

Freedom from Shame

Shame is a device of the devil that fans the flame of the memories from our past. As we determine to hold on to memories that lead to sorrow, the result is the sabotage of restorative recovery. There is no doubt that we have all made mistakes and need to claim responsibility for our behavior. However, there needs to be a clear distinction between guilt and shame.

Guilt is found in an external event of inappropriate, unhealthy and erroneous behavior that can be utilized internally for learning and growth. Shame, on the other hand, is the transference of external concerns into deep internal conflict that becomes distorted and twisted, generating intense discomfort, rendering us stuck and ineffective, and inevitably, stifling growth and productivity.

Guilt can be used as an ingredient for learning, growth, reconciliation with others, and reconstruction of moral character, while shame leads to disappointment, discouragement, depression, and despair. Shame is the distorted internalization of guilt that fosters the over-personalizing of our mistakes and wrong doing. When guilt says, "I did something wrong," the clandestine scheme of shame is to utter, "I can't do anything right." When guilt says, "I did a bad thing," shame says, "I'm a bad person." When guilt says, "I made a mistake," shame says, "I am a mistake." When guilt can admit wrong and say, "I am sorry, please forgive me," shame insists, "I am unforgivable." Our shame screams at us, "Loser!" until we believe it about ourselves.

Healthy guilt is a stepping stone toward growth, while shame is a trap door that, as we step on it, spirals us down into a cycle of failure. **But if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.** (1 John 3:20 NKJV)

Shame is born from unmet and failed expectations. Whose expectations? Ultimately, our own unmet and failed expectations result in our judgment of ourselves, which in turn leads to shame. Many of us cannot forgive ourselves. Because of this, we wonder "How can God forgive me?" We must learn that when we live according to what the Bible says about God's expectations, we need only to let go of our own failures and rest in the loving mercy of the Sympathetic Savior.

Embracing the gracious forgiveness of Jesus Christ in our recovery from our selfish intentions and behavior is the will of God. To do this, we must believe that all God has for us in recovery is for our benefit, in order that we may experience fulfillment in his joy. We can experience blessing, peace and joy in our new life in relationship with Christ.