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**“O NATION THAT HAS NO SHAME”**

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**INTRODUCTION – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Book of Zephaniah, which is only three chapters in length, looks toward the punishment of all sinful nations, including Judah. Written by the Prophet Zephaniah of which we know little about. Actually, chapter one, verse one tells all we really know about the prophet. His ancestry is traced back four generations to a man named Hezekiah. Various scholars think Hezekiah was the king of Judah by that name who reigned in the late eighth century during the ministry of Isaiah (II Kings 18-20). If so, Zephaniah would have belonged to the royal line. That would perhaps explain why he did not condemn the king in Zephaniah 1:8 and 3:3-5 where he blames most of Judah's upper classes for their sins. Other scholars note that the name Hezekiah was quite common and that the ancestor is not identified as king. Further, Zephaniah's father was named Cushi, which could mean “Cushite” or “Ethiopian.” They suggest that Zephaniah's ancestry was traced four generations to demonstrate that he was indeed an Israelite.

The date of Zephaniah, according to Zephaniah 1:1 occurred during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.). Most scholars date the book between 630 and 621. In 621 King Josiah instituted a sweeping reformation of worship in Judah (II Kings 22:3-23:25), which officially abolished the worship of Baal and the stars mentioned in Zephaniah 1:4-6. The contents of the Book of Zephaniah looked toward a future punishment. In Zephaniah 1:2-6 he predicted punishment upon the whole world, including Jerusalem while Zephaniah 1:17-18 depict the inability of sinful humanity to escape God's punishment.

The American Standard Version of 1901 supplies us with the text for our lesson where we read, “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation that hath no shame;” Zephaniah 2:1.

### **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO OUR SENSE OF SHAME?**

Whatever happened to the sense of shame? Seldom do we hear the phrase, “shame on you” anymore. Not all that long ago, it was heard often. But now it is different. We live in a “politically correct” world which bends over backwards to eliminate the feeling of shame. Perhaps the reason for this is that sin and shame are linked together, and as our society seeks to do away with any concept of sin, any shame that would be associated with it would also be done away with. When one looks at Genesis 2:25 they see that both Adam and Eve were naked prior to their disregard of the will of God. We also note that they, although naked, were not ashamed. However, after their sin, “they knew (realized, NIV) they were naked; ... (Gen. 3:7). Why was that? Because shame was introduced into the world as their consciences were activated as they went against what they had been told by God. This act of disobedience, and the results that followed, caused them to be disgraced before God.

### **WHAT HAS CAUSED US TO LOSE OUR SENSE OF SHAME?**

As we look around us we are confronted with the questions, what happened to and where did shame go? It cannot be denied, we’ve lost the ability to feel shame because we’ve abandoned the narrow way (Mt. 7:13-14), and replaced it with a false sense of “tolerance.” What has happened is “tolerance” has become the idol of our age in the lives of so many people. Someone has correctly stated that shame is the “last virtue of a decadent society.” Such, of course, is not something that is new and only applicable to our present society. The prophet Jeremiah spoke in his day about those who undermined the work of the true prophets, preaching “Peace, peace,

where there is no peace.” (Jere. 6:14; 8:11). It has been correctly stated that “it is false grace to preserve peace at the expense of truth.” How we need to learn that lesson today, both in the world and the church, and if we fail to do so we should expect God to take note of our failure (I Cor. 5:10).

The idea of universal tolerance, which is nothing more than the acceptance of any style of behavior or belief without judgment, is permeating our society. Of a recent past President of the United States it has been said that when speaking to a group of homosexuals he is reported to have said: “We need to broaden our imagination.” In other words, we need to “broaden” the narrow way to accept that which God has not accepted on matters pertaining to homosexuality. However, the truth of the matter is, God’s word cannot be “broadened” by man (John 12:48). When it comes to the Bible, God has said it, and that settles it whether or not I agree with what has been said! For example, what God has said on homosexuality remains the way in which He looks at it to the present hour. Starting with Genesis 1:27 where “...God created he him; male and female created he them” (note it was Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve), to the sin of sodomy in Genesis 19, on to the principles found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and to the words of Paul in Romans 1:26-27 and I Corinthians 6:9, one has to have help to miss the point God has made. Homosexuality is sin, and those who engage in such, or those who support such (Rom. 1:32), should be ashamed of their sin against God, and no manner of “broadening our imagination” will change this!

