphasises strongly that because we have all sinned against God, we are all guilty and condemned and we cannot escape eternal punishment unless we accept God's offer of a free pardon through Jesus Christ.

> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John chapter 3 verses 17 and 18, ESV).

> We know that everything in the Law was written for those who are under its power. The Law says these things to stop anyone from making excuses and to let God show that the whole world is guilty. God doesn't accept people simply because they obey the Law. No, indeed! All the Law does is to point out our sin (Romans chapter 3 verses 19 and 20, Contemporary English Version).

Freed from our guilt and shame
The same passage of Scripture goes on to tell us how we can be freed from guilt:

> God treats everyone alike. He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so that by faith in him we could come to God (verses 22 to 25, Contemporary English Version).

Or as Paul in another chapter categorically states:

> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans chapter 8 verse 1, ESV).

Freedom from shame is also secured for us by Jesus Christ. Shame can cause great distress as we see in the prayer of the Psalmist:

> You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonour; my foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none (Psalm 69 verses 19 and 20, ESV).

What is Shame?
Shame is that unpleasant feeling that a person experiences when he or she feels guilt or inadequacy. Shame causes people to blush and want to hide. Where did shame come from? We read about this in the very first pages of the Bible.

> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25, ESV).

But then something happened to change this as we read in the next chapter. At the suggestion of Satan who had taken on the form of a snake:

> The woman stared at the fruit. It looked beautiful and tasty. She wanted the wisdom that it would give her, and she ate some of the fruit. Her husband was right there with her, so she gave some to him, and he ate it too. Right away they saw what they had done, and they realised they were naked. Then they sewed fig leaves together to make something to cover themselves. Late in the afternoon a breeze began to blow, and the man and woman heard the LORD God walking in the garden. They were frightened and hid behind some trees. The LORD called out to the man and asked, 'Where are you?' The man answered, 'I was naked, and when I heard you walking through the garden, I was frightened and hid!' 'How did you know you were naked?' God asked. 'Did you eat any fruit from that tree in the middle of the garden?' 'It was the woman you put here with me,' the man said. 'She gave me some of the fruit, and I ate it.' The LORD God then asked the woman, 'What have you done?' 'The snake tricked me,' she answered. 'And I ate some of that fruit' (Genesis 3:6-13; 21-23, Contemporary English Version).

Causes of Shame
Shame came upon Adam and Eve because they believed what Satan told them and disobeyed God. There are various causes of Shame. One of these is that we feel shame because of what others have done to us.

This is very evident in the tragic event in the life of a beautiful young princess called Tamar. She was the daughter of King David. Her half-brother Amnon the son of another of the king's wives took a liking to her. A cunning friend suggested that Amnon should pretend to be ill and get his father to send Tamar to cook for him. When this happened Amnon said to Tamar,

> Bring the food into the chamber, that I may eat from your hand. And Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her (2 Samuel 13:1-2, 6 & 10-14, ESV).

"As for me, where could I carry my shame?" It is possible that Tamar began to feel it was her fault. Perhaps she thought: "It is all my fault I led him on." Of course this was not true it was not her fault. Her father the king was at fault. He had not given her the protection she deserved.

It is interesting that victims of abuse feel shame even if it was not their fault. The perpetrators should be ashamed but are often so hardened in their sin that they feel no shame. The seemingly irrational reaction of feeling deep shame by a victim of abuse, be it sexual, physical, or verbal, does in fact have an explanation. Our evil enemy the devil and his demons exploit human trauma to gain control over victims of abuse. It is the devil who heaps shame on people in order to make them mentally unstable and make them take their own lives as he did with Judas Iscariot. It is part of his strategy to drag people down to hell. While Satan cannot drag a born-again believer down to hell, he can make his life totally miserable and ineffective for the kingdom of God. That is why our recent series on the Whole Armour of God was so important. We need to use the resources that God has given us to resist the devil.

Why we often feel shame
We often feel shame because of what others say about us: David felt the shame of the slander people hurled against him:

> How long, O you sons of men, Will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness And seek falsehood? (Psalm 4:2, NJKV).

The sons of Korah also felt this as they bemoaned the state of their nation:

> You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples. My dishonour is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me (Psalm 44:14 and 15, NJKV).

When parents verbally abuse their child, it can have a devastating effect on the development of that child. In their desire to see their child do well at school a parent may think that picking on every little mistake will goad their child to do better. In fact, it will have the opposite effect. Of

course, mistakes should be corrected but in an encouraging way and successes should be celebrated. Children will delight in pleasing a parent who encourages them. But heaping criticism and shame on a child will be devastating. We feel shame because of what we have done ourselves. Ezra in his prayer for his nation said:

> And I said: “O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6, NJKV).

Shame accompanies guilt in those whose conscience is awakened.

Acts that bring shame
Here are some verses of Scripture that highlight acts that bring shame:

Laziness:

> He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame (Proverbs 10:5, ESV).

