



## **Atonement for Shame, Sin as Guilt and Sin as Shame, The Gospel for West and East**

“Whenever I translate for missionaries and Western pastors who come to preach in Japan, there is a disconnect in their preaching on sin. The word “sin” in Japanese is the same word as committing a crime. “Sinner” is the exact same word used for “criminal”. So, when the Japanese hear that word, they think, ‘I have not committed a crime, so why is this Gospel

presented as if I am in need of a Savior?’ The very crux of the western message of the gospel is thus truncated and the people are turned off.” (Megumi Wilson, 2/2/18)

Similarly, there is a legal connotation of sin in Chinese that also means one who has committed a crime. The Chinese may recognize the brokenness of the world in how people betray each other or act unjustly in business or speak evil of one another, but generally, they don’t see themselves as sinful.

Indeed, the Western and Eastern understanding of sin and the presentation of the gospel are very different. Jayson Georges has said: “The Gospel is truly a multifaceted diamond capable of rescuing humanity from all aspects of sin” (Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, Time Press, 2016, p. 55). Yet when we consider the gospel’s message in terms of sin, there have been large portions of that diamond that have been overlooked in the West. Tonight we will try to contrast the Western and Eastern understanding of guilt and shame as it relates to Christ’s work on the cross.

### **Sin from a Western Theological Perspective**

- Wayne Grudem defines sin as “Any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act attitude or nature” (Systematic theology by Wayne Grudem, Zondervan, 1994).
- Gregg Allison in his book (fifty core truth of the Christian faith) says “as sovereign and holy God establishes the moral law as a reflection of his righteous nature, and sin is any violation of this law” (Gregg Allison, *Fifty Core Truth of the Christian Faith*, Baker Books 2018 p. 138)
- Mark McMinn says: Sin involves rebellion, breaking away from God, insisting that our desires and will are more important than God’s...Sin is basically a relational issue. (M. McMinn, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling*, IVP, 2008, p. 151)

This emphasis predominates in the Western Focus of the Gospel:

- Individual sin makes people guilty before a holy God.
- “The judicial language associated with the doctrine of justification, have all helped to emphasize the legal aspect of salvation...Popular exposition of the ‘plan of salvation’ such as the Roman Road and the Four Spiritual Laws all emphasize personal guilt and the need for an individual decision to receive Christ as one’s personal Lord and Savior” (Timothy Tennant, *Theology in the context of World Christianity*, Zondervan, 2007, p. 82).

Four Spiritual laws and the Roman Road:

- Four Spiritual laws
  - o God loves you
  - o We are sinful and separated from God
  - o Only through Jesus Christ can you know and experience God’s love and salvation
  - o We must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
- The Roman Road
  - o Our need (Rom 3:23)
  - o Sin’s penalty (Rom 6:23A)
  - o Jesus Christ’s remedy (Rom 5:8)
  - o God’s gift to us (Rom 6:23B)

- How to receive Christ Jesus
- From this perspective Christ's sacrifice was to pay the penalty of that sin. That concept is behind the words Atonement, justification and propitiation.

The emphasis is on personal guilt and thus a need for a personal Savior.

But the predominance of guilt in the Western framing of the gospel clearly violates Biblical teaching. "The term guilt and its various derivatives occur 145 times in the OT and 10 times in the NT, whereas the term shame and its derivatives occur nearly 300 times in the OT and 45 times in the NT (Timothy C. Tennant, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, Zondervan, 2007, p. 92).

The guilt-dominated understanding of sin is only a Western one-sided approach. An understanding of the power of shame, instead of guilt, is a critical issue that must be faced if one is bridging the Western gospel of sin and the meaning of Christ's death from the West to the East. "To ignore the theological/cultural matter of honor and shame comprises a blind spot which hinders the missional impact of the gospel" (Mischke, *The Global Gospel*, p. 60). This blind spot has basically involved the rejection of shame by Western thinkers and writers. Such rejection "is rooted in a faith commitment to individual moral autonomy" (David Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, Westminster Press, 1986, p. 114).

### **The Asian Rejection of guilt and individual sin**

"The millennials in China today who believe in naturalistic evolution, for example, think that human concepts, values, desires, and religious beliefs are, like human life itself, metaphysically untethered to any transcendent purposes. Our lives and values are rather the product of such blind mechanisms as random genetic mutations and natural selection. In the view of such naturalistic believers, there isn't any "way it's supposed to be" or anyone like God to sponsor and affirm this state of affairs. Thus, there isn't anything like a *violation* of the way it's supposed to be or anything like an affront to God - and hence there isn't anything that fits the definition of sin" (Self-Examination and Confession of Sins in Traditional China Pei-Yi Wu)

Such a "naturalistic evolutionary perspective rejects any understanding of the moral law or a God who is behind such a universal Law. Human beings are their own center; there is no dependence on a superior being. There is no objective moral truth" (C. Plantinga, Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed To Be, A Breviary on Sin* Eerdmans, 1995, p. 2).

