

## Shame vs Guilt

Shame screams, "**I am a mistake.**" Guilt, on the other hand, is a feeling of wrongness of action." Guilt says, "**I made a mistake.**"

Shame is a feeling of worthlessness, unacceptability and illegitimacy. It is a deep wound that is the result of a curse on your **identity** by important people in your life. All too often those people were your parents. "Shame is a vague but persistent oppression that weighs on our spirit and inhibits us from experiencing joy." (Toni Dolfo Smith). It will not go away until its root is found and extracted.

Remember the old chant, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me?"

The phrase, "words can never hurt me," is simply not true. It is a mythical childhood rhyme. Words, cruel name calling, and labels can hurt. At a crucial moment, words from a significant person spoken to a vulnerable, receptive individual can build or break a life. Perhaps the rhyme should read, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can break my heart."

Shame is conveyed by something that is **said about you or done to you**. It is a deep feeling of being uniquely flawed causing you to believe you are inadequate, insignificant, different, isolated from others and unimportant. Shame says, "I don't have what it takes," "I don't belong," "I'm not supposed to be here," or "I am worthless."

Shame can be an all-encompassing feeling that taints your view of yourself and the rest of the world. It may begin with the words or deeds of others which became the voice in your head because you believed it was true. How often do we hear, "My mother said it so it must have been true!"

Many times people try to overcome the feeling of shame by doing things that they hope will make a difference. They become "human doings" instead of human beings, **trying to attain perfection**.

Shame seems to be rooted in a deep-seated fear of abandonment. It results in an elaborate appearance-management system of **putting on masks** to hide the reality of who you believe yourself to be. It causes you to hide from others those things

about you which are not perfect. It screams, "If you are not perfect, you are not acceptable."

"In our woundedness we believe 'I am a bad and worthless person.' One who lives a life in shame doesn't know how to be happy or content. They find a sense of identity in being shameful. They play the role of being a victim." *Mark Laaser*

### **Seven Family Rules That Impute Shame**

1. Always remain in control of all behavior, feelings and circumstances.
2. Always be right and do it right. Perfectionism rules the family. Every thing must always be the best and as it supposed to be.
3. When rules #1 and #2 fail, and things get out of control, get angry and blame someone. Children are held responsible for their parent's anger.
4. Deny everyone in the family five basic human experiences. **It is wrong to:**
  - **Feel** (Control yours emotions. It's wrong to feel sad, lonely, fearful, etc.)
  - **Perceive** (What the parent says is which are perceived "right", period.)
  - **Need** (Always be self sufficient. Don't bother anyone with a need.)
  - **Believe** (Parents tell you the truth.)
  - **Imagine** (You have no right to imagine anything. A lifestyle of stuffing every "wrong" decision deep inside is established.)
5. Always hide and maintain secrecy regarding anything you did wrong.
6. Never acknowledge a mistake or make yourself vulnerable to anyone.
7. Don't trust anyone. Relationships are erratic and unreliable.

Shame, the result of other' words or actions which are perceived as thruth,is based on a condemning lie about your identity. But the Bible says in Romans 8:1 *"There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

*(This information is adapted from "The Ancient Paths" by Craig Hill, "Released from Shame" by Sandra Wilson, "Potters Institute" by Blake McKenzie and my ministry experiences.)*