

## Who Am I?

### 2 Cor. 5:17

When Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, at one point she visited a retirement community and went around shaking the hands of the residents. One elderly woman didn't seem to recognize her, so Thatcher asked her, "do you know who I am?" "No," the woman replied, "but if you ask the nurse, she usually knows."

This morning we're beginning a series called *Who Am I? Finding Our Identity in Christ*. There is nothing more important about you than your identity because your identity is *who you are*. The definition of the word *identity* is *the fact of being who or what a person or thing is*. Identity is the fact of being who you are. That seems pretty simple - aren't we all being who we are? Who else could we be? The truth is our identity is not only the most important thing about us, it can also be one of the things about ourselves that we are most confused about, that we are least clear on. Like the elderly woman in the nursing home, we can forget who we are and we need to go back to God's word regularly to remind us of who we are. And that's what we are going to be doing for the next several weeks.

But before we jump in, there are two landmines we want to avoid in this series. The first is *Bible superficiality*. Our identity in Christ goes to the core of who we are and it goes to the very core of the gospel, and so the last thing we want to do is slap a few Bible verses on this topic and go home. Have you ever been driving and seen a car with a Christian bumper sticker on it - maybe a Christian fish or a "honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker and said, "hey, those people are Christians". How do you know? Who else but a Christian would have a bumper sticker with a fish on it? But a sticker on the bumper doesn't necessarily mean a changed life. I was interested to read that a recent study on road rage showed a positive correlation between the number of bumper stickers on a car and the likelihood of the driver going postal on other drivers. And it really didn't matter what the bumper stickers said - the guy with all kinds of Jesus saves bumper stickers on his car was just as likely to take a tire iron to someone's windshield as the guy that had a lot of "take this job and shove it" bumper stickers. People with a lot of bumper stickers are more likely prone to road rage. Now, if you happen to have a lot of bumper stickers on your car, I don't want any trouble with you. I'm just telling you what the study found. I'm sure it doesn't apply to you. So we're good, right? But let me just say to those of you who don't have a lot of bumper stickers on your car...you might want to watch out for that guy!

But slapping a bumper sticker on our car isn't the same as having our hearts and character transformed by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And slapping a bible verse on our foreheads about our identity in Christ isn't the same as the truth of that bible verse entering our hearts and doing a deep work inside us. My prayer is that the Lord enables and empowers His word to reach our hearts in an honest and powerful way in this series.

The other landmine I hope to avoid is this series becoming a narcissistic celebration of self. I hope and expect this series to be encouraging and uplifting as we explore what the Bible says about our identity in Christ, but the goal of our time isn't to become obsessed with ourselves. Someone once said, *None are so empty as those who are full of themselves*. Trying to fill ourselves with ourselves will leave us feeling more and more empty. Our identity actually becomes more rooted and more secure as we lose sight of

ourselves and get a clearer view of Christ and his glory. Narcissism, which is an out of control self-love, is sin's substitute for what we were created for: to love and glorify God.

So where do we start a series on identity? We opened with 2 Cor. 5:17 and we're going to work our way back to that verse in a few minutes, but I think to truly understand our identity we need to start at the beginning. Not the beginning of your life or mine, but the beginning of the human race, found in Genesis chapter one. That's where all of our stories start, that's where our roots go.

## I. **Who are we? Created by God in His likeness**

*(1:26) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... (27) So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them. (2:7) the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature... (18) Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him ... (21) So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:7,18,21-22 ESV)*

There is something different about how God created man than any other created being. Everything else God created He created simply by speaking the word. But God stooped down and formed man from the dust of the earth, and then He bent close and breathed the breath of life into man's nostrils. God didn't do that to any other living creature. God's breath turned Adam from an inanimate thing into a living, breathing, person. And then God lovingly formed Eve in the same way. Who am we? We are hand-made by God.

But there's something else in Genesis 1 that is really important, so important that the Bible repeats it. *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* Men and women are created in God's image, in His likeness. It's not that God looks like us physically but God has imprinted His image on mankind in a very unique way. Every human being bears God's image. There are attributes of God that we share with Him: God is creative, we are creative. God is a communicator - we are communicators. God is relational - we are relational.

