

Shame Replaced with Honor

If shame is the deep sense that “I’m not enough, I’m not accepted, I’m not wanted,” we get past our shame by being told, “You are enough, you are accepted, you are wanted,” by somebody who really matters. That someone is God Himself. Throughout the New Testament these are the very things that we are told over and over again. Today, as we conclude our four-week study on shame, we are going to look at some passages that describe who God says we are. May these truths melt away our shame!

Read Acts 2:29-36; Philippians 2:8-11

1. What do these passages teach about Jesus?

Read Romans 6:1-11

2. As do many other passages, Romans 6 teaches that we are “in Christ” (v. 11). What does it mean that we are “in Christ”?
3. What does this passage teach about who we are “in Christ”?

Steve said:

Paul does a fascinating thing in this passage. He basically tells us to base our spiritual expectations on our union with Christ. This is instructive for all of us who struggle with shame. Our shame tells us to set our expectations low now to avoid disappointment later. We’re losers and we’re always going to be losers. Sooner or later we’re going to crash and burn spiritually, relationally, financially, and vocationally, so we better not get our hopes up. Paul had a very different perspective. Instead of fixing our eyes on ourselves and what we think we can reasonably pull off, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus and believe that His autobiography is now ours.

4. What do you think it means to “base our spiritual expectations on our union with Christ?”

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

5. How does Paul describe the believer here?

Steve said:

The ultimate antidote to our shame is to accept the glorious identity we have in Christ. When we accept that His honor is ours we begin thinking of ourselves differently. We're **not** outcasts; we are sons and daughters of the Most High God, brothers and sisters of the Risen One. We are **not** unwanted; we are cherished and loved. Just to be clear, this isn't merely "staying positive." There's nothing wrong with staying positive, but that's not what we're saying here. And we're not talking about pretending that we're special (when everybody knows that we're really not). God isn't like a doting parent who says, "Johnny, you could be President someday!" No, actually we're talking about a spiritual reality. We're talking about what God has done for those who are "in Christ." It's not about our goodness; it's about the greatness of the salvation that Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection. In Christ you really aren't an outcast; you are accepted and wanted and loved.

6. Practically, how to do we "accept the glorious identity we have in Christ"? How do we let the truth that we are accepted and wanted and loved sink deep into our hearts?

Referring to how the father responded to his prodigal son's return by giving him the best robe, a ring on his hand, sandals on his feet, and a lavish celebration (Luke 15:20-24), Steve said:

The father replaced his son's culpable shame with honor. Here's a question to ponder (and this gets at the heart of dealing with shame long-term): What would please the father more? The son humbly accepting his father's honor and joining in the celebration? Or the son stubbornly refusing the robe and ring and sandals and feast, insisting that he's not worthy, he's not enough, he's really not accepted? The second response would have made the **older brother** happy, he wanted his little brother to live in shame as a second-class member of the family. But the **father** was pleased (and honored) when his son accepted the honor he freely gave. Humbly receiving the honor from his father would have been "to the praise of the glory of his father's grace." This is the very thing that shame-filled people are reluctant to do. Shame tells us that because we don't deserve it and aren't worthy of it we should reject it (or ignore it). The issue is, "Which voice do you believe?" Do you believe what your shame is saying about you? Or do you believe what God is saying about you?

7. How do you respond to what Steve says here?
8. How does the love of the father in this parable help you get a glimpse of what God has done for you regarding your shame?
9. What might it mean for you to humbly accept the Father's honor and join in the celebration?