

Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ

Message 2: Sources of Identity, part 1

“Know thyself” is the famous slogan of Greek wisdom allegedly first uttered by the philosopher Thales. Learning who you are is an important first step in finding your place in the world. Unfortunately, Thales didn’t say much about how we discover this knowledge. The French philosopher Pascal tells us how: “Not only do we know God through Jesus Christ alone; but we know ourselves only by Jesus Christ.” One cannot truly know himself until he knows his Creator and the purpose for which he was created. And one cannot know the Creator except through His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn 5:23, 14:6).

That idea—that we know ourselves because we know God through Christ—is no longer the majority viewpoint in our culture. Most people *don’t* identify themselves in this way. People today often identify themselves by their opposition to God. They identify themselves by their wicked passions and “vile affections” (Rom 1:26). They identify themselves by their support for the things that God hates. Or they identify themselves in relation to many other things, but not in their relation to God.

We live at a time when identity is a major topic of conversation. Many people today are very interested in identifying themselves and making sure that others identify them in ways that they demand. People don’t want to be misidentified. People insist that we use proper names and pronouns to identify them. More and more, we hear people saying, “Hi, my name is ... and my pronouns are...” Identity is a very big deal these days. People are very touchy about how you identify them.

Christians must understand the issue of identity from a Christian and biblical perspective, and that’s what our Summer Sermon Series is all about. We must understand what God says about our identity, and we must accept the identity that God gives us.

Last time, we looked at some things the Bible says about identity. We considered our identity before being saved and our identity after being saved.

Today, we’ll try to more clearly define what identity is and where it comes from.

I. What Is Identity?

The Bible is full of language pertaining to identity. E.g.,

1 Peter 2:9–10 *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Words like this give us our identity from God’s perspective. God tells us who we are.

Quote: Identity is that sense of being and self-understanding that frames our actions, communicates to others who we are, and sets the agenda for our acts. Identity is the sum of everything that pertains to and shapes a person.¹

- A. Identity is that inner voice saying, “This is the real me.” I think of my identity as the person who is looking out of my eyes, that voice in my head, my soul.
- B. How do we know who we are? There are really only two options:
 - 1. Either we come up with that identity ourselves—we look within and see how we feel about ourselves; or
 - 2. Others give it to us. We consider our world and see how we fit into it.
 - 3. For Christians, we must accept the identity God gives us. God uses various sources to tell us who we are. We’ll be looking at some of those sources of identity today.
- C. Identity changes somewhat over time. We continually change physically as we age and in other ways as we have new experiences, relationships, commitments, and so forth. Dramatic, emotional experiences radically alter our thoughts or behaviors, such as the birth of a child, death of a loved one, success, failure, etc. We are constantly modifying our identities, although we are usually oblivious to the whole process.
- D. Identity is not *image*. Image is largely external, relating more to the way we want others to see us than to what we really are. Hair, clothes, possessions, and attitude may lend a certain image to us, but these externals do not determine who we are.

¹ Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Introduction to a Hermeneutics of Identity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168 (2011): 11.

Real identity is what you are in and of yourself, not the identity you project because of what you want people to think of you. The real you is the internal you, which may be vastly different from the image you portray.

Trans: Identity describes what you think of your true self, your inner person, your heart and soul—who you really are. That identity pertains to virtually every aspect of life, so it's very important.

- II. What are the sources of our identity? How do we come to view ourselves as we do? Identity usually is made up of several factors, including...
- A. Our God: Ultimately, we are who we are because God made us and identified us. God sets our identity, and it's very important that we accept the identifying factors that God gives us.
 - B. Our relationships: Life is relational, and relationships help determine identity. Family and friends tell us who we are and where we fit in. We know who we are by virtue of our relationships.
 - C. Our physical and mental characteristics: gender, size, race, abilities, personality, etc. Human identity is deeply tied to physical and mental characteristics. E.g., tall, short, fat, skinny, shy, outgoing, smart, dumb, etc.
 - D. Our religion/faith or lack of it: what we think about ourselves has a lot to do with our religious faith. Religion determines our value system, our beliefs, and our behavior. Religion is one of the strongest identifiers. Some identify themselves by their lack of religion or opposition to religion.
 - E. Our experiences shape us; i.e., our opportunities, education, trauma, failures, achievement, and celebrations. Especially intense experiences can have a life-long impact on us. E.g., conflict, crime, violence, abuse.
 - F. Our location: we are defined to some degree by the place we live, especially in growing up. Geography influences identity. E.g., Yankee, southerner, westerner, American. E.g., traveling to SC, I'm reminded of how different the culture is down there.
 - G. Our vocation/career: one of the first questions we ask new acquaintances is "what do you do?" The jobs we do define us in some ways. Men in particular tend to identify themselves by their job/career.

