

Guilt and Shame – Daniel Han

Introduction

I talk to the parents quite often (I would like to do so). I love talking to them to get to know them and their kids. My aim is to hopefully inspire them to model the spiritual life through Jesus at home. But more than often (and to my surprise), I get responses like, “Only if they could be like you.” Or, “They could learn a lot from you.”

Actually, quite recently, I was talking with an older dad at my church to check in on how their college daughter was doing. This dad would reminisce about her days in high school, where she would attend church every weekend. Today, she is living a depressed life at home. What changed? I don't know. Out of frustration or maybe hopelessness, the dad uttered to me the same thing that many other parents have said to my face. In anguish, “I wish my daughter would be more like you.”

At first, I didn't know how to respond to that statement. “Should I feel good or bad about this?” I thought. On one hand, they were complimenting me. Am I supposed to say thanks? But as I looked into it more, I realized that they were heartbroken over the outcome of their child. They had raised her to be successful. That was their dream! I was a standard that they were comparing their own kids to. The more I think about it, the more I can understand how these parents must feel overwhelmingly shameful about who or where their kids are. They were just communicating their hearts to me. They yearn for a son or daughter who will bring them honor.

Tribalism, Guilt, and Shame

Tribalism is “the behavior and attitudes that stem from a strong loyalty to one's tribe or social group.” Tribalism is by no means new, and at first glance, it doesn't seem bad at all. Ever since the creation of this world, the descendants of Adam and Eve have had to gather enough resources for themselves in order to survive. Sometimes survival meant competing through war or fleeing. Lot and Abram split off peacefully from each other due to the lack of resources for both families to survive in the surrounding area. But the key factor in a tribe is loyalty. Without loyalty, no one survives. However, if there is loyalty, everyone will feel like they belong to each other. Tribalism fills the God-given need for human belonging. Unlike true fulfillment, tribalism has its shortcomings. In a tribe, thinking is made unnecessary because you already have the innate sense to do what the tribe wants you to do. You won't have to be taught because you already know what is best for the group. Doing otherwise is highly shameful and will grant the individual guilt. Doing what is best for the group would lead you to receiving and feeling honor.

Every Chinese parent compares their kid. Okay, maybe not every parent. But it felt like every parent did. Often during my childhood, I would overhear my mom talking with other moms about their kids while at church. Sometimes, I would hear other moms compliment me. That felt great and really gratifying! Other times, I would hear my mom complain about me. That sucked a lot and always hurt the most. I promised myself that even though I did bad things, I would do more good things because I wanted to be loved by my mom. I wanted to do honorable things to cover up the bad in my life. As an older brother, I did my best to never fight with my younger brother. I

worked my hardest at getting all A's in school. I put in my best effort to go to church and be a good Christian (if that even exists). If it was honorable and would make me worthy of praise,

you could find me doing it without hesitation. The fear of bringing shame and guilt to myself motivated me to try harder. This is the typical human response to the human experience of shame and guilt.

If we live a life motivated by guilt and shame, it will bleed into other areas of our lives. Eventually, it will bleed into our spiritual lives. Contrary to common thought, the typical response to guilt and shame is not a healthy way to approach the spiritual life.

- Typical Response #1: A spiritual life motivated by shame will lead us to cover up.
- Typical Response #2: A spiritual life motivated by guilt will lead us to hide in fear.

A spiritual life motivated by shame will lead us to cover up

Growing up at church, a common phrase that I heard was, “Nobody is perfect, but we try our best to be like Jesus.” However, sinning did not feel good. It actually made me feel like a failure. It was shameful. “I should be growing,” I thought. However, constantly struggling with the same sins would leave me feeling hopeless. I even felt frustrated with myself. Why couldn’t I break free and be who Jesus wants me to be?

