

Securing Your Identity
in Christ

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Many of the tremendous struggles Christians continually face are related to the problem of identity. "Identity" speaks of exact likeness in the nature and quality of an object. It is who a person is and what he is like on a consistent basis. When we discern a person's identity, then we can pray accordingly in order to help them.

For some people, their cultural identity has preeminence. It is rooted in the conscience, which is where the norms and standards of the soul and mind have been established. Others have their identity in the world system. They love the things of the world. Others have identities derived from human good. These people are willing to give their bodies to be burned, but they do not have the love of God (1 Corinthians 13). All of their sacrifices are self-motivated.

As this booklet will show, our identity is derived from the Finished Work of Jesus Christ. Through His death, He made a way for us to be

one with Him. When we recognize the price that He paid for us, we can have an identity that is established in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Then we can see ourselves and others as God sees us—seated above.

Chapter One

ATTACHMENTS THAT ESTABLISH WRONG IDENTITIES

“And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

“But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy [Spirit] which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:14-20).

People, even if they don't realize it, are constantly searching out their identity. For example, in Genesis 13, Lot sought his identity in materialism. He turned toward the green grass and fertile soil of Sodom because he had an attachment to money. On the other hand, Abraham, Lot's uncle, had plenty of money and possessions, but he did not let them become his identity.

Habakkuk 2:5 speaks of one whose desire is enlarged "as hell and as death, and cannot be satisfied." For example, in his materialistic identity, Lot was never satisfied. He sold his testimony to get material things. So attached was his identity to Sodom that he and his family literally had to be dragged from the city as God prepared to destroy it. Lot's wife had her identity in Sodom and Gomorrah. She just wasn't going to be happy unless she lived in Sodom. As she was fleeing the destruction God had delivered them from, she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). Lot's wife should have put her identity, with its attachments to the past, behind her.

The Traps of Sight and Reasoning

In Numbers 13:31, ten spies on a mission to scout out the Promised Land returned with an

evil report. They said, “We cannot take Canaan, for the people there are too strong for us.” Their identities were drawn from sight, comparison, and human rationale. These spies did not have a faith perception based upon the promises of God’s character. Instead, they had an identity derived by sight that says, “I can’t go there” or “I can’t do this because....”

The men and women who have their identity in homosexuality aren’t happy unless they can practice it. At that point, they have gone beyond the stage of wanting help. Similarly, a promiscuous person’s identity needs to have promiscuous affairs to have fun. The drug addict’s identity is tied to the next “high”—that is all he can live for.

You meet other people whose identities are trapped in being offended (Proverbs 18:19). A day doesn’t go by without their being offended over something. Others have an identity of blame (Genesis 3:12). Nothing is ever their fault, and they are always caught up in the blame game because that is their identity.

Trapped in the Past: Problems in Marriages

Wrong identities open the doors to problems in many marriages. There are Christian wives

who will not enjoy sex with their husbands. Their identities leave them disinterested in sex because they misunderstand its meaning.

Studies have shown that nearly 85 percent of Christian wives are not good lovers. Unfortunately, the reasons are usually due to something that they did years before they were married. A past identity is controlling the soul when it comes to intimacy. Because their identities are stuck in the past, they can't enjoy sex with their husbands in the present.

It is true that Proverbs 6:32 warns that sex outside of marriage destroys the soul. But it is also true that God is in the soul-healing business (see Psalm 41), and He will heal quite quickly if faith is alive.

"I don't like sex," a wife may say. She did like it, however, at one time when it was wrong for her to have it. How about liking it now that it's right to have it in marriage? Just get right with God, and realize God's will and purpose for marriage. The problem is that many don't believe they can do all things through Christ who would strengthen them (Philippians 4:13). If a woman doesn't believe that God can fulfill the needs of her heart, she has to admit that she doesn't believe in God's promises.

This woman and others like her don't enjoy sex because they don't understand that it was *first* created for pleasure, even before the purpose of procreation. Adam and Eve had sex for pleasure long before Cain and Abel were born.

Sex isn't imperative, but when a husband loves his wife and he isn't demanding, she should be able to respond to his initiations. It may result in nothing more than kissing and holding. Still, there should always be a framework of love that produces a desire to be intimate in sex. Sex is a type of what happened when we were saved and Christ entered into our hearts. The husband enters into a union with the wife. It is an expression of the mystery of the Trinity in the experience of salvation.

The past is gone forever; whatever was done is done. You have been forgiven. Don't defraud each other (see 1 Corinthians 7). "I don't defraud, I just don't enjoy it," you say? Then get right with God in that area, as in any other area of life. Do not let your identity be in the past. You can be as free as free can be!

Chapter Two

RECEIVE A NEW IDENTITY

The apostle Paul said, "It is not I, but Christ." He realized that the only way to have a true identity is through the Cross of Calvary. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul declared, "I am what I am by the grace of God." Paul's identity was in the Cross and in the grace of God. His sins were forgiven, and God couldn't remember them. His identity wasn't in legalism; it wasn't to legislate righteousness. Paul was made a brand-new creature with a brand-new identity.

