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“STRANGERS AND EXILES”:
CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AS THE FOUNDATION
FOR COUNSELING KOREAN AMERICANS

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**“STRANGERS AND EXILES”:
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FOR COUNSELING KOREAN AMERICANS**

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To Yehsul,
my sunshine.
And to Mom and Dad,
my moonlight.

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PREFACE

Growing up as a beloved only child, self-righteousness has always been my number one struggle and the starting point of my sin. I have had a decent “Christian” identity of my own definition, which does not align with the true Christian identity that Scripture teaches. After the years of idolizing myself and indulgence of sin, God finally struck me down and showed me that my righteousness is nothing but a filthy rag. While I am fully known by God by his sovereign grace and mercy, I am still getting to know God little by little, day by day.

This little man of faith would never have been able to take further steps to write this thesis without his wife. Yehsul, you always have been on my side, whether the day is bright or dark. Thank you for your kind words of encouragement and warm hugs. You are my sunshine; without you, there are only rainy days in my life.

I am forever grateful for my parents, who put their love and trust in me without reservation. I know I might not be the best son in the universe, but I cannot ask any better and godlier parents than you two. You are my moonlight; your ceaseless prayer of tears calms my undulant heart and illuminates over it.

I am heavily indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Jeremy Paul Pierre. Ever since the fall of 2015 when I took his introduction to biblical counseling class, he has been my role model as a faithful theologian as well as a caring counselor. Through the classes, meetings, and casual conversations, he has watered and propped my wayward thoughts so that it can bear some good fruits. Thank you for being my supervisor-mentor, Dr. Pierre.

I am thankful for all the professors of Southern Seminary who have taught me and mentored me over the years. I am especially grateful for Drs. Gregory B. Brewton, Joseph R. Crider, Esther R. Crookshank, Robert D. Jones, Chuck T. Lewis, Thomas J.

Nettles, Matthew D. Westerholm, and Gregory A. Wills. These men and a woman of faith have displayed a model of Christ-like life both inside and outside of classroom. Thanks to Southern seminary as well, which became a starting point of my family as well as my theological education.

Lastly, I want to finish this preface by quoting the first stanza of an old hymn written by Fanny Crosby.

To God be the glory! Great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Jeemin Moon

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of history, human beings have never stopped migrating from one place to another. The earliest migration in human history dates back to the first humans, Adam and Eve, as they were sent out from the garden of Eden. Scripture also narrates the stories of other people who lived their lives as immigrants: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Naomi and Ruth, and Daniel and his friends. All of them faithfully lived their lives with an identity that was given by God and was reinforced through their relationship with him. The author of Hebrews rightly describes these forerunners of faith as “strangers and exiles on the earth” who were “seeking a homeland” (Heb 11:13-14).¹ Because of their desire for “a better country, that is, a heavenly one,” God “is not ashamed to be called their God” and “has prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:16b).

Fast forward two thousand years from the time of Jesus, the number of immigrants is ever-growing, “reaching 258 million in 2017, up from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000.”² Among all the countries on the globe, the United States of America has the largest number of immigrants: as of 2019, about 48.2 million immigrants are living in the U.S., which is about fifteen percent of the whole population of the country.³ Among those immigrants, about 2.5 million people are from the Republic of

¹ All English translations of Scripture are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

² United Nations, *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2017), 0.

³ World Economic Forum, “Which Countries Have the Most Immigrants?” last modified March 19, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/which-countries-have-the-most-immigrants-51048ff1f9/>.

Korea.⁴ In fact, Korean Americans are one of the fastest-growing minorities in the U.S., having grown by twenty-one percent in the past six years.⁵

Over the years, Koreans have flourished in America and established many Koreatowns within some of the big cities or metropolitan areas such as New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. Thanks to their assiduity and their enthusiasm for education, Korean Americans are regarded as one of the “model minorities” in America.⁶ Despite their success as an ethnic minority group, Korean Americans suffer from numerous mental distresses such as an identity crisis, anger, and depression. Although more than sixty percent of Korean Americans identify themselves as Protestants and thousands of Korean churches are serving them in all over the U.S., the resources for counseling Korean Americans and counseling ministries available for them are vastly insufficient.⁷ In such a context, this thesis aims to equip gospel ministers and lay counselors to better understand the experience of Korean Americans in light of Scripture and to give biblically faithful counsel for them.

Thesis

In this thesis, I will argue that Christian identity was the essential factor that enabled immigrants in the Bible to navigate through the turmoil they experienced in foreign countries, and therefore it is also indispensable for Korean Americans as they live

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Countries Which Have Many Korean Immigrants,” accessed February 24, 2020, http://www.mofa.go.kr/www/wpge/m_21509/contents.do.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Definition of Korean Immigrants Living in Foreign Countries and Their Statistics,” accessed February 24, 2020, http://www.mofa.go.kr/www/wpge/m_21507/contents.do.

⁶ The Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School explains model minority as follows: “Since its introduction in popular media more than a half century ago, the term ‘model minority’ has often been used to refer to a minority group perceived as particularly successful, especially in a manner that contrasts with other minority groups.” Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School, “The Model Minority Myth,” accessed March 1, 2020, <https://thepractice.law.harvard.edu/article/the-model-minority-myth/>.

⁷ Statista, “Religious Affiliation of Korean-Americans 2012,” last modified July 19, 2012, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/238977/religious-affiliation-of-korean-americans/>.

in the United States of America in the twenty-first century. To put it simply, Christian identity is an identity in Christ: it is God the Father’s authoritative answer—based on the Person and the work of the Son of God—to the most fundamental ontological question of every human being, “Who am I?” and it can be strengthened by the divine-human relationship empowered by the Spirit of God. Christian identity works as a supra-identity that has authority over all the other identities constructed by oneself or by others. This identity in Christ not only can speak to the painful experience of Korean Americans but also can empower them to be “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37) in Christ while they live in a foreign land as strangers and exiles. In sum, this thesis will (1) examine the experience of Korean Americans, (2) demonstrate Scripture’s delineation of Christian identity, and (3) articulate the implications of Christian identity in counseling Korean Americans who struggle with identity issues.

Factors of Experience of Korean Americans

In order to give more relevant and more effective counsel for Korean Americans, it is essential to understand their context of experience and their struggles. This chapter will provide a comprehensive sociological and generational overview of Korean Americans’ experience.

First-Generation Korean Americans: Definition and Factors of Experience

First-generation Korean Americans (FGKAs) are Koreans who immigrated to the United States after reaching their adulthood. While Koreans started to immigrate to the U.S. in the late 19th century, immigration was limited due to Japanese colonization in Korea, the Korean War, and the restrictive immigration policy of both the Korean and the U.S. government. It was after the legislation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Koreans started to immigrate to the U.S. in larger numbers. As of 2017, there were approximately 1.2 million first and 1.5-generation Korean Americans, which is

about half of the whole Korean American population.⁸

Encyclopedia Britannica defines immigration as the “process through which individuals become permanent residents or citizens of another country.”⁹ Although it might seem as simple as physical relocation from one country to another, the context of immigration is much more complicated. In general, people decide to immigrate to other countries because they are not satisfied with their lives in their own country. While each person and each family have a different reason for immigration, they commonly anticipate the following advantages that immigration seems to promise: (1) a less competitive culture, (2) a better education, (3) better natural environment, and (4) better job opportunities.¹⁰ They expect that their dissatisfaction will be resolved and they will be able to enjoy a better life if they immigrate to a new country.

For many FGKAs, however, such high expectations are not fully met as they migrate to America. Instead, they now face a unique set of challenges caused by immigration, such as language barrier, economic hardship, cultural conflict, and marginalization. These factors of FGKAs’ experience make their adjustment and acculturation extremely challenging.

Language barrier. A language barrier is one of the most prominent struggles that FGKAs experience. Many FGKAs have a hard time communicating in English because English education in Korea is focused on reading and listening, not speaking and writing. Furthermore, Korean and English have a completely different sentence structure and phonetic characteristics, which make it challenging for Koreans to learn English. A

⁸ Pew Research Center, “Origins and Destinations of the World’s Migrants, 1990-2017,” last modified February 28, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/interactives/global-migrant-stocks-map/>.

⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Immigration,” accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/immigration>.

¹⁰ Kyung Min Kim and Gun Woong Na, “People Who Leave South Korea: Immigration Syndrome,” *Maeil Business News* (Seoul), June 21, 2019, <https://www.mk.co.kr/news/economy/view/2019/06/442120/>.

research study on Korean Americans' English proficiency shows that less than half (47%) of FGKAs feel confident in communicating in English, while other Asians living in the U.S. and U.S. born Korean Americans reported higher English proficiency, 70% and 94% respectively.¹¹ FGKAs' language barrier affects almost every aspect of their life, such as career choice and communication with others.

Economic hardship. FGKAs experience economic hardship because their "relocation to America often results in lower socioeconomic status as compared to what many immigrants had established in their homeland" over the years.¹² FGKAs also report that "the education [they] received in Korea is often not recognized; and due to language difficulties," their "abilities as professionals are frequently underestimated."¹³ Although they are skillful and well-trained in their professional fields, their poor English becomes an obstacle for them as they seek job opportunities. As a result, most FGKAs end up running a small business such as a laundry, a convenience store, and a beauty supply regardless of their major, education level, and profession. Despite their hard labor, most FGKA families remain as a middle class in terms of household income.¹⁴

Cultural conflict. In addition to a language barrier and low socioeconomic status, FGKAs also experience serious cultural conflict since Korean culture radically differs from American culture. D. Toarmino and C. A. Chun describe the cultural conflict

¹¹ Pew Research Center, "English Proficiency of Korean Population in the U.S., 2015," last modified September 8, 2017, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/chart/english-proficiency-of-korean-population-in-the-u-s/>.

¹² D. Toarmino and C. A. Chun, "Issues and Strategies in Counseling Korean Americans," in *Multicultural Issues in Counseling*, ed. Courtland C. Lee (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 1997), 238.

¹³ Toarmino and Chun, "Issues and Strategies," 238.

¹⁴ According to Pew Research Center, Korean Americans' median annual household income is \$60,000, with foreign born Korean American's median annual household income as \$57,000. Pew Research Center, "Economic Characteristics of U.S. Korean Population, 2015," last modified September 8, 2017, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/chart/economic-characteristics-of-u-s-korean-population/>.

that FGKAs experience: “Korean immigrants often experience dramatic environmental changes in their lives and must learn to cope with the reality that many of the cultural values and behavioral patterns that were useful in their native country are now irrelevant, misperceived, or ineffective.”¹⁵ In addition to their cultural conflict in American society, FGKAs also experience cultural conflict within their families because of the cultural difference between them and their children. For FGKAs, cultural conflict is “a reason for the heightened psychological distress and social alienation from others and even from their own children who are predominantly English speaking and much Americanized.”¹⁶

Marginalization. Due to the aforementioned factors, many FGKAs find themselves marginalized within the larger American society and culture. In 2017, the Pew Research Center reported that Korean Americans are regarded as one of the most separated people groups from the rest of the community, both culturally and ethnically.¹⁷ Even years after their relocation, many FGKAs “remain largely monolingual with limited English, predominantly attend Korean ethnic churches/temples, socialize primarily within co-ethnics and demonstrate high ethnic solidarity and pride.”¹⁸ Children of FGKAs also reported that their parents experience “greater marginalization in the larger context”¹⁹ than they do. Although FGKAs and younger generations of Korean Americans share visible phenotypic characteristics, FGKAs have significantly lower societal power due to some factors such as their Korean accents and “their lack of social and cultural capital as

¹⁵ Toarmino and Chun, “Issues and Strategies,” 238.

¹⁶ Miwa Yasui, Tae Yeun Kim, and Yoosun Choi, “Culturally Specific Parent Mental Distress, Parent–Child Relations and Youth Depression among Korean American Families,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 27 (June 2018): 3371, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-018-1151-z>.

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “Koreans in the U.S. Fact Sheet,” last modified September 8, 2017, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-koreans-in-the-u-s/>.

¹⁸ Yasui, Kim, and Choi, “Culturally Specific Parent Mental Distress,” 3371.