Adam and Eve knew they had sinned after they ate the fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil, which God had told them not to do. In their shamefulness, they tried to cover themselves with leaves. Genesis 3:7 says, *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.* Chapter 2 shows that they were not ashamed of being naked before they ate the fruit. When sin came into the world, everything changed. Every individual who came after Adam, the father of all humanity, shares a common inclination due to the transmission of the original sin. When we become aware of our sinful nature in the presence of a divine being, our feelings of shame will compel us to conceal our wrongdoings. Adam and Eve tried to put together a covering out of leaves, but it was an inadequate covering for their disturbing nakedness.

In my own life, I found myself resorting to more effort to deal with my shame and my spiritual failure. I tried to outdo the bad in my life with the good. I became passionate about hating my sin (praying on my knees to be more sincere about my confession), and I would promise myself and God to try my hardest by maximizing all my effort, vowing to God to never make the same mistake again. However, it would never work. I would fall into those same sins and, as a result, become more frustrated due to feeling like nothing was ever happening.

A spiritual life motivated by guilt will lead us to hide in fear.

During my youth, I struggled to reconcile the dichotomy between being a sinner and being saved from sin. Despite all the good Christian things I was doing, I felt like a failure across the board. This failure stemmed from the remorse of being a Christian who consistently grappled with wrongdoing and an evident lack of spiritual growth.

Listening to a sermon about “Who you are at home vs. Who you are in public” would lead me to fear that if anyone knew who I really was, then they wouldn’t want to be with me any longer. I always felt so guilty for my wrongdoings before God. I was not where I was supposed to be. I had been a Christian for 10+ years and yet I was still struggling to develop a vibrant prayer life like some of my mentors have talked to me about. As a result of guilt, I would practice hiding (Just like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3). Since the fall, we have shared the same inclination as Adam & Eve: to hide as a result of guilt. Just like the first humans who concealed themselves due to guilt, we also conceal our most profound and troubling wrongdoings, keeping them hidden in darkness because we fear that they would not be accepted if exposed. A spiritual life

driven by guilt often results in suppressing our true selves and a reluctance to acknowledge our own shortcomings as we attempt to avoid the discomfort of feeling guilty or like a failure.

Great Temptation

This presents a significant temptation for a Christian. I contend that individuals residing in cultures that prioritize tribalism and place a premium on guilt and shame—such as the eastern cultures of the world—are confronted with an even more formidable temptation.

Performing good deeds to conceal sin or obscure the very issues that a Christian struggles with is the default way of our hidden heart. Because the Christian has lived a spiritual life relying on his own strength rather than the strength of the Holy Spirit, it is not surprising that spiritual burnout will result if this cycle continues. It could be argued that despite being saved, a significant number of young Christians disengage from the church for this reason: they have not yet had a genuine encounter with the Holy Spirit. Attempting to live the spiritual life as Christians by means of discipline and effort will inevitably cause our service and good deeds to wilt and wither.

Shame and Guilt can only be healed in Christ

John Coe says this: “No amount of spiritual effort on their part can ever relieve them of their burden of shame and guilt in the Christian life except Christ. No amount of effort in spiritual formation or the doing of the spiritual disciplines can grow them or fix them.”

In other words, it means that, within the Christian perspective, individuals cannot overcome feelings of shame and guilt through their own spiritual work or practices. Only through Christ can they be released from these burdens. Personal efforts in spiritual development or engagement in spiritual disciplines are not sufficient to resolve or heal the inner heart.

Paul writes in Galatians 3:1–3,

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

This passage does not refer to a salvation based on works, for we are saved by faith, and no one can deny that. However, I would argue that Paul is referring to our sanctification. The challenge he seems to be referring to is this: even though we accept that salvation (being justified) comes through grace via faith, we often try to achieve sanctification (the ongoing process of becoming righteous) through our own actions.

