

5. Learning to Move from Shame to Self-Acceptance

In our last two topics, we have talked about the changes that begin to happen within us once we place our trust in Christ. We saw that Christ wants to help us begin to move from fear to love. He also wants us to move from guilt to forgiveness, cleansing and forgiving others. Today, we are going to focus on how we move from shame to self-acceptance.

When Adam sinned, he immediately experienced shame because he was naked before God. Instead of dealing with his shame before God, Adam tried to deal with his outward appearance by covering himself with fig leaves. Ever since that time people have focused on their outward appearance as they have tried to deal with their inadequacy and shame. As a result, people focus on the fact that they are too short, too tall, too thin, too fat, their nose is too big or too small or many other things about their outward appearance. By focusing on these things, they fail to deal with their appearance before God as sinners and forget that God looks on the heart.

One of the greatest verses for new Christians to learn and understand to help them begin to reverse the effects of shame is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” What a privilege to know that Christ does not just patch up the old person but instead He recreates us as new persons. In this verse we see that Christ did three things for us at the moment of salvation:

- Christ made us a new creation
- Christ said that the old has passed away
- Christ said that the new has come

By making us a new creation, Christ changed us on the inside. We are given a new nature and have been set free. With our new nature we are now free to make choices again. We can choose to sin but we can also choose to ask Christ to give us His strength to do what is right. Galatians 5:13 tells us, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” We are now free to serve one another in love.

Christ also says that the old has passed away. Once Adam sinned he received a yoke of bondage and became a slave to sin. Galatians 5:1 tells us, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” The Galatians had turned back to the law to try and help them live their new lives in Christ. In turning to the law, they had again become entangled in a yoke of bondage. The law can never make a person do right because that is not the purpose of any law. A law only shows a person when he has done wrong. Galatians 3:24-25 tell us that the law was our tutor or schoolmaster to bring us to Christ but once we came to Christ we are no longer under the tutor. To turn back to the law to help us in our spiritual growth is to turn back to bondage.

Christ then says that the new has come. The new is best understood through the new commandment that Christ gave to the disciples and us in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By

this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The new means that we have been set free to love as Christ loved as we abide in Him (John 15:5) and yield to Him (Romans 6:13, 16). The more we learn to yield to Christ, the less shame we feel because we are no longer focusing on ourselves. Instead we are focusing on the new life that Christ has given us which makes us free to serve one another in love. We begin to realize as Philippians 4:13 tells us, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Because the things that we are doing we are doing through Christ, we do not experience shame because we know that we are pleasing Christ.

This in turn helps us to realize how we are able to do what we do. 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 tells us, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ We do not need to focus on ourselves any longer - a new focus
- ◆ We can realize that our sufficiency is from God - a new sufficiency
- ◆ We can realize that God has made us adequate - a new adequacy
- ◆ We can be effective ministers of the new covenant - a new ministry
- ◆ We have been given true life by the Spirit - a new life

Many Christians have not understood and applied these principles so they are still controlled by shame. Other Christians are still controlled by shame because they are living with unconfessed sin. They have hidden their sins from others but they have not hidden their sins from God. Proverbs 28:13 tells us, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” The person who tries to cover his sins will not prosper because his fear, guilt and shame are destroying him from within. The true remedy for dealing with our sins is given in this verse:

- We are to confess our sin
- We are to forsake our sin

Instead of confessing and forsaking our sin, a common way that Christians deal with their shame is by trying to become busy with Christian activities with the hope that the busyness will cause the shame to go away. The problem that we face if we try this approach is that the shame is still there when we finish our activities because the activities have been substituted for confessing and forsaking the sin. Instead we need to focus on renewing the inner man by confessing and forsaking sin. 2 Corinthians 4:16 tells us, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.”

When we focus on renewing the inner man each day as we spend time in prayer and confession, we are then able to work out what is happening in our lives. Then our activities have meaning and purpose instead of just being busyness to help us forget our shame. Philippians 2:12-16 tell us, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst

of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” As we renew our inner man day-by-day, these verses tell us that:

- * We will work out what is happening in us
- * We will do all things without complaining and disputing
- * We will shine as lights in the world

As we help new Christians learn to deal with their shame in a Biblical way, their lives will begin to have real purpose as they see Christ work in and through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help new Christians learn what it means to be a new creation in Christ.