

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. Preachers told me that seeing people of the opposite sex undressed was sinful, because the sight of their naked bodies would cause me to have lustful thoughts.

In over thirty years as a male nurse, I’ve seen the nakedness of many thousands of female patients, yet their bare bodies never brought me the sexual lust predicted by sermons at church. Warnings that the sight of nudity would lead me into sin proved to be a religious suspicion, not the truth. The nude body itself has never been the source of lust, because Jesus clearly told us that sexual lust comes from the heart.

When I took a college figure drawing class, we learned to draw 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 naked anatomy, to capture their poses on paper, these models did not stimulate lust, as church leaders told us they would.

Sadly, when missionaries first came to naked tribal people, they preached a message of “body shame” right alongside the Gospel, insisting that converts cover up. When this practice backfired and opened up those lands to pornography, modern missionaries stopped doing this. They learned to let these naked people keep their natural, healthy view of the body. This policy reversal clearly exposed our former error, but the church at home has failed to admit it and apologize for it. Enemies of Christianity know this fact and point to it as proof that the church is deceptive and hypocritical. They know we are still preaching “body shame” in the name of Christ.

Most Americans visiting European beaches where swimsuits are “optional” discover a surprising absence of the sexual stimulation expected from their religious upbringing. Some even join their European friends in nude sunbathing or skinny dipping, never feeling the *body shame* they were taught about all their lives. When such people realize how Christian ministers were mistaken about something as simple and insignificant as the natural state of the bodies God gave us, can we blame them for questioning the church’s much more serious message about Christ the Savior?

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 been teaching so zealously. The world desperately needs the truth of the Gospel entrusted to the church’s stewardship. But there is no excuse for mixing a demonic falsehood into that liberating message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This poem was written to help weed out that falsehood from Christian preaching.

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, 1/23/2009*