¹⁹ Lana Kim, Carmen Knudson-Martin, and Amy Tuttle, “Transmission of Intergenerational Migration Legacies in Korean American Families: Parenting the Third Generation,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 41 (December 2019): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-018-9485-7>.

immigrants.”²⁰ Although there is a degree of difference, marginalization is a common experience for all generations of Korean Americans as well.

Common Psychological Problems That First-Generation Korean Americans Experience

Because of personal variables such as years of living, education in America, degree of acculturation, and adherence to Korean values, each FGKA experiences different psychological problems. There are, however, some mental distresses commonly experienced by FGKAs: depression, anger, *hwa-byung*, and identity conflict. A brief explanation of each will be helpful in understanding and counseling FGKAs more effectively.

Depression. The challenges that FGKAs experience due to various contextual factors can cause depression. For example, little tasks such as ordering food or going for groceries can be challenging for many of them because of a language barrier. Unlike when they lived in Korea, FGKAs are not competent professionals anymore since their education and training are not recognized in the U.S. Being marginalized and culturally isolated, FGKAs do not have someone with whom they can share their concerns. They also worry about their children, wondering if their children might be ashamed of their “inability to integrate to the mainstream culture”²¹ due to their social awkwardness and poor English. As a result, Korean American older adults’ “rates of probable depression as indexed by standardized depression screening tools are up to four times greater than those of Whites or African American older adults.”²²

²⁰ Kim, Knudson-Martin, and Tuttle, “Transmission,” 184.

²¹ Yasui, Kim, and Choi, “Culturally Specific Parent Mental Distress,” 3373.

²² Yuri Jang et al., “The Association Between Self-Rated Mental Health and Symptoms of Depression in Korean American Older Adults,” *Aging & Mental Health* 16, no. 4 (May 2012): 481.

Anger and *hwa-byung*. FGKAs also experience anger issues. Both the lack of social support and their low socioeconomic status can lead to frustration and resentment. While their anger can grow against racially discriminating mainstream society, FGKAs can become angry against their households as well. Toarmino and Chun’s research shows that “Because Korean American men are at a high risk for social isolation, their spouses and children can easily become the target of their frustration and anger.”²³ FGKA women can also grow angry against their own family because of the stress they get from work and homemaking.

Some FGKAs experience a culture-related syndrome called *hwa-byung*, which in Korean means “anger disease” or “fire disease.” *Hwa-byung* can be defined as “a chronic anger syndrome, in which anger is thought to have been chronically suppressed and ‘accumulated and become dense’ and to be characterized by unique symptoms”²⁴ such as (but not limited to) insomnia, fatigue, and panic attack. While both Korean American men and women suffer from *hwa-byung* (17.2% of Korean American women and 7.9% of men), it is experienced most frequently by middle-aged Korean American women.²⁵ One of the possible explanations is the significant impact of Confucianism in Korean culture: because Confucianism teaches people to suppress one’s emotion, FGKAs might internalize their anger and frustration, and this suppressed emotion can eventually develop into *hwa-byung*.

Identity conflict. Because of their lack of English skills and poor acculturation, FGKAs shy away from associating with Americans and joining in the

²³ Toarmino and Chun, “Issues and Strategies,” 243.

²⁴ Min et al., “Symptoms to Use for Diagnostic Criteria of Hwa-Byung, an Anger Syndrome,” *Psychiatry Investigation* 6, no. 1 (March 2009): 7, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2796033/>.

²⁵ Lin et al., “Hwa-Byung: A Community Study of Korean-Americans,” *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorder* 180 (1992): 386.

mainstream society. Furthermore, the experience of marginalization and racial discrimination frustrate them so that they cannot step out of their comfort zone. As a result, many FGKAs fail to adjust to a new culture and end up developing a defensive, hyper-Korean identity. Their hyper-Korean identity is further reinforced as they associate with Koreans exclusively by going to a Korean church, starting a small business in a Korean town, and only attending Korean American social gatherings.

FGKAs' hyper-Korean identity, however, does not relieve their concerns about their identity. Although they are living in their comfort zone, they still want to join the mainstream society because they do recognize themselves as members of American society. Their exclusive lifestyle and their hyper-Korean identity actually cause an identity conflict as they live in America as American citizens because they feel the gap between the life they have dreamed and the life they are living right now. Although they left Korea to pursue an American lifestyle, they find it almost impossible to live as fully Americans due to the lack of their socioeconomic resources. Their experience of identity conflict can discourage them and make them to become pessimistic about their lives.

1.5-Generation Korean Americans: Definition and Factors of Experience

1.5-Generation Korean Americans (1.5GKAs) are Koreans who were born in Korea but raised in the United States. They are the children of FGKAs who arrived in America before reaching adulthood, usually at the onset or in the midst of adolescence. Although both FGKAs and 1.5GKAs were born in Korea and moved to America later, significant difference exists between the two generations because 1.5GKAs are more predisposed to learn the new language and culture due to their younger age. 1.5GKAs' faster adaptation and acculturation, however, does not mean that they live a problem-free life. 1.5GKAs experience a unique set of difficulties as they adjust to a new environment. Some of the common hardships that they experience are culture shock, challenges at school, and family conflict.

Culture shock. During the initial stage of immigration, 1.5GKAs experience sudden changes in almost everything around them: language, food, culture, and people. Under American culture which is significantly different from Korean culture, their morals, values, and customs might not be useful anymore. Compared to their life in Korea where they were the majority, they now live as a minority racially, culturally, and linguistically. They also experience a sense of loss as they leave everything, including their family members and friends back in Korea. Such dramatic and holistic change can cause a huge culture shock.

Challenges at school. 1.5GKAs also have a hard time at school. While schools in Korea required them to remain silent and to act as passive recipients, American schools expect them to actively participate in classes and to engage with other students. For 1.5GKA students who learned to admire Confucianist values such as contemplativeness and humbleness, American schools' requirements for active engagement can cause a great amount of stress. Some other differences between Korean schools and American schools, such as competition versus cooperation and collectivism versus individualism, can also confuse 1.5GKA students.

In addition to the cultural difference, some other problems can also make 1.5GKAs' adjustment difficult. One of them is a language barrier. Learning a new language can be extremely stressful and can make 1.5GKAs feel idiotic. Their friends also make fun of their accent and their poor English skill. Another problem is racial discrimination. Compared to African Americans and Latino Americans, "Asian American students reported higher levels of peer discrimination."²⁶ Even at the schools where many Asian students attend, 1.5GKAs "still felt a measure of discrimination among non-Asian

²⁶ Sang Hyun Lee, "Liminality and Worship in the Korean American Context," in *Religion and Spirituality in Korean America*, ed. David K. Yoo and Ruth H. Chung (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 116.

peers,” which “made them uncomfortable and even angry.”²⁷ All three factors of experience—cultural difference, a language barrier, and racial discrimination—can make 1.5GKAs’ adjustment to American schools extremely challenging.

Family conflict. 1.5GKA adolescents experience conflicts with their parents due to a number of reasons. First, Korean American families have a conflict over the children’s academic performance. In Korean culture, “children are often viewed as extensions of the parents themselves,”²⁸ and children’s success is regarded as parents’ success in the Korean community. In particular, children of FGKAs “reported tension and conflicts with and more academic pressure from their parents than other Asian American groups.”²⁹ Because FGKA parents believe that education is a key to achieve upward mobility, they urge their children to study hard and to enter prestigious universities. As their parents put their hope in their children, 1.5GKA students fear that “without academic success their parents will lose face in their community.”³⁰

Another reason for family conflict is a cultural difference between 1.5GKAs and their parents. For example, 1.5GKA students learn at the school to be autonomous and independent, but their parents expect them to be obedient and to follow their guidance. Such a difference can confuse 1.5GKA adolescents and cause serious family conflict. Various other issues such as responsibility and finances can become the topic of their family conflict as well. Due to the different pace of acculturation and lack of communication, 1.5GKAs experience continual conflict with their parents.

²⁷ Lee, “Liminality and Worship,” 115.

²⁸ Toarmino and Chun, “Issues and strategies,” 246.

²⁹ Kyong-Ah Kwon, Gyesook Yoo, and Jennie C. De Gagne, “Does Culture Matter? A Qualitative Inquiry of Helicopter Parenting in Korean American College Students,” *Journal of Child and Family Study* 26 (2017): 1979.

³⁰ Christine J. Hong, *Identity, Youth, and Gender in the Korean American Christian Church* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 112.

Common Psychological Problems That 1.5-Generation Korean Americans Experience

Although FGKAs and 1.5GKAs experience similar psychological problems as they step into the unknown world together, their experience is not the same due to the differences between them such as age factor, degree of acculturation, and language proficiency. As they adjust to a new culture and environment, 1.5GKAs experience constant conflicts within themselves, within their families, and within the larger American society. Some of the most prominent problems that they experience are identity confusion and depression. Understanding 1.5GKAs' experience of these issues is essential in counseling them.

Identity confusion. Unlike FGKAs who came to the U.S. after their ethnic and cultural identities had been established, the identity of 1.5GKAs is not fully formed yet because they came to America when they were still adolescents or even younger. As they navigate through a new culture, their identity is affected by numerous factors they experience each day. For example, 1.5GKAs will never be viewed as fully American and will not be welcomed by mainstream society due to their racial, linguistic, and cultural difference. At the same time, they will not be fully accepted by either FGKA or SGKA communities as well because of their uniqueness, both linguistically and culturally. Because neither their Korean nor their English is as good as native speakers, communicating with both FGKAs and SGKAs will not be flawless. Furthermore, because 1.5GKAs' culture is almost equally affected by both Korean culture and American culture, both FGKAs and SGKAs will find 1.5GKAs' culture different from theirs. Due to such difficulty to belong to any group, 1.5GKAs will experience significant identity confusion.

Depression. Contrary to the "model minority" stereotype, Asian Americans are more likely to suffer from mental distresses than European Americans. Among the Asian

Americans such as Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino, Korean American youths have “the highest risk of depression ... with rates as high as 40%.”³¹ Such a high rate of depression among Korean American adolescents can be attributed to several factors of their experience. The first reason is a sense of loss. Leaving their home country and close people can be a depressing experience. The second reason is cultural conflict. As they try to acculturate themselves, 1.5GKAs can become frustrated and depressed by some factors such as culture shock, lack of social support, and racial discrimination. The third reason is family conflict. Constant family conflict over some issues such as responsibility, academic success, and finances can cause extra stress for 1.5GKAs and depress them.

The issue of depression among 1.5GKAs can easily worsen because it is hard for them to find someone to open their heart to and talk with. Because of their unique characteristics both culturally and linguistically, they might have a hard time joining both FGKA and SGKA communities, let alone American communities. Even if they find someone, it is still hard for them to share their struggle because Korean culture discourages emotional expression and regards depression as a shameful phenomenon that only weak-willed people experience.

Second-Generation Korean Americans: Definition and Factors of Experience

Second-generation Korean Americans (SGKAs) are FGKAs’ children who were born in America. Thanks to their parents’ sacrifice and support, SGKAs have more opportunities to receive higher education and to obtain better-paying jobs than their parents. Although fluent in English and well-adjusted to American culture, SGKAs still experience many conflicts and hardships both in American society and in Korean society. Some of the common factors of their experience are bi-cultural and multicultural identity, family conflict, and marginalization.

³¹ Yasui, Kim, and Choi, “Culturally Specific Parent Mental Distress,” 3371.

Bi-Cultural and multicultural identity. Contrary to their parents who hold hyper-Korean identity, SGKAs tend to have a more Americanized identity because they were born in America and socialized in American cultural norms. Although they learn Korean as a first language when they were young, soon English becomes their native tongue as they go to school and use English exclusively when associating with their friends and teachers.

SGKAs' strong American identity, however, does not mean that they have no Korean identity at all. Along with their parents' effort to teach Korean language and customs, some institutions help SGKAs to develop a Korean identity. One of them is an educational institution called *Hangul Hakgyo*, which means "Korean alphabet school" in Korean. Associating with religious organizations or regional school boards, *Hangul Hakgyo* teaches not only the Korean language but also Korean cultures such as food, costume, and literature. It also celebrates some of the biggest Korean national holidays such as Korean Thanksgiving and Lunar New Year's Day. In this way, *Hangul Hakgyo* contributes to the development of SGKAs' Korean identity. Thanks to their parents' education and support of some institutions like *Hangul Hakgyo*, SGKAs become able to understand their ethnic and cultural identity as Koreans.