The reality is that only Jesus can deal with our shame and guilt. Because of our human sinfulness, we are actually all incapable of dealing with our own sin. Sin will always lead us to shame and guilt. Because of the shame and guilt, the temptation will be to do whatever it takes to deal with sin on our own. It's when we realize that no amount of effort can relieve us of the burden of shame or guilt—only Christ—that we can rest in the freedom of wrestling with not what but who—Jesus Christ. The Christian life is not about obedience and effort; it is about obedience to an opening of our hearts to a relationship in Christ.

What can we do to deal with guilt and shame?

As a result, in our prayers, it's important to embrace the complete justification given by God and the astounding reality that I am completely forgiven and accepted by God. This acceptance is

due to the righteousness of Christ earned on our behalf and attributed to us, rather than our own actions. Without being raised with this understanding, we rarely find similar concepts in our experiences that would lead us to such beliefs. Almost everything in my culture and my own sense of self tells me that my worth is tied to my actions. However, the essence of Christ's life of obedience is to transfer his deserved righteousness to me so that, united with Christ, I am fully accepted by God the Father.

The true source of our change is the living Spirit within us, not our own efforts. While our deeds collaborate and engage with the Spirit, it is the Spirit itself that drives change. Echoing the words of Jesus, I'm incapable of transforming myself without being connected to the Spirit's presence within me (as referenced in John 15:5). Therefore, our transformation is essentially God's Spirit, enabling us to embrace more fully the significance of Christ's sacrifice and the only declaration of our righteousness through His love.

As parents, model our Father's unconditional love.

Parenting is hard, and it is by no means easy. But I encourage you to model the Father's love for your child or youth. Studies have shown that children and youth learn and grasp the idea of God as Father through the lens of who their parents are. In my life, my distant father was a hindrance to understanding God's love for me. My mom was a catalyst. Therefore, ask yourself:

- a) How can you, as a parent, manage your discomfort when your child does something wrong, so that you can provide discipline without becoming condemning or punitive, and maintain a close relationship instead of distancing yourself?
- b) When your child misbehaves, how can you assist them in understanding and learning from their actions within an environment of love and discipline, rather than encouraging them to simply hide their missteps by superficially acting well?

Conclusion

The vast majority of the parents I talk to do not know my past. I don't blame them. The truth is, I lived a life consumed by guilt and shame that infused into my spiritual life. Because of my attempts to deal with my own shame and guilt, I have resorted to overcoming my feelings of shame and guilt through my own spiritual work or practices. I dropped out of high school, cut myself off from church out of nowhere, and suffered from severe depression. I lived days where I felt that there was an unliftable burden on my shoulders. Only through Christ did I slowly begin a spiritual life where my burdens were being placed on his shoulders. I still have a long way to go, not out of obedience but out of an ever greater understanding of the depth of the love that Christ has for me and the power of the Spirit.

This writing is based on the teaching of John Coe: Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation

For many days, I would kneel by my bedside in intense regretful prayer. "I hate my sin; Jesus change me," would be a prayer I daily muttered. That never changed me. I woke up early to read the Bible. That never changed me. I served in every ministry possible and evangelized enthusiastically. That never changed me, either.

All my life, I have worked hard to overcome. I believed that my sins would be no different. "I should be able to overcome this," I thought. So with every sense of guilt and shame came a

deeper determination to be a good Christian. “This was good!” I thought. Isn't it the act of a Christian's commitment and obedience to follow Jesus and become more like him?

If I needed to suppress my true emotions and ignore how inadequate I am, I would do it. Slowly but surely, life became a constant and restless game of acting. Every interaction I had, in person or online, was to give off the perception I wanted others to have of me. And become an expert actor, I did. You could've even nominated me to win an Oscar. The fake me was seemingly vibrant and joyful. The real me was broken, depressed, and shameful. And it was all a secret.

But the truth is, not one of us is perfect. We are unlovable human beings. There is no good in any of us. Not even one tiny bit. Because Jesus is just, “we were by nature deserving of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3).

