

The Christian Identity

in

Christ

“Christ is all, and is in all”

by

Richie Temple

Cary, NC

When I was growing up during the tumultuous years of the 1960's and 1970's the subject of a personal “identify crisis” became a well-known topic. It was commonly taught that each individual person must search within himself to find out whom he or she was and what their corresponding purpose in life should be. Needless to say, this led to much soul-searching on the part of many people along with a rejection of many of the accepted values of those times. No doubt this quest continues for many people today. In fact, it would probably be fair to say that this search for identity and purpose in life has always been a quest for mankind. One thinks of the quest of Socrates for truth and a splendid biblical example would be the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes in which Solomon searches for the meaning of life. Indeed, to some extent almost every person goes through this identity crisis at one time or another – sometimes more than once - whether as a teenager, as a recent college graduate, as a new parent, as someone approaching middle age or, ultimately, from the point of view of old age, with death growing ever nearer.

The Bible, of course, *does* give answers to the question of our identity as well as to the meaning and purpose of our lives. In fact, this is one of the central purposes of the Bible and the basic framework is set out right from the start in Genesis chapter 1. The most fundamental of all truths is that God is the creator of the heavens and earth and that man was created in the image of God to rule over

God's created earth in fellowship with God. Genesis 1:26-27 specifically sets forth this relationship between God, man and God's entire creation:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” [Gen. 1:26-27 NIV].

Properly understanding our identity as men and women, begins with understanding that God is the creator and that we are God's creatures, created for the specific purpose of living in fellowship with God and carrying out his will upon the earth. Indeed, the Old Testament goes on to teach us our specific duties before God and that we are accountable to God for our thoughts, words, and deeds in the light of those duties. The Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes summarizes these truths:

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear [Reverence] God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.” [Eccl. 12:13-14].

The New Testament perspective does not contradict the Old, but it does add new and important information in the light of a changed situation due to God's redemptive work in Christ. From the Old Testament perspective man's duty before God was plain: fear, or reverence, God and keep his commandments. However, from the New Testament perspective - after Christ's life, death and resurrection and the giving of the holy Spirit – life is now looked at from the eternal perspective for the believer

in Christ. The apostle Paul sets forth the reasons for this:

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” [II Cor. 5:14-17].

This truth of being a new creation in Christ is the key to understanding our identity as individuals as well as corporately as the people of God. All of the quests of mankind for identity, meaning and purpose in life will only find their fulfillment in Christ. In fact, all of history finds its meaning and purpose in God’s redemptive work in Christ. Once again, the apostle Paul set forth this truth of the eternal perspective in Christ in his second letter to Timothy:

“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but is has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [II Tim. 1:8-10].

The Old Testament perspective of the duty of man is certainly true. We are God’s creatures, created in his image, and our duty is to reverence him and keep his commandments. However, as both the Old and New Testaments

show, man was, and is, incapable of living up to the requirements of God’s commandments as found in the Old Testament Mosaic law.

Therefore, man, on his own merits, “falls short” of God’s requirements in this life (Rom. 3:22-23) and – apart from God’s redemptive work in Christ - at the final judgment when God “will bring every deed into judgment” (Eccl. 12:14) he will fall short as well. As the New Testament states,

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing [literally, “the deeds of”] the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin” [Rom. 3:19-20].

The New Testament thus portrays in vivid detail that we are all under the power of sin, thus leading to a permanent “identity crisis” that can only be solved by God’s redemptive work in Christ:

“Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed

yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." [Gal. 3:22-29].

God's purpose for every individual is to find his identity as a child in God's family through faith in Christ. Once a person believes in Christ he is incorporated into Christ and becomes an heir of all of God's plans for his people. From a NT perspective it matters not if we are black or white, rich or poor, male or female. All that matters is that we are part of God's family and the church of the body of Christ because for believers in Christ, "Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11).

Apart from these truths, all searching for identity will always be in vain. Whether man searches within himself psychologically or outside of himself in the vast expanse of the universe he will always find that apart from a

relationship with God, through Christ, "everything is meaningless" [Eccl. 1:2; 12:8]. Only through faith in Christ can we "overcome" and obtain "victory" over the spiritual forces of evil and the corruption of the present world due to sin [I John 5:1-5]. The apostle Paul summarized the true Christian perspective in his Letter to the Galatians. It is the only answer to man's identity crisis; all others will end in futility and despair:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." [Gal. 2:20].

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God." [Gal. 6:14-16].