

# The Pathway to Repentance

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## LESSON THREE: The Contrite Heart

### Introduction

1. Have you ever broken something?
  - a. My daughter broke her arm trying to pull her sister up on the roof.
  - b. What happens to that which is broken after it heals?
    - i. Often become stronger than it was before
    - ii. If it breaks again, it will break somewhere else
    - iii. Of course, this is not true for all things (i.e. breaking a glass)

2. Have you ever been broken? No, not broke, but hit bottom?

Due to having done something wrong, from realizing that you are in a bad place and you need to make a change? We might call it 'hitting bottom'. When you are struggling with a personal issue, it seems to be an almost universal truth that before things can get better, they have to get worse -- *sometimes a lot worse*.

What causes one to hit bottom? For the one fighting alcohol addiction, it might be a DUI; For another individual, its losing their 5<sup>th</sup> job that makes them finally realize that they need to make some personal changes about their character. Whatever it is, how we deal with that low point will determine if we will change for the better, or continue our slide. But who likes dealing with the pain of shame?<sup>1</sup>

3. Have you ever had a broken heart? No, not because of a romance lost, but spiritual brokenness?

While this might be a matter of semantics (of how you define the words) we are going to learn that the biblical shame is something to be embraced. In fact, it is the key to repentance. Without it, real change will not and cannot take place.

**Thesis:** A Contrite heart is both natural and an essential part of path to repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> In this discussion one might have to deal with the differences between guilt and shame. In the psych world shame is a focus on self (usually regarded as a unhealthy emotion, with no positive value) while guilt is a focus on behavior

## 1. David's Brokenness

David knew brokenness, first when he feigned madness while running from Saul, and second from his sin of adultery and murder.

### a. Psalms 34

*The righteous cry, and the LORD hears  
And delivers them out of all their troubles.*

<sup>18</sup>The LORD is near to the **brokenhearted**  
And saves those who are **crushed** in spirit

### b. Psalms 51

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;  
You are not pleased with burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit**;  
A broken and a **contrite** heart, O God, You will not despise.

Did you catch that? – God is *near* to the brokenhearted, He *hears* their cry and *delivers* them. The sacrifice that He desires is a **broken spirit**, and a **contrite heart**. This is counter intuitive – we would think, that because most persons shrink back from the guilty, that God would also disown us when we acknowledge our guiltiness before Him. Yet David says such people God *will not despise!*

What is a broken spirit? What does a contrite heart look like? Is it merely embarrassment for being caught, for having done something wrong? Is it the shame one feels for failing? Or is it something different entirely?

Let's first look at the subject of shame....

## 2. Defining Shame – the world's view of shame dismisses its redemptive value

### a. Webster's

#### Definition of Shame

: a feeling of guilt, regret, or sadness that you have because you know you have done something wrong

: ability to feel guilt, regret, or embarrassment

: dishonor or disgrace

**1 a** : a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety

Often characterized by a warm washing that floods over the body; feelings of insecurity and vulnerability

b. The Counselor's Definition

- i. The feeling of guilt, regret, or sadness that you have because you know you have done something wrong
- ii. Shame vs guilt
  1. Shame is **directed towards self**
  2. Guilt is directed towards ones **behavior**  
**Shame means "I am wrong."**  
**Guilt means "I did something wrong."**
- iii. Many (such as Brene Brown) claim there is no positive value in shame; All shame is destructive and defeating.
  1. Thought to be negative in that it results from an individual accepting the norms of others, such as:
    - You are not good enough
    - Not smart enough
    - Never will succeed
    - Too fat, too short, too ugly
  2. Often the suggested solution is to reject societal norms all together, and then find your own values – discover truth for yourself. The result is **moral neutrality**. **Nothing is wrong or right, just different**. This approach says...
    - Don't let people judge or condemn you, don't allow them to make you feel that you are not good enough, that you are a failure.
    - Don't let them make you feel shame. There are just trying to control and manipulate you.
  3. The problem with such an approach is that it does not address that fact moral failures should result in the appropriate shame (i.e. murder).

***Moral entropy*** - Going from order to a state of disorder

Yet, we will see that the opposite is actually true. That denying your shame, that burying it, is the source of real problems.

### 3. Denying shame only creates more problems

*When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.*      **Psalm 32:3,4**

- a. You may think it is a matter of semantics (how you define shame), but there is value achieved from shame, and it is essential to the repentance process.
  - i. Guilt is the result of doing something wrong (transgressing an accepted value; or societal ethic). It is a *natural* response.  
Yet, we know that someone can acknowledge their guilt but not feel any associated remorse/shame.
    - One may say, "I feel bad because I did this"
    - While another says, "Okay, I did it! so what's the big deal?"

