

Smashing the False Identity

Sookja Han

West Valley Presbyterian Church

INTRODUCTION

Today, I am going to preach about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Korea the whole country is obsessed with plastic surgery. One out of three women underwent surgery to change their faces. The New Yorker (March 25, 2015) calls Korea the world's capital city of plastic surgery. Another article in New York Times reported about Miss Korea beauty pageant participants: everyone looks similar because of the plastic surgery. Does plastic surgery change WHO you are?

STORY OF JACK NEWMAN

It's a powerful story to depict a real new creation who is "walking newness of life," reflecting Paul's message in Romans 6:3-4, which is the centerpiece of today's text.

BODY

So, here Paul exhorts us to "walk in the newness of life." The first step: to die

Before exploring what it means to die, let me briefly give you backgrounds of Paul's theology and the text

Paul illustrates the gospel is always a tool to shape WHO we are as followers of Christ Jesus; Paul brings everything under scrutiny of the gospel. The twin themes of conformity to Christ's death and the imitation of Christ are foundational elements of Paul's vision of discipleship.

Romans 5 discusses the justification by faith: people contested why obey God if we were saved by grace. They questioned the more sins the more grace? So in Ch. 6 Paul defends his position.

In v. 1, Paul directly confronts his detractors who considered the gospel a license for antinomianism with respect to Romans 5:20; antinomianism is a million dollar word for a doctrine of grace that allows people to live freely once they were saved by grace.

Paul addresses sin as a status/lifestyle in present active tense; the real question is, can you continue to live your life in sin granted justification by grace through faith?

Paul emphatically says “No way!” or more close to Greek “Hell, no” (The NRSV translation “By no means,” doesn’t sufficiently render Paul’s force)

Before moving on, I think it’s critical to understand what sin means in our culture.

Let’s face it, we all don’t like to talk about sin and continually misunderstand. We mostly paint sin as gross misdeeds like adultery, murder, embezzlement, genocide, etc. But sin is really an easy word to talk about without ever using the word itself. There are lots of words you can use that express the idea of sin—failure, being broken, falling short, shortcomings, flawed, trespassing, twisted, missing the mark, imperfection, living only for yourself, going your own way, evil, wrongdoing, messing up, rebelling, hurting others, and so on. Sin is the word that is used to describe wrongdoing in all its forms, big or small, personal or corporate, consciously conceived or unconsciously acted out.

Understanding sin and identifying your own sin are key to the understanding of grace. Without identifying your sin, you cannot understand the cross. Without understanding the cross, we can’t really commit our lives to Jesus.

I am going to share my sin. I used to work really hard to build the skillset that I needed to architect my identity. Self-defenses, white lies, subtle way of manipulating people for my self-interest, and deflecting issues by asking questions of what, how, where, when, and why, were some of my skills. I thought I had been successful to build walls around me to hide WHO I really was. And you know what? It didn't work for me very well. Why? Because at the core of WHO I was, my deepest craving was to be connected to the WHO of God with the WHO of me.

C.S. Lewis articulates sin in *The Screwtape Letters*: Screwtape the master devil teaches his nephew Wormwood how to make people sin. This is what he says, "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts,..." You see how sin creeps into our lives?

In vv. 3-4, Paul tells us the steps to quest to "walk in newness of life": Paul addresses we ought to identify ourselves with Jesus through baptism. This means death to sin

- So the first step is to die; how do we exactly die?
 - a. First we die to the dominion of sin

Charles G. Finney who was a Presbyterian minister and the leader in the Second Awakening Movement in America in 19th century says death to sin is "the opposite of death in sin" implying we die to a will opposed to God's will and self-indulgent state of mind. Like Jack Newman who was freed by reason of his demise, our own demise is a way to start a brand new life.

One of the most tried and true methods of Satan is to first tempt a person to sin, and then once he or she sins, to thrust that person into depression. The *evil inclination* gets us to sin and then makes us feel so bad about our sin that we think that we can never repair the

damage that we have done. The ultimate goal of the *evil inclination* is to distance us from God – or at least to make us believe that God has cast us off. But God says he will never forget us even if a woman forgets her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb in Isaiah 49:15.