Every human being carries the likeness of God in him or her. That image has been marred and distorted by sin, and we'll come to that in a minute, but the image is still there. That's why, when we look at the human race, we see beauty and goodness and love and nobility and other great things in the world around us. At the core of our being - the core of our identity - we bear the image of God. That speaks of a dignity, a value, and a nobility that is inherent in every human being just by virtue of their being a human being. The homeless person has as much intrinsic value in God's sight as the multi-millionaire. The janitor of a Fortune 500 company as much value as the CEO. The newborn babe has as much intrinsic value before they're able to walk or talk or do much of anything, as a fully grown, highly accomplished person. Our value - and our identity - isn't based on what we *do*. It's based on what/who we are.

Being created in God's image is why we want our lives to have meaning, to amount to something. God is a God who does amazing things, He is, Jesus said, always at work accomplishing great things. He has built that desire to accomplish and achieve into the fiber of our being. We want our lives to make a difference.

Being created in God's image is also why deep inside we long for real and meaningful relationships - that's how God built us. God is a relational God - He is love - and we bear His image in that. The last words of Gen. chapter 2 tells us that Adam and Eve were naked and were not ashamed. Yes, they were comfortable having no clothes on, but there's more to that than that. They could stand before God and each other totally exposed and not feel the slightest embarrassment or shame or fear. God would walk with them in the garden in the cool of the day and they'd share openly and unashamedly with Him - no fear, no guilt, no self-consciousness. Their relationship with God and each other was based on complete and total honesty and self-disclosure. No mind games, no false images, no pretence, no partial truths, no hiding how they feel out of fear of how the other person might respond - they were completely genuine and open and had nothing to hide. God created each of us with a deep, deep longing and yearning for relationship with each other and, most of all, with Him. Who are we? We are created by God in His likeness.

## **II. Who are we? We are sinners who distort the likeness of God**

*Gen. 3: 4- 10 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it **your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**" So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."*

When sin entered the world it poisoned everything and it's destruction goes in a million directions. But the core of sin's destruction is how it messed up our identity. The serpent promised Eve that she'd get an identity remake: *you will be like God*. She was made in the likeness of God, but this was different. This was a promise that she could stop being a reflector of God and graduate to being a little god herself. The serpent was tempting her with a better identity, but what Adam and Eve got was a devastated identity. Their identity was rooted in their Creator, being in fellowship with Him, and reflecting God (bearing His image) to the world. Sin and disobedience severed their fellowship with God and distorted their ability to reflect God's image to the world.

Two significant identity things happened: first, pride bent our mirrors inward so that instead of reflecting God's image to the world, we became obsessed with reflecting our own image to the world. Our existence became all about us rather than all about God. We are born with a belief that we are the center of the universe. By the way, this doesn't just apply to larger than life, billionaire celebrities that want to be president (and I'm not thinking of anyone in particular). It applies just as much to the quiet, totally unknown person leading a quiet, little life but who bends everything in their little life inwards towards themselves. Rather than reflecting God's image, we became obsessed with reflecting our own image. We want the world to revolve around us: *you will be like God*.

And, at the same time, we don't want the world to see who we really are. That's the other significant identity thing that happened. We want the world to worship us, but we don't want the world to see us - not for who we really are. Verse 7 tells us that Adam and Eve's eyes were opened...and they knew they were naked. When God came to walk in the cool of the day like He always did, rather than run to Him, they ran away and hid.

And we've been hiding ever since. On that day things like shame and fear and guilt became a part of our human identity and we've all learned to one degree or another ways to hide who we really are from each other. We don't want people to see our real identity so we fake an identity, we sow fig leaves together to try to cover up our shame and fear. Instead of our identity being the fact of who we are, we base our identity in superficial things like our looks, or our athletic skills, or musical skills, or intelligence. We sow together an image made from making a lot of money, or being an artsy person, or having a lot of kids, or being the life of the party, or being the uber-confident person. We can even use religion and being spiritual as a way of stiff-arming people from knowing who we really are and what we really struggle with.

