

YOUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 1:1-2)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

Who are you? How do you identify yourself? Your personal identity is very important.

Sometimes one can suffer the loss of his identity; that loss can be either temporary or permanent. Sometimes a loss of identity results from injury or illness. Perhaps a person has fallen and struck his head, or maybe he has taken ill and runs an excessively high fever, as a result, he suffers a loss of memory. He suffers amnesia; he cannot remember his past, he cannot even remember his name; consequently, he has suffered the loss of his identity.

Sometimes a loss of identity occurs as the result of a crisis in one's life: we hear about "an identity crisis." Maybe the individual has just lost a long-standing job or has just retired; maybe he has just gone through a divorce; or maybe it is a young person making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Whatever the cause, the person is undergoing a traumatic emotional experience in his life and consequently is experiencing "an identity crisis." As a result, he is confused as to who he is and what he is supposed to do; his former relationships that served to give meaning and identity to his life have been severed and now he is grasping to "find himself."

Sometimes one can have his identity stolen from him by force and oppression. The 1977 T.V. movie, *Roots*, portrayed how the African slave was deprived of his freedom, of his dignity, and even his identity: his African name was replaced with an English name. The effort was made to totally sever the man from his past and then create for him a whole new identity, so that he might be exploited for his master's purposes. The same was true of Daniel and the other young Hebrews when they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians (Dan. 1:6-7.)

When a person suffers a loss of identity there results a great deal of confusion in his life, he finds himself grasping in the dark. Furthermore, when one suffers the loss of identity he is very susceptible to being manipulated and controlled by other people—usually with sinister motives.

Now these same things can happen to us as Christians if we lose sight of our spiritual identity: there will be a great deal of confusion in our lives, a loss of orientation and focus; we will be very susceptible to being controlled and manipulated by the world and by the devil himself. For our own assurance as well as our spiritual well being, it is essential for us to know our Christian identity.

As we approach the Epistle to the Ephesians, we find that the Apostle Paul at the very outset defines for the Ephesian Christians and for us our Christian identity. Because it is vital to our spiritual life, we must be ever aware of our Christian identity.

I. You Are Identified as Belonging to God

The Apostle Paul is writing to *"the saints."* In biblical terms, *"saints"* are those who have been set apart to belong to God. In Ephesians 1:14 the redeemed are defined as *"[God's] possession."* Furthermore, *"saints"* are those who have been set apart to become like God in His character of love and holiness, as the Apostle Peter informs us: *"you are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [appointed to be God's] own possession, so that you might display the virtues of him' who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1 Pet. 2:9.)

Paul is writing to *"the saints who are in Ephesus."* That is to say, he is writing to those who have been set apart for God but still find themselves living in this present sinful world. As a *"saint,"* what may the Christian expect from the world? He may expect ridicule: *"[Engaged] in such [a lifestyle], they think that it is strange for you not to plunge with them into the same flood of dissolute living, so they malign you"* (1 Pet. 4:4.) He may expect to be slandered: *"Conduct yourselves in a proper way among the Gentiles; so that, even though they slander you as evil doers, by observing your good works they must glorify God on the day of his visitation"* (1 Pet. 2:12.) He may expect hostility, Jesus testified to His disciples, *"If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:19.)

As a *"saint"* living in this present world, what may the Christian expect from God while he finds himself living in this present world? The saint—the man who belongs to God by virtue of his faith in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ—can be sure of the intercession of God the Son and the faithful watch care of the Father in response to His Son's prayers on his behalf. In His prayer on behalf of His church, the Lord Jesus makes the following request of His Father: *"I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one"* (Jn. 17:15.) Let us bear in mind Martha's testimony when she said to the Lord Jesus, *"I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you"* (Jn. 11:22.)

As a *"saint"* living in this present world, how should the Christian conduct himself? Writing to the church at Philippi, the Apostle Paul gives this admonition:

Do all things without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life. (Phil. 2:14-16a)

Let us be ever aware of the fact that as Christians, we are identified as “*saints*,” that is to say, as those who belonging to God, having been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. This means the loss of our former identity: “*You do not belong to yourself; ²⁰you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body*” (1 Cor. 6:19b-20.) But this also means the gaining of a new and blessed identity, note, again, 1 Peter 2:9-10,

... you are ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [appointed to be God’s] own possession, so that you might display the virtues of him’ who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Formerly you were “not a people,” but now you are “the people of God.” (1 Pet. 2:9-10a)

As Christians, may we ever be mindful of this blessed truth, especially at those times when we are tempted to blend in with the crowd and identify ourselves with them.

II. You Are Identified as Being Faithful to God

The Apostle Paul is writing to “*the saints*” whom he further identifies as those “*who are faithful.*” There is an intimate and unbreakable connection between belonging to God and being devoted to God.

