

Identity in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:17

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Good morning, family. So I don't use that word loosely. You may not have known it, but you have an Indian brother. Some of you are not convinced, I can tell. You have an Indian brother because you and I are related by blood. If you know Jesus, we're related by His blood, right? That makes us family. That makes us one. That makes us brother and sister in Christ. That's God's idea, not mine. It's in His word, right?

So it is my joy to meet many of you for the first time. Some of you second, third, fourth time. That's wonderful. But I hope to get to know many of you and to be able to serve the Lord with you in North and South Carolina. We're going to pray together. And the Lord has laid upon my heart a message about our identity in Christ. So we'll pray together and then get right into God's Word. Let's pray.

How kind You are, Lord, and how amazing are Your ways. Since time began, and in our lives today. Lord, the grace that You have poured upon us is, as we have already sung about and prayed about, unmatched. Nothing that we could ever earn, nothing that we could ever give You proper thanks for. But we celebrate Your love, Your grace, Your kindness to us. And Lord, this morning, as we look into what Your Word says about our identity in You, would You speak to each one of us? I'm assuming, Lord, that when You give me a message to speak to the church, that You have something that You're already at work in, in each one of our lives, including mine. So, Spirit of God, would You work in and through me? Would You take and use what I have prepared, or something else, to speak to each one of us that we might walk aligned with You? As You seek to be close to us, to work in us and through us for the sake of others. We come dependent on You, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" Let me read it once more. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"

Developmental psychologists say that humans begin the search for identity between the ages of 12 and 18. I have spent a lot of time in pastoral ministry counseling people who are way older than 12 to 18, and I'm telling you that I've talked to 40-year-olds and 60-year-olds who are asking, "Who am I and why am I here?" I don't think the search for identity is gone between 12 and 18, that somehow we figure it all out. I think we continue to search until we find that fulfillment in Christ.

The world defines identity by where you are from, the language you speak, how you look. The job that you have, your name, who your parents are, whether you are married or unmarried, how many children you have, your house or neighborhood, other possessions, what school you went to, your grades, maybe titles that are after your name. Who knows you and whom you are known by. By your political party, by how many people follow you on Twitter or Instagram or TikTok or Facebook. The world's identity markers divide people. Divide people. The world uses these markers to control behavior. It encourages comparisons and spurs desires. We have an entire field of study that is set apart just to do this, you know what it's called? It's my wife's degree, actually, from college: marketing. It's all about pointing out to you that you are dissatisfied. And if you only had this one thing, then you would be fulfilled. Your identity would be secure.

The enemy uses identity to attack believers. Jesus in the wilderness faced the enemy's taunting. How many times does the enemy ask Jesus about His identity? In three temptations, how many times does he do it? Oh, please don't leave me up here hanging. How many times? Nope, two. But it's still more than one. Twice he says "If You are the Son of God..." Now think about that. The enemy is an archangel who has actually stood before the throne of God. So he is actually seeing Jesus standing there. And he asks the question, why? Is it because he didn't know? No, it was because he was trying to dislodge Jesus from His identity as the Son of God.

The religious leaders also question Jesus' identity. The reality is, our flesh is tempted by what is offered. We chase the world's identity markers because it feels good. It seems to be right. It seems to be better than what God is offering. Or sometimes it's just because we don't even know what God is offering. It's just ignorance. All of the world's identity markers are fleeting and passing. It is temporary, it changes, it is transitory. It all changes. We all get old. We all don't look like we used to once. Some of us don't have as much hair as we used to once. Everything that the world provides as identity markers, fade and dissolve and are changed.

But what God offers is different because He also is interested in identity. He has much to say about who we are and why we are here. God's markers of identity unify us. I can only touch a few of these markers with the time we have today, but I want to make sure I at least begin you on that journey to finding out more about what God says about your identity in Him. God says that we are made by Him: specifically, uniquely, purposefully, intricately woven together, fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139 and Colossians 1 say that.

God says that we are made for Him, for His purposes, yes, but also for Him in the sense that your car is made for gas. What does that mean? If your car is made for gas, what does that mean? Somebody help me. Yeah, it means it's not going to run on orange juice, right?

It's made to be satisfied and work on only one thing. When God's Word says that you were made for Him, you were made to be satisfied by Him. You were made to live full of Him. He is your only satisfaction. God's Word says that we were made for His glory as well. Isaiah 43:7 says that His people, who He called by His name, He made for His glory, that you would be the carriers of the gospel, yes. Of Jesus, yes. Of the Holy Spirit, yes. Into the lives of others. That when you showed up, Jesus was showing up.

I'll let that sink in for a second. When you show up at your work, Jesus is showing up. When you show up at your school, Jesus is showing up. Husbands, when you show up at your home, your wives are meant to go: "Wow!" Wives, is that what happens? Why? Because Jesus just walked into the room. I can flip that one around, too. And yeah, no. I'm not picking on the women this morning.

