The Death of Shame

Is there a distinction between fame and infamy? Today, one must wonder. Fame is defined as a "widespread reputation, especially of a favorable character; renown; public eminence." In contrast, infamy is defined as an, "extremely bad reputation, public reproach, or strong condemnation as the result of a shameful, criminal, or outrageous act." How has it been possible that there has emerged a blurring between the meanings of such clearly distinctive traits and qualities? This phenomenon can only be ascribed to the absence of shame.

We daily observe headline news appearing more and more like the gossip magazines of old. Even the most notable gossip rag, "The Enquirer," took on a prestige of acceptance one couldn't have fathomed in yesteryears. The downfall of an actor or singer happens with such regularity it's hard to imagine it not being scripted and orchestrated by their agents to bring them or keep them in the public view. Horrific statements and abnormal behaviors grow worse and worse to keep pace with the desensitization of the public – so as not to have their lifestyle submerge into the realm of the accepted, thereby falling on deaf ears as 'ho-hum,' common.

The public is captivated by those who continually 'push the envelope' or 'cross the line.' Like it or not, the media has almost entirely engrossed the psyche of our culture. As the rich and famous, (or infamous) plow the virgin turf further into the outrageous, the public swoops in behind like the wake of a boat, following the path into the dark abyss of the amoral.

So, on it goes, with the headlines of the latest shenanigan by the infamous, followed by the outrageous acts of the masses. What accounts for this slipping, sliding, and slouching towards Gomorrah? The absence of the social fence of old that was removed because of the harshness and coldness it 'appeared' to contain – shame.

The maintenance of a good name is firmly rooted in our now dying Judeo-Christian society. Parents instilled in their offspring the importance of keeping the name of the family above reproach. One kept from becoming involved in immoral or illegal activities not solely because of the fear of fines or imprisonment, but by the shame it would bring upon the family.

In the farm community where we reside, there are surnames which are synonymous with character, integrity, morality, and ethics. This isn't by chance or accident. These families nurtured their children with the teaching of values by regular attendance in Sunday school, family activities, parental involvement at school, and one can't minimize the importance of regular contact with grandparents and other members of the extended family.

It can be argued that the breakdown began two-fold: the shift towards focusing on mass media, particularly television, and the internet, for one's values, and away from the focus on the elders of a family. The trend of the relocation of each generation has greatly weakened our social fabric. It is accepted, if not expected that once a child reaches the age of adulthood, they relocate to where money runs like water, so they can live the good life that supposedly only money can buy. In the absence of those he was raised to respect and admire, the importance of one's name diminishes in their own eyes, and living for what life can offer, and pleasure at any cost is magnified.

A pastor's responsibility is as a watchman on the wall assigned to cry out and make those he is called to protect aware of approaching danger. We are long past that point because the danger is now within the walls of our society. Yet hopefully if one is listening, they can still hear the proverbial words in time to make a difference, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches . . .* Proverb 22:1."

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