

15. Stout, H. Economic Tradeoff, Wall Street Journal, Sept. 6, | 1991.

Pastor's Column

Shame

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Shame. If there was a list of endangered words as there is of endangered species I believe shame would be on that list as a result of looking at our culture.

Recently, New York's highest court ruled that it is permissible for women to go topless in public as long as such action is not for lewd or commercial purposes. The case originated when several women in Rochester went topless at a picnic. They were arrested for indecent exposure. The women went to court. The court ruled that it is discrimination to allow men to appear in public without their shirts and not allow women the same exposure.

Perhaps there are those patients who still are ashamed for their doctor to examine certain areas of their bodies, even when those doctors are of the same sex. That is a needless concern, generally. Certainly, there are some unscrupulous physicians even as there are pastors. A recent report indicated that 9% of physicians have had sexual contact with their patients. As a part of their calling, doctors may well have to see areas of our bodies otherwise reserved for viewing by our marriage partner. Dr. Luke speaks of the woman with a hemorrhage in Luke 8:43ff. A visit to one of her many doctors could well have required a pelvic examination. God made our bodies in such a way that medical viewing of various areas is a necessity. No clearer example can be given than the location of the birth canal. The Old Testament covenantal act of circumcision is also illustrative. Genesis 17:23 states that Abraham, at God's command, took Ishmael and his household male servants and circumcised them that day. While no longer covenantally required, circumcision remains a valid medical procedure.

Yet within society we are more and more seeing a move away from such shame. No doubt much of society's lack of shame can be traced back to the popularizing of the profaning of God's name by the media. Once this was accepted we have seen an increase of speech and activity that once would have resulted in shame in our society.

The reader of Scripture has to go no further than Genesis 3 to view shame. Following Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit we read: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (v.7). Later they "heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (v.8).

What was the reason for this hiding? They had sinned against a holy God and were conscious of that sin.

The sovereign God sought them out and confronted them with their sin and its consequences in their lives and upon all mankind who would descend from Adam and upon creation itself. Scripture then records that "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (v.21). Adam and Eve were unable to clothe themselves in such a way as to stand before the Lord God. Through God's actions they were taught that only God can provide proper clothing for man to stand before God. A substitute provided clothing for them in the Garden. A greater Substitute, Jesus Christ, would provide the proper clothing of His righteousness for all saved sinners throughout history.

Clothing is important for a sinful people. Clothing is a marked contrast to our otherwise naked condition before man and our actual, continuing nakedness before God. Due to their sin Adam and Eve could not bare their physical bodies to one another, for they could not bare their souls to one another. (Rather than confessing their sin to God, they blamed another for their sinful action.) When God came into the garden they sought the additional covering (or clothing) that the Garden provided (v.8). Yet, it was not enough. We are always naked before our ever-present God.

In Scripture, legitimate exposure of a woman's breasts is set within the context of marriage. In Prov. 5:18, 19 we read, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love." Song of Solomon records these words of the beloved regarding his wife: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle which feed among the lilies" (4:5). Nakedness is proper within the marriage relationship. A solid godly marriage is, of course, built on an open communicative relationship. Not only can the marriage partners be physically naked before one another, they are also to be willing to bare their souls to the one to whom they have become united in one flesh.

Our society continues to deny God and His Word. As a result sin against God is non-existent in the eyes of our decadent culture. It is therefore not surprising that we are seeing the increase of shamelessness. Once shameful acts are now committed openly and with increasing acceptance by many leaders in our society. Examples are many -- homosexual activity, legal abortion, living together outside the bonds of marriage. And, we cannot forget the open looting during the recent riots in Los Angeles.

A culture which denies God will have little shame. Many physicians and medical personnel can attest that this has resulted in increased sexual diseases, treatment of which adds to spiraling medical costs. Of course, the effects extend beyond our physical bodies, touching every facet of our being in one way or another.

We often associate toplessness and nakedness with

African or South American tribal females. As Christian missionaries enter these cultures and proclaim the Gospel of Christ, conversions occur by God's grace. The women then begin to wear clothing on their hips and chests. Why the change in dress? I believe it is in great part due to their regenerated understanding of their shameful position as a sinner before a holy God, not merely copying the dress of another culture.

We can continue to expect increasing shamelessness in our society until we by God's grace are ashamed of our sin and are turned by God-given repentance and faith to trust in and consciously serve the living holy God Who is the Final Arbiter in what is good and evil.