

# Personal Spiritual Growth

## Week 3 - Identity in Christ

### ***Week 3 – Summary***

One key aspect of our personal growth is shaping our identity of who we are and how we think about ourselves. The Bible speaks of a dramatic change in our identity once we are born into Christ. From the moment of our new birth we “clothe” ourselves with Christ, our identity becomes that of Christ. Describing the new identity is easier than the change in thinking that is needed to transform our view of self and life away from our own view and into Christ’s view. We find our true identity in Christ and Christ alone.

### ***Identity in Christ***

Finding our identity in Christ makes our lives different in many aspects. Finding our identity in Christ means that we make decisions and evaluate life through God’s value system instead of our cultural values. A second distinction recognizes that who we are is part of God’s design and thus is something to live out rather than overcome. Finally, if our identity is found in Christ, then the life we live we live for God’s purposes and not our own. Growth in faith and growth in our relationship to God is growing to lose our self-centered identity and embracing the identity of Christ.

### ***Cross Shaped Values***

Part of the struggle to find our identity in Christ is understanding that God’s values are different from our cultural values. Our cultural values are familiar and “natural” mostly because we are so accustomed to them.

- ❖ 1 Cor 1:18-2:5 – Paul addresses the problem of cultural values in the church at Corinth emphasizing that God has chosen the weak and lowly things of the world as the vehicles for his message. It is the shame of the cross that has become the symbol of our lives. Our lives rest on the power of God demonstrated in ways that the world finds foolish, weak, and meaningless.
- ❖ 1 Peter 4:12 – Here Peter encourages the scattered Christians to expect suffering for the sake of Christ and that such sufferings are a participation in the sufferings of Christ. Our suffering is a part of our acceptance of the identity of Christ, who suffered at the hands of men.
- ❖ John 15:20f – Jesus reminds the apostles that they will suffer in the same ways that Jesus suffered. No servant is greater than his master. Our lives are patterned after Jesus life. He suffered because he lived God’s will in a world that valued different things. It is the same clash of values that will lead to our own suffering.
- ❖ Heb 2:10 – It is challenging to think that the path toward perfection passes through the land of suffering. The fire produces a better result.

### **Discussion**

- ❖ What is it about Christ that people find difficult to accept?
- ❖ What hesitation do you have about sharing how your life is different since you began following Christ?
- ❖ Sin is weakness. What attitude could we adopt about sin that demonstrates cross shaped values?
- ❖ In what ways could we intentionally become weak, so that God could be shown to be strong?
- ❖ What Christian values do you think our culture has the most difficulty accepting?

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## ***I Am Who I Am***

Another significant aspect of finding our identity in Christ is accepting our own design and the design of others as God's design and not evaluating our own worth or the worth of others based on a different value system.

- ❖ 1 Cor 12:1-31 – In this long discussion Paul addresses the problem of people wanting to have the gifts, skills, abilities, positions of others because they feel that one design is better than another. Paul's image of a body makes it clear that although there are different parts of the body, every part serves a function and collectively they work together to bring about good for the whole.
- ❖ Humility = Accepting who I am, how I am created by God. The prideful person seeks to elevate who they are in relation to others, because they value the distinctions, they value certain aspects more than others so they amplify those aspects as determinates of value. Part of claiming identity in Christ is accepting the part of the body he created you to fulfill. The only thing worse than being a body part that you don't feel is important is not fulfilling your role as that part.
- ❖ 1 Cor 15:9f – Here Paul struggles with being selected by God for a special mission and designation as an apostle.

## **Discussion**

- ❖ What do I consider to be my shortcomings? Weaknesses?
- ❖ In what ways do I lack of talent, skill, ability, position, power, authority?
- ❖ How can my weakness demonstrate God's strength?
- ❖ In what ways do I value certain gifts, skills, abilities, status, roles, etc more than others?
- ❖ In what ways am I dissatisfied with myself? Are there parts of this dissatisfaction that equate to "I don't like being the way I have been made?"

## ***I Live For God's Purposes***

Finding our identity in Christ changes our perspective on the purpose and value of our life's efforts. Everything that we do we do to expand the kingdom of God and fulfill God's design of our lives. I think we need to be careful in our thinking in this area. It is too simplistic to think that the only way to dedicate our lives to God is to enter ministry or church work. That is clearly not the case. God has designed people with different gifts, skills and abilities to reflect His being. God's creation is a reflection of his character and personality and we find in creation a variety of created things that all fulfill the purpose of "revealing God." Living for God's purposes invites us to be imaginative and to dream beyond what we think is possible.

- ❖ Phil 2:12-26 – Paul reframes his situation in terms of how his circumstances will serve the interests of God's kingdom in the world. He submits his life choices under the calling of God and accepts his identity of being called by God for a purpose.
- ❖ 1 Cor 7:17-24 - Becoming a Christian changes everything about the way we think but does not demand that we change everything about the place in life we occupy.

## **Discussion**

- ❖ Compare these two questions:
  - (1) How can I be a Christian in my chosen profession of \_\_\_\_\_?
  - (2) How can I use my chosen profession of \_\_\_\_\_ to advance the kingdom of God in this world?
- ❖ How might living for God's purposes affect our choices in different categories: career, family, money, time, possessions, etc.