

Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ
Message 8: Steward and Ambassador (final message)

This is the final message in our Summer Sermon Series on Christian identity. In this series, we've talked how people in the world today are often very confused about their identity. ...

Christians need not be confused about our identity; we simply need to know and adopt the identity that God gives us. It's important to know that we are made in the image of God, that we are children of God, "in Christ," holy/royal priests, citizens of earth and heaven, and servants of Christ and of his church. All those ideas have rich and meaningful application for how we identify ourselves. If we would see ourselves in those terms, we would have no confusion regarding who we are or what our place is in the world. We would also reject the radical individualism and self-centeredness so common in our society today.

The Bible mentions several other ways of identifying ourselves that we won't have the time to deal with right now. We could examine how the Bible describes believers as saints, heirs, soldiers, athletes, farmers, vessels, and first fruits. Perhaps at some time in the future, we'll look at those identifying features.

We're going to finish out this series by considering two additional ways of identifying ourselves—as stewards and ambassadors.

I. Christians identify themselves as stewards.

A. Definition: A steward is a manager or administrator. He takes care of other people's property. Think of a restaurant manager or a hotel manager—he's a manager or an administrator.

B. Jesus used the idea of stewards in his parables—

Luke 12:42 *And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, ...*

In that parable, the steward was responsible to care for the others in the household. He had resources and responsibilities, and he was accountable for how well he managed these resources.

Believers are stewards in that God has entrusted to us various resources, and He expects us to use them properly. We are managers and supervisors over the things that God provides.

Our objective is to be a “faithful and wise steward” to whom the Lord can entrust his “household.” We want to be good managers of the things God gives us.

C. Texts

Matthew 25:21 His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

Luke 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.”

D. Let’s look at some important areas of stewardship; what are the resources we are supposed to manage?

1. Time: The Bible tells us to “redeem the time” (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5), that is, make the most of every opportunity. Use the time you have for good purposes. Time is gift or resource from God that believers are to use in ways that would please and honor God.

There’s some truth in the old saying, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” Time on earth must be spent doing God’s business and preparing for eternity. Time is short and is passing away—life is like a vapor. Believers will give an account to God regarding how we spent our time.

While believers should carve out time for rest and relaxation, too much time spent on unprofitable activities can be destructive. Use your time wisely.

2. Treasure (money): The Bible contains many principles regarding money and its use:
 1. God owns everything (Ps 24:1). Every good thing we enjoy comes from God (James 1:7).
 2. Don’t love money or be materialistic. Be content, not greedy. Greed gets you into trouble (Luke 12:15; 1 Tim 6:8-10).

3. Give generously and cheerfully to support Christian ministry (2 Cor 9:6-8). Generous giving results in generous blessing (Luke 6:38). Giving is an act of worship (Phil 4:18). We should give in a planned and systematic way (1 Cor 16:1-2).
4. Being rich should not be a primary goal of life (Prov 23:4).
5. Labor to meet the needs of your family (1 Tim 5:8).
6. Save money now for later (Prov 6:6-8).
7. Be sensitive to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.

There is no excuse for financial irresponsibility. You may not have much money, and you may wish you had more, but whatever amount you have comes from God, and you must handle it as a careful steward.

3. Talents: God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7). We are responsible to use whatever gifts and talents we have for the good of others.

1 Pet 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

The church is the context for the use of our spiritual gifts. We should use our talents, abilities, and resources to enhance the ministry of our church. We are accountable for how well we manage and employ these gifts.

For you to be gifted, and then not to use that gift in God's service, is a great shame. Don't bury your talent.

4. "Temple" (body): Paul reminds us that the Christian's body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and you are not your own. Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which [belong to] God" (1 Cor 6.19-20).
 - a) Think of your body as a tool that God has given you to serve Him and to serve others. Just like any tool, it can be used for good or for evil. We must use our bodies properly, in ways that honor God.

- b) We may be tempted to think that if we own anything, we own our own bodies. But that's not true. God owns our bodies, and He tells us very clearly what He wants us to do with them.
- c) Believers must discipline ("keep under" 1 Cor 9:27) their bodies. We should take care of our body. Eat the right kinds of foods, exercise, and avoid destructive behaviors. Keep your body healthy and fit. Doing so prevents sin and allows you to be an effective tool in God's service.