內疚與羞恥

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引言

我很喜歡與教會中的父母交談，讓我可以了解他們和他們的孩子。

我的目的是希望激勵他們靠着耶穌塑造一個屬靈的家庭。

但我得到的回應常常令我驚訝，因為他們往往的回應是：「只要他

們能夠更像你便好了。」又或者，「希望他們可以從你身上學習更多。」

事實上，最近，我在教會與一位年長的父親交談，想了解他們上大學的女兒近況。這位父親卻回憶起她在高中的日子，那時她每個週末都會去教會。如今，她在家過著很鬱悶的生活，我不知道是什麼改變了她，出於沮喪或絕望，她父親對我說出許多其他父母說過同樣的話。他痛苦地說：「我希望我的女兒變得更像你。」

起初，我不知道該如何回應這句話。我對此應該感到高興還是難過？

一方面，他們在稱讚我，我該說謝謝嗎？但當我進一步了解後，我發覺他們對孩子的成長感到心碎，他們的夢想是培養孩子走向成功，我成為他們的標準來衡量自己的孩子，當我越深思就越能理解這些，父母一定會對自己的孩子感到極度羞恥。他們向我傳達他們的心聲，他們渴望有一個能帶給他們榮譽的兒子或女兒。

部落主義 (Tribalism)

什麼是部落主義？部落主義是“源於對部落、家族或社團強烈忠誠的信念、行為和態度”

部落主義絕不是新鮮事，乍一看，它似乎一點也不壞。自創世以來，亞當和夏娃的後裔必須為自己爭取足夠資源，以求生存。有時生存意味著透過戰爭進行競爭或以逃跑尋求安逸。

由於缺乏資源，羅得和亞伯蘭和平分手，兩個家庭分別在周邊地區生存，但部落主義的關鍵因素是忠誠，沒有忠誠，無人能倖存。但是，如果有忠誠，每個人都會覺得自己屬於彼此。

部落主義滿足了上帝賦予人類歸屬感的需要。不過與真正的滿足仍然有所不同。

部落主義也有它的缺點。在部落或所屬羣體裡，思考是不必要的，因為你已經擁有了與生俱來的意願去做所屬部落希望你做的事情。你不需要被教導，因為你已經知道什麼對家族（部落）來說是最好的。反之則是非常可恥，並且會導致個人的罪惡感。做對家族（部落）有利的事情會讓你獲得並感受到光榮。

每個華人父母都會與別人比較自己的孩子。好吧，也許不是每個父母，但感覺就像每一個父母都在比較。在我的童年時期，我常常會無意中聽到我媽媽和其他媽媽在教會談論他們的孩子。有時，我會聽到其他媽媽稱讚我，我感覺棒極了真是令人興奮！有時，我會聽到媽媽抱怨我，我感覺很糟糕，而且總是讓我受傷最深。我向自己承諾，即使我做了壞事，我便需要做更多好事，因為我想被媽媽愛；我想做一些光榮的事來掩蓋彌補我生活中的壞事。身為哥哥，我儘量不跟弟弟打架，我會盡力在學校取得全A成績。我盡最大努力去教會並成為一名“好基督徒”。任何事情若是光榮的並且能讓我得到讚揚的話，我會毫不猶豫地去做。因為害怕帶給自己羞恥和內疚，故此我常激勵自己要更加努力。這是人類對羞恥和罪疚感經驗的典型反應。

羞恥和內疚

如果我們的生活充滿罪惡感和羞恥感，它就會滲透到我們生活的其他領域。最終，它會滲透到我們的精神及屬靈生活。恰好與通常的想法相反，內疚及羞恥的典型反應並不會建立健康的屬靈生活。因為：