Furthermore, SGKAs also have a multicultural identity. As Christine Hong argues, "Second-generation Korean Americans benefit from the homogeneous quality of Korean community," and it "assists them in retaining strong ethnic ties and in receiving support in the form of solidarity while they maintain their relationships and interactions with those from other racial-ethnic groups."³² Lana Kim, Carmen Knudson-Martin, and Amy Tuttle also affirm that SGKAs "usually have a bi-cultural or multicultural identity, as their sense of ethnic identity is developed in relation to their multicultural socialization, and the immediate sociocultural contexts within which they lived and were

³² Hong, *Identity*, 115.

educated.”³³ While their multicultural identity can be a great advantage as they live in a multicultural society, “the process towards developing multicultural identities can involve an internal struggle with feelings of not fully belonging to any cultural in-group; instead being ‘other.’”³⁴

Family conflict. Because of cultural and linguistic differences, SGKAs and their parents experience ongoing conflicts. Some of the most prominent issues that they have conflict over are academic success and career choice. While “financial success is a tangible expression of success in America” for the immigrant generation, many FGKAs ended up having low-paying jobs “with the hopes that their children would be able to achieve the American Dream.”³⁵ In other words, FGKAs now defer their dream of upward socioeconomic mobility to their children. As a result, many FGKAs urge their children to enter the prestigious universities and pursue well-paying jobs such as a medical doctor, regardless of their children’s dreams and interests. Without understanding each other’s thoughts and cultural standpoints, their conflict only worsens.

In addition, SGKAs cannot help but acting as family brokers because of their parents’ poor English skills and ignorance about American cultural practices. Such role reversal can disturb the family hierarchy since parents now “rely on their children for assistance when dealing with authority figures (e.g., school teachers, doctors) and weighty or complicated issues such as medical insurance and tax filing.”³⁶ This role reversal can cause some negative effects on both of them: the parents may feel ignorant

³³ Kim, Knudson-Martin, and Tuttle, “Transmission,” 181.

³⁴ Kim, Knudson-Martin, and Tuttle, “Transmission,” 181.

³⁵ Elena Young-Kyong Kim, Roy A. Bean, and James M. Harper, “Do General Treatment Guidelines for Asian American Families Have Applications to Specific Ethnic Groups? The Case of Culturally-Competent Therapy with Korean Americans,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 30, no. 3 (July 2004): 359.

³⁶ Kim, Bean, and Harper, “Do General Treatment,” 363.

and powerless, and the children can feel stressed and overwhelmed. As a result, their family conflict can get worse and worse.

Marginalization. Despite their English fluency and their openness to other cultures, SGKAs are still being marginalized and perceived as forever foreigners in American society. As they experience marginalization, SGKAs' can feel more frustration than FGKAs or 1.5GKAs because they identify themselves primarily as Americans due to their American birthplace and education. As a result, some of them choose to overassimilate themselves to American culture and society by rejecting and repudiating their Korean identity. Their effort to overassimilate themselves can cause some mental distresses such as depression and anger.

SGKAs also experience marginalization within the Korean community. Because of SGKAs' poor facility with the Korean language, older Korean Americans do not feel comfortable talking with them and even look down on them. Cultural differences between SGKAs and older generations contribute to their marginalization as well. A SGKA student describes his experience of cultural conflict in the Korean community: "At school, participation counts towards my grade so I always talk even though it makes me sort of uncomfortable. Then when I'm home or here (at church) when I speak up, it's called 'talking back' and the adults all think it's rude, especially my parents."³⁷ One of the results of SGKAs' marginalization is a division within the Korean community. For example, many Korean churches have a separate English Ministry (EM) where English-speaking Korean Americans gather and worship together exclusively.

Common Psychological Problems That Second-Generation Korean Americans Experience

For SGKAs, some of the most frequently experienced psychological problems

³⁷ Hong, *Identity*, 106

are identity crisis, depression, and low self-esteem.

Identity crisis. Just like other generations of Korean Americans, SGKAs experience an identity crisis. SGKAs' identity crisis, however, differs from other generations because they consider themselves primarily as Americans, while FGKAs and 1.5GKAs consider themselves primarily as Koreans. Even if they regard themselves as Americans, SGKAs are still not fully accepted as Americans in mainstream society. As a result, SGKAs often experience an identity crisis more severely than FGKAs and 1.5GKAs.

The marginalization and discrimination SGKAs experience in the Korean community also contribute to their identity crisis. The Korean community sees SGKAs as watered-down whites and not as fully Koreans. Some of older Koreans even ridicule and scold them due to their poor Korean and culturally improper behaviors that are not problematic in American culture. As a result, some SGKAs make a community within a Korean community and associate with themselves exclusively. Although they recognize themselves as Koreans ethnically, many SGKAs feel hurt by other Korean Americans and eventually become negative about gathering together with them.

Because they are not fully accepted both as Koreans and as Americans, many SGKAs experience confusion about their identity. A SGKA adolescent vividly describes his experience of an identity crisis:

It's like I have to be two different people sometimes and I never get to be really me, you know? ... I'm never fully this or that ... Korean or American. Adults at church are always pointing out how my Korean sucks and people at school and other places ask me stupid questions like how to say something in Chinese or if I know Kung Fu. I feel like people are always making fun of me for either being too Asian or too American but I don't feel like I'm either sometimes.³⁸

As he shares, SGKAs experience an identity crisis as they navigate through both worlds. Their identity crisis can cause some other mental distresses such as depression and low

³⁸ Hong, *Identity*, 106-107.

self-esteem.

Depression and low self-esteem. According to Josephine Kim, a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, SGKA males suffer from depressive disorder much more than other Asian Americans, and SGKA females have the lowest self-esteem among Asian Americans.³⁹ Kim attributes this phenomenon to SGKAs' parents, arguing that their parents have failed to understand and communicate with them. The ongoing conflict between SGKAs and their parents contributes to SGKAs' depression and low self-esteem.

Kim also shares her categorization of the identity of Korean Americans, which is helpful for understanding SGKAs' depression and low self-esteem. The first category is SGKAs who have low American and high Korean identity. While they have a strong Korean identity thanks to their close relationship with their parents, they do not like to speak in English and to associate with other students at a school. The second category is those who have high American and low Korean identity. Although they flourish at a school and get along well with friends, they are not close to their parents due to their poor Korean and cultural differences. The third category is SGKAs who have low American and low Korean identity. These students are the most vulnerable to experience depression and low self-esteem since they do not associate well with anyone. The last category is those who have high American and high Korean identity. They are the ideal group that adapt well in two different worlds by adjusting their language and behavior. Kim argues that the imbalance of the two identities causes depression and low self-esteem for SGKAs.

³⁹ Hyun Cheon Kim, "Second-Generation Korean Americans Have the Lowest Self-Esteem," *Boston Korea*, September 16, 2013, <https://www.bostonkorea.com/news.php?code=iv&mode=view&num=18004&page=1>.

Conclusion

On the flip side of the model minority stereotype that they are often regarded as, Korean Americans struggle with socioeconomic challenges and experience various psychological problems as they weather through challenging daily lives in the United States. As fresh immigrants to the U.S., First-generation Korean Americans face numerous obstacles such as language barrier, economic hardship, cultural conflict, and marginalization which hinder them from successful settlement and acculturation. As a result, they experience some psychological hardships such as depression, anger issues, and identity conflict.

1.5-generation Korean Americans, who migrated to the U.S. following their parents as young children or teens, experience a unique set of difficulties such as culture shock, challenges at school, and conflict with their parents. Although 1.5GKAs suffer from similar psychological problems with their parents such as identity confusion and depression, both the reason and experience of their problems are different from their parents: while 1.5GKAs are viewed as “forever foreigners” in mainstream societies due to their racial, linguistic, and cultural characteristics, they are also not fully accepted by both FGKA and SGKA communities due to their unique cultural identity. As a result, their identity confusion and depression worsen as they experience marginalization in various groups as inbetweeners.

Second-generation Korean Americans are the children of FGKAs who were born in America. Although they take advantage of quality education and various job opportunities thanks to the sacrifice and support of their parents, SGKAs still experience some sociocultural challenges such as bi-cultural and multicultural identity, family conflict, and marginalization. They experience a serious identity crisis and depression as they cannot fully identify themselves to both American and Korean communities and encounter marginalization and discrimination in both communities.

For all three generations of Korean Americans, identity issue seems to be the

most prominent and significant problem because it is not only closely related to their socioeconomic and cultural experiences but also greatly affects other psychological problems such as depression and anger issues. In order to equip pastors and counselors to help Korean Americans effectively, the next chapter will establish the significance of Christian identity for Korean Americans from a biblical and theological standpoint.

CHAPTER 2

SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY FOR KOREAN AMERICANS

In the previous chapter, this thesis surveyed the experience of Korean Americans both sociologically and generationally. Although there are degrees of differences, all three generations of Korean Americans experience difficulties related to language, culture, family relationships, and marginalization. In terms of psychological problems, they experience an identity crisis, anger issues, and depression. In short, different generations of Korean Americans experience similar interpersonal and intrapersonal issues as they live in America, although the causes and experience of psychological problems vary generation by generation.

Among the various psychological problems that Korean Americans undergo, identity crisis seems to be the most prominent issue for all three generations. It is also closely related to other mental health problems they experience such as depression. Because of its significance, biblical counselors not only have to understand the nature of Korean Americans' identity confusion but also should be able to give biblical counsel for this issue.

In order to equip biblical counselors for such a task, this chapter will articulate why Korean Americans should establish a firm Christian identity. More specifically, this chapter will perform the following tasks: (1) it will provide the definition and characteristics of Christian identity and prove its superiority over the worldly understanding of identity by contrasting the two; (2) it will articulate the significance of the biblical metanarrative as Korean Americans establish Christian identity and explain how they can live out biblical metanarrative by using a pastor-theologian-counselor

Jeremy Pierre’s dynamic heart model; and (3) it will present a brief survey of some immigrants in Scripture and show how they embodied Christian identity as they lived in foreign countries as strangers and exiles.

Worldly Identity Versus Christian Identity

Before considering the significance of Christian identity for Korean Americans as they deal with their identity issues, this section will explain what identity is and its characteristics according to worldly understanding. In addition, it will articulate the definition and characteristics of Christian identity in contrast to worldly identity. Lastly, this section will compare the two different identities and argue for the superiority of Christian identity over worldly identity.

Worldly Identity: Definition and Characteristics

The Cambridge dictionary defines identity as “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others.”¹ As this definition implies, identity is an individual’s answer to the most fundamental, ontological question: “Who am I?” Every person constantly endeavors to give a distinctive yet reasonable answer to this question, which can satisfy both oneself and others. Identity formation can take a lifetime as people strive to establish their identity.

The three characteristics should be considered in the study of personal identity. First, identity is affected both by oneself and by others, and it is used to distinguish oneself from others—often used to prove one’s uniqueness and worth compared to others. An individual’s identity is an answer not only to the question “Who am I?” but also “Who am I according to others?” because an individual’s identity is being established through social interaction. A systematic theologian Kevin Vanhoozer describes this interpersonal

¹ Cambridge Dictionary, “Meaning of Identity in English,” accessed June 10, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/identity>.

nature of identity formation: “The human creature is neither an autonomous individual nor an anonymous unit that has been assimilated into some collectivity, but rather a particular person who achieves a concrete identity in relation to others. Human being is inherently social.”² As people associate with each other in society, their identity is often used just like a business card to distinguish themselves from others. Because personal identity is inherently social, both individual and communal factors should be surveyed in counseling someone who struggles with an identity issue.

Second, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence one’s identity formation. Any intrinsic characteristics of a person can have an impact on one’s identity, such as gender, race, and disability. At the same time, numerous extrinsic factors affect one’s identity as well, such as marital status, occupation, education, and religion. It is important to note that these intrinsic and extrinsic factors do not work separately but conjointly. For example, different combinations of gender and occupation may result in a different role in the workplace or open different job opportunities. Since both intrinsic and extrinsic factors have an influence on one’s identity formation interrelatedly, they should be considered together.