Human beings fell through disobedience. Adam and Eve sinned. And we stand separated from this life with God. But God, in His love and His grace and His mercy, made a way for us to be reconciled to Him through the cross, through Jesus Who died on the cross. He lived a perfect life. He suffered and died by the blood shed on His cross. He made us righteous, holy, acceptable to God. He gives us a new identity in Him. We don't earn identity. Identity is a gift, given by Him, because of what He does on the cross.

We are a new creation in Christ, Scripture declares. This is the gospel. Scripture says that we are His sheep, Psalm 23. Sheep are known by the shepherd. If you look in Scripture, you don't have the name of any sheep. You have Abraham's sheep mentioned. You have Jacob's sheep mentioned. You have Joseph and his brothers' sheep mentioned. You have David's sheep mentioned. Everything is about the one who is the owner, the master of the sheep, the shepherd.

You are His sheep. By the way, that means that your care and your place in life actually says something about your Shepherd. If He doesn't take good care of you, it is a shame on the Shepherd that He did not care for His sheep, which is a beautiful thing to remember when you pray. "Hey God, this is about Your name. This is about You as my shepherd. If you don't provide, it's Your name, Lord." And we see many prayers like that. That's why we can approach Him with boldness. Because we are His sheep. Our identity in Psalm 23 is speaking about Him being our Shepherd. We are His sheep.

Ephesians 1 tells us that we are adopted, redeemed, forgiven, sealed by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2 tells us that we are God's people, a part of His household. Philippians 3 tells us that we are citizens of heaven. Colossians 3 tells us that we are holy and dearly loved. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful

light: First Peter 2. We are dearly loved children of one Father, heirs of the kingdom, one family: Romans 8 and Ephesians 5. We are ambassadors of the King: Second Corinthians 5.

To God, your Creator, you are His masterpiece. His “poema” is the word. It's the place where we get the word poem from. You are His poem to this world, to reveal Him through your life as you live into your identity. His masterpiece. His handiwork. His “poema”. Zephaniah 3 says that your God sings and dances over you. Many of us know that Scripture says that we are to sing praises to the Lord. I am amazed how many believers don't know that you have a God who actually sings over you. Because you are His masterpiece. You matter to Him. It's part of the identity that He has given you.

Our identity as followers of Christ is not connected to the way that the world identifies us. We have much more important, permanent, and eternal identity as God's people. Your identity, value, meaning, purpose is found in the One who made you. You don't have to go discover it. He is the One who gave you it, and He will show you what he made you for. Seek Him. Society sees our differences. God sees what is common in Him.

It's great that we have a combined service today. But the way that we divide the church bothers me deeply. Because what I see in Scripture is that the racial, ethnic, national uniqueness that He gives us is a way for God to display His glory amongst the people of the world. It was not meant to divide us. It was not meant to separate us. It was meant to be a beautiful way of Him showing His glory through us.

Brothers and sisters, I'm a Christ follower who happens to be of Indian descent. I am not an Indian Christian. I am not anything first. I am a Christ follower first, and then whatever else you want to add after it, just happens to be a part of the uniqueness that He gave me. He determined where I was going to be born. He determined what my heritage was going to be. He determined location, parents, every part of my life because He wanted to reveal something unique through me. But that is not what defines me. What defines me is that I am His!

Why are we dividing based on other things? Why are we separating based on other things? Our identity in Him unifies us, but that is the way it is with all of the things about who we are in Him. It is meant to unify, not divide. For us as Alliance believers, we have additional uniquenesses. It's just a particular way that He works through us. We get to be a part of this family called the Christian Missionary Alliance. We worship together on Sundays and Saturdays and whenever else we have services. There's about 400,000 believers in the US who call themselves Alliance Christians. We worship in 38 languages here in the United States. That's pretty awesome. Yeah, that's pretty awesome. But we have about 2000 churches here around the world. Our Alliance family is about 6.7 million people in 88

countries, 24,000 churches, 90 theological institutions. And we send as a collective, the Alliance World Fellowship, all of us together, about 1700 missionaries to go tell people about Jesus.

I am really thankful for my Alliance family. I really am. When I lost all of my family, the church was the only family I had, and it happened to be an Alliance Church, who took us in and loved on us. And that's my family. But it doesn't make us better than anyone else whose identity is in Christ. We are unique. We have a specific place in God's plan. All of that is awesome. But we weren't meant to be divided from other believers. Separated out like we are special. We get the special house in heaven. You guys can be at the bottom of the hill.