Part of your body is your mind, your brain. Believers must discipline themselves to think in a way that would honor God. Christians must guard their minds and think the right kinds of thoughts (Phil 4:8; GIGO). We must renew our minds through exposure to God's Word (Rom 12:2).

- 5. Truth: God's Word is truth (John 17:17), a deposit entrusted to believers (1 Cor 4:1; 1 Tim 6:20). As such, believers must learn it, know it, appreciate it, search it, proclaim it, and defend it.

Stewards must seek to pass down the Word uncorrupted from generation to generation. Parents must be intentional about passing down the faith to their kids.

We have all these resources—time, treasure, talents, temple, truth—and it's our responsibility to be good managers of them. We are to guard them and develop them. We want to use these resources to serve God and to serve God's people.

E. Several implications of stewardship

- 1. My highest goal is to be a faithful steward, i.e., to discharge my stewardship responsibilities in a way that pleases God. I must manage the things under my care properly. I should take care of the things God gives me, not abuse them or waste them. I'll be called to account for my stewardship someday.
- 2. Since God owns everything and we own nothing, we should be content with the things God gives us. We should also be content if God takes them away. We should say with Job, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). We hold things with an open hand.

3. God wants a return on his investment. If he's given us a talent, he wants us to use it for his purposes. He wants to see growth and development of our talents. Whether you received much or little, you should attempt to invest whatever resources you have for an increased harvest. God wants stewards who develop and use the talents God entrusts to them.
4. I may enjoy the things I have but I must not set my heart on them (Mt 6:21; Lk 12:15). I may enjoy the material blessings of life without being bound to them or enslaved by them. My highest affections are directed toward people and God's work, not things (Col 3:1). Greed and covetousness should have no place in my life.
5. I should be thankful for everything I receive, knowing that it ultimately comes from God. I should count my blessings and not take resources for granted.
6. I can be generous to others because I am simply passing along the blessings God has given me.

Trans: 1 Cor 4:2 *It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.* Faithfulness is success. We are stewards, and our highest goal as stewards should be faithfulness. We don't want to mismanage the resources that God gives us. We don't want to squander or bury our God-given resources. We want to use what we have for the glory of God and for his purposes.

II. Every Christian should identify as an ambassador.

A. Definition: An ambassador is a representative or a spokesman. Most countries have ambassadors who represent their home countries in capitals around the world. The ambassador has one primary job—to pursue the best interests of his home country. His main responsibility is conducting business for his country.

B. Text

2 Corinthians 5:20 *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

C. What are some implications of being an ambassador?

1. Ambassadors enjoy a privileged position.

- a) Serving as an ambassador for a country is something of a plum position; it's a great honor and privilege. Ambassadors enjoy many benefits not afforded to average people. They are high ranking diplomats who have large responsibilities but also enjoy unusual privileges. It's a great honor to be chosen to represent your country as an ambassador.
- b) Ambassadors for Christ should appreciate their position as well. It's a great privilege to be a representative for God.
- c) Every Christian should see himself as an ambassador. This title applies to all Christians; thus, all Christians should think of themselves as ambassadors and behave as if they were representing Christ in everything they do.

App: It could be that you are the only Christian that some people know. So you want to represent Christ fairly and accurately to others.

2. Ambassadors are sent out.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

John 20:21 So Jesus said ... "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

- a) Who has sent us out? "We are ambassadors for Christ."
- b) Ambassadors don't stay at home; they are sent out to do their work in a foreign country. For believers, that foreign country is the world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11). Ambassadors must see themselves as foreigners in a foreign land.
- c) Ambassadors must deliver the message their head of state has given them. Christian ambassadors must go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Ambassadors take the message around the corner and around the world.

- d) Ambassadors avoid picking up many of the habits and customs of the land in which they sojourn. The fads, trends, and sensibilities of their host country are of little interest to them.

E.g., the US ambassador to Japan is not trying to become Japanese. He's American; he's representing the interests of America in Japan. He might enjoy various aspects of Japanese culture, but he's not trying to imitate the Japanese.

Likewise, 1 John 2:15-17—*Love not the world....*

We are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world.

The main concern for ambassadors is pleasing the one who sent them, not adopting the culture of the places they are temporarily living. They must try to retain the habits and traditions of their true homeland.