As Christians, we are challenged to be faithful to the Lord our God. We are called to be faithful in the midst of opposition:

Live your life only in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that if I come and see you—or if I remain absent what I will hear about you is that you are standing firm in one spirit, and with one soul contending for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸and that you are in no way being intimidated by those who oppose you. (Phil. 1:27-28a)

We are called to be faithful in leading a productive Christian life: “*my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain*” (1 Cor. 15:58.)

As Christians, we are encouraged to be faithful to the Lord our God by the example of the saints of God who have gone before:

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate

those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Heb. 6:11-12)

We are encouraged to be faithful to the Lord our God by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself:

Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:2-3)

We are encouraged to be faithful to the Lord our God by the sure reward to be obtained:

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you into prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)

As Christians, we can be assured of faithfulness to the Lord because our faithfulness occurs within the context of His faithfulness. First and foremost, it is the Lord who is faithful. The Apostle Paul declares that he is confident of this thing, namely, *“that he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6.) The Lord’s faithfulness becomes the incentive and the source of our faithfulness:

Therefore, my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you both to create the desire and to produce the work for the sake of his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)

Our faithfulness is produced by reliance upon the Holy Spirit, rather than reliance upon ourselves, as the LORD declares through the Old Testament prophet Zechariah, *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, declares Jehovah of hosts”* (Zech. 4:6.)

Let us be ever aware of the fact that as Christians, we are identified as being faithful to God—let us especially remember this when we are confronted with a moral decision and are tempted to think that it does not matter what we do or how we live. Consider the example of Daniel: *“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s delicacies [namely food that had been offered to the idols of Babylon, the partaking of which amounted to a communion meal with the idols], nor with the wine that he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself”* (Dan. 1:8.) Consider the example of Joseph:

Now Joseph was well built and handsome, ⁷and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" ⁸But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:6b-9)

III. You Are Identified as Being "in Christ Jesus"

Paul describes the saints, the faithful ones, as being "*in Christ Jesus.*" This identification of the Christian as being found "*in Christ Jesus*" occurs four times in the opening chapter of Ephesians:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and who are faithful **in Christ Jesus.** (Eph. 1:1)*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms **in Christ.** (Eph. 1:3)*

*... he chose us **in him** before the creation of the world in order for us to be holy and blameless in his presence. (Eph. 1:4)*

*... he predestined us to be his adopted sons through Jesus Christ ... ⁶for the praise of the glory of his grace. [This grace] he freely bestowed upon us **in the Beloved.** (Eph. 1:5-6)*

From all of eternity God has viewed the Christian "*in Christ Jesus.*" There has never been a moment when God did not identify you (as a Christian) in your relationship to Christ—as being in Christ, note Ephesians 1:4, "*he chose us in him before the creation of the world in order for us to be holy and blameless in his presence.*" In the course of time, God caused you to believe in Christ as your Savior and to personally enter into His life, note 2 Thessalonians 2:13a, 14a, "*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation ... ¹⁴he called you to it through our gospel.*"

By way of illustration: At the beginning of the day the farmer envisions his hay being reaped, baled, and stored in the barn. During the course of the day he actually proceeds to reap the hay, bale it, and bring it into the barn. Spiritually, God always considers the Christian in his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, (even before he has been born,) and at some point in the earthly life of that individual God actually brings him personally into that saving relationship with Christ.

It will only be at the return of Christ in glory that our amazing relationship to Christ shall be fully realized and revealed. The Apostle Paul assures us in his epistle to the Colossians, *"your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, shall be revealed, then you also shall be revealed with him in glory"* (Col. 3:3b-4.) The Lord Jesus Himself declares, *"On that day [He is ultimately referring to the day of His return] you shall know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you"* (Jn. 14:20.)

Let us be ever aware of the fact that as Christians, we are identified as being *"in Christ Jesus."* Let us especially remember this blessed truth at those times when the devil would seek to make us concentrate upon ourselves as though we were independent, "unaffiliated" sinners before God. Let us be assured by the truth expressed in Romans 8:1, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Conclusion

A man who does not know his identity suffers a great deal of confusion in his life, and he is very susceptible to being manipulated and controlled by others for their own sinister purposes. Likewise, a Christian who loses sight of his spiritual identity will suffer a great deal of confusion in his life, and will be very susceptible to the manipulative influence of the world and of the devil himself.

As a Christian, it is very important for you to know and to always remember your spiritual identity if you are to live a productive and happy Christian life. Let us ever be aware of our spiritual identity as it is defined for us in Ephesians 1:1-2. We are *"saints,"* set apart to belong to God and to have His righteous and loving character reproduced in us. We are called to be faithful to God our Savior and heavenly Father. We are in Christ Jesus, united to Him and heirs to all the eternal blessings bestowed upon Him by God His Father.