Criticism versus Contrition

Some people live in "critical identities." They may go to a church where they see souls

saved weekly, a full house with standing-room-only crowds, and people heading to the foreign fields month after month. Yet, they are always finding fault, and they never have fun in church.

The pharisee, in Luke 18:11-13, thanked God that he wasn't like the publican, an extortioner, who stood afar off at the temple. But the pharisee had his identity in being religious. He let God know that *he* tithed and fasted twice a week, yet he wasn't even saved.

The publican came before God with an identity that was in his sins. He couldn't look toward heaven and he wouldn't look to the altar. He stood afar off and beat upon his breast, saying, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." The publican came with an identity in his sins, but he found forgiveness and he went home justified; he received a new identity.

Facing the Crisis

Sooner or later, every one of us must face an identity crisis. We must admit that we have accumulated things that have made us who we are. Then, we must take care of those things by committing them once and for all to the Finished Work, where we have already been crucified with Christ. "And they that are Christ's have

crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

When your identity is in the grace of God and rooted in resurrection life, moods don’t affect you, even when details of life and financial pressures come. You don’t have to act weird and have people around you whisper, “Don’t touch her today—she’s had a good four weeks, but now she’s back at it.” Adam’s identity does not have to be in control. God has made a better way.

Come to the Altar

The altar was central in the lives of God’s people throughout the Bible. In Genesis 4:4, Abel brought a blood offering to God. Cain did not. Instead, he brought vegetables, which represented the works of his own hands. Abel’s offering was accepted at the altar, which represented the house of God.

Abram went to Egypt because of a famine in his land (Genesis 12:10). When they arrived, he told his very pretty wife, Sarai, to lie to pharaoh if he asked whether she was Abram’s wife. Abram told Sarai to say, “I am his sister.” This meant that if pharaoh wanted to sleep with Sarai, he would have thought it was all right.

Fortunately, God intervened, warning pharaoh in a dream that Sarai was Abram's wife.

Abram lied three times in Genesis 12 alone, yet his identity was in faith. He is not a religious father—we don't go to him to confess our sins. Still, Abram, who became Abraham, represents a spiritual father. He is the father of our faith.

After everything that happened with the pharaoh in Egypt, Abram returned to Bethel, "to the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 13:4). This would be like us returning to where we first had a great time with Jesus Christ: the first altar, first glory (Exodus 40:34), and first love (Revelation 2:4).

Chapter Three

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE: THE FOUNDATION OF OUR IDENTITY

In Genesis 28, Jacob, backslidden and afraid, was sent away from home after stealing his brother Esau's birthright. On his way he came to a place he called Beth-el, "the house of God." It was there in a dream that Jacob saw a ladder that reached up into heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on the ladder, and God said, "The same blessing I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I give to you. I will never leave you, and I am going to bless you so that your seed is as the sands of the sea" (see verses 12-15).

Remember, when God gave this promise, Jacob was backsliding. And when he left there, Jacob went on to Haran where he remained backslidden for twenty years! Then, in Genesis 32, God told Jacob to go back to Bethel; so, he

packed up his possessions and his family and started back.

Jacob was left alone with God. He wrestled with God all night (Genesis 32:24-28); the angel was Jesus Christ. Though Jacob prevailed, Jesus Christ touched the hollow of his thigh, making him lame for the rest of his life. Still, Jacob did not give up, but he said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

What was the blessing? A brand-new identity. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." That was Jacob's new identity.

God's Glory and the Assembly

The tabernacle in Exodus 40 was considered to be the house of God. It was a beautiful place where the glory of God filled the Holy of Holies, filling it up so completely that even Moses could not enter in.* While the tabernacle was moveable, Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 7 was immovable, and the glory of God filled it, too. Today, every born-again believer is the temple of God. He doesn't dwell in buildings—except where the believers are.

Now, when God invaded and inhabited the

tabernacle and the temple, do you think anyone thought of bringing whiskey inside of them? Do you think anyone considered committing immorality in these places? No, these were houses of God. In fact, people who tried to commit fornication in the proximity of the house of God were killed (Numbers 25). Why? It was the holy house of God.

According to Hebrews 10:25, wherever believers are assembled, *that* is the house of God. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit in him, along with the Father and the Son. As we gather together, His glory is in each one. Consider what Leviticus 26:8 says, “Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.” *This is what being part of a church is all about.*

Forsake Not the Assembly

A Christian may think, “I can be just as spiritual at home as I can at church.” That is wrong. You cannot be as good a Christian when you purposely stay away from the house of God, from the assembly of believers. We have been told to assemble ourselves together much more. You can argue about it, but one day you will face God. You will be alone—without your spouse,

without your money, and without your pride.