Our true homeland is heaven; that's where we are citizens. So we retain the habits and customs of our homeland; we don't adopt the habits and customs of this evil world.

3. Ambassadors are under authority.

Lu 7:8 “*For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.*”

- a) Ambassadors are not self-employed. They do not have authority to communicate their own opinions. They do not speak for themselves. They do their work on behalf of the one sending them.
- b) The head of state dictates the duties of his ambassadors. They go where he sends them and say what he tells them.
- c) Ambassadors are bound by the laws of the place that sent them. No matter where Christians might live, they are bound by God's laws. The laws of the world are constantly changing, often for the worse; but the law of God is changeless.
- d) Our primary authority is God and his word, not the laws of the places we live temporarily.

4. Ambassadors convey a message.
- a) The central task of an ambassador is to communicate the desires of one head of state to another. The ambassador is a spokesman communicating a message.
 - b) What is that message? We plead and implore the unsaved “on Christ’s behalf” to turn from sin and believe the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:18–19 [God]... has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

- (1) Reconciliation occurs when two hostile parties are brought into a peaceful relationship. Sinners are separated from God, under the wrath of God, and need to be reconciled to God through the sacrificial death of Christ.
 - (2) The “ministry of reconciliation” is the work of bringing the Gospel message to those who need it.
 - (3) The “word of reconciliation” is the Gospel, the means by which sinful men are reconciled to a holy God. That message has been “committed to us,” that is, believers. We must go out and proclaim this message.
 - (4) That means that we must know this message very well and be able to tell others. Can you do that?
- c) Communicating this message is an urgent need (.20). God is pleading through his ambassadors that the lost to be reconciled to God. This message cannot wait; we must deliver it with speed and intensity.

Maybe there is someone here who has not yet been reconciled to God. We are delivering this message to you—be reconciled to God through repentance and faith.

5. Ambassadors often experience opposition and danger.

Ephesians 6:20 ... *I am an ambassador in chains; ...*

Ambassadors often do their job in the midst national upset or chaos. Ambassadors may have powerful enemies. Occasionally an ambassador will be kidnapped, imprisoned, or even killed while on duty. Ambassadors may expect opposition to their message. The fact that they represent someone else may make them the target of harassment or even persecution.

Christian ambassadors represent God and speak for him. Because of that, we often face opposition and hostility. Some Christian ambassadors are imprisoned, some are killed. So it can be a dangerous job. Even here in the USA, we are facing increasing hostility and opposition because of our message. But we cannot allow that to stop us from doing the job.

Don't let a little opposition stop you from carrying out your job as ambassador. Some people don't want to hear the message, but some people do. Some people hate this message of reconciliation, but others welcome it gladly. So don't stop proclaiming the message that God sent you to proclaim.

If you are a Christian, then you are a steward. God expects you to manage all the resources he has given you—time, talent, treasures, “temple,” and truth. He expects a return on his investment, and he’ll reward you for doing a good job. So make sure that you do the master’s will with the resources God has given to you. You are a steward; strive to be a faithful and wise one.

If you are a Christian, you are an ambassador. It’s your responsibility to represent God to this lost and dying world. You have a message to deliver—sinners may be reconciled to God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It’s our job to exhort unbelievers to accept that message.

These responsibilities are part of our Christian identity. These tasks tell us who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. I am a steward-manager and an ambassador-representative. I have a job to do and resources to do it. I must be about my Father’s business.

The biblical teaching about identity should give us great confidence in knowing who we are and what we are all about. While the unsaved world stumbles around in blindness and confusion about the issue of identity, Christians can be very clear about their identity. God tells us who we are. Most importantly, we are made in the image of God. We are his people, and he is our God. We are priests in his service, citizens of his kingdom, and servants in his vineyard. We faithfully manage his resources and fervently communicate his message to others.

We understand our privileges and our responsibilities. We know who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. We know our identity, and that gives us a sense of stability and purpose. We can navigate this chaotic and confusing world because we know who we are and why we are here.

Maybe you cannot say that about yourself. You are perhaps unsure what your identity is. The solution to that confusion is repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ. When you become a Christian, your confusion about identity is replaced with certainty. I urge you to identify yourself with Christ. Believe in him, and you will find your identity in him.