- 典型回應1：受羞恥驅使的屬靈生活會導致我們掩蓋自己的錯失。
- 典型回應2：由罪惡感驅動的屬靈生活會讓我們隱藏在恐懼之中。

受羞恥驅使的屬靈生活會導致我們掩蓋錯失：

在教會長大的時候，我聽到的一句常見的話是：「沒有人是完美的，故我們要學習像耶穌一樣。」然而，犯罪的感覺並不好受。它讓我感覺自己很失敗。感覺可恥。

「我應該成長，」我想。然而卻不斷地與同樣的軟弱鬥爭，罪惡會讓我感到絕望。我甚至對自己感到沮喪。為什麼我無法打破壞習慣，從中得到自由並成為耶穌希望我成為的人？

亞當和夏娃吃了善惡樹上的果子之後就知道自己犯了罪，因為上帝已經告誡他們不要越過這界線。故此他們感覺羞恥並試圖用樹葉來隱蓋他們的羞恥。創世記三章七節說：「他们二人的眼睛就明亮了，才知道自己是赤身露体，便拿无花果树的叶子为自己编做裙子。」

在第 2 章記載

他們在吃果子之前並不以赤身露體為恥。當罪進入世界時一切都變了。全人類之父亞當之後的每一個後裔由於原罪的傳承而具有共同的傾向。

面對聖潔的神我們意識到自己的罪性，我們的羞恥感會迫使我們隱瞞我們的錯誤行為。亞當和夏娃試圖用樹葉作為遮蓋物，但是這不足以掩蓋赤裸令他們羞恥及不安。

在我自己的生活中，我發現自己需要付出更多的努力，來補賞我的羞恥和屬靈生活上的失敗。我試著用善行來戰勝生活中的敗壞，我憎恨我的罪，

（我常跪下祈禱，因為這樣我感覺讓我的懺悔更加真誠），願上帝幫助我盡最大的努力改善，向上帝發誓永遠不會做出同樣的錯失。但根本沒有果效。我仍然持續犯同樣的罪，結果，因為感覺在改變上原地踏步而變得更沮喪。

由內疚驅動的屬靈生活會讓我們隱藏在恐懼之中

在我年輕的時候，我努力平衡「我是罪人」與「我已經被救贖」之間的矛盾或二分法認知。

儘管我做了很多作為基督徒的好行為，但我感覺自己是個完全的失敗者。我的失敗感源自於身為一個基督徒，我悔恨自己雖然一直在努力奮鬥，但仍然行為不端，生命明顯缺乏屬靈的成長。