Who introduces that kind of nonsense? Our hearts do. The world's ways of looking at identity do that, the division. It's just a unique part of who we are for God's glory. So why am I telling you all of this today? I'm telling you this because I want you to live fully into the identity that God gave you. To battle the lies of the enemy, the world, and even your own flesh with what Scripture says about you. Not what someone else said, or not what you think as you look in the mirror. Who are you according to what Jesus says about you? Can we live into that piece? Don't believe the lies. Challenge the enemy with the truth. God's Word is truth.

There's a second reason. I want you to notice that, yes, this identity actually does include the promise of heaven. But it's not just about the promise of heaven. It's about our lives here today. I don't know if there's anybody in this group here, that you're glad you're saved. You're glad you're not going to hell. But honestly, Monday morning, it's not the church life anymore. It's just me going back to my ordinary life. No, no. Your walk, your identity, your belonging to Jesus is not a Sunday morning thing. It's an every single day thing. It's an every single moment thing.

Scripture is addressing how this identity impacts your life today. So, how does this identity in Christ change how you live? For those of you who are married, does this identity in Christ change how you live in your marriage? Does it affect how you raise your children? Does your identity in Christ, does it change how you work at your workplace? Does it change how you treat strangers? Or, usually it's harder as to how we treat people we know. How does your identity change the way that you act in conflicts and disagreements? It's meant to change that. How does it change? How does identity change how you act when you are offended by someone else? Does it break your heart like it breaks God's when you are offensive? "I have offended someone else:" does it break your heart?

Identity is meant to change everything. When we live into identity it means that we are a new creation. We don't act like we used to always. It's not my life plus Jesus. It is "Christ is my life." If Christ is my life, it changes and affects everything, right? Paul wrote about identity in every letter of his, and so did Peter. Paul's favorite identity statement starts with "In Christ" and "In Him." Do you know how many times he uses it? How many times Paul uses it? 143, good guess. 143!

So here's a little trick that we're taught in seminary, okay. If God's Word says something once, it's important. If God's Word says something twice, it's really important. If God's Word says something 143 times, what do you think? That's right. We got a preacher up here. But it doesn't just include Paul. The other mentions of "in Him" and "in Christ," the identity statements that are there in the New Testament, there are 200. 200! It's a great Bible study, if you need to start one. Take God's Word and start looking for the "in Him," "in Christ," "in Jesus." Go look for them. You will be mind-blown about what God says about you and your identity and your purpose, and the way that He wants you to live in this world.

His Holy Spirit is here to help you. Not to find a parking spot, although He may do that, but it's to empower you to live into the identity that Jesus has given you on the cross.

So family, are you living according to what God says about you? Or what someone else says? Are you waiting for enough likes on Facebook to believe that you are somebody of importance? Sorry, I went to Facebook. Are you waiting for--Facebook is for the old people, I'm counting myself as one of them. Are you waiting for shares and likes on TikTok? What are you hoping will satisfy you? Are you caught up in the comparison game? Where are you looking for identity? Does the identity markers that Jesus talks about in His Word: does it matter to you? Does it impact your life in any way? Does it change how you live?

Let's pray together. I'm going to wait in quiet, just for a moment. If God is stirring up stuff that you have put in place other than what He says about you, I want you to turn those things over to Him. Some of us grew up in really messed-up homes. And there were words spoken to us about our identity that no matter if we're 20 or 30 or 50 or 60 or 70 years old, we still hear those words in the back of our head. I want you to hand that over to Jesus and tell Him, "I am going to believe what You say about me, not what somebody else said."

Whatever need you feel like you need to fulfill somewhere else, would you tell Jesus, "I am not chasing after that. I am going to start chasing after You. And I want You, Lord, to fill me. I want You to push to help Your identity words to sink deep into my soul, that I will be satisfied in You."

Lord God, You know each one of us. And You know how we live. You know where our thoughts go. You know all of these things about us that sometimes we don't even know. And

we're so worried, Lord, what the world will think about us. What will my friends say? What will the neighbors say? What will, whatever? And Your word is so clear about the value and the worth that You see in us. The identity that You have given us as Your children here on the earth. As we confess these things to You, Lord, whatever it is You stir up, we don't want to make things up to confess to You. But if you are stirring something, Lord, we hand You these things right now. And we'll tell You, Lord, we don't have the power to change this, but we're going to go into Your Word and believe that Your Holy Spirit will make these things real in our lives. If my behavior does not align with my identity in Christ, that You will give me power and I will obey and surrender and respond to You in obedience. If I have hurt others, Lord, and it doesn't align with my identity, I confess that to You, Lord, and I will take care of that today. Because I want to live in my identity as an ambassador of the King. Representing Jesus in every relationship that I am in. Help us, Lord. What You have given us, Father, You also gave us the power to live in to that by Your Holy Spirit. And Spirit of God, we surrender ourselves to You. Do what only You can do in and through us. I know You love my family here. I know You love them deeply. I know, Lord, that You want to work in and through us, that this world is changed, reconciled to You. Lord, begin with me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.