Third, identity is not a static but a fluid concept. In other words, personal identity constantly changes as a person experiences changes in one’s life. These changes can happen over various aspects of people’s lives, such as their socioeconomic status, their relationship with others, the city/state/country they live in, and their physical health. While a life change usually precedes an identity change, people cannot always ascribe their identity change to their life change. One of the examples of such change is a change of gender identity. These days, people increasingly identify themselves with a gender that is opposite to their birth gender. While some of them still insist that their gender identity

² Kevin Vanhoozer, “Human Being, Individual and Social,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 174-75.

is an inborn characteristic, myriads of scientific research results support the opposite. Because a personal identity can constantly change throughout one's lifetime, establishing an unwavering foundation of identity is significant in counseling people.

Christian Identity: Definition and Superiority Over Worldly Identity

Different from worldly identity, Christian identity can be defined as identity in Christ: how God sees a believer through Jesus Christ and his redemptive work. In other words, it is the Creator's authoritative answer to a believer's question, "who am I?" Here are some of Scripture's answers about who a Christian is in the Son of God: a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), God's workmanship (Eph 2:10), a child of God (John 1:12; Gal 3:26), a fellow heir with Christ (Rom 8:17), a chosen race (1 Pet 2:9), the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21), the branch (John 15:5), a friend of Jesus (John 15:15), a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20), a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), and the list goes on.

Because Christian identity is a divinely proclaimed reality, it supersedes all the other identities that a person or a group may have. One of the Scripture passages which supports its superiority over worldly identity is Galatians 3:28. In this verse, the apostle Paul argues that there is no room for division or discrimination among Christians, such as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, and male or female because all Christians are "one in Christ Jesus." This also means that Christ's followers are more than their race, social status, gender, and nationality since their new identity in Christ supersedes all the worldly markers of identity. Christian identity, however, does not negate the traditional identity markers, since these are still true of them; rather, the new identity in Christ not only enables believers to actively reinterpret their identity markers but also unites them as one body of Christ so that they can labor together for the cause of the gospel.

Christian Identity: Characteristics Compared to Worldly Identity

In contrast with the three characteristics of worldly identity, Christian identity has the following characteristics: (1) Christian identity directs an individual's attention and service outwardly, (2) it enables a person to evaluate any intrinsic and extrinsic factors in one's life, and (3) it is strengthened throughout a person's lifetime as one's relationship with God deepens. A brief explanation of each characteristic will be beneficial for further discussion on the significance of Christian identity for Korean Americans.

First, Christian identity shifts one's focus from inward to outward. In other words, it redirects a believer's purpose of life from serving oneself to serving God and others. This dramatic change is only possible because of Christ's redemptive work for sinners, as the knowledge of the gospel and the faith in it lead true Christians to live for God and others. The apostle Paul describes the nature of this fundamental change in his letter to the church of Ephesus: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. ... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:8a, 10). This passage clearly shows an indicative-imperative nature of Christian identity: because a believer is God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," he or she now ought to live for God and others. While worldly identity defines who a person is according to oneself or others, Christian identity defines who a person is according to the Creator. While worldly identity keeps people focused on worldly things, Christian identity drives believers' focus towards heavenly things. Because only Christian identity gives a true and eternally valuable answer to the question "who am I?" it is superior to any worldly sense of identity.

Second, Christian identity enables and equips believers to evaluate all intrinsic and extrinsic factors in their lives in light of God's Word. While people try to define who they are based on their intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, these factors actually

interrupt them from constructing a satisfying and reliable definition of self. According to the New Testament scholar Brian Rosner, “The Bible judges the standard markers of human identity (race, gender, occupation, and so on) to be inadequate foundations upon which to build our lives” because these factors are “insecure and not designed to bear too much weight.”³ Establishing one’s identity upon these standard markers is like building a house on the sand: when the rain falls, and the floods come, and the wind blows and beat against the house of identity, it will fall greatly. The only unshakable foundation is the Word of God, and the house of personal identity which is built upon his Word will not fall “because it had been founded on the rock” (Matt 7:25b).

Third, Christian identity is strengthened as a believer’s relationship with God deepens. While a constant change of personal identity due to various life changes can cause confusion and even identity crisis, Christian identity rooted deeply in the Word of God gets stronger over time as believers’ divine-human relationship becomes more solidified. Here is the beauty of Christian identity: just as Jesus is the founder and the perfecter of the faith of all believers (Heb 12:2), he serves as the architect who founds and perfects the identity of Christians. Moreover, he himself *becomes* the foundation of believers’ identity as they come before God and trust in his name. On the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christians’ identity will grow constantly as they experience communion with God through prayer, Bible meditation, and corporate worship.

In summary, Christian identity trains believers to walk according to God’s perspective of them through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Because it is the divine definition and proclamation about believers’ existence, Christian identity has authority over any kind of worldly identities. Establishing Christian identity is foundational for Korean Americans because it not only shifts their attention to the higher calling of loving

³ Brian S. Rosner, *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 245.

God and others but also enables them to appraise both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in their lives according to Scripture. As Korean Americans' identity in Christ becomes more solidified through their communion with God, it will constantly empower them to be "more than conquerors through him who" loves them while they live as strangers and exiles in a foreign land (Rom 8:37).

Identity Crisis, Christian Identity, and the Biblical Metanarrative

As the previous chapter reveals, all three generations of Korean Americans experience identity issues due to various reasons. For example, FGKAs' lack of English proficiency and poor level of acculturation contribute to their identity conflict. In case of 1.5GKAs, their identity confusion is associated with their unique cultural identity and difficulty to join either FGKA or SGKA community. For SGKAs, social marginalization and discrimination that they experience in both Korean and American communities have a significant impact on their identity crisis.

Although the aforementioned factors are closely related to Korean Americans' identity issues, they are not determinative by themselves. For instance, becoming proficient in English and achieving high levels of acculturation do not automatically resolve Korean Americans' identity conflict. Even SGKAs, who speak fluent English and are well-accultured, suffer from a severe identity crisis, sometimes even more than the other generations of Korean Americans. In short, the betterment of Korean Americans' life circumstances and abundance of socioeconomic resources do not guarantee the ease of their identity problems.

The Biblical Metanarrative: The Core of Christian Identity

Rather than poor socioeconomic mobility and lack of social support, the most fundamental reason for Korean Americans' identity crisis is the lack of a metanarrative that enables them to understand and interpret the challenging reality they face. The

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries define metanarrative as “an overall account of things that enables people to find belief, pattern and meaning in their experiences.”⁴ According to Robert Hunt, the loss of a metanarrative is “the loss of a sense of a single framework within which the whole of human experience can be understood by all participants in that human experience.”⁵ Because people’s lives are filled with stories they live out, having a metanarrative that binds and penetrates all other micronarratives proves to be essential. This does not mean, however, that Korean Americans can adopt any story as their interpretative metanarrative in understanding their own lives because not every narrative bears the same right and authority over human experience. What they need is a true and rightly authoritative story through which they can interpret all of their life experiences.

Scripture testifies that no other narratives are worthy of providing a theological and practical framework for human beings to comprehend God, the universe, and themselves; instead, it testifies that only a biblical metanarrative is suitable for such a task since it is the Creator’s authoritative narration about the purpose of their existence. This biblical metanarrative works as the bedrock of Christian identity, since bearing Christian identity means to graft one’s life story into the bigger story of the Bible and the people of God. Therefore, Korean Americans should learn the biblical metanarrative in order to live out Christian identity through embodying God’s stories in their own lives.

Three levels of biblical narratives. In his book, *The Biblical Metanarrative: One God - One Plan - One Story*, Bill Jackson argues that “the story of the Bible is being told at three different levels simultaneously.”⁶ He labels these three levels as the big

⁴ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, “Metanarrative,” accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/metanarrative?q=metanarrative>.

⁵ Robert Hunt, “Christian Identity in a Pluralistic World,” *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 2 (April 2009): 181.

⁶ Bill Jackson, *The Biblical Metanarrative: One God - One Plan - One Story* (Corona, CA: Radical Middle Press, 2013), chap. 2, sec. 3, para. 1.

picture, the strategic picture, and the detailed picture. First, the big picture is “the overarching level” which “has to do with the great, redemptive narrative.”⁷ The big picture is often regarded as the biblical metanarrative because it shows the framework of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This big picture refers to the *what* of God’s plan, and it helps readers of Scripture to understand smaller narratives in the Bible in light of God’s redemptive history.

The second level, the strategic picture, refers to the *how* of God’s plan: it depicts “God’s strategy to accomplish his plan” through “the creation of a nation called Israel, the people of God, the summing up of that nation in the Messiah, and the grafting of all Gentile nations into the people of God.”⁸ The third level, the detailed picture, “has to do with all the individual stories of the Bible in their local contexts.”⁹ In other words, the detailed picture shows how all the rest of the stories in the scriptures flesh out the big picture and the strategic picture. The larger context that the first and the second levels provide helps the readers to understand all biblical narratives in light of God’s redemption plan.

Understanding biblical narratives in three different levels can benefit Korean Americans because this theological framework enables them to understand their own life experiences in light of God’s bigger story and redemption strategy. In other words, Korean Americans can actively reinterpret challenging life events they face in a foreign land through knowing the biblical metanarrative and viewing their own stories according to it through having faith in Christ. For example, they can be empowered to find hope and meaning by knowing the story of the Israelites in the wilderness and trusting that the same sovereign God will lead them and provide for them as they maneuver through the

⁷ Jackson, *The Biblical Metanarrative*, chap. 2, sec. 3, para. 1.

⁸ Jackson, *The Biblical Metanarrative*, chap. 2, sec. 3, para. 6.

⁹ Jackson, *The Biblical Metanarrative*, chap. 2, sec. 3, para. 1.

challenging environment in America.

The knowledge about the biblical metanarrative and having faith in the Narrator can also empower Korean Americans to overcome sufferings. The Bible declares that “sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to” Christ’s followers (Rom 8:18), and the whole of Scripture—from Genesis to the book of Revelation—testify to this glory. Through believing in Christ and waiting for the kingdom of heaven, Korean Americans can rejoice even in their sufferings, since “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom 5:3b-4). As Paul says, this “hope does not put” them “to shame, because God’s love has been poured into” their “hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to them” (Rom 5:5).

Living out the biblical metanarrative wholeheartedly. This biblical metanarrative starts to work powerfully in people’s lives when they adopt it as an authoritative and interpretative narrative over all the other stories in their lives. Adopting the biblical metanarrative, however, does not mean to simply have extensive knowledge about the Bible because a human heart, which is the epicenter of human beings according to Scripture, is much more complicated. As a pastor-counselor-theologian, Jeremy Pierre skillfully articulates the three main functions of a human heart: cognition, affection, and volition. Pierre addresses:

Human experience is three-dimensional. The human responds cognitively, through rational process based on knowledge and beliefs. It also responds affectively, through a framework of desire and emotions. It also responds volitionally, through a series of choices reflecting the willful commitments of the heart. These three aspects of the heart’s response are all a part of how people were designed to worship God.¹⁰

As Pierre explains, all three functional aspects of a human heart should be considered in counseling people to bring about a true and lasting change in their lives.

¹⁰ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 12.

More specifically, biblical counselors should instruct Korean Americans how each aspect of their hearts can be associated with the biblical metanarrative so that they can live it out wholeheartedly. First, in terms of cognition, Korean Americans ought to learn what the biblical metanarrative is and trust it as a true delineation about God and the universe. As Pierre argues, people “interpret a situation based not only on beliefs directly related to the situation, but on a whole framework of beliefs, many of which they are less aware.”¹¹ Therefore, they should learn what the biblical metanarrative is and believe it as true so that they can adopt it as their framework of beliefs through which they can interpret various life situations.

Understanding and believing this biblical metanarrative, however, is impossible for sinful human beings, because they “became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” due to the effect of the fall (Rom 1:21b). Without God’s enlightenment, they can neither comprehend nor believe “the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages” (Rom 16:25b). In other words, it is God who opens “the eyes of” people’s hearts so that they “may know what is the hope to which he has called” them (Eph 1:18).

