

Has the Church Been Preaching a False "Body Shame"?

Throughout my upbringing, I was taught from many pulpits that the human body without its clothing is lewd, vulgar, obscene and indecent. The church claimed that seeing people of the opposite sex undressed is sinful, because the sight of their nude bodies will bring evil thoughts and sexual lust.

As a male nurse, I've seen the nakedness of multiple thousands of female patients, yet their bare bodies do not cause me to have evil thoughts or sexual lust. In thirty years of this, the church's teaching about the sinfulness of simple nudity has never proven to be true. Why? Jesus said the source of sexual lust is in the heart.

When I took a figure drawing class in college, we learned by drawing from nude models. Neither I nor my classmates got sexually excited by the sight of their exposed bodies. Even though we stared intently at their nakedness to capture them on paper, these models did not stimulate lust, as the church told us they would.

When missionaries first brought the Gospel to naked tribal people, they also brought a message of "body shame" and insisted that converts cover up. When this practice backfired and opened those lands to pornography, modern missionaries stopped doing this. They learned to let these naked people keep living with their natural, healthy view of the nude body. This policy reversal advertized our former error, but never has the church admitted to it or apologized for it. Enemies of Christianity know this fact and point to it as proof that the church is deceptive and hypocritical. They know we still preach "body shame" in the name of Christ.

Most American tourists who visit those European beaches where swimsuits are "optional" have discovered the absence of evil thoughts and sexual lust that the church warned about. Some, who joined their European friends in nude sunbathing or skinny dipping, never felt the *body shame* they were religiously taught all their lives. When such people realize how the church's teaching misled them about something as simple as the wholesomeness of God's naked image and temple, can we blame them for questioning the church's much more important message about Christ?

The above lessons and illustrations about the unclad human body caused me to go back to the Bible to see the real source of this "body shame" that the church has taught all these years. I love the church. The world needs the Gospel of which the church is a chosen steward and messenger. But there is no excuse for mixing a demonic falsehood into the message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This poem was written to help weed out that falsehood from our preaching of His truth.

ORIGIN OF BODY SHAME

Dressed up as a serpent in crafty disguise,
A demon attempted, by using his lies,
To blot out the beautiful image that God
Had made of Himself out of hand-woven sod.

As naked as truth from the day of their birth,
And destined by God to be rulers of earth,
Both Adam and Eve were alive by God's breath,
But Satan used knowledge to put them to death.

The serpentine liar pretended to heal
Their blind faith in God for what's moral and real.
His trick by that Gnostic fruit opened their eyes,
Remaking their minds independently wise.

"You see for yourself, God left both of you nude!
Your unhidden bodies are shamefully lewd!"
Our first parents listened to what Satan said,
For now their life-bond to the Maker was dead.

The diet of conscience controls how it guides,
Which sins it allows, or what goodness it hides.
So, God found and asked them, with leaves round their waist,
"Who said you were naked? What fruit did you taste?"

Some call it God's will to keep chewing that fruit,
Embracing its scruples in zealous pursuit,
Maligning His gift of our wonderful skin
By calling the sight of its nudity sin.

But others discover a godlier view,
Rejecting this prudery's body taboo,
Resisting the porn that is wedded to shame
Passed on from the devil's original claim.

These temples are sacred, not sordid, unclean.
If you would be holy, don't call them obscene.
Our hearts can be dirty, or lustful and bad,
But bodies are closest to truth when unclad.

— *David L. Hatton, 1/23/09*