- H. Our interests and pastimes: many people identify themselves by the sports they follow, the hobbies they pursue, and/or the recreational interests they have. E.g., I could identify myself as a Packer's fan, wood worker, fly fisherman.

Trans: These are the normal ways that we identify ourselves. There may be a few other minor factors that help us identify ourselves, but these are the main ones.

III. Improper/partial sources of identity

One of the big problems in our world today is that people identify themselves in wrong ways. These ways are wrong because they are contrary to God's design; they are corrupt and wicked, outside of God's moral will. Non-Christians are often very unstable and disturbed because they identify themselves in ungodly ways or they fail to identify themselves properly.

As Christians, we should make sure that we identify ourselves properly, by biblical standards and expectations.

What are some ways of identification that we should avoid?

- A. Don't identify yourself primarily by your feelings/emotions. We should not identify ourselves primarily by our own internal thoughts or feelings.
 - 1. Your mental state does not determine reality. One of the big problems in our world today is that people want to change reality based on how they feel or think. They try to conform external reality to inner feelings.

E.g., A man feels like a woman, and so he demands that reality conform to his feelings. He's willing to change reality to conform to his feelings. He's willing to modify his body, his behavior, and his appearance to conform to his inner thoughts about himself.

Such a transformation was not even possible 100 years ago. A man could feel like a woman, but he could not transform himself surgically or with drugs or hormones. He can do that today. Modern technology and medicine has made it possible for people to transform their physical bodies to conform to their inner, personal feelings about themselves.
 - 2. Why is that a bad idea? Why is it foolish to try to change reality based on our inner feelings?

- a) We know that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). He who trusts in his own heart is a fool (Prov 28:26). People are often controlled by their “vile affections/passions” (Rom 1:26).
- b) We also know how unstable feelings and emotions can be. Feelings are fickle; they change all the time.

We should not identify ourselves primarily by how we feel or how we think. We should conform our feelings and thoughts to reality, to the truth, to facts.

- 3. Unfortunately, our culture is now telling us that inner personal feelings and emotions are more authoritative than physical anatomy or even DNA. We are, at a fundamental level, what we feel inside ourselves, we are most “authentic” when we act out our inner feelings—that’s what the culture is telling us today—act on your feelings, be your “authentic” self.

One writer calls this idea “expressive individualism.” We must act out what we feel inside no matter what. We must be true to our inner feelings, passions, and appetites. We must express what we feel about ourselves. We must conform the world around us to how we feel about ourselves.

There is a large emphasis on being “authentic,” that is, true to your inner personal feelings about yourself. Teachers tell little children that if they feel like the opposite sex or even like a furry little animal, then they should act out that feeling. Don’t repress yourself; express yourself; be your authentic self. That’s the big message of our world today.

- 4. I hope you can see the error of identifying yourself primarily by inner feelings or personal thoughts. Our inner feelings and thoughts are often wicked, corrupt, and false. Our goal should be to think God’s thoughts after him and to conform ourselves to what God says about us.

- 5. God must have authority over us; he has the right to identify us.

- B. Don’t identify yourself primarily by physical appetites.

1. The moral revolution that began in the 1960s promoted the lie that happiness comes from fulfilling our lowest human appetites. “If it feels good, do it” is very bad advice that many people follow to their destruction. But many people in society today identify themselves by their appetites and attractions.

Illus.: In the documentary, “What is a Woman?” the host interviews a couple of women, one of whom uses about six different adjectives to identify herself. All of the words reflect her appetites or affections.

