"...Neither Fear not Shame can Cure...."  
An investigative research paper on shame and lust addiction in men

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Abstract:

Addiction to lust is common in many men today. This lust is often rooted in our yearning for emotional intimacy—yet finding ourselves unprepared, unequipped and fearful of that intimacy. Shame pathology results from our wanting relationships and genuine equality and mutuality with women, yet finding ourselves crippled by centuries of male sexism and by our emotional dependencies on the opposite sex. 'Shame wounding' continues to fuel this pathology by promoting both compulsivity and a fierce sense of self-loathing. This paper explores 'shame' as a concept; and considers some major causes of shame-based addiction. Some sound therapeutic approaches for treatment are also investigated.
Introduction

"Everyone has his faults which he continually repeats; neither fear nor shame can cure them"

Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695)

The word shame originates from the pre-Teutonic root word "s'k em" probably from PIE *skem-, from *kem- "to cover" (covering oneself being a common expression of shame) [Genesis 2:25; 3:7; 9:23]. Shame is an intense reaction to the pain of humiliation which necessitates secrecy and deception. For shame to be exposed could mean more humiliation and that would feel intolerable.

Shame can best be described as an emotional wound to the Self for which one blames oneself. A shame state can be triggered in anyone who is sufficiently disempowered. Shame is metaphorically seen as the fear of ‘being caught with one’s pants down’; experienced as a sinking feeling, a wish to disappear or hide. Shame hounds boys and men throughout most of their lives for two reasons. First, since the standard of masculinity against which most boys and men measure themselves is unrealistically narrow and perfectionist, virtually no one feels he sufficiently measures up. The shame system seems to operate on its own, because men are not often in contact with their pain, and it therefore appears spontaneously. The pain referred to is organized around sets of values, beliefs, and ‘defenses’ which translate messages to our private world holding it in. The reason for this is related to the idea that the shame-self exits as if on an "island" within the psyche, apart from the Self, yet still connected. If shame is stimulated through rejection or humiliation, whether in fantasy or reality, the powerful pain apart from conscious awareness revolves around the notion that the outside world becomes a part of the interior original “bad self” feeling.

Second, since masculinity is conferred more than won, since it represents membership, not a state of being, and is, therefore, in danger of being revoked. If a boy grows up in a home where he feels unloved, neglected and worthless, he would feel ashamed of his own shame and would need to hide this knowledge from others and even himself. The pain he feels about his worth would create massive fear and anxiety about being abandoned by the parents. These vigorous wounds are capable of generating massive shifts of unprocessed pain that can flood the body with fierce self-loathing. As the boy matures the force of this energetic pain is often so intense that it blasts out of the unconscious into the world via addictions. Mental health professionals believe that addictions grow out of a need to escape or "medicate" emotional problems and emotional pain emanating from this “bad self” feeling. In this respect, a sexual compulsion is similar to alcoholism or drug abuse.

The intent of this paper is to try to explore shame as a concept and also to uncover some major causes of shame-based addiction. This paper also researches some sound, therapeutic approaches for the efficacious treatment of lust addicted men.

Shame Pathology and Addictions

"Self love, my liege, is not so vile a sin as self-neglecting"


Sylvan Tompkins (1963), a renown neurologist, proposed a physiological/developmental explanation for shame pathology. He described a neural pathway in the brain for shame and has always asserted that shame is a universal condition shared by all human beings and places the origins of shame within the first two years of life, before the self or identity has entirely formed. He further asserts that these shame neural pathways are also linked to joy and pleasure, in that normal affect-shame is the shame that occurs when desire outruns fulfillment… to the extent we seek pleasure, we must also experience shame.