Now there's nothing wrong necessarily with any of these things, and they can be a real part of our personality. I'm talking about subtle ways that we mask insecurity, ways we hide who we are from fear of being exposed. These are internal impulses that take place deep in the heart and really only we and God can truly know go on. But they are the symptoms of a deeper issue, a broken relationship with our Creator and a distortion of His original intent that out of our relationship with Him we reflect His image to the world. And the great news for those who believe in Jesus Christ, is that in Christ God has restored our relationship with Himself and given us a new identity, an identity that, once again, is rooted in, and flows from our relationship with Him.

### **III. Who are we? *We are new creations in Christ***

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Cor. 5:17*

When we come to Jesus in faith, God doesn't just slap a coat of paint over our sin and guilt and brokenness and flaws and call it good. When Christ enters a life, he brings complete forgiveness and total cleansing and he makes us new creations. We aren't what we were! The old has passed away; behold! Everything is made new! You are a new creation in Christ! Totally new! This is true, but it can get a little confusing, cause you may be thinking, "I don't feel like a new creation." And then you look at the guy sitting next to you and you're thinking, "he definitely doesn't look like a new creation!" (no offense meant to those of you with a lot of bumper stickers on your car!)

We'll look more at this in the coming weeks, but when we came to Christ in faith, God regenerated us - made us alive in Christ - and legally and positionally before God we are made totally justified and righteous in His sight. In Christ we are adopted as His sons and daughters. And so to God your identity is righteous, holy, justified, and His beloved child. Not that someday you'll be these things - you are these things right now because you are in Christ and he has made you righteous, holy, and justified and God's children.

But here in this life there is a war that is going on: we are new creations, but we're still dragging around what the Bible calls the old man, or this body of sin. Sin is real but it isn't what defines us anymore! Being

in Christ is what defines us - that is our identity now. The power of sin is real, but it isn't the greatest power in our lives anymore - the life of Christ living in us is the greatest power in our lives. Your identity is no longer sinner, separated from God, guilty, and condemned. No, in Christ your identity and my identity, is forgiven, righteous, justified, adopted and beloved child of God. That is who you are. That's really who you are.

And that's why so much of the NT is saying, *now be who you are!* Identity is the fact of being who you are, and the NT calls us to walk in our identity in Christ. Be who you are.

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Col. 2:6-7*

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (Ephesians 4:1 ESV)*

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)*

These and so many other passages are all saying, Christ saved you by his finished work on the cross, by faith in him you are forgiven and brought into right relationship with God, God Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in you, and you are a beloved child of God. You don't work to make that true, that is true because you are in Christ. Now be what you are!

And so God's work in us is to conform us into the image of His Son Jesus. We are once again increasingly reflecting who Jesus is to the world. And He calls us to walk in the light - to be honest before God about who we are without shame or guilt, but also without putting on a phony image for God or men.

- Cultivate your relationship with God - God created us to be in relationship with Him. Relationship with Him is at the core of who we were created to be. The separation between us and God because of sin has been done away with through Christ, the barrier has been taken away. But all relationships take spending time together and we do that by walking with God and talking with God in prayer. I know personally what a struggle it can be for Christians today to spend time in prayer. For that reason I am concerned that many believers don't really have much of a relationship with God. Don't put on your "religious best" to talk to God - don't try to be fancy or formal. Just share your heart when you pray.
- Be real. True relationships need to be built on authenticity and honesty. Think about it, how can you be close friends with someone if they never let you see who they really are? Can't. If you're struggling with something - anger, or lust, or fear, or pride, or whatever, don't try to hide it from God. Be honest about it. Maybe you don't even want to change, don't want to give it up. Tell God that. Tell Him, God, I don't have the ability or even the desire to get this out of my life, but I know You do. Give me Your heart, give me Your perspective of this, and remind me that I'm Your child and give me a heart that wants to imitate my Father.

Let this sink in: if you are in Christ you are a new creation. Believe that, it's true! And be what you are!

As we close in prayer, I want to talk a moment to those who aren't in Christ. You were created to know God and be in relationship with Him. Nothing else in the world will fill that hole in your heart. Sin has

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*  
Allen Snapp  
Grace Community Church  
May 1, 2016

separated you from God, and there's nothing you could ever do to bridge that chasm, but Christ has made a way by his death on the cross. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. It's a promise in God's word. If you want to believe and receive that promise for yourself, pray with me as we close.