

Ashamed—Not Ashamed (1)

by Walton Weaver

In the New Testament there are four different words in the verb form translated “shame” and “ashamed.”

1. The first word is used in two different ways (see W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 79). It describes a *shame* which (a) *prevents a person from doing a thing*, like in Luke 16:3, where the unrighteous steward in one of Jesus’ parables was reported to be squandering his possessions. When called in before his master to give an account, he responded by saying, “What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg” (NASB, and throughout this article). This same word also sometimes describes (b) *a feeling arising from something that has been done*, like in 2 Corinthians 10:8, where Paul says he would not be put to shame even if he has boasted somewhat in defense of his apostleship (see also Phil. 1:20 and 1 John 2:28). This is the word used in 1 Peter 4:16 where Christians are admonished not to be ashamed to suffer as a Christian.

The next two words used for shame are strengthened forms of the first word. They are strengthened by prefixes being added to the same word.

2. Vine points out that the first of these two words is used only in the sense of (b) above. This is the word used when we are told not to be ashamed of Jesus (Mark 8:38), the gospel (Rom. 1:16), or the testimony of the Lord (2 Tim. 1:8). Paul uses this word to say that he is not ashamed to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:12), and to plead that the Lord will “grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Tim. 1:16). The word is used twice in the book of Hebrews: (1) Christ is not ashamed to call us his brethren (Heb. 2:11), (2) nor is God ashamed to be called the God of all those who seek a better country (Heb. 11:16). Christians, however, should be ashamed of their former evil doing (Rom. 6:21).

3. Examples of the second word of these two appear in both the active and passive voice. In the former (active) sense, hope does not make one ashamed (KJV; rendered, “does not disappoint” in the NASB), and foolish things have been chosen by God to shame the wise (1 Cor. 1:27; the KJV has “confound”). “Disgraces his head” and “disgraces her head” (“dishonoureth” in the KJV) in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5 belong to this class. So does Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:22: “What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? . . .” Examples of the passive sense of the word will be found in Romans 9:33, 10:11, 2 Corinthians 7:14, 1 Peter 2:6, and 1 Peter 3:16.

4. The fourth word (in the verb form) for shame (*entrepē*) literally means “to turn in . . ., that is, to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct.” This word is used in only three places in the New Testament (1 Cor. 4:14; 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 2:8).

The two noun forms of the word for shame are akin to the first and fourth words which we have just considered. The first of these words is found in Luke 14:9, 2 Corinthians 4:2,

Hebrews 12:2, Philippians 3:19, Revelation 3:18, and Jude 13. The second word is found in 1 Corinthians 6:5 and 15:34.

From this review of the words used for “shame” in the New Testament, let us now briefly consider some things of which the Christian should be ashamed and some things of which he should not be ashamed.

Let Us **BE** Ashamed . . .

1. *Of Our Past Lives in Sin.* A true Christian finds no pleasure in the sinful things which he did before he became a Christian. When Paul is writing to encourage Christians to live in a new kind of life now that they have died with Christ, been buried with him in baptism, and raised up with him to walk in a new kind of life (Rom. 6:1-4), he asks them later in the chapter, “Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death” (Rom. 6:21). He takes for granted that any Christian worth his salt will be ashamed of such behavior that once characterized him. How could the Christian find delight in such things now? He should rather be ashamed of them when he considers the fact that the only outcome of such behavior is eternal ruin and destruction. Yet, we sometimes hear Christians joking about the kinds of things they used to do while they were yet in the world. How can this be consistent with a Christian’s new way of life in Christ?

2. *Of Evil Things Done In Darkness.* In a similar way, Paul shows in Ephesians 5:3ff. that the Christian is not to engage with the sons of disobedience in sins of immorality and impurity. Such things as fornication, greed, filthiness, silly talk, and coarse jesting “are not fitting,” he says, “but rather giving of thanks” (v. 4). Because these things bring on the wrath of God (v. 6), Christians are charged, “Therefore, do not be partakers with them” (v. 7). We are now “Light in the Lord” and such practices are foreign to our way of life (v. 9). Such unfruitful deeds of darkness should be exposed, “for it is disgraceful [*aischros*, the adjective form] even to speak of the things which are done by them [the sons of disobedience] in secret” (v. 12).

3. *Of Nakedness In Public Places.* Compared to the first noun form for the word “shame” (*aischunē*, discussed in the introduction of this article), the word Paul uses for “shamefacedness” (KJV, from *aidos*) in 1 Timothy 2:9, when he is discussing modesty, “is the nobler word, and implies the nobler motive: in it is involved an innate moral repugnance to the doing of the dishonorable act . . .” (Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, xix). Trench remarks that this “moral repugnance scarcely or not at all exists in the word *aischunē* . . .” Have we lost sight of the fact that *shamefacedness* has a moral repugnance about it? When Paul tells the women to dress modestly, he adds, “with shamefacedness and sobriety.” Study those two words. How many of our people in the churches have this kind of *shame* and *good sense* when it comes to scarcity of dress, or otherwise immodest apparel (such as pants so tight people look like they have been poured into them)? This shame applies to other things as well. Where is the shame today on the part of Christians who profess godliness? Where is the sobriety, or level-headed thinking? Have we seen so much nakedness, heard so much filthy language, and witnessed so much dishonesty in public places (like on TV and the movies, and on our streets) that we have lost our sense of shame over such things?

4. *Of Failure To Obey Divine Instructions.* In the book of 2 Thessalonians Paul had to

deal with a serious problem that had sprung up in the church in that city. Some had the view that Christ's coming was just around the corner, and as a result they had stopped working altogether. Paul gave specific instruction on this subject and commanded the church there not to help them if they would not work. He also expected those who were caught up in this matter to heed his instructions and go back to work: "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12). The other members were to encourage them to obey Paul's instructions. But what if a person would not do so? In that case, Paul says: "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame" (v. 14).

From this we may gather that when one does not obey Jesus, or one of his inspired messengers, he ought to be ashamed; and if he is not ashamed because of such failure, his brethren ought to do what Paul instructed these brethren to do to help bring him to shame. Any person is in serious trouble when he can go ahead in a practice with no shame, if in his practice he is rejecting divine instruction to be able to do it. Let us never lose our sense of shame when it becomes clear to us that we are acting without approval from the Lord. This is our only hope of restoration.