- b. Secondly we die to our old identity like Jack from a bank robber to a pastor; 2 Timothy 3:2-4 illustrates what constitutes our old identity: “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, . . . , ungrateful, unholy, ³inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit.”
- c. Thirdly we die to the pursuits and aims of “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches” (1 Jn. 2:16): letting go of the world is what Jesus means we live in the world but not of the world in John 15.
- d. Fourthly we die to the subjection of the body: all its appetites and proclivities for pleasure and lust are brought into subjection to the will of God
- e. Lastly we die to anger, anxiety, insecurity, fear, shame, etc.
- The second step: Paul explains that we ought to be buried with Christ in baptism
 - a. Burial is the seal of death: it is a certificate of our death to the world
 - b. Burial is the displaying of death: it implies the believer’s open confession of death to sin to everybody

We have to realize that in order to be successful in our new life, we have to distance ourselves from certain places, situations and people who are likely to revive our “old man of sin.” For instance; if you were an alcoholic who was trying break your addiction to alcohol, would you continue to go to the bar, hang out with your same drunken buddies, and be so naive as to think that you will be able to just order a coke. No, just like Lot, we have to get out! --we have to put distance between us and our old habits.

Now that we've learned what it means to die... let's learn what it means to truly live, which is "being alive to God." Paul is saying it's not enough merely to die to sin because in and of itself that is impossible. We must be united with Christ: Paul specifies the seal of solidarity with Christ Jesus in 4 ways "co-buried, co-planted, co-crucified, and co-exist" in light of sin – Jesus' reality becomes our reality by the baptism of his Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit replaces our "old self" with the new identity in Christ; the renewing work of the Holy Spirit transforms us. For example, we act not out of self-promoting motive but out of self-giving love. The only way to crucify "old self" daily and keep it dead (1 Cor. 15:31) is the total surrender of ourselves to the Holy Spirit at all times and in all areas of our lives because we clay jars that have the treasure (2 Cor. 4:7). We, the clay jars must be shattered to have the treasure work in us. Remember we are clay jars NOT rubber jars.

To be raised - what does it mean to be raised in Christ through baptism? The resurrection is the special work upon Jesus "from the dead by the glory of the Father"; the victory over sin and death; "Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:55-56).

We are raised to our new identity: Our life is not the life of the first creation but of the new creation among the dead (2Cor. 5:17); the new creation entails holiness, righteousness, and joy by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Because God has liberated us from the power of sin, we should transfer our allegiance to Jesus who sets us free.

Living with Christ means not only freedom from sin but also to be full of life to serve God (v.10-11) and to do his will. We need to make our whole being a perfect offering to God (Rom. 12:1-2). Our life manifests the presence of the living God by caring for others, especially the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed. We are able to fulfill all that we were intended to be

when God made us. We are able to embrace the differentness and the otherness of other people.

If God has given to you and to me an entirely new life in Christ, how can that new life spend itself after the fashion of the old life? Shall the spiritual live as the carnal? How can you that were the servants of sin, but have been made free by precious blood, go back to your old slavery?

I want to close my sermon by inviting you to prayerfully examine and identify sin in order to die to sin rather than to die in sin. As I said, sin has many forms and names; don't play around sin. Label it for what it is. Turn from it; flee from it. Don't put yourself into the place of temptation. Where does your identity lie? Did you die to your old identity as a sinner and rise to a new identity as a child of God? Your old self has been crucified to the cross and buried with Jesus; and that through his resurrection you have come alive to a brand new reality.

Renewal work of God through the Spirit is not merely spiritual but translated into praxis. Purification of the flesh, renewal of the heart, and reorientation of hopes and desires enables us to love God and this love of God is also worked out as love of neighbors.

Jesus tells people to deny themselves and take their own cross to follow him (Mark 8:34). Jesus never promises that it would be an easy journey. Grace is not a license to live freely but a license to self-control to be Christlike. This is what it means to follow Jesus.