2. Science very confidently tells us that we are nothing but animals, and we all know that animals are governed by nothing more than their inner instincts, their appetites, their natural impulses. If we are animals, then we should do the same—do what comes naturally; follow your instincts and compulsions.

Illus.: There is a children’s book on the facts of life called “It’s Perfectly Normal.” The book seeks to normalize some behaviors that should not be normal. Maybe such behaviors are natural or normal for animals, but they should not be normal for humans.

3. Many people today do not want any restrictions on these impulses; they want to be free to act according to their feelings, and they want everyone else to affirm these behaviors.
4. We know that when people determine to follow their base appetites, they become more and more degraded and indecent. Cf. Romans 1:20f—the ultimate result of idolatry is uncleanness, lust, and vile affections.
5. Unrestricted pursuit of inner appetites leads to destruction and misery. Ultimately, the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure leads to hell (cf. 1 Cor 6:9). We must control our inner appetites and seek to fulfill them in proper, God-honoring ways.

- c. Don’t identify yourself primarily by passing whims, interests, or fads.
 1. Pop culture is very influential in our world, and many people enjoy adopting the latest fads, trends, and fashions. People adopt the attitudes, behavior, and language that they see on TV, in movies, internet videos, and in music. They jump on the band wagon and do what everyone else is doing.

That tendency is very evident now through the power of the Internet. Cultural influencers today can have almost immediate impact on millions of others through social media. Within minutes, styles can change.

2. Pop culture is by nature transient and temporary. What is popular one minute is totally out of style the next.

E.g., when I was in college, most of the girls had “big hair.” Now the fashion is long, straight hair. If you look at a pix of my sister from the 1970s, she fits right in with modern hair styles.

3. If you identify yourself with whatever is stylish, trendy, and popular, you’re going to be changing your identity very frequently.
4. Our source of identity has to be more than merely what is popular in the culture.

- D. Don’t identify yourself in ways that violates basic norms of decency, dignity, and/or common sense.

1. It is totally irrational, unreasonable, and immoral for a man to identify as a woman or a woman to identify as a man. Up until recently, only a very small minority of the population did so. Gender dysphoria was exceedingly unusual and affected mostly men.
2. Today, not only are people identifying as the opposite sex, but they are identifying as animals. “Furries” are people who identify as animals. There is a whole furry sub-culture, many people today who think of themselves in terms of animal characteristics.
3. Some adults identify as children. I heard of a man in his mid-40s who identifies as an 8-year-old girl. And the crazy thing is that people affirm his identity; they think it’s fine.
4. I’ve even heard of people identifying themselves in terms of a cake—fluffy, sweet, light, warm, layered, flavored.
5. Today, the approved attitude is that you can identify any way you want. People think that it’s virtuous to tolerate all kinds of behavior that a few years ago would have been seen as mental disease and dysfunction. Today, it’s just fine. “Do your own thing.”

6. Many so-called professional people in education and in psychology affirm these troubled people in their warped, irrational, indecent identities. And they are starting this process at earlier and earlier ages.

Illus.: The American Academy of Pediatrics recently published a new book titled “You-ology: A Puberty Guide for EVERY Body.” The book aims “to talk about puberty in an inclusive way.” And, of course, the book affirms that there are many genders and that the LGBT identity is normal/natural.

There are many books available in the public schools and in the public libraries that provide graphic, technical information about the most intimate details of life. These books are filled with pictures of people carrying on in indecent ways. And most of these books present the LGBT lifestyle as normal and acceptable. Millions of children are being indoctrinated/groomed with these ideas, so we should not be surprised when the culture adopts them and defends them.

The world around us is identifying itself in ways that are indecent, immoral, and downright ridiculous. Christians must not affirm or accept these ways of identification. E.g., we do not affirm a man who is pretending to be a woman. We do not play along with a child who identifies as an animal. We do not accept immoral and indecent behavior as normal and natural. We do not accept the idea that a man can have a husband or a woman can have a wife. We refuse to use improper pronouns—a biological woman is a she, and a biological man is a he, no matter what surgeries a person has had, what chemicals they have pumped into their bodies, or how they dress.

We must stand against such false identification. We must insist that we identify ourselves correctly and properly, according to God’s standards of reality. How do we do that? We should consider proper sources of identity.