

Shame: “I’m nobody’s nothing!”
Titus 3:3-7; Eph. 2:4,5; 4:22-24 - February 7, 2010
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If you have identified with the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, and the fear of punishment described in the three previous messages, you will most likely relate to feelings of shame. One young lad found wandering the streets of London after a bombing raid was asked who he was. The lad said, “*I used to be my momma’s boy, now I’m nobody’s nothing!*” Have you ever felt like “nobody’s nothing?” If you have, you know what shame feels like.

I. Living with a shame based identity.

There was once a man who had a summer cottage on the coast of Maine. He decided to start a Bible study for the children who lived on a small island off the coast. He gathered the children and thought he would break the ice by asking a question they would all know, “How many of you have ever seen the Atlantic Ocean?” No response. In disbelief he asked again. Still no answer. Then it dawned on him that these children had lived on this island surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, had heard its surf daily, and yet not one of them knew it by name. (From making peace with your past, p.49) Perhaps you have lived all your life being influenced by the feelings of shame, yet were unaware of what it was called.

Shame’s pain.

While everyone experiences shame from time to time, a person suffering from a shame based identity lives in a constant environment of worthlessness. Guilt stems from something we do; Shame speaks to who we believe we are. The lie that Satan loves to flaunt in our faces and lead us to believe about ourselves is, “**I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.**” Shame is the voice that seldom rests as it whispers in our minds such messages as: “You are different than other people. You are fundamentally flawed. You do not measure up; something is wrong with you. You are inadequate.” Shame creates a deep sense of inferiority which destroys self worth and influences our emotions and behavior in negative ways. Shame infects the core of one’s being with a strong belief that failure and inadequacy is one’s lot in life.

Shame’s origin.

We know that disobedience to God’s command caused Adam and Eve to experience guilt, shame, and fear. They knew instantly that their actions had dishonored God. Shame is a part of this world’s brokenness. But how do we become filled with shame?

Shame’s origin is typically in childhood resulting from neglect, a lack of nurture and love. It can come from growing up in a family environment where parents unknowingly model their own shame identity. Family secrets like an alcoholic parent, or physical or sexual abuse can create a deep seated belief that we are flawed. A home environment where traumatic events are not resolved or talked about or where a child isn’t given the rights to express their own needs and feelings can contribute to the lie of unworthiness.

Repeated experiences of failure, real or perceived, can in time impress upon a young mind that they are inadequate. As this pattern continues, the belief is hardened and becomes the general self-identity of the person. Hence all they do feeds on the memories of a dark and broken past which colors the future with shades of hopelessness.

I cannot put my finger on any single cause of my own shame based identity, but I know that as early as kindergarten, a belief was being formed within me, convincing me, that I was inadequate in comparison to others. Shame has been a major force in shaping my life, but never in a positive way. How about you? If I am willing to speak about it, I encourage you to speak about it with someone you trust as well.

Shame's effects.

Obviously, shame does not produce positive benefits. It manifests itself in a variety of negative ways
(Taken from *Search for Significance* by Robert McGee):

- 1. Shame produces habitually destructive behavior.** It fuels negative attitudes and pessimistic thinking.
- 2. Shame instills self-pity.** We tend to see ourselves as victims of life and may blame other people and the circumstances of life. We throw regular pity parties but no one attends but us.
- 3. Shame promotes passivity.** We embrace the attitude of "What's the use!" We avoid pursuing life with vigor. Instead, we play it safe.
- 4. Shame lends itself to isolation and withdrawal.** I was so convinced that I had nothing to offer anyone and that no one wanted to know me that for the first year in seminary I would avoid the student lounge/cafeteria for fear that no one would want me to sit with them.
- 5. Loss of creativity.** It is difficult being creative and coming up with new ideas if you are convinced that nothing will succeed.
- 6. Co-dependent relationships.** Co-dependents need to take care of and rescue people. They need to be needed. Taking care of a needy person is a way of trying to gain personal significance....but it usually just burns you out.
- 7. Shame may also lead us to despise our appearance.** A lot of people are ashamed of the way they look and have a hard time feeling comfortable in their own skin.

