

## Guilt vs Shame

[Brene Brown says](#) that the way we get connection (that sense of love and belonging) is vulnerability. The problem with that is you have to show people who you really are. And the problem with that is so very many of us are ashamed of who we are. (Clarification: Brown helpfully points out that shame is different from guilt. Guilt is about behavior: “I made a mistake.” Shame is about self: “I *am* a mistake.”) Shame drives our fear of ever being vulnerable—if people see me, they will reject me. So we hide deeper and deeper, or work harder at numbing ourselves. It’s what I call the “everything’s fine” two-step. This is true in our relationships with people, and it’s also true in our relationship with God. We know that God has forgiven us (dealt with our guilt through the work of Christ on the cross—something we talk about a lot on this blog), but we don’t really believe he likes us (that’s the shame talking: “You are bad and unloveable.”) So we hide from him too (evidenced, for example, by the completely contrived, superficial, and jargon-laced prayers one hears in churches and Bible studies—we only talk that way when we’re hiding; we don’t talk that way to our grandma or our therapist or anyone else from whom we do not fear rejection).

We talk really well about how Christianity deals with guilt. But we struggle bring the Gospel to bear on the blanket of shame that covers our congregations (and our families!). A good place to start is taking a good long look at how Jesus treats people who are clearly dripping with shame.

### Biblical shame vs American shame: Jeremiah 8:12

Rev Harold Senkbeil “Note that I don’t call him a “homosexual” since the Bible doesn’t speak that way; it bluntly and directly addresses homosexual behaviour, calling sinners to repentance. But once forgiven, Holy Scripture never labels a sinner by his sinful behaviour, but rather he is called what he truly is: a *Christian* who has been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Jesus Christ is of course the greatest friend of sinners. He was always found with sinners during His earthly ministry, and that’s part of the reason they nailed Him to a cross. The good and upright people who considered themselves godly couldn’t understand what a nice guy like Jesus was doing hanging around with prostitutes and public sinners.”

### Who did Jesus hang out with? Matthew 21

- Luke 7:36 Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee. A sinful woman proceeds to wash Jesus' feet, causing the Pharisee to take offense. Jesus then points out that the Pharisee host greatly disrespected Jesus his guest by neglecting virtually every hospitality custom of the day, while the 'sinful' woman upheld them and honored Jesus in the process.

- Two Debtors- love in the parable is the response to unmerited favor, response to pure grace. Therefore she loves much. Catholic Jerusalem Bible reads, “Her great loves proves that her many sins have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love.”
- Perfect Passive announces a forgiveness that has already taken place: “her sins have been forgiven.”

Does God think we are worthless? John 3:16-17, Luke 15:11; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16

Look at how he treats the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. She’s had a string of failed marriages and is now unmarried, but living with a man. Jesus knows everything about her, yet he *initiates* a conversation with her, singling her out for compassionate attention. And when he reveals that he knows everything, he simply continues the conversation without a single word of judgment or exhortation. He then implicitly tells her that the Gospel is for her, too! And look at how Jesus treats tax collector Zacchaeus in Luke 19. This Jew-turned-Roman-lackey was a total sell out. He betrayed his own people to line his pockets. And like the Samaritan woman, he is just full of shame. So Zacchaeus, in being so desperate to see Jesus that he does the undignified thing of climbing a tree, makes himself completely vulnerable. (Everybody could see him up there!) But when Jesus sees him, he offers no rebuke, no listing of Zacchaeus’s sins—just says, “I must stay at your house.” Jesus wants to *honor* this sinner’s house with his presence. Again—don’t miss this!—another vulnerable move by Jesus. By not throwing the book at Zacchaeus and then staying *at his house* (!), he opens himself up to public criticism for being “soft on crime” and scorn for palling around with bad characters. Jesus meets vulnerability with vulnerability. This is called empathy. And Brené Brown says it’s the only thing that kills shame.