The fact of the matter is truth by definition is narrow. Perhaps we have all seen or heard the old sermons on the subject: H<sub>2</sub>O is water: H<sub>3</sub>O can’t be water; N<sub>2</sub>O can’t be water. Or, one and one is two: one and two can’t be two; two and two can’t be two. No matter how you look at it, there is absolute truth in these matters and there is absolute truth in what God has revealed within His

word (John 8:32; 17:17). The reason this can be said is truth is narrow (John 14:6). It has always been, and will always be. In consideration of truth we must understand that it cannot contain error. But, as our world moves further and further away from the idea of absolute truth, as revealed within the pages of the Bible, the devil takes advantage. There can be no denial of the fact that the Apostle Peter knew exactly of that which he wrote in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Something that is known to be 99% error and 1% truth will usually be immediately identified as error. The problem is if something is 1% error, and 99% truth, you still have error, but it is often not recognized as such. How many of us would gladly accept a can of Coke which was 99% Coke and 1% poison? I am sure none. But when it comes to the acceptance of truth tainted with error we lay reasonableness aside. Is this not what we see with the Galatians in Galatians 1:6-9? Note, they had “perverted” the truth. They were not accused of totally abandoning the truth, but of the perversion of it. It must be understood that truth is always 100%. Notice what John had to say in I John 2:21, “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, **and that no lie is of the truth.**” (emp. Mine, r.w.s.).

If we were to simply put it as God would have us, we are not to be “tolerant” as the world defines the word. Of course we are to, and we must let others, “live and let live” when it comes to our earthly citizenship. There is not anything else we can do. We understand that we are “in the world” (John 17:11), but we must also understand that we dare not be “of the world” (John 17:16). The fact of the matter is intolerance of evil and untruth does not mean physical war: “for the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal...” (II Cor. 10:4). But we must take a stand against evil wherever such is found regardless of what others may say. It has become unpopular with

those of our society to stand where God would have us to stand. But the choice is ours, are we to be unpopular with the world or with God (Mt. 6:33)?

Of course, as you make the proper choice here you can expect to hear judgmental statements such as, “you’re being judgmental” overlooking the fact that this is the “pot calling the kettle black.” As we are well aware, self-righteous judgment is always wrong (Mt. 7:1-5). However, to hold up the Bible and indicate that everyone must obey the standard set forth therein, while also applying the same truth to your self, is not being judgmental in the way forbidden by Scripture. Rather, it is the passing on of what God says to all mankind. If, while visiting a doctor, he indicated that you were several pounds overweight, he is not being incorrectly “judgmental”; he is simply reporting what the facts indicate to be the case. He, essentially, is telling you that you have violated the standard of what the proper weight range for someone your gender, bone structure, and height is, and all the name calling in the world will not change that fact.

### **SHAME FOR WRONGFUL ACTS A TEST OF CHARACTER**

As we give careful consideration to the words of the Bible we see that the heartfelt feeling of shame for wrongful acts serves as a test of character. Recall how the apostle Paul, with “all good conscience,” relative to his actions prior to his conversion (Acts 23:1), still looked back in shame on his former deeds, viewing himself as the “chief of sinners” (I Tim. 1:15). The prophet Isaiah, when called by God, did not only blast the awful society in which he lived, but included himself when he said, “...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). How important it is for us to understand that if we are unable to see the shame in our own lives it does us no good to see it in the lives of others.

But going beyond that, cognizance of our own sin does not blind us to the transgressions of

others. Ezra's attitude is helpful to us in making us aware of what is correct in this area as seen in Ezra 9:6, "And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens". As we consider our actions and words we must constantly evaluate them in light of God's word. The Psalmist, in Psalm 15:4a, indicates that those who abide in God's house are those in whose eyes a vile person is despised, and who honor those who fear the Lord. In other words, as faithful children of God we must love the things God loves and hate what He hates. Solomon issued the following warning in Proverbs 17:15, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD." Recall the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 5:20 "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, stated that they were to "...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:11). How much more plain does it need to be made before we, as a nation, or as the church, get the point?

### **THE NEED FOR A SENSE OF SHAME**

It is important for us to understand that without a sense of shame, we have no prospect of salvation. The reason for this is that without such we have no cognizance of our sin in our lives, and without a sense of shame, we cannot be holy, and without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). As we ponder this we easily see the practical principles that are applicable to us today. In our attempt to understand the importance of shame we examine various aspects of life enquiring about the ability to feel shame, or the inability to feel such, as is seen in the following examples.

