

The Struggle With Shame For Christian Children

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Abstract

Children who grew in the church are more prone to feel shame and guilt. They struggle to grasp their minds around the fundamentals of the Christian life such as the grace of God, salvation through grace and faith. These children are more vulnerable to be entrapped with a condemning Christianity, instead of a convicting Christianity. This paper is about why and how Christian children can easily struggle more with shame and guilt than adults.

Keywords: Shame, guilt, children, struggle

The Struggle With Shame For Christian Children

Over the past couple of years, children who have grown in the Christian walk has been susceptible to struggle with shame and guilt. They struggle in grasping their minds around the principal fundamentals of faith, such as salvation through grace and faith, that adults find easy to understand.

Children think today with concrete thinking. According to Good Therapy (2015), "concrete thinking is literal thinking that is focused on the physical world. It is the opposite of abstract thinking." The word of God requires an abstract thinking mindset. Abstract thinking requires understanding relationships, metaphors, analogies, etc. Children are too young in order to have such thinking that requires them to understand a relationship, which in this case, a relationship with God, and metaphors and analogies, which in this case, is the word of God which includes many of these, such as Psalms, Proverbs, etc. It later leads the kids to later not fully understand the theology of the Bible, and they "typically possess a 'latent theology,' in which they quest to believe in God or some other form of ultimate reality." (Thurston, 1994). Because of this, children who grew up in the church can feel some sort of dysfunction and imbalance when it comes to trying to understand essential Christian teachings. They feel a disconnect when it comes to thinking more about the word of God because of how accustomed they had gotten in thinking about God in a concrete way.

It is important to note that not all children are all in the same category when it comes to realizing the basics of Christianity. As children grow, the way that they view God can drastically change, and not all levels of concrete thinking will be the same for all children. However, "it is not surprising to note that they often find it hard to grasp theological foundations to the Christian

faith (e.g., salvation by grace)." (Thurston, 1994). In the article, "Shame and Guilt In Christian Children", guilt is described as a state of having broken a moralistic rule. There are two types of them, healthy, which shows you that you did something wrong, and toxic, which makes you believe that you are something wrong.

In order to evaluate this in children, there was a case study that involved play-therapy with an eight-year-old son of Christian parents, whose name was Jacob, who was caught repeatedly lying and stealing by his parents. Every time he would be caught doing this, his father would parent-shame him by calling his actions as sinful. To keep in reference, Jacob was hospitalized 36 times for allergic reactions. During the examination of the play therapy, Jacob got distracted by stuffed animals and the psychotherapist firmly called his attention, and he rambunctiously reacted against the stuffed animals by saying "you're all bad," and shoved it into a cabinet. He later went on to say that this was punishment for them because the animals were starting to play harshly. This act "of shoving the animals in a 'cage' reflected both his projection of guilt (punishment for wrongdoing) and of shame (forcing the animals into an exile of hiding)." (Thurston, 1994). Because of guilt and shame, he started to show that he starting to become violent within him and it spewed out from within him when he shoved the animals.

Why is it so common that Christian children can become so entangled with this type of struggle? First of all, they can become overfamiliar with the message that is being preached because they have grown so used to being the faith that they would like to experiment with other things as well, such as partying, alcohol, etc. The children are prone to losing joy in the Christian journey and feel as if their parents are shoving their ideas down their throats.

This article gives a clear representation of how children can struggle with simple yet powerful Christian teachings, which can be relatable to many people. The topic of shame can broad itself, and many people can be prone to suffer with it, but primarily, the Christian children can become more susceptible to many aspects of it, because they can be told that one thing is wrong, and another thing is right, without a clear explanation why. The writer, Nancy Stiehler Thurston, provides many agreeable ideas that no matter how children can learn about the word of God, they can wrestle enormously with it.

As a person who grew up in the church, I was able to identify myself deeply with this article. I was able to understand why the reason why I felt so much shame growing up, and I identified myself in the same position as the kids in the article. Personally, I'm not surprised to know that young people are more prone to feel so much shame and guilt because, out of my own experience, my parents would do the same thing as Jacob's father did, by guilt-shaming them.

Romans 8:1 says "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." Micah 7:19 says "He will take pity on us again, will tread our wrongdoing underfoot. He will cast all our sins down to the bottom of the sea."

Works Cited

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