Second, in terms of affection, Korean Americans should love God and value biblical metanarrative over all the other stories in their lives. Human society is a mass of stories, and different stories are often incompatible as they compete against each other—just as the evolution theory conflicts against the creation theory. Because each story promotes different values, people should be careful in adopting one story over another as an authoritative and interpretative narrative.

Also, people cannot love the core narrative of Scripture while hating God because he is the center of this story: he is the playwright, the storyteller, the main character, the center of attention, and the object of all glory and honor. While worldly

¹¹ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 38.

stories cajole people to value secular and ungodly things such as wealth, fame, and power, the biblical metanarrative rightly instructs them to value God and what he values. Just as Korean Americans adopt the metanarrative of Scripture as their interpretive framework, they should love God and value biblical metanarrative as an authoritative story over all the other stories.

Third, in terms of volition, Korean Americans should choose to commit themselves to live out the biblical metanarrative in their lives by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. According to Pierre, a choice is “the outflow of complex structures of commitments,” and “commitment is the heat devoting itself to something it deems worthy.”¹² In other words, a commitment to something naturally results in valuing that something. Valuing in and of itself, however, is not enough, just as “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17b). In addition to learning about the biblical metanarrative and valuing it, Korean Americans ought to demonstrate what they value by applying it to their lives.

More specifically, living out the biblical metanarrative means embodying the Christian identity: living according to what God says about who a person is, instead of living according to what oneself thinks or others say about who a person is. The biblical metanarrative equips Korean Americans as they live in the United States because it (1) informs them what Christian identity is through telling various stories (cognition); (2) inspires them to cherish their identity in Christ by revealing the surpassing glory of the gospel (affection); and (3) encourages them to live out Christian identity by testifying that the Holy Spirit dwells within them and empowers them to imitate Christ (volition).

In summary, Korean Americans should adopt biblical metanarrative as their core belief, core affection, and core commitment while they navigate both worlds. In other words, Korean Americans should engage with this metanarrative of Scripture with

¹² Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 44-45.

all their hearts by learning and trusting it, cherishing and valuing it, and committing to live it out. Because the biblical metanarrative plays such an important role for Korean Americans as they live out their Christian identity, biblical counselors should teach it to them diligently and encourage them to embody it through believing in Christ and imitating him.

Immigrants in the Bible and Christian Identity

Up until this point, this chapter has compared Christian identity to worldly identity and discussed the central role of the biblical metanarrative in living out Christian identity. Christian identity is an identity in Christ: how God sees human beings through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. As the divine answer to the most fundamental question of human existence, “Who am I?” Christian identity has authority over all other worldly identities and their markers. People can embody Christian identity by adopting the biblical metanarrative as their core belief, core affection, and core commitment.

Scripture not only articulates Christian identity but also shows how people of God lived it out in foreign countries as strangers and exiles. Some of the most prominent immigrants in the Bible are Joseph, Ruth, and Daniel. Although being abandoned by his brothers and sold to Egyptians as a slave, Joseph adhered to his faith in God, anticipating the day that God would fulfill his childhood dreams. As a Moabite woman and young widow, Ruth identified herself with the Israelites by putting her trust in the God of her mother-in-law and became the great-grandmother of King David. Daniel was found faithful to God by resolving not to “defile himself with the king’s food” (Dan 1:8a) and by continuing his daily prayers to Yahweh even under the life-threatening situation. These stories of immigrants in Scripture not only inspire Korean Americans to continue their journey of faith in America but also set practical examples of how they should live out Christian identity in a foreign land.

Joseph, Ruth, and Daniel: How They Embodied Christian Identity

While Christian identity means identity in Christ, all three aforementioned immigrants of the Bible—Joseph, Ruth, and Daniel—lived and died before Christ’s incarnation. Whereas some people might consider that their faith identity was not exactly a “Christian identity” like the people of the New Testament, the nature of these immigrants’ identity was the same with the later generations of Christians. According to Donald Leggett, a professor emeritus at Tyndale Theological Seminary, being called by God’s name indicated the Old Testament roots of Christian identity. Expounding upon Isaiah 43, Leggett argues that “The phrase ‘(you are) called by my name’ (7b) emphasizes Israel’s unique responsibility to represent Yahweh in terms in which he has revealed himself to them” since “God has entrusted his *name* to his people” (underline and italics are original).¹³

As Leggett points out, the people of God from the Old Testament were to represent him, just like Christians from the New Testament era and onward are to represent Christ by imitating him in their lives. Leggett further articulates that Isaiah 4:1 clarifies the meaning of being called by God’s name:

In this context the phrase shows, first, *ownership* or *possession*. ... It describes God’s people in a covenant of marriage with the Lord (Prov.2:16, 17; Ezek. 16:8; Mal.2:14). ... Secondly, the phrase implied the *right of rule*. ... Israel was called by his name and he ruled over them. Such was not the case with their enemies who had experienced nothing of willful submission to God the King. ... Thirdly, to be called by God’s name means to be given the privilege of representing God and of participating in his likeness, to identify with him.¹⁴

All three Old Testament immigrants had successfully lived as the people who were called by God’s name through (1) representing God’s ownership based on a covenant relationship, (2) showing his rule and authority by their willful submission, and (3)

¹³ Donald Leggett, *Called by God’s Name: The Old Testament Roots of Christian Identity* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012), chap. 1, sec. 2, para. 1.

¹⁴ Leggett, *Called by God’s Name*, chap. 1, sec. 2, para. 3.

participating in his likeness by identifying themselves with him. A more thorough examination of each one of them will inspire and encourage Korean Americans as they maneuver through the challenging daily experiences in a foreign land.

Joseph. Although his life was a series of trials and hardships, Joseph faithfully embodied Christian identity wherever he went and in whatever he did. When Joseph fled from the sexual temptation of Potiphar’s wife, he showed his allegiance to God and his endeavor to keep himself holy. The constant temptation and request of Potiphar’s wife must have been really hard for him to turn down for a number of reasons: (1) as a servant, it is almost impossible to disobey the command of his master’s wife; (2) as a young man, it would have been extremely difficult to repel the sexual temptation; and (3) as a slave without future hope, an intimate relationship with the wife of Pharaoh’s officer could have felt promising for the brighter future. In spite of all these temptations both inside and out, Joseph “made truth his ally” by “giving the proposition its right name of wickedness” and “rooted his loyalty to his master deep enough to hold” by relating all to him (Gen 39:9).¹⁵ He counted no earthly benefit and pleasure as worthy because he rooted his faith identity in God’s covenant and counted it more significant than his earthly identity.

Even in prison after being unjustly accused by Potiphar’s wife, Joseph did not remain frustrated but diligently performed his duty as an overseer of the prison just as he had served “in the house of his Egyptian master” (Gen 39:2b). In other words, Joseph’s solid Christian identity—an identity as a person called by God’s name—empowered him to be faithful to his earthly duties. Everywhere he goes and every role he takes, his “outstanding abilities and integrity, crowned with the touch of God, were constant at

¹⁵ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 202.

every level: as prisoner and as governor he was simply the same man.”¹⁶

Regardless of his position and the situation that he faces, Joseph boldly shared his identity in God. To Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker who were downcast because of their peculiar dreams, Joseph testified that interpretations belong to God (Gen 40:8). He also clarified Pharaoh’s words by indicating that it is not him but God who “will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” (Gen 41:16b). As a British Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner points out, “With hasty brevity he [Joseph] points from himself to God (the position in the sentence makes it emphatic) as sole revealer, disposer and benefactor.”¹⁷ By making it clear that he is not the point but simply the pointer, Joseph demonstrated his humbleness as well as his profound faith.

Joseph’s firm Christian identity and his faithfulness to both God and his duties had a significant impact on the people around him because they could clearly sense God’s presence and blessings over him. Potiphar “saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands” (Gen 39:3). The keeper of the prison “put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners” and “paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge” because it was obvious that “the Lord was with him” (Gen 39:22-23). After Joseph had interpreted the mysterious dream, Pharaoh proclaimed Joseph as “a man ... in whom is the Spirit of God” and acknowledged that “God has shown” everything to him (Gen 41:38-39). Because Joseph faithfully lived out his Christian identity in every position and situation, the Gentiles could recognize God and thus his name was glorified.

Joseph’s remarks to his brothers in Genesis 45 and 50 indicate that he lived his life in light of God’s story, which is bigger than his own story. In Genesis 45:4-8 when he reveals himself to his brothers for the first time in Egypt, Joseph shows his faith in God by recognizing God’s providential control through a series of events instead of blaming

¹⁶ Kidner, *Genesis*, 203.

¹⁷ Kidner, *Genesis*, 206.

his brothers for their brutal sin against him. As Kidner points out, this biblical realism enabled Joseph “to see clearly the two aspects of every event—on the one hand human mishandling (and the blind working of nature), on the other the perfect will of God—and to fix attention on the latter as alone being of any consequence.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Joseph’s threefold reply to his brothers in Genesis 50:19-21 displays an apex of both the Old and New Testament faith, as Kidner articulates:

To leave all the righting of one’s wrongs to God (19; cf. Rom. 12:19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19); to see his providence in man’s malice (20; cf. on 45:5), and to repay evil not only with forgiveness but also with practical affection (21; cf. Luke 6:27ff.), are attitudes which anticipate the adjective ‘Christian’ and even ‘Christlike.’¹⁹

In other words, putting trust in God and his sovereignty not only enabled Joseph to actively reinterpret the tragic events in his life but also empowered him to love his brothers and grant forgiveness to them.

In summary, Joseph successfully navigated the adversities and sufferings in a foreign land as a person called by God’s name. He displayed godly characters throughout his life in various positions and situations: (1) he proved his allegiance to God by rejecting the temptation of Potiphar’s wife; (2) he demonstrated his earnestness by diligently performing his God-given duties both in Potiphar’s house and in the prison; (3) he showed his humbleness by shifting Pharaoh and his servants’ attention from him to God; and (4) he manifested his godly love by forgiving his brothers. His profound faith shined through his words even in his deathbed as he recognizes God’s bigger story of saving the Israelites from Egypt in the future.

In all these moments, Joseph faithfully lived out his Christian identity. In other words, his solid identity in God enabled a stranger and exile like him to maneuver through the difficulties in a foreign land as more than a conqueror. Through Joseph’s life,

¹⁸ Kidner, *Genesis*, 218.

¹⁹ Kidner, *Genesis*, 235.

Korean Americans can not only learn the importance of establishing Christian identity for a successful immigrant life but also can imitate his godly characteristics such as loyalty, earnestness, humbleness, and love in their daily lives.

Ruth. The Book of Ruth starts with the tragic deaths of all the males in Naomi's family, including her husband and two sons. Finding no hope to continue her life in Moab and hearing that "the Lord had visited his people and given them food" (Ruth 1:6b), Naomi decided to return to the land of Judah. While Orpah, another daughter-in-law of Naomi, chose to return "to her people and to her gods" (Ruth 1:15), Ruth insisted on following Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18). Compelled by Ruth's firm resolution, Naomi allowed Ruth to follow her and to live with her in Judah.

Ruth's decision to follow her mother-in-law reveals her strong faith in God because moving to Judah meant so much more than just a relocation for a young Moabite woman like her. In Ruth's days, "nations tended to be distinguishable on the bases of ethnicity (hence 'her people'), territory (hence 'land of Moab'), kingship (hence 'Eglon king of Moab' in Judg 3:12-17), language (Moabite, Hebrew, etc.), and theology."²⁰ In light of such historical and cultural background, it is reasonable to assume that her migration caused a complete change of her life in every aspect such as geographic location, language, ethnic community, culture, and customs. In other words, "With radical self-sacrifice she abandons every base of security that any person, let alone a poor widow, in that cultural context would have clung to."²¹

Furthermore, her decision of immigration to Judah also had religious implications, which Ruth acknowledged when she confessed to Naomi: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16b). As Arthur E. Cundall and Leon

²⁰ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 639.

²¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 641.