In 1 Samuel 15:13-35, King Saul had his identity in pride, and deception ruined him. But when you humble yourself before God and allow Him to break you, you can be like Jacob with a new identity of power with God and with men.

**Read Seeing the Glory of God, by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

Chapter Four
JESUS NEVER FORGETS
WHO WE ARE

In Luke 5, the people pressed upon Jesus to hear the Word of God. So, He found two empty boats by a lake, while the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets. Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon Peter, and a little ways out He began teaching the people. When He had finished teaching, Jesus told Peter to launch out into the deep and let down his nets. But Peter said, "Oh Lord, we have toiled all night, and taken nothing. Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net."

Oh, *God help us to do what the Word of God says to do!* Jesus said, "Let down the net," and they caught so many fish that the net broke (verses 4-7).

Peter could only bow down, broken before Jesus and say, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He was saying, "Lord, You don't

know who I am. My identity is established in what I do. I am proud and impulsive. My identity is not in You. Depart from me." But Jesus said in verse 10, "Fear not: I don't want you to fish for fish anymore. From now on, I want you to fish for men."

Failure Isn't Final

Sadly, at the end of Jesus' life on earth, Peter followed Him afar off (Matthew 26:58-75). After the Lord was arrested by the Roman soldiers, a maid who recognized Peter as a disciple said, "You are one of his disciples." Peter said, "I am not." Another maid said, "You are one of them; your speech betrays you." He said, "I am not one of them." When someone else confronted him, Peter cursed and said, "I don't know the man!" Then the cock crowed.

At that moment, Jesus, being led away to be tried at the house of the high priest, looked upon Peter (Luke 22:54-62). Christ had to turn to him deliberately and stared him down with tender eyes. Then, Peter remembered the words Jesus said to him: "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Luke 26:34). Peter went out and sobbed. Jesus looked at him, but he looked at him in tenderness and sweetness because this

prophecy was now fulfilled.

In John 21, even after Jesus was crucified and appeared to the disciples in the Resurrection, Peter quit his calling. He said, “I go a fishing”—and the other disciples followed along. May I point this out: It is difficult to backslide alone. Someone else will always backslide with you. Peter *and* the disciples went back out fishing, and the Bible says they caught nothing (John 21:3). Then, Jesus appeared on the shore.

“Children, have you any meat?” He asked.

“No,” they answered.

“Cast your net on the right side.”

Peter was so backslidden that he couldn't even see that it was Jesus on the shore; he thought it was just a man addressing them. But John, remembering what had happened in the beginning in Luke 5, said to Peter, “No. It is the Lord.”

Once again, their net was full of fishes—more than they could handle—and Peter was the first one to swim to shore. Jesus had brought Peter back to the place where they first met.

It is like someone who drifts away from church, away from the house of God, and then is brought back to the assembly. This time, the songs in church mean so much. The worship

and the messages mean so much. The love and smiles from the people in the church touch him again. The prayers and caring and help he receives let him know that he is *back* in the house of God. It is where he finds his identity.

This is what God always does. He brings people back to the house of God, if they will let Him. Their backsliding always corrects them (Jeremiah 3:19-22). He restores them to their identities in the Finished Work. What a beautiful thing—to be back in the house of God!

A Firm Foundation

Toward the end of his life, Pastor Bob Jones Sr. battled Alzheimer's disease. One of the last times he got up to speak, he began telling and retelling the story of how he was saved. "Years ago I was on a dirt road, and a domineering thought came to me: 'You've got to live somewhere forever, so you better learn how to live.' I was only twelve. God told me to go to a little church where my mom was. I stood way up back—my mom didn't know it. I went and got saved...."

After repeating the story several times, his son, in tears, tapped him on the shoulder and gently eased him off the platform. It was a sad

scene. Still, I can't help but think how this great man of God didn't remember much, but he remembered the day he came to Jesus. He remembered the house of God, the foundation of his identity.

CONCLUSION

I remember years ago helping a group of rebellious teen-agers to see the truth about identities. When called to my office, they expected condemnation. Instead, God led me to lovingly and tenderly communicate just how much each one of them meant to God. I told them that they were His temples; that He so loved them, He died to make a way to come and live inside of them.

“This is why you shouldn’t have sex before marriage,” I said. “Don’t let someone else invade what belongs to God. Your body is His. You are His. Please don’t hurt your temples.”

They responded magnificently to those words. In fact, three girls came and confessed, saying, “We have been living in fornication, but now we understand how God sees us and we want His forgiveness. We just didn’t understand it.” They were ready to receive a new identity.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,

and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

We are the temples of the Holy Spirit. That is who we are, our identity. Knowing this will keep us pure more than any list of regulations and rules.

Those girls received new identities, and a dangerous trend that was going on in their school at the time was reversed. They began to glorify God in body and spirit, which belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The same kind of victory can be yours. Just remember always that "ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:23). In Hebrews 12:2, we are to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Only when we derive our identity from Jesus Christ can we experience our heavenly position. What a glorious identity!