When shameful feelings are linked to the need for affection, fear, denial and self-consciousness may appear. According to Lewis (1992), shame results only when one makes an internal judgment, that is, when s/he sees him/herself as responsible for the particular failure. The author further reasons that love withdrawal is
a precipitant of shame, since it is difficult for the child to attend to the cause of love being withdrawn. It leads to internal attributions of self-blame and to a very powerful global attribution of failure, thus, provoking shame, which then leads to poor interpersonal relationships. The common thread which seems to lead to shame is the devaluing of the person; viewing themselves as not measuring up. When people fall short of the standard, they feel judged, inadequate, damaged and undesirable. Quoting Maurice J. Barry Jr. (1972), Wm Cloke (1997) most eloquently describes what experiences might create a shame reaction:

*In the genesis of the shame reaction, the parent's attitude toward the child is one of angry rejection of the child himself. The parent fears and rejects the child's dependency and masks the fear with anger. Punishment is used in the form of humiliation and the parent takes the transgression as evidence of the innate badness on the part of the child. When the parent attacks the child's right to such an impulse, it degrades the child's self concept. This includes threats of abandonment and is followed by an angry separation of the parent and child. He fears abandonment, fears his own resentment, and suffers a decrease in confidence in his own capacities. All this is most painful, but since the child is held at a distance and finally left alone by the still angry parent, the child must resolve the tensions by himself and with himself in painful solitude.*

These experiences create such acute painful solitude, caused from powerful breaks in the emotional connection from parent to child, that the intense feelings cannot be emotionally or intellectually processed i.e. unprocessed or disorganized material can be referred to as chaotic or overwhelming, says Cloke (1997). Shame pathology is so intense, and generates such powerful negative feelings toward the Self, writes Spero (1984, p. 259), that the shamed individual is unable to derive self-esteem from within. This means that most, if not all, access to self-esteem must be sought through contact with others.

The result is that the person who is unable to feel good about themselves will engage in relationships with others that seem to represent a cure for shame, resembling a search for “other-validation”. The process of acquiring this kind of self-esteem from intimate relationships occurs when the person meets someone that to him represents a fantasy of redemption. The abiding fantasy is that one day someone will appear to release him/her from his shame. This fantasy can never be realized, however. No person can ever redeem another from their shame. When someone believes in this redemptive fantasy, it often and easily develops into a recipe for addiction. Shame is “called into action”, assert Bennett, Sullivan, and Lewis (2005, p. 313), when the organism remains fascinated by whatever triggered its interest and wants to continue the action, with whatever or whomever, in hopes the interest or excitement, the pleasure, will continue.

Early on in addictive cycles, we want to get rid of something, but usually what gets us going is the interest or the excitement or the change in affect that we feel. So we’re more interested in it; and in the sexual arena, if that is involved with another person, even if that person is objectified, as in pornography or someone that we are using in our addictive behaviour, we will utilize that wanting to make that interest and excitement more and more. Afterwards, the psyche invents a rationalization to create a means to an end. The means to an end is identified as "entitlement to react" or the switch that legitimizes the purging of shame from the psychic system.

**Shame and Addiction to Lust**

Lust-addicted men struggle mostly with shame and seek to purge it in the ways mentioned. Their shame manifests as a series of internalized statements painful statements about oneself, which serve the addiction in several ways. First, they trap him into believing he cannot turn to others for help, as to do so would result in his being rejected and judged - in short, he comes to see himself as alone and isolated. Secondly, feeling alone and isolated, the use of sexually compulsive behaviour to deal with emotional challenges is increased. Lastly, as the addiction progresses, the addict associates people with pain, and the addiction with comfort. In short, this series of shame based beliefs become the addicts’ “operating system.”
In addition, Laaser (1996) found lust addiction to stem from feelings of abandonment which central to trust, security and feelings of safety and well-being. Those who have either experienced or perceived abandonment have learned to not trust themselves or others (Schwartz & Southern, 2002). Addicts learn that they can duplicate the feelings without becoming vulnerable or intimate. Lust addicts use pornography, fantasy, masturbation, exhibitionism and voyeurism, etc. to fulfil the rush without the intimacy of a relationship, but their fear and pain of abandonment keep them disconnected. Both long and short term events lead a person to become very anxious (and usually depressed). This results in an agitated, or "toxic," state. Eventually one acts out--engages in the addictive behaviour -- in order to produce a high feeling and reduce the anxiety. However, acting out becomes a trigger for more acting out and the cycle continues as follows:

As the ‘cycle’ loops back onto itself, further feeding the short-term ‘contributors’, it would seem logical that one could “break” the cycle if the triggers could be eliminated. However, nothing is further from the truth, as interrupting the cycle doesn’t address the central shame issue. To do this, the addict must confront / challenge the underlying shame-prone impaired thinking and beliefs. Similar to Laaser, Patrick Carnes (1997, p. 70) outlined a larger “Addictive System” which takes in the Addiction Cycle along with (a) impaired thinking, and (b) the belief system - both which drive the Addiction Cycle as depicted below:

Carnes (1997, p. 127) points out that if sex is seen as important in ones’ family system, combined with the fusion of feeling both good & bad, it leads to the corollary: “I am bad or flawed because sex is my most important priority”. Addicts, then, have confirmation of their own innate badness through the following belief system: (a) I am basically a bad, unworthy person; (b) No one would love me as I am; (c) My needs are never going to be met if I have to depend on others; (d) sex is my most important need; and (e) I am bad because sex is my most important need.
Over time, these shame-prone beliefs organize his/her behaviour into a series of ritualized behaviours which are both predictable and personalized. These behaviours become the core of a six stage model of the cycle of acting out:

- **Triggering events**: when confronted with emotional stresses, even those which would be considered positive, the addict is flooded with emotions he is unable to process. These emotions in turn trigger a need to regain some sense of control.
- **Preoccupation**: concentration becomes highly focused on sexualized thoughts and memories. As the addict becomes more focused on these sexualized thoughts and memories, he begins to formulate plans to act out sexually.
- **Ritualization**: a highly predictable routine of behaviours used to prepare for the preferred form of sexual acting out. The intense focus of ritualization results in the addict experiencing a shift in perception referred to as depersonalization.
- **Acting-out stage**
  - **Physiological reward**: with orgasm there is a cascade of neurotransmitters associated with pleasure resulting in the immediate cessation of emotional pain, anguish.
- **Despair** resulting from the act itself.

**Intervention & Treatment**

Treating shame-prone compulsions is a difficult, life-long process. Maintaining sobriety over lust addictions requires strong motivation and a constant vigilance during times of potential danger. With good emotional support, however, it is possible to make the necessary changes. In dealing with shame, it is important to remember that healthy shame is not the feeling that we are *bad* but rather the feeling that we are imperfect or incomplete. Shame is not always tied to questions of good and evil, or even being healthy or dysfunctional. Healthy shame is that feeling that tells us that we are *not* God. **We are not omnipotent, there are some things we cannot do. We are not all-knowing, there are limits to what we can learn and remember. We are not omnipresent, we can only exist in one place at a time. We are not omniscient, there are some things that are beyond our understanding. We are also not perfect (sanctified).**

According to the Potter-Efron’s (1989, pp. 36-42) healing from ‘toxic’ shame has to come from (a) enhanced self-awareness, (b) identification our main shame messages, (c) grieving our relationship loses, and ultimately, (d) forgiving ourselves and any abusers. This is only possible if we can assist the addict in:

- Recognizing their own physical and emotional experiences of shame.
- Noticing experiences, situations, people and internal messages associated with shame.
- Becoming aware of self-criticism, self-consciousness & shaming relationships.
- Becoming aware of responses and defences: paralysis, escapism, denial, withdrawal, perfectionism, criticism, arrogance and rage.
- Identifying the main shame messages from their family-of-origin and co-dependent relationships.
- Grieving the abuse and neglect associated with the shame and the losses in your adult life resulting from the toxic shame.
- Working with their inner child, especially in prayer with Jesus.
- Setting goals that reinforce feelings of humility, autonomy and competence.
- Giving the shame back to the abuser, seeking professional help as needed. This may include, where appropriate and after working through the steps at least once, consulting with a counsellor and/or a sponsor, confront the abuser directly or via unmailed letters, psychodrama, *etc*.
- Challenging the shame, using affirmations directed to both their adult-self and the inner child. This has often been called “de-shaming our internal dialogues”.
- Forgiving any abusers (and ourselves) in the sense of letting go of the anger and turning vengeance over to God.
The two most difficult steps in healing ‘toxic’ shame are always the last two; namely, “de-shaming our internal dialogues” and forgiving ourselves for the wrongs done to us. Most of us who have been through pain and injury find we’re our own worst critics. Our minds are often filled with bitterness and slander toward ourselves that we couldn’t reconcile when we were first wounded. We have an adversarial relationship with ourselves; that is, we don't like ourselves and are quick to judge ourselves. This kind of constant, critical inner dialogue leads to discouragement and undercuts our motivation to keep working on our issues. It also makes it extremely difficult to forgive ourselves.

