

# IDENTITY

## **Sabbath Sunday Devo By Jarrod Rogers**

Imagine this – the time has come for you to walk through what some feel like is the peak of suffering – you have to renew your driver’s license at the DMV. You have done everything you can to try to enjoy the time you had left before that dreadful day where you have to sit there (sometimes for nine hours) and wait to be called upon to perform this tedious – but required – task. Suddenly, the moment you have been forced to wait for finally arrives, your name is called to approach the DMV worker who will be assisting you in this process. You approach the desk, excited this moment has come for you to be free of the bondage of the poorly designed chairs and repeating advertisements and the archaic televisions in the waiting area with a new license in hand. The worker asks you, “May I see a valid form of identification?”

But suddenly – your worst nightmare happens. Your poise suddenly changes to someone who can’t find their keys to their car. You fumble around checking all of your folders you have, your wallet, your pockets, your shoes – every place on your person that could hold the one thing you are looking for. But the result is the same, you do not have a tangible, visible, and valid form of identification present with you. Let alone you know who you are – you could say your name, date of birth, social security number – but how will they know if they have no physical proof to confirm it?

For some, this can be their notion of the Christian walk. They may have an expansive knowledge of biblical theology and fluency in how to articulate the gospel – memorizing and reciting large passages of scripture, carrying a tattered bible with a host of multi-colored journaling pens – their factual knowledge of scripture is thorough. It can even be those who possess seminary degrees, have faithfully attended worship conferences, or are loyal to a rhythm of service within their local church. However, possession of these things does not equal an identity which is firmly rooted in Christ.

## **Identity Outside of Yourself**

Societally we have been conformed to look into the deepest parts of ourselves for identity. In its psychological definition, identity is defined as “[the encompassment of] the memories, experiences, and values that generate one’s sense of self.” We often investigate this summation of our own mental processes and experiences to try to fabricate a sense of self. But what if the biblical view of identity as a Christian is countercultural to this definition?

A great example to examine is the apostle Paul. In Philippians 3, Paul is warning the people of Philippi the difference between those who trust in Christ for their true identity vs. their identity being in the things they have done. For those who were Hebrew, God's chosen people, a primary identifier that one belonged to Israel and followed God was circumcision.<sup>[1]</sup> Within the early church, conflict began to resonate throughout the various provinces whether or not circumcision should still be performed as an identifier of one who follows Christ. Paul addresses it this way:

*“Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!*

*I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin – a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness I obeyed the law without fault.”* (Philippians 3:2-6)

Of anyone, Paul had plenty of things he could use to help identify him as righteous and dedicated to God. Paul's parents followed the law to circumcise him on the eighth day – an important timeframe within the Jewish law. He also had plenty of identifiers to add to that: pure-blooded Israeli, from the tribe of Benjamin (a beloved son of Jacob), a Pharisee, and even a claim of righteousness to obeying the law without fault. If you summated all of the things Paul was, you would think he has plenty of anchors to tie his identity to. Comparatively it would seem that no one else could measure up. But here is what Paul thinks about all of these things he once was:

*“I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared to the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law, rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.”* (Philippians 3:7-9)

*Garbage. Worthless.* Paul says these things he once identified as do not matter. Not only does he speak on the minimal value that these identifiers have, but even says that he has discarded these things so that he can become one with Christ. He recognizes the truth that the anchor of his identity is not from his previous experiences, from anything he has done, from any way he has served, but that his

identity is found in Christ and what Christ has done for him. Do we have the same mindset? Can we accept that any part of ourselves – even the things society may deem as positive and beneficial – are pointless if they are apart from Christ? Can we, just as Paul did, truly say:

*“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.”* - Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

- Name three things you identify as (your job title, your role in your family, personality traits, the things you do, experiences you have had, etc.).
- Take a true inventory of yourself. Of the things you identify as, do any of them provide a sense of self-worth, a sense of pride, or lead to comparison?
- If so, confess these things and ask the Lord how you can lay those things down and above all things trust Christ in who you are and what he has done for you.

## Who Is God?

Before trusting in Christ we had an identity as enemies of God – we were even seen as those who obeyed the devil. This is a harsh reality for us to accept, but before Christ’s redeeming work we were evil along with all of our desires.<sup>[2]</sup> But now we can accept that in Christ we have been made anew.<sup>[3]</sup> Our identity of being one who opposed God is now rewritten through the blood shed on the cross.<sup>[4]</sup> We now have the ability to perform good works and to live a life more abundant because of what Christ has done for us.<sup>[5]</sup>

The area we can have difficulties with is accepting this. We can fully know the truth that we have a new life and new identity in what Christ has done for us, so why is it so hard for us to accept who we are in Him? This is because our view of our identity in Christ is proportionate to our belief of who God is.