Wickedness:

> The righteous hates falsehood, but the wicked brings shame and disgrace (Proverbs 13:5, ESV).

Giving an answer before hearing the other person out:

> If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame (Proverbs 18:13, ESV).

Disobedience and violence towards one’s parents:

> He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach (Proverbs 19:26, ESV).

Keeping bad company:

> The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father (Proverbs 28:7, ESV).

Not giving proper discipline to a child:

> Punishment and discipline can make children wise, but children who are never corrected will bring shame to their mother (Proverbs 29:15, Easy to Read Version).

Wrong Choices bring us shame. Instead of trusting the Lord for protection Israel sought to make alliances with foreign powers. The prophet warned the nation that this wrong choice would bring shame upon them:

> Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation. …Everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace (Isaiah 30 verses 3 and 5, ESV).

The Worship of idols brings us shame:

> They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, 'You are our gods' (Isaiah 42:17, ESV).

There are many aspects of idolatry. It is idolatry to seek supernatural help and power from any other being than God himself. It is an abomination because it brings people under the influence of evil spirits. The people of Israel were warned about this.

> Soon you will go into the land that the LORD your God is giving you. The nations that live there do things that are disgusting to the LORD, and you must not follow their example. Don't sacrifice your son or daughter. And don't try to use any kind of magic or witchcraft to tell fortunes or to cast spells or to talk with spirits of the dead. The LORD is disgusted with anyone who does these things, and that's why he will help you destroy the nations that are in the land. Never be guilty of doing any of these disgusting things! You will go in and take the land from the nations that practice magic and witchcraft. But the LORD your God won't allow you to do those things (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Contemporary English Version).

Covetousness is idolatry. Desiring what is not yours is like worshipping an idol.

> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5, ESV).

The rejection of God's Word brings shame on people:

> The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, so what wisdom is in them? (Jeremiah 8:9, ESV).

Shame can have terrible results

Shame can have terrible results Shame can lead to self-hatred. Hating ourselves is a great insult to God who created us. It is as if we were accusing God of making a mistake. Self-hatred can lead to self-harm and eventually to demonic influence. Self-harm can include eating disorders, drug abuse, cutting oneself or burning oneself. The demonised man who met Jesus was involved in self-harm, it says in the Bible:

> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones (Mark 5:5, ESV).

The ultimate and final Shame is the shame of the unrepentant in being condemned to hell.

> And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2, ESV).

Sleep in Scripture is a way of speaking of death in order to emphasise the inevitability of rising again.

How to overcome shame

Jesus shows the way to overcome shame. He had nothing in himself to be ashamed of but at His crucifixion others sought to heap shame on him. We are told that we should be:

> Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus overcame the shame that was heaped on him because he took a long-term view of things. He saw the coming joy even in his deepest pain. With this view of things, he was able to reject all the shame that his persecutors heaped upon him. He did not take any of it to heart.

Jesus frees us from our shame by giving the believer a new identity of which he need no longer be ashamed. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews makes a wonderful statement about how Jesus views his followers:

> He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise' (Hebrews 2:11-12, ESV).

This is amazing! We believers should say it to ourselves every day: "The Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call me brother (or sister as the case may be)."

You can overcome your shame when you are helped by the Holy Spirit to understand that you are chosen by God to be his son and heir. He accepts you as his child, you are loved and cherished.

God planned for those who believe in Christ,

> To be like his Son. He chose them and made them right with him. And after he made them right, he gave them his glory (Romans 8:30, Easy to Read Version).

In Old Testament Scriptures glory is the opposite of shame.

> How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? (Psalm 4:2, NJKV).

To free us from shame our blessed Lord gives us glory and honour as sons and heirs of God. We overcome shame by repentance and cleansing from sin and the true experience of being loved and accepted by God. Jesus said to his followers:

> For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God (John 16:27, ESV).

Paul proclaimed:

> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20, ESV).

He also wrote:

> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5, ESV).

We overcome shame by letting go of our hatred for those who have done wrong to us and forgiving them.

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:31-32).

We can help each other overcome shame by showing acceptance, love, and respect to each other.

> We who are strong in the faith ought to help the weak to carry their burdens. We should not please ourselves. Instead, we should all please other believers for their own good, in order to build them up in the faith. Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you (Romans 15:1,2 and 7, Good News Bible).

Being in a circle of friends who love, accept, and encourage each other is a wonderful way to be freed from shame. That is why it is so important for a believer in Christ to be a member of a church where such love, acceptance and encouragement is to be found.

Gospel appeal
Dear listener, you may be completely unaware of your guilt before God. I pray that God's Holy Spirit will convince you that you are guilty so that you will cry out to Jesus Christ who is the only one who can free us from guilt and shame. Please make sure you have asked Christ to do this for you. When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples he proclaimed:

> Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

He will take away your sin if you ask him. He will free you from guilt and shame.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk entitled 'Free from guilt and shame', Talk Number 1483 in the series called 'Freedom.'

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