- ii. When one realizes that they know they have transgressed an accepted norm, they feel guilty, and this triggers a shame response:

“I failed” “I did not act correctly” “I was wrong and now I am embarrassed”

- iii. The person who does not have the capacity to feel shame can become pathological in wrong behavior
  - A pathological liar
  - Compulsive/addictive behaviors
  - Brain becomes hard wired; one acts without even thinking

b. Refusal to feel shame only enables the negative behavior to continue

- **Jeremiah 6:14-15**

"They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace. <sup>15</sup> "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were **not even ashamed at all**; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD.

- **Jeremiah 3:3**

Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you **refuse to blush with shame**.

- **Jeremiah 8:12**

Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, **they have no shame at all**; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD.

c. Denying our shame only creates sickness

- David said it about killed him.
  - *When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.*
- **Psalm 32:3,4**
- Some attempt to dismiss the shame by denying the underlying values that produce the shame in the first place; this just hardens one's heart and enables the sin to continue.
- Yet, those values still exist inherently and the denial only produces a dissonance that manifests itself in negative ways
  - **Defensive and argumentive:** cannot face the reality of what they are doing because the sense of shame is too overwhelming (as water backed up behind a dam)
  - **Irrational:** cannot reason effectively because reason demands acceptance of that which one is trying to bury
  - **Arrogant:** “you are so close minded” accusations of being bigoted, judgmental, ignorant, etc. all because we cannot give credibility to the messenger, because doing so would demand of me to admit my guilt.

#### 4. Characteristics of contrite heart

- Peter: *But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"* **Luke 5:8**
- Broken hearted:  
**Strong's Exhaustive Concordance 7665**
  - contrite, [destruction](#)
  - From daka'; crushed (literally powder, or figuratively, contrite) -- contrite, destruction.
- Crushed/contrite:  
**Strong's Exhaustive Concordance 1793**
  - shabar: to break, break in pieces
  - **NAS:** abolish, break breaks in pieces, crush, demolished, destroy
- Brokenness is not...
  - Feeling worthless
  - Having no sense of value

Shame is deeper than guilt. It is not based on having done something wrong, but more of an ache in the soul, that arise from *being* wrong at one's very core. Shame is more piercing than condemnation, where the reality of judgment is mentally apprehended from an outside arbitrator. 'With shame we palpably feel our own depravity in vivid self-realization.'
- But brokenness is...
  - God focused and not self-centered
  - Says, "I am not worthy to be in your presence"
  - Awareness of the wrong
  - Deep remorse
  - Willingness to change – to do whatever it takes
  - Submission to God's will: *I give up and I give in*
  - I give up trying to do it my way: *I am all yours*
  - "So do with me as you wish, make me what you want"
  - A Cry of help

#### [Psalm 147:3](#)

He **heals** the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

#### [Isaiah 57:15](#)

For this is what the high and exalted One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I **live** in a high and holy place, but **also with** the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to **revive** the spirit of the lowly and to **revive** the heart of the contrite.

#### 5. Embracing shame helps us overcome the sin,

- a. Healthy shame vs unhealthy shame

- i. When the shame is a result of transgressing the false values of others, it seems to always be unhealthy and can cause serious issues
  - ii. When the shame is a result of transgressing absolute values, it is healthy and serves as guide, motivation to live properly.
    - Current research shows a connection between cooperation and punishment; community cooperation decays w/out punishment (such as shame, guilt, gossip)
    - Research shows that when religion causes people think about God, it leads to more socially acceptable behavior.
- b. Shame that results from brokenness can present the defining moment where you can make great change
- i. Purges the inclination to do wrong
  - ii. Makes us think and feel differently
  - iii. It gives us the motivation to change
  - iv. Produces the Godly sorry which is necessary to repent (2 Cor 7)

## Summary

Of sinners and saints...

- The saint can easily see the sinner for who they are: *they sin, they have failed.*
- The saint cries, *"I am right" "I know the truth"*
- Yet is this cry that condemns the saint with the sinner.  
Yes, they know the truth, and that knowledge should humble them, knowing that they don't completely keep the truth either.
- As Jesus said, *"Ye who is without sin, let him cast the first stone"*
- There is room, a place for brokenness in all of us. Any denial of this is just pretense for self-righteousness.
- Rather, be like the sinner praying at the temple, *"God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"* (Luke 18:3)

Thinking soberly...

- a. We think that exposing our shame, will cause other to flee. Yet here we are assured that God does not run from, but to those who are broken.
- b. When we cover our inadequacy, and fake our strength and ability, it is as if God just lets us go it alone, *"let's see how this turns out"* It is like a child who refuses help, wanting to accomplish a task on their own. Finally, out of frustration, they turn to the dad and ask for help. This is our Father. Our pride shackles our self, closing the door on God's help. Our humility opens the door to God's grace and power in our life.
- c. You see, waiting to hit bottom is not a good strategy in dealing with sin. You can change right now, before it gets worse, before it is too late.