How about in how we dress? When was the last time you heard a sister in Christ comment, "I

couldn't wear that short skirt, I'd be ashamed"? Is not the issue of modesty a matter of which shame could and should be involved? Consider the words of Paul to Timothy in I Timothy 2:9a, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel..." What of Christian men who appear in public dressed in apparel more like the apparel of the worldly minded than that of one who seeks in every aspect of life to display a sense of holiness? Or is it just women who are to dress in such a way that professes "godliness" or "holiness"? Do not the words of Peter have any meaning to us today as we think of the concept of our developing a holiness similar to that of God? Recall with me these instructions, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (i.e. manner of life, R.W.S.); Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Pet. 1:15-16).

What about the way we speak? When was the last time you heard someone say something like, "If I uttered the Lord's name in a profane way, or used that kind of language, I'd be so ashamed"? In every media existent today we hear, read, or see the Lord's name used in a way other than that which would bring honor to Him. Recall the words of Paul in Romans 15:4 wherein he indicated that those things "written afore time were written for our learning" as we consider the command found in Leviticus 18:21, "...neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God:..." The word "profane" has to do with turning that which is holy into that which is common. In the way the name of God is thrown around today, it is evident that it is used more frequently in this form than any other. His name has been "trodden" under the foot of man wherein all reverence has been taken away.

We live in a world that is being greatly influenced by what we watch, listen to and read. Recall, if you can, the last time you heard someone say something like, "I'd be so ashamed to support the kind of vulgarity, profanity and violence that is part of our daily television or movie

viewing.” The use of profanity is common today. We cannot turn on our televisions without hearing the use of such on a regular basis. As a matter of fact, one web site indicated that “Profane language is used once every six minutes on network TV shows, every two minutes on premium cable shows, and every three minutes in major motion pictures...”<sup>1</sup> It has become so that even radio commercials are “peppered” with such language in order to give a sense of “reality of life” to them. When it comes to the use of profanity, perhaps it can best be said as I once heard years ago, “The use of profanity is an inept mind trying to express itself.”

Believe it or not, violence is to be found in some of the most unlikely television programs. Researchers have reported that “some of the most violent television shows available for all viewers are America’s Funniest Home Videos, Tom and Jerry, Three Stooges, and Road Runner.”<sup>2</sup> As we consider the consensus of those who have studied this matter it is clear, “The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children.”<sup>3</sup> This is according a statement presented to Congress in 2002. Another study revealed that “On average, young children: Watch TV for 2 to 4 hours per day. Watch 4,000 hours of TV before they enter kindergarten. Are exposed to 20 to 25 acts of violence per hour on Saturday morning TV programs intended for children.”<sup>4</sup> Still yet another has indicated that “By the time the average child is eighteen years old, they will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders.”<sup>5</sup>

What about the music our young people are listening to? One author stated, “Violence in today's music encourages violent behavior. That's an opinion. But you might be surprised to learn whose opinion it is. In a survey of teenagers, 54 percent said that the violence portrayed in music and on TV could lead to violence in life.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, music and sex are a powerful combo. “Teenagers



who listen to songs with raunchy lyrics start having sex earlier than those who listen to other types of music, according to a new study in the US. Young people who listen to music with ‘sexually degrading’ lyrics that describe women as sex objects and portray men as ‘sex-driven studs’ were almost twice as likely to start being sexually active within the next two years than teens who listened to little or no sexually degrading music, according to a study by the Rand Corporation, a Pittsburgh-based thinktank.”<sup>7</sup>

Pornography has become a multi-billion dollar a year industry. Consider the following,

“It is estimated that pornography has grown to a 13 Billion Dollar Industry

Every day up to 30 million people log on to a pornographic web site

The combined circulation of Playboy and Penthouse exceeds that of Time and Newsweek

60% of all web sites are pornographic

The average age at which a male first sees a pornographic magazine is 11 years old.”<sup>8</sup>

The same study just cited that was conducted among church of Christ elders, deacons and preachers revealed the following:

“41% of all men say they either strongly agree or agree with the statement ‘I believe Internet pornography to be one of the biggest problems facing my congregation’, compared with 29% of women who say the same

84% of men have viewed some type of pornography, 51% of women have viewed some type of pornography,

57% of men have intentionally viewed Internet pornography, 15% of women have intentionally viewed Internet pornography

45% of all men say they either strongly agree or agree with the statement ‘I have struggled with Internet pornography as a temptation’ while only 6% of all women say

this

30% of all men have viewed Internet pornography on more than 25 occasions; only 2% of all women have done the same

79% of the men who have ever intentionally viewed Internet pornography even once say that it is now a temptation for them

73% of all men 19-29 indicate they struggle with Internet pornography as a temptation Compared with 9% of men 60+.”<sup>9</sup>

With all of this information before us, where is our national shame, not alone the shame that should be found within the Body of Christ? Clearly we can see there appears to be no boundaries in what is made available for public consumption via mass communication. As we consider the plight of pornography there is no way that we could conclude that it contributes to the purity that the child of God is to have. Think of Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