Morris point out, Ruth’s confession “does not mean that she has no religious principles or that she rates friendship above faith” because in the following verse “she invokes Yahweh, which indicates that already she has come to trust in him (cf. 2:12).”²² Charles Simeon, an English evangelical clergyman, also affirms Ruth’s faith and godliness: “Her views of religion might not be clear: but it is evident that a principle of vital godliness was rooted in her heart, and powerfully operative in her life.”²³ Through leaving both her own people and her god and cleaving to the God of Judah and his people, Ruth exemplified the kind of profound faith that Jesus commanded of believers when he said, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

In Judea, however, Naomi and Ruth experienced extremely low socioeconomic status as two widows without any decent way of making a living. As a young Moabite woman, Ruth “had had to face widowhood, exile from her own land and people, and in Israel grinding poverty.”²⁴ In spite of such a desperate and frustrating situation, Ruth went out to the field and gleaned leftover grain in order to take care of her mother-in-law. Although gleaning from the field was a right specifically granted to the widow by the law (e.g. Deut 24:19), it was still a strenuous and dangerous work because “a hostile landowner would have ways of making gleaning difficult for the friendless.”²⁵ Knowing the possible threat of abuse or even her own life, she went out to the field to perform her filial duty. Through her self-sacrificial service, Ruth demonstrated godly and noble character such as love and faithfulness, and she could do so because of her identity as a

²² Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 251.

²³ Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 3: *Judges to 2 Kings* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 91.

²⁴ Cundall and Morris, *Judges and Ruth*, 268.

²⁵ Cundall and Morris, *Judges and Ruth*, 261.

person called by God's name.

In summary, Ruth overcame numerous hardships she faced in Judea as a young Moabite widow with her new identity established in God. She did not hesitate to abandon every base of her security in order to follow Naomi and serve the God of Judea, displaying her trust in the Lord and his providence. As a stranger and an exile living among the people of God, she identified herself by faith as a person called by God's name and earnestly performed her filial duty even at the risk of her own safety. In other words, her firm Christian identity enabled her to put her trust in the Lord and to continue maneuvering through challenging life situations.

Later on, this "worthy woman" of faith was "blessed by the Lord" (Ruth 3:10-11) and became an important part of God's metanarrative of salvation history as a great-grandmother of King David. The various generations of Korean Americans can learn from Ruth's willingness to trust God in a foreign country and follow his leading even when navigating new cultures and traditions. They can also take comfort from her story that God works in tragedy and transition even when his interventions on their behalf might not be evident until a later time.

Daniel. Daniel was one of the Jewish captives "of the royal family and of the nobility" taken captive to Babylon (Dan 1:3b). Upon his arrival, Daniel was assigned to eat the king's food and learn "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (Dan 1:4b). Daniel and his three friends, however, resolved not to defile themselves by eating the king's food or drinking the wine that he drank. At least two factors would have caused their reluctance from eating king's food: many of the foods (1) would have been regarded as "unclean according to the law of Moses (cf. Lev 11 and Deut 14), either inherently or because they were not prepared properly" or (2) could have been undesirable because these were "first offered sacrificially to the Babylonian gods" and "therefore associated

with idolatrous worship.”²⁶ As an American theologian Leon J. Wood indicates, “Partaking of this food would have been an indirect act of worshipping the Babylonian deities.”²⁷

Their refusal to eat the king’s food and to drink his wine, however, was indeed a courageous act because of several reasons as an Old Testament scholar Stephen R.

Miller articulates:

(1) To refuse the royal diet could have been taken as an insult to the king and as an act of direct disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar’s orders. (2) Pressure from Daniel’s peers most certainly made the decision difficult. . . . (3) Such unorthodox behavior could have jeopardized their chances for advancement. (4) The quality of food would have been attractive. It was the best in the land. (5) Their new location may have tempted them to be unfaithful. . . . (6) It would have been natural to argue that since God had not protected them from captivity—this horrible situation—they did not have to be careful to obey his commands. They could have become bitter toward God during this time.²⁸

Notwithstanding the fear of the king and the temptation of physical pleasure or future success, Daniel and his friends held fast to their resolution based upon their deep religious convictions, and Daniel seemed to act as a representative of the group as he took the initiative role in making this resolution. As an English theologian Joyce G. Baldwin argues, “It would seem that Daniel rejected this symbol of dependence on the king because he wished to be free to fulfil his primary obligations to the God he served.”²⁹ In other words, Daniel “acted upon the spiritual light he had, and God honored his faithfulness by imparting more.”³⁰

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, all the wise men of Babylon

²⁶ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 66–67.

²⁷ Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 37.

²⁸ Kidner, *Genesis*, 235.

²⁹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 92.

³⁰ Miller, *Daniel*, 67.

including Daniel and his friends encountered the threat of death because no one had been able to interpret the king's dream. In such an urgent situation, Daniel told his friends "to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery," so that they "might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:18). Daniel also told his friends that Yahweh "is the God who is over the heavens, i.e., over the sun, moon and stars which the Babylonians worshiped."³¹ Even in front of Nebuchadnezzar who was the greatest king of the day, Daniel boldly proclaimed God's sovereignty over the kings of the earth (Dan 2:37-38). Daniel minimized "his own wisdom and casts himself as merely the facilitator of a communication from the divine 'revealer of mysteries.'"³² Through this event, Daniel manifested various godly characteristics such as a strong faith in God, courage to speak up, and humbleness to give credit to God.

After Daniel had become one of the three "high officials" in the whole kingdom of Babylon, other high officials and satraps "sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom" (Dan 6:4). Finding no ground for complaint against him, they devised a stratagem to urge king Darius to "establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days ... shall be cast into the den of lions" (Dan 6:7b). Even after the enactment of this law, however, Daniel neither stopped his custom of daily prayer nor hid it from others. As Miller writes, "Daniel was a man of courage and conviction who was willing to stand for God even if it meant death."³³ That is to say, his strong identity as a person called by God's name encouraged him to deliberately defile the law even risking his own life.

³¹ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 65-66.

³² Carol A. Newsom and Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 74.

³³ Miller, *Daniel*, 182.

As a result of breaking the king's law, Daniel was sentenced to death.

Although king Darius was "much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel," he could not do so because it was "a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed" (Dan 6:14-15). When Daniel had been brought and cast into the den of lions, Darius declared to him, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" (Dan 1:16b) Darius' words imply not only his recognition of Daniel's lifestyle of serving God continually but also his belief that Daniel could be saved. Miller draws inferences from Darius' declaration that Daniel "must have been telling the king of the great miracles the God of Israel had performed," and his testimony "not only would have included Yahweh's miracles in Babylon but also wonders from Israel's past like the dividing of the sea when Israel escaped from Egypt."³⁴ Although it is impossible to know for certain that Daniel actually shared God's miracles and Israel's exodus history, his faithfulness and consistency were indeed noticed by others and gave rise to the fear and praise of God from the heart and mouth of the Gentile king (Dan 6:25-27).

In summary, Daniel faithfully and passionately lived out his identity in God both as a captive and as one of the high officials of Babylon. By making a resolution not to defile himself by eating unclean food, Daniel manifested his steadfastness. By asking God to reveal the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, interpreting it in front of the king, and attributing all the glory to God, Daniel displayed his strong faith, sheer courage, and genuine humbleness. By prioritizing his religious habit of daily prayer over his own life and security, he demonstrated his allegiance to God, fidelity, and integrity. Even in the den of lions, Daniel "through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb 11:33), and "no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God" (Dan 6:23b).

In short, Daniel's profound faith in God and his firm identity as a person called

³⁴ Miller, *Daniel*, 185.

by God's name not only empowered him to weather through the adversities and hardships in Babylon but also enabled him to be more than a conqueror in all these things (Rom 8:37). By living a life of bravery and faithfulness, Daniel set a great example of a godly immigrant for Korean Americans to follow and imitate in their lives. Furthermore, trusting the fact that the same sovereign God who took care of Daniel and protected him from the danger is still in control of everything can give Korean Americans a great relief and encouragement.

Conclusion

Because all three generations of Korean Americans experience some kind of identity issues, establishing solid Christian identity is essential when counseling them. Compared to a worldly understanding of personal identity—an individual's answer to a question, "Who am I?"—, the biblical understanding of personal identity—God's authoritative answer to the same question—is far superior in every way: (1) while worldly identity is used to distinguish oneself from others often with the purpose of proving one's uniqueness and worth compared to others, Christian identity directs one's focus and service from inward to outward; (2) while both intrinsic and extrinsic factors have a huge influence on the formation of one's worldly identity, Christian identity enables and equips an individual to evaluate every intrinsic and extrinsic factor in his or her life according to the Word of God; and (3) while an individual's worldly identity constantly changes without a firm foundation, Christian identity which is established upon God's Word gets strengthened throughout one's lifetime as the divine-human relationship deepens.

Although the improvement of Korean Americans' experiential factors such as their socioeconomic status and levels of acculturation may ease their identity conflict for some degree, it will not fully resolve their struggles over identity issues because these factors are not determinative by themselves. Rather, what Korean Americans need is a

biblical metanarrative: as a theological and practical framework, the biblical metanarrative enables them to understand and actively reinterpret their life experiences in light of God's salvation history. In order to live out their Christian identity faithfully, Korean Americans should understand three different levels of narratives in the scriptures and adopt the biblical metanarrative as their core belief, core affection, and core commitment.

Among many immigrants in Scripture, Joseph, Ruth, and Daniel are some of the most outstanding immigrants who faithfully lived out their Christian identity—an identity as people called by God's name—in foreign countries. Joseph demonstrated various godly characters such as allegiance, earnestness, humbleness, and love throughout his life, both as a slave and as a governor of Egypt. As a young Moabite widow with her new identity found in God, Ruth overcame numerous adversities in Judea and became a significant part of God's salvation history as King David's great-grandmother. Based on his faith identity, Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food, prioritized daily prayer to God over his own life and security, and stopped the mouths of lions. By faith, all three immigrants in the Bible successfully lived out their Christian identity and therefore glorified God's name through their lives in the foreign lands.

In chapters one and two, this thesis not only examined Korean Americans' sociocultural experiences and their psychological problems but also established the centrality of Christian identity for them as they weather through challenging daily lives in the United States. The following chapter will explain the practical implications for counseling Korean Americans who struggle with identity issues by applying some selected angles of the theology of Christian identity.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

Although different generations of Korean Americans experience various kinds of psychological problems, identity crisis seems to be the most prominent issue for Koreans living in the United States. Regardless of their sociocultural factors such as age, gender, years of living or education in the U.S., English proficiency, and levels of acculturation, most Korean Americans experience some kind of identity issues in their lives because they are unsure how to reconcile their Korean and American attachments into one identity. To make matters worse, their identity crisis has a negative impact on other psychological problems such as depression and anger issues. Because of its significance, biblical counselors should be able to address a biblical solution to their ongoing struggle of identity.

While establishing personal identity has become a do-it-yourself project in these days and it seems to promise many attractive possibilities, various factors actually “weigh against constructing a stable and satisfying sense of self.”¹ In other words, Rosner argues that “Ours is a day of identity angst” and “It is harder to know who you are today than at any point in human history.”² On top of this social trend, Korean Americans face some additional difficulties that make their identity formation even harder. For example, they have to fight against daily challenges such as the stereotype that mainstream society has over them, social marginalization, and economic hardship.

¹ Brian S. Rosner, *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 245.

² Rosner, *Known by God*, 245.

As the previous chapter has argued, establishing Christian identity is essential in counseling Korean Americans, because it enables them to understand and actively reinterpret traditional identity markers as well as their life experiences in light of Scripture. In order to equip biblical counselors to give not only biblically faithful but also effective counsel to Korean Americans who struggle with identity issues, this chapter will perform the following tasks: it will (1) demonstrate both the indicative and imperative nature of Christian identity and the inseparable relationship between the two; (2) examine the three selected angles of Christian identity—God’s image-bearers, God’s children, and God’s servants—based on the gospel indicative and their implications for the experience of Korean Americans; and (3) explain how Korean Americans can apply the two aspects of the gospel imperative—self-denial and self-identification with Christ—to establish and embody Christian identity.

