

Who Are We?

IDENTITY IN CHRIST - Part 1 of 2

PRIMARY TEXT: ROMANS 5:12-19

SUPPORTING TEXTS: GENESIS 3:1-5; LUKE 3:3-14; JOHN 1:12; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

DISCUSSION GUIDE: 30-45 MINUTES

When we speak of finding our identity in Christ, we often contrast it with defining ourselves by our vocation, success, or performance. But identity can become entangled with far more than work. It can become bound up in the roles we fill, the relationships we value, the approval of others, or the security we fear losing.

We may understand the phrase identity in Christ and still struggle to explain what it means in ordinary life. This study asks what we are trusting to tell us who we are, and how the gospel gives us an identity we could never establish for ourselves.

CENTRAL TRUTH

Identity, worth, and security cannot be separated. What we believe about who we are shapes what we believe gives us value and what we trust to make us secure.

1 Good Gifts, Wrong Burdens

READ GENESIS 3:1-5

Wanting to succeed, advance in a career, or enjoy a loving relationship is not inherently sinful. Work, responsibility, human relationship, and fruitful labor were part of God's good design from the beginning. The problem is not simply that we desire these things, but what we ask them to provide and what we are willing to do to secure them.

In the garden, Satan first cast doubt upon God's Word: "Did God actually say . . . ?" He then appealed to the desire for autonomy and self-rule: "You will be like God." Adam and Eve were tempted not merely to break a command, but to seek wisdom, security, and life on their own terms rather than receive them from God.

The same deception continues. A good gift becomes a cruel master when we require it to define us, prove our value, or make us secure.

DISCUSSION

- 1 ? Which good things - work, relationships, family, approval, achievement, or something else - are most likely to become part of how you define yourself?
- 2 ? How can we recognize when a good desire has begun carrying a burden God never intended it to bear?

2 The Promise of Control

We often believe that security can be found in independence - in our ability to control our lives and secure the outcomes we desire. Yet what appears to be control is often fear. Our decisions may be driven less by freedom than by fear of losing a relationship, a career, a happy family, the approval of others, or the assurance that we are loved.

If our identity depends upon being loved, we may compromise our convictions or even compromise ourselves to preserve a relationship. The threatened loss of love can become a means of control. The same thing can happen in our vocation. We may neglect relationships or compromise our values in an effort to secure our career or the future we believe it promises.

A FALSE PROMISE

Control promises a security it cannot deliver. The more we require an earthly good to secure us, the more its possible loss can govern us.

DISCUSSION

- ? Where have you seen fear of loss influence a decision that appeared, on the surface, to be about control?
- ? Why can a relationship, career, or other good thing exercise power over us when it becomes a source of identity?

3 Obedience in Ordinary Life

READ LUKE 3:3, 8, 12-14

John the Baptist called people to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Among those who came to him were tax collectors and soldiers - two groups commonly associated with coercion, abuse of power, and corruption.

John did not instruct either group to abandon its occupation. He told the tax collectors not to collect more than required and the soldiers not to extort money or accuse people falsely. Their work was not permitted to govern their conduct; obedience to God was.

Having our identity in Christ does not require us to abandon every earthly role, relationship, or ambition. It changes the authority under which we pursue them. A career, relationship, or responsibility can be received as a gift from God, but it cannot be allowed to become our master.

DISCUSSION

- ? What is the difference between receiving a role or relationship as a gift from God and treating it as a master?
- ? What might obedience to God require when faithfulness appears to threaten an outcome you deeply desire?

4 Our Identity in Adam

READ ROMANS 5:12-19

Paul tells us that sin entered the world through one man, Adam. We are also told that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and our own lives bear witness to that truth.

By nature, each of us is in Adam. We remain created in the image of God and therefore possess dignity and value as His creatures, but sin has corrupted every part of us. Outside Christ, we stand condemned before God - unable to please Him, restore ourselves to Him, or establish a righteousness of our own. Even "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

Sin persuades us that through enough effort, achievement, control, or moral behavior we can establish who we are and make ourselves acceptable. But our works cannot rescue us from our identity and standing in Adam.

THE DEEPER PROBLEM

We do not merely need improved performance, greater self-esteem, or better circumstances. We need a new standing before God and an identity we cannot create for ourselves.

DISCUSSION

- ? Why can neither achievement nor moral effort rescue us from our standing in Adam?

5 Our New Identity in Christ

READ JOHN 1:12 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Sin and condemnation are not the end of the story. Just as sin entered through one man, the gift of grace came through one man, Jesus Christ. Through Adam's disobedience many were made sinners; through Christ's obedience many will be made righteous.

Christ gives us an identity we could never secure for ourselves: "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Those who receive Christ are united to Him, adopted as God's children, and clothed in Christ's righteousness. God does not declare us righteous because of our accomplishments or merit. Righteousness is His gift to us in Christ.

Our new identity is not created through self-discovery, secured through achievement, or bestowed by the approval of others. It is received by grace. "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

IN CHRIST

Our identity is not a verdict issued by our performance, our circumstances, or the people around us. In Christ, it is a gift declared by the God who receives us as His children.

DISCUSSION

- ? What is the practical difference between an identity we achieve and an identity we receive by grace?
- ? Which truth about your identity in Christ - united to Christ, adopted as God's child, clothed in His righteousness, or made new - is most difficult for you to rest in? Why?

6 Personal Response

Consider one role, relationship, accomplishment, or desired outcome that has carried too much responsibility for telling you who you are. Receiving your identity from Christ does not make that good thing unimportant. It frees you to pursue it faithfully without requiring it to define you.

DISCUSSION

- ? Complete this sentence: "I am most tempted to let _____ tell me who I am when _____. " What truth about your identity in Christ speaks to that temptation?

WEEKLY COMMITMENT

This week, when that source of identity feels threatened, I will pause and remember: I belong to Christ, and my identity is received from Him.

7 Closing Summary

- Good gifts become cruel masters when we require them to define us, prove our value, or make us secure.
- The desire for control often conceals a deeper fear of losing what we depend upon.
- Identity in Christ places our work, relationships, ambitions, and responsibilities under God's authority.
- In Adam, we stand condemned and cannot establish our own righteousness.
- In Christ, we receive a new identity by grace: united to Christ, adopted as God's children, clothed in His righteousness, and made new.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, reveal the people, roles, achievements, and outcomes we have asked to tell us who we are. Forgive us for trusting Your gifts more than we trust You. Teach us to receive our identity from You, to rest in Your righteousness, and to live faithfully under Your authority. Amen.

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NOTES & COMMITMENTS