If such healing is possible, a major paradigm shift should result in ones’ belief/value system; which should lead to changes in how one ‘sees & does life’ (i.e. handles the intrusive pain of everyday life).

Wilson (1998, pp. 83-4) suggests we need to shift from existing in the ‘false’ self (self-protective personality structure) to living in the ‘true’ (real) self. She claims this shift must affect all areas of our lives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SPRITUAL</strong></th>
<th>Sense of shame, alienation &amp; abandonment</th>
<th>A deep sense of being fully known, freely chosen and faithfully loved by God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELATIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Insecure; a deep sense to ‘earn’ ones place</td>
<td>Secure sense of belonging (not only who I am but <em>whose</em> I am)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RATIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Plethora of misbeliefs</td>
<td>Seeking the truth about ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMOTIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Sadness/anger used to hide fears</td>
<td>A full range of emotions expressed appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOLITIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Self-protective behaviours to avoid pain</td>
<td>“Owning our own junk”; making responsible, informed choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEHAVIOURAL</strong></td>
<td>Unbalanced focus on accomplishments and other-validation</td>
<td>Wise &amp; prudent actions characterized by genuine convictions and compassion</td>
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In his book *Further along the Road Less Travelled* M. Scott Peck (1993) says that when people find themselves in this self-conflict, two extreme reactions are possible. The neurotic person automatically assumes s/he is at fault. The person with what Peck calls a character disorder automatically assumes the world is at fault. The neurotic assumes too much responsibility and too much blame for what goes on
around him/her; the person with the character disorder, not enough. Those of us with a neurotic streak will tend to be more vulnerable to feelings of toxic shame, says Peck:

“All of us have a smattering of neurotic and character disordered personality traits. The major problem in all of our lives is to decide and clarify our responsibilities. To truly be committed to a life of honesty, love and discipline, we must be willing to commit ourselves to reality. This commitment requires the willingness and the capacity to suffer continual self-examination.” Such ability requires a good relationship with oneself; this is precisely what no shame-based person has. In fact, a toxically shamed person has an adversarial relationship with him/herself. Toxic shame—the shame that binds us—is the basis for both neurotic and character disordered syndromes of behaviour.” (Peck, 1993, pp. 35-6)

The goal of therapy would then be to reconcile ourselves with ourselves and with the world; Carnes (1997, pp. 227-28) puts it in these words: “One primary goal of treatment is overcoming all the negative and moralistic myths which have entrapped the addict’s belief system. The purpose of treatment [is]… to bring about a profound shift of beliefs and behaviour in which obsession loses its power”.

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<tr>
<th>Summary of Treatment Processes</th>
<th>Summary of Treatment Processes (cont.)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BELIEF SYSTEM</strong></td>
<td><strong>INTERVENTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPAIRED THINKING</strong></td>
<td>Elect rationalizations and distortions of reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RITUALS</strong></td>
<td>Identify specific rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEHAVIOR</strong></td>
<td>Determine extent of pattern of sexual behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNMANAGEABILITY</strong></td>
<td>Search for evidence of “out of control” behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a ‘systematic’ (transdisciplinary) approach to treatment on the part of all MHP’s and support persons, alike. It requires that the addict not only face his old core beliefs, but once these are “dismantled and new feelings of self-worth and meaningfulness emerge, the impaired thinking of the addictive system becomes exposed” (Carnes, 1997, p. 236) At this stage, the treatment process must “develop feedback mechanisms that keep reality in focus” to adequately address impaired thinking. Addicts must make a commitment to face reality – no other options exist. When it comes to preoccupation, Carnes makes an excellent suggestion of ‘externalizing’ the addictive personality:

“A helpful strategy for therapists to teach about preoccupation is the concept of the addictive personality shift. The therapist actually extends the Jekyll & Hyde experience of the addict by asking them to think as if he were two people – his true self and his addict. In doing this, the therapist introduces the concept of the addict as an alter ego…” (Carnes, 1997, pp. 241-42)

Hopefully, as a companion, I can then begin placing injunctions on the addicts’ rituals, and to work towards “creating life-enhancing rituals to replace destructive addictive rituals. [In doing so], therapists actually help addicts prepare for participation in a new culture” (Carnes, 1997, p. 246-48).
Christian Reflections and Critique

The Paschal Mystery and Brokenness

We are all broken. “There’s a crack in everything” sings Leonard Cohen. We’ve been injured in many ways and our real self houses all of the evidences of these injuries. The pain, the brokenness and the shame we possess is part of who we really are. Brokenness and immaturity are part of who we really are. We need to look at the relationship between the ideal (“Me”) self and the real (“I”) self. “If they are in conflict,” says Cloud (1992, p. 222), “…whenever the real self becomes apparent, the ideal self will judge it and try and make it hide [in shame]. And when we are hiding, we are not in relationship with God & others. If we demand perfection from ourselves, we are not living in the real world. The real self is NOT perfect – a reality we must come to grips with. We have many imperfections, weaknesses and immaturities that are not our ideal. That is reality.” But if the false images of self die; if the cling-on grip of the “Me” dies, it is the “I” self which comes alive. The Paschal Mystery is repeated over and over again.

The “Me” & the “I” in the “I/Thou” Encounter

2Cor. 10:8 “For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.”

Patrick Oliver (2002, pp. 32-39) points out a poignant truth… God cannot be offended by us, because otherwise God would be rejecting God’s own self. When we hurt, God feels the hurt too. In our wounded ness, when we succumb to the pain and run back to our compulsions, the “Me” is (re)constructed… a false sense of identity that we hope others and we believe. Alternatively, it may be a self of which we might feel deeply ashamed. Perhaps the psychological notion of “self-esteem” is also an illusion based upon “feeling good about ourselves”? The “Me” attaches itself to us like Glad-Wrap… it is chameleon-like and ceaselessly needy (clingy). It is this hanging onto that causes so much self-inflicted anguish (the pain of shame).

Some people who carry toxic shame seem to have frozen feelings. As frozen feelings are recovered, however, individuals begin to become more self-aware of said feelings. While it is true that we must identify our feelings, there comes a time when we must dis-identify with them as well. I’m reminded, that the “Me” is created; it does not exist in reality – feelings give the “Me” its sense of identity. But drawing my sense of self from the “Me” is like affixing my identity to the four winds. Jesus recognized this in his confrontation with the “Me” during his temptations in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). Living from the “Me” enslaves us to a façade. James Olthius (1994, 227) puts self-inflicted anguish into its proper perspective:

“To the degree that we do not acknowledge and deal with [our shame] we deny our own inmost experience and thus deny our selves. We set up elaborate control systems to hide ourselves from the deep shame we feel. By not dealing with the basic traumas and using all our energy to repress their effects, our inner lives are on hold and we are frozen captives in prisons of our own making. We are, in effect, victimised once more. In fear, anger, shame and despair, we resist attending to our hurts and remain entrenched in various holding patterns.”

But if I can learn to “let go” I might find another self – the “I” which lies beyond the “Me”. The “I” is the deepest essence of us – it is indestructible. It is revealed when we let go our hold on those compulsions we clutch to so tenaciously. The “I” emerges in those moments when we stop striving to protect/conserve our ‘selves’… and we let ourselves float in the ocean of God. We do not make the “I”; rather, we discover the life of god within – by ‘letting go’ of the preoccupation with the cling-ons of the “Me” which stop the surfing of the “I” which is already present but which only needs to be uncovered. When we “dare to open ourselves” through letting go of our preoccupations, explains Judy Cannato (2002, 9), “we soon learn that God’s essential nature is compassionate and that our entire life has been a narrative filled with God’s efforts to say over and over again, “I love you.” As we continue to be stripped of false images of God, we
are also stripped of false images of self. We can begin to see ourselves not as independent agents defined by the roles we play but as co-creative spirits whose identities are intertwined with God’s.”