You can think of it this way – if I see someone as untrustworthy, as deceitful, as malevolent, as someone who doesn't have my best interests at heart, will I fully trust what they have to say? No – because this is a natural protective tendency. And in its fullness, there even is some wisdom there. We know that the things people say who we have a history of hurt and pain with can lead to even more pain and suffering if we trust what they say. It's a simple recognition of patterns.

But this where the tension of these truths occur – do we have this view of God? Can we trust and believe that God is always faithful? That He is the same God who never stops loving us and never fails to keep his promises to us?<sup>[6]</sup> That He is God who is “compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”?<sup>[7]</sup> When we fully believe God is who He says He is, then we can trust what He says.

So how do we do this? How do I begin to know God and trust who He is? Well, how do you get to know anyone? You spend time with them.<sup>[8]</sup> You listen to the things they say. This is why rhythms of prayer and reading and meditating on scripture are so important. They help us understand who God is, how loving, compassionate, and trustworthy He truly is. They provide a way for you to see His heart for you and I, and how faithful He has been and will be. And then it is so much easier to trust what He says and accept what He says about you as the truth.<sup>[9]</sup>

- If you were honest with yourself, do you fully believe God is who He says He is? Is there any misconstrued view of God you have which makes you struggle to see who He truly is?
- Ask the Lord to provide you with a right view of Him and to give you faith to trust in who He is.
- Write down some rhythms in your life you have currently or would like to start to help you spend more time in the presence of God.

## Who Am I?

Once we trust in the Lord, and take Him at His word, then we can receive the true identity we have been given through Christ. Ephesians 1 provides some of the most substantial key markers to anchor us in our new identity in Christ:

- Blessed (v.3)
- Chosen (v.4)
- Adopted (v.5)
- Redeemed (v.7)
- Sealed (v.13)

This view of those who have accepted Christ in their hearts is a vast change to who we once were. Once enemies with God, now we have not only been forgiven and reconciled to God, but now we are so deeply loved and adopted into the family of God – bearing all the rights and inheritance as His own children.<sup>[10]</sup> Christ's redeeming work rewrites our own narrative of who we once saw ourselves as with who God has created us to be. And because we trust God for who He says He is, we can hold onto these promises.

Our society is engaged in a focus on our “self-talk”. And there is definitely wisdom there – the way we speak to ourselves does affect our own view of self. But once you understand the promises of scripture, and the weight of those words being greater than anything else in your life – even greater than your own perspective of yourself – you have so much ammunition of self-talk to bring to the table. Scripture provides numerous passages on how God sees us. Because even when I cannot muster up the positive words to say about myself, what takes priority is who God says I am in Christ.

- Read Ephesians 1:1-14 and meditate on the ways we are regarded now that we are in Christ.
  
- Pick one of these characteristics and write down a prayer of gratitude for what the Lord has done for you in Christ. Thank Him for the new identity you have been given.

## Proof Of Identity

This finally brings us back full circle to the outward proof of our identity in Christ. Our security in Christ as the foundation of our identity is what leads us to serving one another. Philippians 2:1-11 portrays it this way:

*“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

*Though he was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

This passage expresses the qualifications of serving one another out of love – and not out of selfish ambition – stem from truly knowing who Christ is and what he has done for us. The heart, which biblically was seen as the center of our desires and motives, must be transformed by Christ and renewed in his presence first to serve with pure motive and with right intention. The overflow of a properly aligned heart through Christ leads to serving one another. Not the other way around. As Christ transforms us individually, then this leads to the proof of our identity. This leads to the love by which Jesus says we will be known as his disciples.<sup>[11]</sup> And as we grow in the knowledge of who we are in Christ, firmly rooted in our true identity in him, then we will be able to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and love – so that we are united as the body of Christ and others may see the freedom we walk in to the glory of the Father.<sup>[12][13]</sup>

- Reflect for a moment and answer these questions honestly – do you find yourself serving to try to draw closer to Christ? Do you find it difficult to spend time in His presence?
- Do you trust that your identity is fully anchored in Christ?
- Do you believe your life is one that reflects Christ to others?
- Spend some time with these questions asking the Lord to give you wisdom and encouragement as you reflect on your answers.

#### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES**

1. Genesis 10:14-17 (NLT)
2. Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT)
3. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)
4. Colossians 2:14 (NLT)
5. Romans 8:1-12 (NLT)
6. Psalm 89:33 (NLT)
7. Exodus 34:6 (NIV)
8. Psalm 52:8 (ESV)
9. Ephesians 3:16-19 (NLT)
10. Ephesians 1:3-11 (ESV)
11. John 13:35 (NLT)
12. Colossians 3:10-17 (NLT)
13. Galatians 5:13 (ESV)