

The Wonder of Pentecost

In the second chapter of Acts, the church explodes. The Holy Spirit at last fills the people of God and the world has never been the same. We must wonder how glorious this scene was, as the Spirit of God comes to dwell in the early church, leaving the onlooking world amazed, puzzled, and scorned.¹

In the midst of the uproar, Peter stands to give one of the very first sermons in church history, taking his listeners through the prophecies of the coming Messiah, showing that Jesus is the one the Scriptures are pointing to. Hear Peter's proclamation in verse 22:

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Peter unashamedly preaches Jesus, who was crucified and raised from the dead. He hits on the reality of sin, that these Jews he is preaching to were part of the reason Jesus was put to death. As this predominantly Jewish audience listens to the words of Peter, something starts to shift in them. Their response is very noteworthy:

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

'Cut to the heart.' The truth of Peter's words weighs heavily on them. The reality of their rejection of Jesus, the arrogance of their actions that ultimately led to His death, and their need for salvation *cuts* into their hearts.

The Spirit of God is moving deeply within their hearts to ultimately bring about their salvation and the advancement of Jesus' kingdom.

Negative Feelings

Do you think this experience felt good?

Hard shift.

¹ Acts 2:1-13

Funny question to ask right? Maybe. We actually think there couldn't be a more relevant question to ask in light of this text. We can't help but wonder, how would a modern American respond here? Or even a Christian in 2021 America?

Think about it in different terms than if you were there on the day of Pentecost. None of us were there making the decision to crucify Jesus, but the Bible says we're just as responsible because our sin too took Jesus to the cross. You have sinned against a holy God. You've failed to obey God. You're exposed. This is part of the Gospel. We have a need for a savior. We are not who we're supposed to be. We fall short daily.

There can be no Good News without the bad news of our depraved state as fallen humans.

To answer the question, no, it probably did not feel good. The Jewish listeners were convicted so deeply that they were willing to do anything to be saved! The Holy Spirit pushed on them so they *felt* their brokenness and need for a savior. They felt guilt. They felt shame. But this wasn't just a negative feeling they were experiencing - this was God-given.

They were experiencing conviction from the Holy Spirit.

For thousands of years, God has convicted His people by the power of the Spirit. His desire is for His people to both hate sin and love Him more. This happens in the individual believer over time. As we follow Him in our daily lives, God graciously reveals to us where we fall short and are in need of transformation.

As we see in this text and in the countless experiences of believers, conviction is difficult. For the Jewish audience in Acts, this led to a desperate state where they turned to the disciples willing to do anything to be saved. It can be painful and uncomfortable when God shows us the ugly face of our sin.

In our church's context, this experience is starting to be viewed negatively. There's a danger seeping into the church in which any and all negative feelings are cast aside as 'bad'. When we talk about where we've fallen short, how we've failed to care for those around us, how we've sinned, there's a danger that we think of the shame that comes from our actions or lack of actions, as the problem. Our communities may do the same. The picture is not pretty:

A Community Group member expresses fear over sharing the Gospel with non-believing coworkers. During group time one week, they relay that they had a perfect opportunity to share the Gospel over lunch, but they didn't because they

were afraid of it being awkward. They confess that they are feeling shame over their struggle to share the Gospel.

Too often, the rest of the group shares Gospel encouragement such as 'there's no shame in Christ' or 'Jesus put your shame to death on the cross.'

This is certainly true! However, shame is not your primary problem! It's actually a potential part of the solution to your problem. In this example, the problem is not your shame, the problem is your apathy and fear of man. You should feel shame over these things! They are sinful and against God's design.

This example can be connected to any number of sins of omission or commission. Failure to love and serve your spouse, sexual sin of any kind, a lack of generosity or service, and angry outbursts at your children or roommates.

Shame may actually be the correct response to sinful actions or inactions.

Shame and Conviction

A lack of shame in response to sin is not a good thing. It may point to a seared conscience; meaning, over time sin dulls your senses to the point where you can't feel the weight of your wrongdoing anymore. What a terrifying scenario!

When we quickly spout Gospel truths to try to make people feel better, we may be doing them a disservice. We may be tempted to think that the actual problem is the emotions that result from sin, rather than the sin itself.

Ironically, we end up using gospel encouragement to quickly cover up the negative emotions that come with sin, leaving the actual problem unaddressed.

We so desperately want to relieve one another of shame, but God may want to use that shame. He may be seeking to cut us to the heart. That may sound confusing, but the Scriptures points to this reality:

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives².

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.³

² Hebrews 12:6

³ 2 Corinthians 7:10

These are just two places where the Bible tells of God's grace being revealed through, at times, painful conviction over our sin. It can hurt to see the gravity of our sinful natures. But we should recognize that this is God working in our lives!

A deeper understanding of your sin combined with an aversion to its presence in our lives is good, even when it's uncomfortable and painful.

Now certainly there is a category for Gospel application for shame. We have plenty of verses that encourage this. Shame may come from lies that are untrue and demonic. We should pour truth and love over these using verses like Romans 8:1:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*⁴

But there is godly conviction in Christ Jesus. Sometimes the simple truth is you sinned sexually with your girlfriend or boyfriend and you should probably feel some shame.

God is on a mission to lead us into repentance and deeper relationship with Himself. We are going to feel shame as we experience conviction. Thank God!

As a Christian, you don't have to be so worried about eliminating your shame. They are not things to run from. They are things to listen to, to talk to God about, and to discern what He is trying to lead you into.

Specifically this means that when you're hearing someone talking about their shame, establish the fact that the shame is a secondary issue. It is not a sin to be repented of. It is a feeling, albeit an uncomfortable one, yet a feeling nonetheless. Help one another discern what's actually going on. What is God trying to lead you into here?

Jesus didn't die for you to not feel bad about your sin anymore. In His grace He doesn't abandon us to think that we're okay when we sin. It's His grace that allows us to be 'cut to the heart.' It's His grace that convicts us and leads us to deeper love for the King of Kings.

⁴ Romans 8:1