**Christian Shame Messages**

Much of what people fear in churches is having their true self (the “I” self, warts and all) “found out”; exposed, and humiliated. If the “I” is publicly exposed, devalued or rejected, these are all experiences which can produce painful emotions of shame. For many people, experiences of this kind are so acute or so frequent that shame begins to become more than a passing painful emotion. Over time, shame can work its way into the core of a person's identity… it can become central to how people perceive themselves. Once shame has become internalized, a person can experience shame in response to their own internal promptings. It is not necessary for another person to expose them or devalue them or reject them. In this way the painful experience of shame becomes a daily reality.

This is particularly germane when we think of orthodox religious views of sexuality. R.H. Albers (1995), in his brilliant treatise *Shame: A Faith Perspective*, reminds us that in orthodoxy shame is often linked with sexuality. Albers (1995, pp. 88-89) explains:

> “Much shaming is fixated on that which is associated with the body and sexuality. As a result, celibacy and virginity have historically been lifted up as preferred states of religious existence. In his research on sexuality and shame, Silvan Tomkins has come to this conclusion with regard to the ethos which Christianity has created in relation to sexuality:

> When we move to the Christian conception of sexuality and shame we move to a pluralism of ideologies and sectarian controversies, as in most religions. It is, however, clear that sexuality and shame become primarily moral and religious matters. Sexuality became one among many marks of the human being’s fall from innocence and from love of and by God, for which s/he lived in the shadow of eternal damnation. Not only has sexuality turned from shame to guilt, but a massive burden of terror has been added to the sexual act. Sexuality is no longer aesthetic or unesthetic, platonic or illusory, a threat to the active, honorable political life, a threat to the reproduction of the species and to the monogamous family, nor a threat to the will of the individual; it is now above all else a sign of disobedience to the will of God, demanding that the individual risk a variety of punishments, including an eternity in Hell. Shame and terror are now tightly fused.

> From infancy, strong messages are overtly and covertly given regarding the body. The genitals are associated with that which is ‘dirty’ or ‘unclean’. Some researchers believe that “…a major source of shame during the toddler period is the ‘negative reaction of a parent who looks on the infant anxiously when the child is engaged in genital exploration or play’”.

This negative view of the human form results in many Christians finding it difficult to feel good about their relationship with God unless they feel badly about themselves. Many religious systems (those with orthodox theology) set up standards which are used to judge people's worth. If people do not meet these standards, they are devalued and shamed. Religiously reinforced shame was as common in Jesus’ day as it is in our own. The religious leadership worked very hard to attain high personal moral standards. But they also devalued people whom they saw as "sinners." "Sinners" who did not meet the leader’s standards were outcasts, untouchables, people of no value. Such low self-image accompanying internalized shame from sexuality, however, is a kind of disabling self-hatred; in fact, it makes very poor soil for spiritual growth – just the ticket to combat the self-critical malaise of a shame-based person.

Sandra Wilson (1990, p. 163-64) describes yet another type of shaming message in churches today… a phenomenon she calls “shame-based religiosity”. People with obvious issues are an embarrassment to a shame-based Church. Since real Christians have no serious problems, no provisions have been made to help the wounded – in fact; churches seem to “shoot their wounded”. Emphasis is on looking religious by wearing the right clothes and carrying the right translation of the Bible. Attendance at church activities is
used as the main indicator of a person’s true spirituality. Emphasis is on performance. Emphasis is on 
appearances – on appearing ‘perfect’. Those who aren’t seen in this way often are made to feel shame:

“…shame-based religiosity keeps human-made rules in order to be ‘right.’ God is 
experienced as a demanding Shepherd who drives his sheep. I am expected to be totally 
(or almost totally) transformed the moment I trust Christ. Since I should be totally 
transformed (perfect) I am different-and-less-than Christian because I’m not perfect. 
Small-group Bible studies are dangerous places because someone might get close 

enough to see behind my mask of perfection and know I have problems.”