To recognize that shame is a powerful force operating within our lives and to name it as such is a good beginning. The next question is the big one. "Is there anything we can do about it?"

II. God's answer to shame is being made new from the inside out.

"Dr. Paul Tournier once compared life to a man hanging from a trapeze. The trapeze bar was the man's security, his pattern of existence, his lifestyle. Then God swung another trapeze into the man's view, and he faced a perplexing dilemma. Should he relinquish his past? Should he reach for the new bar? The moment of truth came, Dr. Tournier explained, when the man realized that to grab onto the new bar, he must release the old one." (McGee, p.102,103). Personal change is extremely hard. Remaining in an uncomfortable rut may seem to be safer than to let go of the known to reach out for the uncertainty of the unknown future.

Come to think of it, coming to Christ as our personal Lord and Savior is a lot like letting go of one trapeze bar in order to grasp a new one. The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus saying: ***At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not***

because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7). Salvation is the releasing of our grip on the old life of sin, and of reaching out in faith, to the new life made possible through God's mercy and grace. This new life is a radical reorientation. It is a "new birth" in a spiritual sense, wherein the Spirit of Christ brings forgiveness and eternal life.

In Ephesians 2:4,5 we read, "***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.***" We were spiritually dead due to our sins, but God ***made us alive with Christ***. We have new life within us; it is new life from above.

Where there is life, there is potential for growth and change. While our salvation is instantaneous, our growth in Christlikeness is not instantaneous. The Bible describes persons young in the Faith as "babes in Christ". However, we are not intended to stay in the cradle and feeding on mother's milk. We are to grow into maturity as disciples. This does not happen automatically, it takes discipline, hard work, commitment, and perseverance.

The same can be said about changes within our personality and especially with the emotional baggage we all carry around. The more complicated the baggage, the more time and effort is required to become progressively healthier in Christ. We have a responsibility to participate in this process of growth and change. The Scripture says it like this: "***You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in True righteousness and holiness***" (Eph. 4:22-24)

So what is the procedure? In the case of a shame based identity, we need to identify it as a product of our old life, and we are to "put off" our old self, its attitudes, ways of thinking, and acting. We need to recognize Satan's lie: "***I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.***" We need to take that false belief and insert it into the document shredder and shred it to pieces.

Next, we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit ***to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in True righteousness and holiness***" We "put on the new self" by trusting that ***"I am deeply loved, fully pleasing, totally forgiven, accepted, and complete in Christ."*** (Robert McGee). We are to "put on" or "claim" by faith these truths that we have discovered which are the by product of Christ living in us. This is our new identity: ***"I am deeply loved, fully pleasing, totally forgiven, accepted, and complete in Christ."***

As these truths take hold in our innermost being, we will discover the old lies growing weaker and weaker, while the new identity in Christ grows stronger and stronger. This is not a 24 hour make over; this is a new way of approaching life. It is a process of becoming all that we are meant to be in Jesus and it will continue until the day we die and will ultimately be completed as we stand before the Lord.

Are you ready and willing to act on the truths you've been hearing about?

Are you ready to renounce the lie: "***I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself***" so that you no longer have to live in the fear of failure?

Are you ready to renounce the lie: "***I must be approved (accepted) by certain others to feel good about myself***" so that you can be free from the fear of rejection?

Are you ready to renounce the lie: “**Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished**” so that you can be released from the fear of punishment?

Are you ready to renounce the lie: “**I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless**” so that you can be set free from debilitating feelings of shame?

If so, you are invited to come to the front of the auditorium and kneel or sit in prayer. Ask the Father to reveal to you the lies you’ve been believing about yourself. Ask Him for forgiveness. Ask Him to set you free from the bondage of the falsehoods. Ask Him to enable you to grasp the truths found in the Cross of Christ:

- **I have been justified**, therefore I’ve been forgiven and granted the righteousness of Christ.
- **I have been reconciled** through Christ and am now totally accepted by Him.
- **I have been set free from all condemnation and punishment** because Jesus satisfied God’s wrath so that I can receive the love of the Father.
- **I have been made a new creation in Christ** and I have His life within me to grow and change into what He wants me to be.

Come to your Savior and Lord and let the process of inner healing begin.