Christian Identity: Indicative and Imperative

In order to fully live out their identity in Christ, Korean Americans should first understand an indicative-imperative nature of Christian identity because it provides an essential framework for them not only to think through (cognition) and cherish (affection) their new identity in Christ but also to practice (volition) it in their daily lives. In encyclopedic definition, an indicative means “the mood (= form) of the verb used in ordinary statements and questions,”³ and an imperative means a mood “used to describe the form of a verb that is usually used for giving orders.”⁴ In terms of biblical theology—especially in terms of the New Testament, the indicative refers to what God has done for believers through Christ, and the imperative denotes how Christians ought to live in light of that indicative. These two words often receive a premodifier, *gospel*, resulting in the

³ Cambridge Dictionary, “Indicative,” accessed September 23, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/indicative>.

⁴ Cambridge Dictionary, “Imperative,” accessed September 23, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/imperative>.

gospel indicative and the *gospel imperative*. This gospel indicative becomes the theological foundation of believers' identity in Christ, and the gospel imperative provides the way how believers ought to live with their Christian identity.

Many biblical authors, most notably the apostle Paul, used the indicative-imperative principle in articulating believers' identity in Christ and how they ought to live. One important aspect of this principle is that the two elements cannot and should not exist separately because the indicative always leads to the imperative. According to a pastor-theologian David Prince, "The proper relationship between the gospel indicative and imperative is not to pit one against the other."⁵ Prince continues, "Rather, it is to understand that their relationship is irreversible" because "The imperative rests on the foundational indicative and is consequential."⁶ A Dutch theologian Herman Ridderbos also affirms this: "Indicative and imperative are both the object of faith, on the one hand in its receptivity, on the other in its activity. For this reason the connection between the two is so close and indissoluble."⁷ Therefore, in teaching and counseling Korean Americans, biblical counselors should always deal with both aspects of Christian identity together.

The Gospel Indicative: Believers' Identity in Christ

As a result of what Christ has done for believers, Scripture refers to Christians in various ways, such as "a chosen race" (1 Pet 2:9), "fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17), and citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). In order to give a comprehensive yet concise description of Christian identity, some biblical counselors have suggested a number of

⁵ David E. Prince, "What God Has Joined Together: Indicatives and Imperatives," The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (Blog), March 10, 2014, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-god-has-joined-together-indicatives-and-imperatives>.

⁶ Prince, "What God Has Joined Together."

⁷ Herman Ridderbos, *In Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 256.

combinations of biblical identity markers. For example, David Powlison, one of the pioneers of the biblical counseling movement, argues that every Christian has “a *common calling* in all relationships to walk worthy of” their identity “as the wife, child, and slave of the Lord.”⁸ He further articulates:

You are first and foremost Wife. ... Whether you are male or female, married or single, you are Wife to Jesus Christ, called to fear Christ and live subject to Him. Similarly, at the core of who you are, you are essentially Child, beloved of the one Father ([Ephesians] 1:2, 1:5, 5:1). Whether you are a parent or a child, you are Child to God, called to obey and honor Him. Furthermore, you are essentially Slave to the Lord ([Ephesians] 5:8-10; 6:5-9). Whether you are in authority or under authority in your workplace, you are Slave to Christ, called to obey and fear Him.⁹

Although Powlison’s portrayal is indeed helpful and can be an eye-opener for many nominal Christians, the word *slave* can denote a negative impression for them such as coerciveness or oppression, neither of which are correct descriptions of God and his character.

Another effort to describe Christian identity was made by Paul David Tripp, who is a frequent speaker and a well-respected author from the field of biblical counseling. Tripp claims that “the Gospel defines our identity in four areas: creature, sinner, sufferer, and child.”¹⁰ He adds, “Ineffective and unproductive people are ineffective and unproductive because they just don’t know who they are.”¹¹ The knowledge of who they are in and of itself, however, cannot change the way how people live because all three dimensions of their hearts—cognition, affection, and volition—should be actively involved in living out Christian identity.¹²

⁸ David Powlison, “The Fear of Christ is the Beginning of Wisdom: Ephesians 5:21-6:9,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 22 (Winter 1999): 50.

⁹ Powlison, “The Fear of Christ,” 50.

¹⁰ Paul David Tripp, “What is the Gospel? It’s An Identity,” *The Paul Tripp Podcast*, Podcast Audio, September 20, 2020, <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/117-what-is-the-gospel-its-an-identity/id1463769457?i=1000491963688>.

¹¹ Tripp, “What is the Gospel?”

¹² Throughout the podcast, however, Tripp makes it clear that faith in Christ is the presupposition of the living out of this fourfold gospel identity. For example, he states: “The gospel is not

Although both Powlison and Tripp's descriptions are accurate and comprehensive, this thesis will examine the biblical theology of Christian identity from a slightly different angle in an effort to equip biblical counselors more thoroughly to counsel Korean Americans who struggle with an identity crisis. The selected aspects of Christian identity are that believers are (1) God's image-bearers, (2) God's children, and (3) God's servants in Christ. A brief survey of each aspect can benefit biblical counselors not only to understand the various dimensions of Christian identity but also to think through how they will apply this truth in counseling Korean Americans.

God's image-bearers (*imago Dei*). All Christians are first and foremost God's image-bearers. *Imago Dei*, which means "image of God" in ancient Greek, is a Christian doctrine that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6). This doctrine distinguishes human beings from animals because only humans were created as God's image-bearers while all the other "beasts of the earth" were created "according to their kinds" (Gen 1:25). There are three different views regarding how humans bear God's image, and each view tries to explain how a certain aspect of God's image is manifested through humanity.

First, the substantive view locates God's image in human beings within psychological or spiritual aspects, such as their "mental endowment, power of thought, self-consciousness, freedom of will, capacity for the eternal, the true, and the good."¹³ Second, the functional view explains that humans are God's image-bearers in terms of their "functioning as a representative (not a representation) in his exercise of dominion."¹⁴ Third, the relational view highlights "both the vertical relationship between

only about who you are created to be. But the gospel is about the being given of the brand-new identity that is given to everyone who *believes*" (italics added). Tripp, "What Is the Gospel?"

¹³ Daniel Simango, "The *Imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27): A History of Interpretation from Philo to the Present," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 42, no.1 (2016): 178.

¹⁴ Simango, "The *Imago Dei*," 181.

man and God and in the horizontal relationship between men.”¹⁵

Because each view examines a limited angle of *imago Dei*, a single view cannot provide a satisfying and comprehensive description of this doctrine, as Hermann Bavinck argues: “Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. While all creatures display vestiges of God, only a human being is the image of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations.”¹⁶ A systematic theologian Gregg Allison also supports the holistic understanding of this doctrine: “The image of God is human beings who engage in the privilege and responsibility of mirroring, or reflecting, and representing God, both as individuals and as a corporate entity, in their whole being and in their functions.”¹⁷ Therefore, it is proper to say that humanity bears God’s image on all three levels: substantive, functional, and relational.

As a result of the fall, the image of God in human beings was distorted yet not totally lost as Wayne Grudem articulates: “Though man is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life *some* parts of that image have been distorted or lost. In short, ‘God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices’ (Eccl. 7:29).”¹⁸ Jack and Judith Balswick, professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, also affirm the effect of the fall: “Granted, the human condition is marked by sin, and therefore we are a broken image. The biblical view acknowledges that the human condition is marked by internal tension.”¹⁹ Thus, *imago Dei* should be understood not by examining human beings alone,

¹⁵ Simango, “The *Imago Dei*,” 180.

¹⁶ Hermann Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1999), 187.

¹⁷ Gregg R. Allison, “What in the World is the Image of God?” unpublished class notes for 27070 (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring Semester, 2018), 1.

¹⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 444.

¹⁹ Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 136.

but by surveying the life of the “second Adam,” Jesus Christ, who not only lived a perfect life in a mortal body but also gives people the hope of future glorification.

The doctrine of *imago Dei* provides Korean Americans with at least two very important benefits. First, it gives them a sense of significance and stability that is based not on the recognition of other people but on God’s knowledge of them. As God’s image-bearers, Korean Americans can rest assured that they are known by God, regardless of their status or situation. Rosner articulates this in his book *Known by God*:

Being known by God gives our lives true and lasting significance, no matter how disappointing or diminished they may be. God reassures us of our significance and worthy by reminding us that our names are written in heaven, that he remembers us constantly, and that he knows us intimately and personally.²⁰

This profound truth that they are known by God as his image-bearers can encourage and empower them to “run with endurance the race that is set before” them, as they look to Jesus, who is “the founder and perfecter of” their faith (Heb 12:1-2).

Second, *imago Dei* helps Korean Americans understand the biblical metanarrative and identify their own stories with it. This doctrine effectively covers every aspect of the Bible’s core narrative: Creation (God’s image being bestowed), Fall (God’s image being distorted), Redemption (God’s image being progressively restored, i.e. sanctification), and Consummation (God’s image being fully recovered). Because this theological doctrine is closely intertwined with the biblical metanarrative, the knowledge of and faith in it will enable Korean Americans not only to graft their life stories into the grand-narrative of Scripture but also to interpret their own stories in light of God’s salvation history.

God’s children. The doctrine of *imago Dei* is closely related with the fact that all Christians are God’s children, as Rosner points out: “Our very identity as human

²⁰ Rosner, *Known by God*, 206.

beings is tied up with being children of God made in the image of God.”²¹ The apostle John declares that “To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). In Romans 8, Paul argues that believers “have received the Spirit of adoption as sons” and adds that “if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (8:15-17). Paul also urges the Christians in Ephesus to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph 5:1). In short, Scripture constantly calls believers as God’s children in Christ and commands them to live on this earth as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father.

The theological truth that all believers are God’s children can provide Korean Americans a cognitive meaning as well as have an affective impact on them. Rosner explains the trifold cognitive meaning that all believers can have as children of God: they (1) “have the status as God’s heirs and coheirs with Christ awaiting an eternal inheritance,” (2) “are to imitate the Father and the Son,” and (3) “are disciplined by God,” who is their “loving heavenly Father,” so that they “might grow into full maturity.”²² Because this transcendent God has now become their most intimate Abba Father, Korean Americans can find the assurance of being intimately known and loved by God. Such assurance of God’s love for them and his personal knowledge of them can become the foundation of their courage to overcome hardships they face every day.

God’s servants. On top of their identity as God’s image-bearers and children, all Christians bear an identity of God’s servants as well. In the gospels, Jesus frequently teaches his disciples to serve others (Matt 20:26; Mark 9:35). He also reminds his followers that he came to serve and not to be served (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45), and he shows an example of servant leadership by washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-

²¹ Rosner, *Known by God*, 84.

²² Rosner, *Known by God*, 156-61.

17). Christ's servanthood is most beautifully described in Philippians 2:7-8: "He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Paul also calls his fellow believers to live as God's servants by working "heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" in whatever they do (Col 3:23-24) and serving one another through love (Gal 5:13).

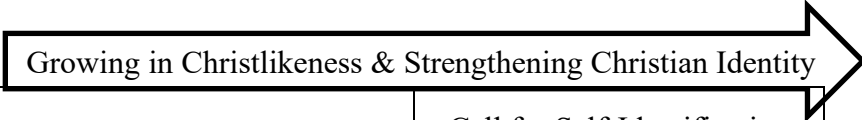
The truth that Christians are God's servants teaches Korean Americans at least three important lessons. First, it rightly humbles some Korean Americans who try to make names for themselves and find their identity in their achievements. Because they are mere servants who were bought with a price, they cannot boast of themselves anymore but should "boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31). Second, it provides them a sense of safety and comfort because their Master is not only a mighty warrior who is able to protect them from all dangers but also a loving shepherd who leads them and walks with them in wherever they go. Third, it compels them to serve God by keeping his commands because it is not themselves anymore who have the authority over their lives but Christ their Lord. Having sound understanding and firm faith in the fact that God is their Master will rightly urge Korean Americans to love God and their neighbors in their lives.

In summary, the trifold identity in Christ as God's image-bearers, God's children, and God's servants can bring invaluable benefits for Korean Americans to establish a firm Christian identity and provide the foundation to faithfully live it out through faith in the United States. The doctrine of *imago Dei* not only gives them a sense of significance and stability but also helps them to understand the biblical metanarrative and identify their own life stories with it. The truth that they are God's children can strengthen their Christian identity by providing them a cognitive meaning as well as having an affective impact on them. As God's faithful and humble servants, Korean Americans can feel a sense of safety under God's protection and continue the good work of faith through obeying the Lord's commands.