我聽過一篇關於「你在家裡是誰與你在公共場合是誰」的講道，讓我擔心如果有人知道我的真實面目，他們就不會願意與我在一起了。

在神面前我總是為自己的錯誤感到內疚。

我成為基督徒十多年了，但我仍在努力培養充滿活力的祈禱生活因為這是我的導師們對我的教導。

好像亞當和夏娃，由於內疚我會隱藏自己的過失。

人類在犯錯以後都會像亞當和夏娃有著相同的傾向，就是

因為內疚而躲藏。

由於內疚，我們隱藏了最深刻、最令人不安的錯誤行為，不承認這些罪行反而將它們保留在心底的憂暗

處，因為我擔心如果被暴露了，我將不會被接受。

內疚會驅我們壓抑真實的自我，並且不願意承認自己的污點。

當我試圖逃避內疚感或失敗帶來的錯折感時便會導致我不能以真我與神連接。

巨大的誘惑

這對基督徒來說是一個重大的誘惑。我認為居住在

側重部落主義並同時重視內疚和羞恥的文化中，例如東方文化，往往會使我們陷入這種可怕的誘惑中。

我們會用行善來掩飾罪或掩蓋基督徒所面臨的掙扎，

這常常是我們隱藏內心罪惡的預設方式。這是因為基督徒是靠著

自己的力量而不是聖靈的力量來過屬靈的生活。

如果這個循環持續下去，就會導致倦怠、燒耗狀態。儘管得救

了，很多年輕基督徒因以下的原因離開教會：他們沒有

與聖靈有過真正的相遇。我們試著模仿其他基督徒透過紀律和努力來過屬靈生活；

最終會導致我們因為服侍和善行疲憊，以致屬靈生命枯萎。

羞恥和內疚只能在基督裡得到治癒

約翰·科 (John Coe) 說：「他們無論付出多少的努力，都無法減輕他們的心中的罪疚和羞恥。

除了依靠基督以外，基督徒無論多努力，靠着屬靈的行為及操練都不能除掉心中的內疚和羞恥感。」

換句話說，這意味著，在基督教的信仰中，個人是無法

透過自己的靈性生活或操練消滅

心中的羞恥和內疚。唯有藉著基督及祂的救贖大能我們才能

擺脫罪疚和羞恥的重擔。個人在屬靈生命上的努力或

操練都不能解決或治癒內心這種的掙扎。

保羅在加拉太書 3章1-3 節寫道，

「

1 無知的加拉太人哪，耶穌基督釘十字架，已經活在你們眼前，誰又迷惑了你們呢？

2 我只要問你們這一點，你們受了聖靈，是因行律法呢？是因聽信福音呢？

3 你們既靠聖靈入門，如今還靠肉身成全麼？你們是這樣的無知麼？」

這段經文並不是指基於行為的救恩，因為我們是因信得救，而不是因行為而得救。

然而，我認為保羅同時也指出我們成聖也是憑信心依靠聖靈。

他似乎指的是這樣的挑戰：即使我們接受救贖（稱義）是憑藉信心接受神的恩典，但信主之後我們卻靠自己的努力、及行為來生活，而不是靠聖靈的能力。

事實上，只有耶穌才能處理我們的羞恥和罪惡感。因為我們人類

其實都沒有能力處理自己的罪。罪總是會引導我們走向

羞恥和內疚。由於羞恥和內疚，人們會不擇手段

靠我們自己的力量來對付罪。當我們意識到再多的努力也無法減輕我們

羞恥或內疚的重擔及痛苦時，我們需要接受是唯有基督能使我們在與罪的掙扎能得到真正的自由和平安。基督徒的生活並不在於服從和努力，而是在於信心。

讓我們敞開心扉以信建立與基督的永恆關係。

我們可以做些什麼來解決內疚和羞恥感？

我們祇需要藉著禱告，憑信接受神完全的饒恕使我們稱義（我們的罪過不再被記念）是很重要的。

令人震驚的事實是我們完全被上帝完全寬恕和接受。我們的義是因為耶穌的義覆蓋我，而不是我們用好行為賺取的義。

為人父母要效法天父無條件的愛

養育孩子充滿挑戰，絕非易事。但為了您的孩子或青少年的成長，我鼓勵你們效法天父的愛。研究表明，兒童和青少對神的認知乃建立在他們對父母的認知及經驗。在我的生命中，我疏離的父親阻礙我理解神對我的愛。但我媽媽卻是個催化劑。因此，請反問自己：

a) 身為父母，當您的孩子做錯事時，您如何處理您自己羞恥的不安情緒，這個認知會幫助您教導孩子而不祇是譴責或懲罰，在訓導中仍然與孩子保持親密關係而不是變得疏離。

b) 當您的孩子行為不端時，您如何在愛中幫助他們理解自己的錯並從中改過。
而不是鼓勵他們只是透過表面上的良好行為來掩飾自己的失誤？

結論

與我交談的絕大多數父母都不了解我的過去。我不怪他們。事實是，我過往

過著充滿罪惡感和羞恥感的生活，這些都融入了我的屬靈生活。

我試著透過在教會的服侍及屬靈操練來克服自己的羞恥感和罪惡感。

但我高中時退學了，我突然離開了教會，並患上了嚴重的抑鬱症。在過往的日子我感覺自己的肩上有一個難以卸下的重擔。只有透過基督我才慢慢開始一種自由的屬靈生活，我嘗試把我的重擔都放在耶穌的肩上，而不是靠自己繼續承擔這重擔。我知道我成長的路還是很長遠。

我願意我的成長不是出於無奈的服從，以此來克服罪疚及羞恥感，而是出於對神無條件的愛的深入體會及回應。