Moving on, where is the shame over abortion that should be felt in our world today? As far as the U.S. is concerned, ***January 22, 1973 should go down in infamy as the darkest date in***

***American history***, overshadowing both December 7, 1943 and September 11, 2001 combined.

On that day, so many years ago, the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, pronounced a death sentence up the approximate 50,000,000 infants that have been murdered at the hands of the abortionists since that date. How is it that even within the church we have those who have to be convinced, if they will be convinced, that the murder of the innocent is blatantly in contradiction to the will of God? Recall with me the words of the “wise man” penned so many

years ago, “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood...” Proverbs 6:16-17. How could it possibly be that a more “innocent blood” could be found than that which is “shed” by the thousands on a daily basis?

The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform reported from The Alan Guttmacher Institute the following revealing information:

**“WORLDWIDE**

**Number of abortions per year:** Approximately 46 Million

**Number of abortions per day:** Approximately 126,000

**Where abortions occur:** 78% of all abortions are obtained in developing countries and 22% occur in developed countries.

**Abortion averages:** Worldwide, the lifetime average is about 1 abortion per woman.” <sup>10</sup>

How can it be that something of this nature happens at the rate of 126,000 per day and we show little or no shame?

The statistics relative to marriage and divorce are staggering, yet no shame is seen in those who treat the “sanctity” of marriage as if it never existed. The National Center for Health Statistics Reports for the past several years continue to reflect nearly one divorce for every two marriages in the US. Carefully consider the statistics below:

“Number of marriages: 2,230,000

Marriage rate: 7.5 per 1,000 total population

Divorce rate: 3.6 per 1,000 population (46 reporting States and D.C.)” <sup>11</sup>

Regardless of the feelings of God on divorce, as seen in the words of Malachi 2:16, “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away...” we continue to see the

“Hollywood style” treatment of God’s first ordained institution (Gen. 2:24-25). What is even more alarming is a recent Barna Group Update entitled “Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians”<sup>12</sup> highlighted the problem before us, “...the likelihood of married adults getting divorced is identical among born again Christians and those who are not born again. The study also cited attitudinal data showing that most Americans reject the notion that divorce is a sin.” Well, no wonder we are faced with the problems that we are if this information is true.

The sanctity of marriage has fallen to the point where one recent article indicated that in the US there are now more unwed people living together than those who are married. Notice what was said, “The recent report of a Census Bureau survey found that married-couple households in the U.S. are now outnumbered. A hair more than half — 50.3 percent — of households are headed by unmarried people, and 31.7 percent of American children are being raised in unmarried homes.”<sup>13</sup> Can you believe that?

## **CONCLUSION**

As a nation, without a sense of shame, we are unlikely to improve in our relationship to God. Rather than drawing “nigh unto him” (Jas. 4:8), we are finding ourselves further from the kind of relationship that we should have. We have become so desensitized that our consciences have become seared, as with a hot iron (I Tim. 4:2). Paul, to the church at Ephesus, warned of those who, being “past feeling,” gave themselves over to lewdness (Eph. 4:19). Such is the case with America today. If things are to change, we must not stop at feelings of shame, but we must seek for forgiveness and determine to improve. We can live lives of honor and integrity as the Psalmist said in Psalm 119:1-6, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They

also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.”

## FOOTNOTES

1. Center for Media and Public Affairs, as quoted by the PSV Ratings,  
[http://www.psvratings.com/issue\\_children.html](http://www.psvratings.com/issue_children.html)
2. Media Violence Paper (<http://louisville.edu/~adcave01/mediaviolence.html>)  
quoting from Potter, James W., *The 11 Myths of Media Violence*, California:  
Sage, 2003, p. 85
3. [http://www.lionlamb.org/media\\_violence.htm](http://www.lionlamb.org/media_violence.htm)
4. <http://actagainstviolence.apa.org/mediaviolence/index.html>
5. <http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdfs/ChildrenMedia.pdf>
6. [http://www.preferredconsumer.com/teen/articles/violence\\_in\\_music.html](http://www.preferredconsumer.com/teen/articles/violence_in_music.html)
7. [http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1839476,00.html#article\\_continue](http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1839476,00.html#article_continue)
8. Bentley, John, *The Problem of Internet Pornography*, p. 2
9. *ibid.*, pp. 5, 6, 10, 13
10. <http://www.cbrinfo.org/Resources/fastfacts.html>
11. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm>
12. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>
13. <http://msn.match.com/msn/article.aspx?articleid=7279>