Niebuhr describes the result for these millennials: living "anxiously, restlessly, always trying to secure and extend ourselves with finite goods that can't take the weight we put on them. We climb social ladders, buy securities, try to leave a name for ourselves or leave a legacy...We strive for raw power or for intellectual transcendence or for moral superiority. Ultimately we try to escape all these strivings, calming our restlessness with flights into lust or drunkenness or gluttony...Our core problem, says St. Augustine, is that the human heart, ignoring God, turns in on itself, tries to lift itself, wants to please itself, and ends up debasing itself." (Plantinga, *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62). That issue collectively is the basis for shame.

### **The power of shame**

Shame/honor cultures are collectivistic. Honor is when people think well of you, resulting in harmonious social bonds in the community. Shame is a negative public rating...One Thai word for shaming means 'to rip someone's face off' so they appear ugly before others.' (Jayson Georges, *The 3D gospel*, Time Press, 2016, pp. 20-21)

Shame's dominance in the two-thirds world is seen in proverbs from many lands:

- Fools show their annoyance at once but the prudent overlook the insult (prov. 12:16)
- Better to die than to live on with a bad reputation (Vietnamese)
- A thousand people bear one's fault (Ughur People)
- The voice of a poor man does not carry far (Laotian) (Scott Moreau *Effective Intercultural Communication*, p.206):

The basis of human shame in God's eyes it that all people have dishonored God and brought shame on ourselves by publically spurning His gracious call to us to live in intimate communion with Him...We are not merely individually or privately guilty before God. We are also corporate participants in a human race that has robbed God of the honor due to Him" (Tennant, Ibid, p. 94). Thus we have brought shame on ourselves and caused a breach in the divine human relationship" (Tennant, Ibid, p. 97). From that perspective "the sense of sin is communicated as 'all for short for the glory of God' (all are defiled and without face)" (T. Chuang 1996, Strand 2000, Effective Intercultural Communication p. 205).

Key words in communicating from an honor/shame perspective: "glory, reputation, honor, praise, fame, dishonor, contempt, ridicule, shame, and slander" (Moreau, Ibid, p. 203). Understanding the depth and power of shame brings a critical perspective to Christ's death on the cross because Jesus paid for our guilt and our shame in the atonement.

## **Jesus Was Shamed**

Matthew's gospel clearly shows all the ways Jesus was shamed before and during his crucifixion:

*27 Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters<sup>[a]</sup> and called out the entire regiment. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. 31 When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. 32 Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene,<sup>[b]</sup> and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. 33 And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). 34 The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it. 35 After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. This fulfilled the word of the prophet: "They divided my garments among themselves and cast lots for my robe." See [Ps 22:18](#). <sup>[c]</sup> 36 Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. 37 A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Two revolutionaries<sup>[d]</sup> were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. 40 "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!" 41 The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. 42 "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! 43 He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.*

Each aspect of his arrest, false accusations, public humiliation and ultimate from of death augmented the power of shame he experienced:

- His capture and arrest as a criminal at night
- His Scourging – Jesus stripped naked, hands bound, publicly beaten, spit upon
- His dishonor as He was mocked as a King with a crown of thorns, His head struck repeatedly
- The fact that he publically carried his own cross through the streets to the place of execution
- The jeering of the crowd
- The fact that he was betrayed and forsaken by disciples
- And the crucifixion itself – which was intended to increase the person's public humiliation through the torture of a slow death

He fulfilled the messianic scripture in Isaiah 53:3 *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised and we held him in low esteem."*

## **Jesus Bore the Shame of our Broken Relationship with God**

But the shame went even deeper in the meaning of his death itself when all the sin of the world was placed on him and he suffered the shame of our broken relationship with God.

*Matthew 27: 45-51: <sup>45</sup>At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. <sup>46</sup>At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli,<sup>[a]</sup> lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"<sup>[b]</sup>*

*<sup>47</sup>Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. <sup>48</sup>One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink.*

*<sup>49</sup>But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>50</sup>Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. <sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. "*

When He cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" it was a fulfillment of Psalm 22, a Messianic scripture which detailed the Messiah's death through crucifixion. Jesus only had breath and strength to quote verse one. Listen to some of the other verses from this psalm:

*"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. <sup>7</sup>All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup>"He trusts in the LORD," they say, 'let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'*

*<sup>13</sup>Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.*

*<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. <sup>15</sup>My mouth<sup>[a]</sup> is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*

*<sup>16</sup>Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce<sup>[b]</sup> my hands and my feet.*

*<sup>17</sup>All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.*

*<sup>18</sup>They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.*

Jesus bore the horrors of the crucifixion for us.

### **Jesus Also Shamed Satan and all the powers and authorities**

Finally, on the cross Jesus also "disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" Col 2:15. This means that "the cross of Christ was also a public shaming of Satan and principalities and powers aligned with him" (Tennant, p. 91)  
This is the basis of our victory over evil now.

### **O Sacred Head**

The words of the hymn O Sacred Head describe our heart's response to the Christ who bore our guilt and our shame:

"O sacred head now wounded with grief and shame weighed down.

Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown;

O sacred head, what glory, what bliss till now was thine;

Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain.

Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.

Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place;

Look on me with thy favor and grant to me thy grace.

What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,

For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?

O make me thine forever, and should I fainting be,

Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to thee."

(Words: Bernard of Clairvaux, Music Hans Leo Hassler)

Amen! Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson Good Friday 3/30/18