The Gospel Imperative: How Christians Ought to Live

As described earlier, Christian identity not only defines who believers are in Christ as the result of his atoning sacrifice (the gospel indicative)—God’s image-bearers, God’s children, and God’s servants, but also commands how they ought to live (the gospel imperative). The Bible, especially the New Testament, shows a constant pattern of the gospel imperative: self-denial and self-identification with Christ. Just like the gospel indicative and the gospel imperative are inseparable, self-denial and self-identification with Christ should be coupled together because the former always precedes the latter. Through denying themselves and identifying themselves with Christ, Korean Americans can grow in their Christlikeness and strengthen their Christian identity, as the chart below indicates.

Table 1. The gospel imperative: self-denial and self-identification with Christ

 Growing in Christlikeness & Strengthening Christian Identity		
Scripture Passages	Call for Self-Denial	Call for Self-Identification with Christ
Romans 13:14	“Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”	“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Ephesians 4:22-24	“Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires”	“Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”

Self-denial. The first aspect of the gospel imperative is self-denial. Throughout the gospels, Jesus invites his followers to deny themselves: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34b; Luke 9:23). Jesus’ teaching of self-denial, however, does not mean to repudiate every aspect of human life. For example, as an Anglican priest John Stott indicates, “Self-denial is not denying to ourselves luxuries such as chocolates, cakes, cigarettes and cocktails (though it may include this);” rather, “It is actually denying or disowning ourselves, renouncing our supposed right to go our own way.”²³ A British theologian Charles Cranfield affirms this: “To deny oneself is to disown, not just one’s sins but one’s self, to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness.”²⁴ In other words, self-denial is turning over the ownership of one’s life to God so that one’s whole life will be God-centered and God-driven.

This self-denial begins by renouncing the false self, which is “attached to various vanities, to material gain, to privilege and power and prestige,” therefore “inevitably anxious and insecure ... about the possibility of losing all these attachments.”²⁵ In other words, one’s false self is equivalent to one’s worldly identity, which is rooted in various secular identity markers such as one’s title, profession, income, and appearance. Just like plowing the field and getting rid of the weeds before sowing the good seeds, Korean Americans should first repudiate their false selves before establishing a new identity in Christ.

Renouncing the false self, however, does not mean to regard all these traditional identity markers as incorrect descriptors of an individual because they are still

²³ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 272.

²⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 281.

²⁵ Robert A. Chesnut, *Meeting Jesus the Christ Again: A Conservative Progressive Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 62.

true of that person; rather, it means to voluntarily detach one's identity from these vain identity markers. A pastor-theologian Robert A. Chesnut's lengthy articulation about relinquishing the false self is worth a quotation here:

So in the midst of it all, as Christians, we find ourselves also called to let go of ourselves, to relinquish our attachments to the false satisfactions of ego, of pride and competitiveness, of recognition and privilege and power that so readily become the harmful side effects of our God-commissioned quest of self-fulfillment. All our attachments to these externalities of self-fulfillment can readily grow to separate us from God and neighbor. They become the false gods of an egocentric life that knows nothing of the relinquishment of self that true love requires. True love of the true self requires the reinvestment of self in the love of God and others. But, again, it is not the extinction of the self to which Christianity calls us. It is the *re-centering* of the self, the re-centering of ourselves in the love of God and neighbor.²⁶

As Chesnut argues, the radical re-centering of the self begins with relinquishing one's false self. Therefore, biblical counselors should perform the two tasks in counseling Korean Americans who are struggling with identity issues: (1) identify the false identity markers on which their counselees have established their identities and (2) help them to detach their identity from the false identity markers by showing how unworthy and inappropriate these markers are to bear the weight of their identity as God's image-bearers, God's children, and God's servants.

Self-identification with Christ. The second aspect of the gospel imperative is self-identification with Christ. Scripture constantly commands all Christians to identify themselves with the Son of God by imitating him in their lives. In the gospels, Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34b; Luke 9:23). In his epistles to the churches, Paul exhorts his readers not only to imitate Christ as beloved children (Eph 5:1) but also to imitate him as he imitates the Lord (1 Cor 4:16, 11:1; Phil 3:17). Other apostles such as Peter and John also urge believers to follow in Jesus' steps (1 Pet 2:21) and "to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6).

²⁶ Chesnut, *Meeting Jesus the Christ Again*, 63.

In short, every Christian including Korean Americans should identify themselves with Jesus by imitating him and following his paths.

In order to imitate the Son of God and follow his footsteps, Korean Americans should first learn what the way of Christ looks like. Mark 10:35-45 teaches how believers should imitate Christlikeness by showing how Jesus contrasted himself with his disciples in three ways.²⁷ First, he chose to *sacrifice* himself for the sake of others while his disciples focused on satisfying their *ambition*. In this text, James and John asked Jesus: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37b). In other words, they tried to bend Jesus’s will to satisfy their selfish ambition and vanity instead of bending their will to the Lord with humbleness. In contrast to these disciples whose interest was utterly self-centered, Jesus lived a life completely and radically others-centered, just as he said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Therefore, in order to identify themselves with Jesus, Korean Americans should imitate him by sacrificing themselves for God and others instead of satisfying their personal ambition.

Second, while his disciples sought *power*, Jesus always chose to *serve* others. While his disciples were quarreling over the issue of power and authority, Jesus taught them not to exercise authority over others just like the rulers of the Gentiles; instead, he commanded, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43b-44). Although he was indeed the glorious Son of God, Christ “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil 2:6b), but lived on this earth as the suffering servant. As Stott rightly points out, “The symbol of an authentically Christian leadership is not the purple robe of an emperor but the coarse apron of a slave; not a throne of ivory and gold but a basin of

²⁷ The idea of the contrast between the way of Jesus and his disciples based on Mark 10:35-45 was retrieved from Stott’s book, *The Cross of Christ*, 278-81.

water for the washing of feet.”²⁸ As the followers and imitators of Christ, Korean Americans should strive to identify themselves with him by seeking to serve others rather than to exercise authority over others.

Third, Jesus chose to take the road of *suffering* in order to fulfill the Father’s will while his disciples sought after the *comfort* in their lives. In Mark 10:38, Jesus asked James and John if they are “able to drink the cup” that he will drink or “to be baptized with the baptism with which” he will be baptized, and they gave a glib answer to him: “We are able” (Mark 10:38-39). In fact, they not only failed to understand the true meaning of their Lord’s question but also possibly misunderstood his question by “day-dreaming about the goblets of wine at the Messianic banquet.”²⁹ In other words, while Jesus was referring to his sufferings for God’s sake, his disciples were seeking the security and comfort for their sake. Stott articulates the incompatibility between comfort and the way of Christ:

Insistence on security is incompatible with the way of the cross. What daring adventures the incarnation and the atonement were! What a breach of convention and decorum that Almighty God should renounce his privileges in order to take human flesh and bear human sin! Jesus had no security except in his Father. So to follow Jesus is always to accept at least a measure of uncertainty, danger and rejection for his sake.³⁰

As Stott instructs, Korean Americans should endeavor to identify themselves with Christ not only by enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel but also by rejoicing in it because “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10b).

Conclusion

As strangers and exiles navigating through a foreign culture and people far away from their homeland, Korean Americans are prone to struggle with insecurity and

²⁸ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 280.

²⁹ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 280.

³⁰ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 281.

uncertainty. These insecurities and uncertainties, combined with other sociocultural difficulties that they experience, can eventually dump Korean Americans into the deep pit of a severe identity crisis. While the world whispers them to build their identity on the secular identity markers such as their achievements or socioeconomic status, these seems-to-be-promising markers will fail Korean Americans because such markers are not only inappropriate but also unworthy foundations to establish their personal identity upon. Instead of these vain and unreliable identity markers, Korean Americans need a solid and trustworthy cornerstone upon which they can found their identity that will empower them to weather through the hardships in a foreign land.

In chapter one, this thesis surveyed the sociocultural factors and psychological problems that the three generations of Korean Americans experience. In the subsequent chapter, this thesis not only examined the superiority of Christian identity over worldly identity but also demonstrated the centrality of establishing Christian identity for counseling Korean Americans who struggle with identity issues. Based on the observations and arguments of the previous chapters, this chapter has discussed how the theology of Christian identity can be applied in counseling Korean Americans.

More specifically, biblical counselors should perform the three important tasks in counseling Korean Americans in order to help them establish a firm identity in Christ and live it out in their lives. First, biblical counselors ought to demonstrate the dual nature of Christian identity: the gospel indicative—what God has done for believers through Christ, and the gospel imperative—how Christians ought to live in light of that indicative. It is also important to explain the indissoluble relationship between the gospel indicative and the gospel imperative.

Second, biblical counselors should instruct various angles of Christian identity that are the result of the gospel indicative—God’s image-bearers, God’s children, and God’s servants—and their implications for Korean Americans. The truth that they are God’s image-bearers can give them a sense of significance and help them to understand

their own lives in light of the biblical metanarrative. An identity as God’s children not only can provide them cognitive meaning—that they are God’s heirs and beloved children—but also can have an affective impact of being known and loved by God. Lastly, an identity as God’s servants can grant them a sense of safety as well as the motivation to obey the Lord’s commandments to love God and love one another.

Third, biblical counselors should demonstrate the gospel imperative—how believers ought to live out their Christian identity—and encourage Korean Americans to practice it in their lives. As God’s image-bearers, children, and servants, Korean Americans should strive to follow the pattern of Scripture’s imperative for all believers: self-denial and self-identification with Christ. Because denying oneself begins by renouncing one’s false self, biblical counselors should help Korean Americans to identify their false identity markers and detach their identity from those unworthy and inappropriate markers. Lastly, biblical counselors ought to encourage them to imitate Christ by choosing sacrifice over ambition, service over power, and suffering over comfort.

If rightly understood, cherished, and exercised, Christian identity will serve Korean Americans as the solid foundation upon which they can establish their personal identity. Furthermore, their new identity in Christ will both enable them to weather through the turmoil of life as strangers and exiles in a foreign land and empower them to be more than conquerors in Christ. May God raise up the generation of faithful as well as skillful pastors and lay counselors to serve Korean Americans so that they will continue their walk with Christ Jesus throughout their lives, as the old hymn sings:

’Tis so sweet to walk with Jesus, Step by step and day by day;
Stepping in His very footprints, Walking with Him all the way.
Step by step, step by step, I would walk with Jesus,
All the day, all the way, Keeping step with Jesus!³¹

³¹ Albert B. Simpson, “Step by Step,” Hymnary.org: A Comprehensive Index of Hymns and Hymnals, accessed October 5, 2020, https://hymnary.org/text/tis_so_sweet_to_walk_with_jesus_step_by_/.

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ABSTRACT

“STRANGERS AND EXILES”: CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AS THE FOUNDATION FOR COUNSELING KOREAN AMERICANS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
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This thesis (1) examines the experience of Korean Americans, both sociologically and generationally and (2) establishes that Christian identity is an essential element for Korean Americans to endure challenging life situations. In sum, this thesis argues the significance of Christian identity as the foundation for counseling Korean Americans who struggle with identity issues.

Chapter 1 examines the common sociocultural factors and psychological problems that the three generations of Korean Americans experience as they live in the United States. Chapter 2 demonstrates the superiority of Christian identity over worldly identity, the centrality of the biblical metanarrative in establishing Christian identity, and the significance of Christian identity displayed through the stories of the three immigrants in Scripture. Chapter 3 articulates the two natures of Christian identity—the gospel indicative and the gospel imperative—and how biblical counselors can deploy these theological truths in counseling Korean Americans.

VITA

Jeemin Moon

EDUCATION

BA, Handong Global University, 2014

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville,
Kentucky, 2019-

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Chaplain Assistant, Eighth United States Army and Eighth Army Republic of
Korea Army Support Group, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2009-2011

Resident Intern in Worship Ministry, LaGrange Baptist Church, LaGrange,
Kentucky, 2015-2020

Worship Band Director, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,
Louisville, Kentucky, 2017-2020