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## Despising the Shame

by David McCarthy

Grammar isn't exactly a favorite subject of most school children. I, for one, had to grind my way through the subject. Today I'm glad I did. If you are to understand a piece of writing, it's important to have at least a rudimentary understanding of grammar. For instance, consider these words by Jesus.

*“And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. **For** whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. **For** what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? **For** what will a man give in exchange for his soul? **For** whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels”* (Mark 8:34-38; emphasis added).

It's easy to see these verses as a collection of unrelated thoughts, but they aren't. To fully comprehend them, you must understand the role of the word, “for.” It can be used as a *preposition* or a *conjunction* (a word that joins together two words or thoughts). When it's used at the beginning of a sentence as a *coordinating conjunction*, its function is to introduce the reason for the preceding phrase. Notice that out of the five verses above, the last four begin with “for.” Thus, in this passage, the last verse defines the one before it; that one defines the verse before it; and so on, until we get to the first verse. That means the last verse is the underlying explanation for the entire passage. As the last verse is about shame, the whole passage fundamentally addresses shame. This simple realization changes the way most of us have historically understood this passage. Here is how it connects together.

The world is of the evil one (1 John 5:19), has no interest in Jesus, no place for Him, and will mock those who are serious about Him. The world seeks to make all who love Jesus ashamed of their faith. You can secretly believe in Him, but if you try to take a public stand for Him, the world will ridicule you. Shame is a great disincentive. We will do almost anything to avoid it. Our natural tendency is to do all we can to gain the world's acceptance. That is why Jesus asks, “*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?*” Jesus isn't speaking here of gaining the riches of the world (even though that has its own problems), but of trying to gain the respect, honor, and acceptance of the world. Without realizing it, we can sell out all we love and value just to fit in, to be accepted. That is the gaining of the world He is talking about.

And this is what Jesus means by “saving our life and thereby losing it.” We try to preserve our life by avoiding shame in the world, and end up losing it. We lose what we were created for, what gives our life true purpose and meaning. Selling out to the world in order to fit in will emotionally and spiritually cripple us. It was the fear of shame and rejection that drove Peter to

deny Jesus. In that moment, he even found a lowly servant girl intimidating. As Peter was denying Jesus, the two were separated by a courtyard. As Jesus turned and looked toward Peter, he suddenly realized what he had done. He was no longer ashamed of Jesus—he was now utterly ashamed of himself; he went away and wept bitterly (to read account, see Luke 22:54-62).

The way to deal with shame is found at the beginning of the passage. Deny your “self” (self-life). Self wants to be preserved, wants to be loved by the world, wants to be well thought of and accepted. Self alone is sensitive to the world’s label of shame. Do away with self, and sensitivity to the world’s use of shame goes with it. Jesus uses here an intensified version of “deny;” it means to “deny utterly.” The root of the word simply means to say, “No.” To be delivered from self begins with saying no to it; to what it wants, what it wants to be, and how it wants to be seen. The way to become insensitive to the world and what it loves, the way to keep from being undone by shame is to deny your self-life and all it values. Refuse it, reject it, say, “No” to it. Saying “no” forcefully out loud is particularly effective. Self loves the world and the things of the world and would rob you of the love of the Father (1 John 2:15-17). Self seeks its own glory, especially in the world’s eyes. But God not only nailed our sins to the cross, He put our self-life there, too (Rom. 6:6). That old Adamic nature was crucified. To deny it is to refuse to let it come down off the cross. Let us keep it there where it belongs.

Jesus rejected the world’s shame: “...*who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*” (Heb. 12:2). Satan has created a world system which heaps shame on the cross, for the cross is the undoing of his kingdom. Jesus despised the shame, for He knew the devil’s objective in it. If we see what the devil is trying to do to us, we’ll despise it, too.

In Mark 8:38, Jesus gives us an additional incentive for not being manipulated by the world’s shame; if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us at His coming. The degree to which we love Him, or the world, will determine just how much this possibility bothers us. The more we get to know Him and love Him, the more that statement alone will drive us to deny our self-life.

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