Many believers from shame-based religiosity who encounter the words of Jesus, “You must be perfect as 
your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) have heard this as saying they must not err – they mustn’t 
make mistakes or have issues. They mustn’t be imperfect – or have blots on their souls, otherwise God 
will not like them. But, we see Jesus’ response to ‘sinners’ as a radical contrast to the shame-based religious 
systems of his time. Jesus did not devalue people because they did not meet a standard--no matter how 
godly the standard. Jesus valued the marginalized, the dispossessed, the unloveable; those people who 
appeared to others merely as not worthy -- Jesus saw these as broken, wounded people as souls of great 
worth.

Jesus’ words of perfection have nothing whatsoever to do with never stumbling. Rather, perfection is the 
capacity to be reconciled with imperfection. Holiness has nothing to do with whether or not we adhere to 
systems or laws; holiness has to do with what we do with our brokenness. THIS IS BEING PERFECT AS 
THE FATHER IS PERFECT; loving the unlovable… embracing the unembraceable… receiving the 
rejected. The stranger come as God in disguise, for they reveal that of which we are most afraid – our 
unlikeable selves, our inadequate selves, our vulnerable selves – our “Me” selves. So that we can say in 
true humility, “There by the grace of God, go ‘I’…”

**Summary and Conclusions**

Shame results in a soul wound which is often generated very early in life, before the existence of a moral 
system. The inevitable consequence of shame is that instead of developing empathy or compassion, it 
leaves in its wake instead, pain, fear, distrust and hatred. Just as love binds us together, hatred (including 
self-hatred) tears us apart. Ultimately, Patrick Oliver (2002, 29) speaks to this truth when he writes “what 

humans see as sin, God sees as pain. Surely it is only because we fear in our core that if others really 
knew us, we would be judged as unlovable, rejectable and unworthy. The human heart is often heavy with 
the pain of fear and secret self rejection.” Healing the shame wound is the secret to finding a truly healthy 
emotional life. If the shame can be healed that constricts our human potential and causes addictive 
behaviours, perhaps we can finally find peace for our souls. For many of us, the road to finding release 
from the pain of our shame is to seek the Lord with all our heart, mind soul and strength (Matthew 22:37).

As a counsellor and “God fearer”, I see the most important element in the process of healing shame is for 
people to take responsibility for it. We need to probe and understand how it affects our spirit and how we 
direct it at others. As long as we are unable to ‘see’ or understand how our shame is shaped, and how it 

might shade our reality, distorting what we see, we will never be free of it. If we are able to reveal the beast 
within and expose ourselves to our deepest shame, we will ultimately come to understand how shame 
affects what we see. Taking responsibility for ourselves might also mean moving away from “legalistic 
principles” – for as we do, changes take place both in our reasoning and in our ability to love. We begin to 
better understand the mysteries of God and relate to Him in love, applying His truth in wisdom & love, 
instead of hiding behind strict, legalistic understandings. The ways people think about situations and 
others change, and they reason in the light of love. In the words of St. Paul, “When I was a child, I talked 
like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways 
behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in 
part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. 
But the greatest of these is love.” (1Co 13:11-13)
If humiliation and neglect creates the original shame wound, then something tells me the cure would lie in the *empathy* and unending *love* (agapē) of Jesus Christ. Put another way, God’s restoration for shame is to finally unmask it and retrieve it from the jungle of the unconscious. If a shamed person works to create attachments to healing people, this helps bring the fears locked up in the unconscious out into the light to be seen, to bring valued insights; then and only then can the working out of the shame happen… which means that it will ultimately not interfere with our ability to form reliable and loving attachments. It is, after all, the dearth of human interaction that creates a shame wound. It would seem logical to assume that the healing for shame lies uniquely in authentic relationships with self, God and others. In closing, let me quote Albers (1995, 106): “*The key ingredient for the shame-based person in the community of faith is genuine fellowship. In order for a shame-based person to enter into such life it is imperative that the community… is open & inviting. Attitudes which preclude participation, like judgementalism, elitism, and pretentious piety are never helpful.*”
References


