

IDENTITY

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By Bill McCurine

“Who am I?” is a question mankind has asked throughout time, regardless of culture, place or race. A variety of factors define and influence our natural identity: family, culture and friends are just some of the influences that shape and define who we are. We Christians are free to identify ourselves any way we want so long as our identity is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our identity must bow to the Lordship of Christ. To the extent we give prominence to anything above Christ in shaping our identity, we err. Identity apart from Christ tends to lead to pride, depression or alienation; it does not lead to God.

Throughout scripture God insists that we base our identity on the fact that He created us, and we are accountable to Him.

Psalm 139:15 (ESV) My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Psalm 139:16 (ESV) Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

In other words, while the earth was still formless and void and before God had created anything that could be called “day”, He had sovereignly determined all our days. As our Creator, God has the sole right to tell us who we are and why we were created.

Second, God will continue to disrupt and overturn events in our lives until we base our identity on Christ.

Ezekiel 21:27 "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is...."

We err when we build our identity apart from Christ.

Psalm 100:3. "Know that the LORD, He is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

When the apostle Paul spoke to the Athenians at Mars Hill he understood that the purpose of identity is to drive us to Christ. So, he told the Athenians:

Acts 17:26-27 "[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him."

In other words God determined our time, our place, our nationality and even our neighbors for the purpose of compelling us to seek Him. Only a sovereign, loving and infinitely wise God can do that.

The Tower of Babel in *Genesis 11:1-9* exemplifies how God will continue to disrupt and overturn events in our lives until we base our identity on Christ.

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When we come to Christ we do not lose our natural identity. Rather, our natural identity is transformed. We learn this from

2 Corinthians 5:16-18: "From now on, therefore, we regard no-one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Our identity (just like our will, mind, body and soul) has been redeemed by Christ. Our natural identity is not lost; it is redeemed, transformed. Our intention as believers should be to encourage this transformation, to be caught up in Christ.

God's glory is too magnificent to save just one people group (the Jews). He has sovereignly chosen to save people from among all mankind. Therefore God the Father said to God the Son:

Isaiah 49:6 "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This grand salvation is part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham:

Genesis 12:2-3 "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Galatians 3:16 tells us that Christ is Abraham's seed: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ."

The word "families" in the Genesis 12 passage above is the Hebrew word "mishpachah" which means clan, family, tribe, people. Therefore, through Christ, all those who believe Jesus will be saved by grace through faith regardless of race, nationality or language. This truth is reinforced in Revelation 5 wherein Jesus Christ is described as the One who alone is "worthy ... to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Therefore, heaven will have representatives from all people groups, all races, all nations, all languages! The racial, cultural, national and lingual diversity of the saints will glorify God. We go into heaven with glorified identities to the praise of His glory!

So, what does that mean for how we see ourselves and others?

First, we are to rejoice in all peoples because they include our brothers and sisters who will one day join us in worshiping God in heaven. As people who believe Jesus, we belong to the family of God. The way the Church Triumphant looks glorifies God.

Second, we need to so live that our identity is more influenced by the Holy Spirit and God's word than by culture and fashion. As Paul exhorts in 2 Corinthians 5: 16-18, we are not allowed to view people simply in their natural identify, but as real or

potential heirs with us in Christ. We do this by loving people regardless of their race, nationality, gender, etc. In all our human interactions, we need to place all our human markers (race, nationality, pedigree, money, etc.) at the foot of the cross. All God's elect are "hidden with Christ in God."¹

APPLICATION

- ❖ What part of your identity have you not surrendered to Christ? Would your wife agree?
- ❖ Ask your spouse or best friend if any racism, sexism, jingoism, zealotry or ethnocentricity resides in some corner of your heart. If they say "yes", treat it like cancer and root it out.

¹ Colossians 3:3