

Who We Are In Christ

I am walking to the front with several bags.

I've brought some of my baggage with me. This one is my self-concept. Let's see, what's in here. Oh! Here's my low self esteem and insecurity. And here, let's see, this one is "I'm inadequate. Um, I don't measure up. And my favourite, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace!"

Sometimes my self-concept can be "positive", depending on my mood or events. For example, I can handle it! I am strong and able. I can do it all by myself, thank you very much!!

This bag is my God concept. Let's see, God doesn't really care about me. How can God love the likes of me? God is just waiting to pounce on me and punish me. How can God allow bad things to happen to me? I can't really trust God.

And this bag, it's full of lies of deception about how I get my needs met. I must please others to be loved. I must perform well to be accepted. I must be in control in order to be secure. My spouse must make me feel content. And believe me, there are plenty more lies that we live by!

Our distorted self-concept, God-concept and how we believe we are supposed to get our needs met can leave us feeling wounded and scarred. We often live with a sense of guilt and shame - of feeling inadequate or insecure. Our behaviour is questionable at best. And sin is often the norm, rather than the exception -- As though we're caught in a hopeless struggle with sin.

The picture that I used to identify with is that of a hamster in a wheel-like cage. No matter how fast the hamster runs, he doesn't go anywhere, just round and round. Literally, a vicious circle! Does this sound (or feel) familiar?

How do you reconcile what you feel and think about yourself, and also how you behave, with what Jesus says?

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10)". **Abundant life?*** Now what is that supposed to look like?

Or when Paul says *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Corinthians 15:57). **Victory?**

Or this, *"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37)" **Conquerors?**

That sure wasn't true of my experience! Let me tell you a little about my own spiritual journey. A number of years ago, I came to the conclusion that living a victorious Christian life was not really possible while I walked this earth. Life had dealt me some pretty tough blows. I had experienced the betrayal of people, people I thought that I could trust. I struggled with sin, the same sins, over and over. I realized that my self-concept was wrapped up in how other people perceived me . . . and it was so very important that people liked me - to the extent that I found myself performing in order to gain their acceptance and approval.

What's worse, I had bought into the LIE that my heart was wicked. This, in itself, is a devastating thing to believe! But it sure seemed real to me as I tried to make sense of the way I was living life. I felt like a fraud. Trying to live, on the outside, a wonderful Christian life, yet on the inside I felt inadequate and insecure - a failure in every sense of the word.

JUST WHO DID I THINK I WAS? At this point in my life, I believed that I was at best a disappointment: to myself, to my wife, to my God. But it was also at this point in my life that God was doing a deep work in my life!

Little did I know, but God was taking me through a process of brokenness. Not because he was punishing me or angry with me, but because of His great love for me and so that He could love me.

I came to this point because all the mechanisms that I had employed to make life work weren't working! It all came to a head one morning and I found myself on my face before God with the cry on my lips, "GOD, I CANNOT DO THIS ANYMORE!"

And that was just what God had been waiting for! My surrender. And He stepped in, in Love, and through a series of events, began to teach me about who I truly was.

Over the last several weeks, if you've been in the service, you've heard some good stuff being preached. Soul spoke recently and talked about how important it was to know and live from our true identity. At the Good Friday service, Paul read from Romans 6 and spoke about how we died with Christ. David's sermons on the resurrection and our new life in Christ.

As I sat there and listened to these words, I thought, "I wonder how many people are really getting what's being talked about?" I mean, I had been a Christian for 25 years and I hadn't really "gotten" it.

Let's get to the heart of the matter. What are we talking about when we talk about our identity? About dying with Christ? About walking in newness of life?

THE OLD SELF WAS PUT TO DEATH

Let's take a look again at Romans 6:1-8. *"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."*

Our baptism into Christ is much, much more than water or a religious ceremony. We are immersed or placed into Christ. Paul is saying that we are immersed into the death of Christ; we are participants in what Jesus experienced!

We died to sin . . . so that we too might walk in newness of life!

So, it begs the question, what exactly died in us?

In Romans 6:6, Paul states, *"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."*

John Gill writes this, "By the old man (or self) is meant the corruption of nature; called a man, because natural to men; it lives and dwells in them; it has spread itself over the whole man; it rules and governs in men; . . . because it is the poison of the old serpent, with which man was infected by him from the beginning; it is derived from the first man that ever was".

What is our "old self"? It's what I call our "in Adam" nature. Our sin nature. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "*For as in Adam all die . . .*" and in verse 49, "*we have borne the image of the man of the dust (Adam)*". In Romans 5:19 Paul says "*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners*".

So when Paul writes that "We know that our old self was crucified with him" he's talking about our sin nature, our "in Adamness"!

Remember that I mentioned earlier that one of the lies that I had bought into was that my heart was wicked? Another lie that has been circulating around for the last 80 or 90 years or so is that our sin nature is still in control, that this "nature" is who we truly are. That's a lie from the pit of hell! But most of us live as though it were true! But God says, "For one who has died has been set free from sin!"

In Galatians 2:20 we read "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*"

I can't tell you how many times I had read this verse, but it had little impact. But in my brokenness, God opened my eyes and heart to the startling truth of what Paul was saying!

Before salvation, when we were "in Adam", we were dead to God, separated from Him by Sin. The "essence" of who we were was "by nature a child of wrath". In our spirits, we were unregenerate, the "old man", sinners.

For the first time, I understood that what I was, a sinner by nature, by birth, had BEEN PUT TO DEATH WITH CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

At salvation, when we confess and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, what happens to us? We most often hear that our sins are forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus on the Cross. While that is wonderfully true, something else happened to us at the Cross.

You see, there are two sides to the cross. The one, the Blood side, dealt with our sins and our sin nature. Christ died for us – "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*" (Hebrews 9:22b).

But there's another side of the cross and that's the LIFE side. Through the work of the Holy Spirit we were raised with Christ to newness of life. And Christ lives His life in us!

Listen to what Dan Stone writes in The Rest of the Gospel: "It's impossible for a person to know their union with Christ, and live out of that union, if they don't know that they have died with Christ. If I think that the old me is still alive, I am still my point of reference. If I am still my point of reference, I am still trying to correct me, straighten me up, make something out of me, or do something to change me. As long as my emphasis is upon me, it can't be upon Christ in me. So I'm a divided person."

The old man is the human spirit indwelt by and enslaved to sin. But God crucified the old man and gave us a new spirit, created "*in righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24).

A NEW CREATION

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come*".

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on this verse states, "for he that is in Christ, that is, a genuine Christian, having Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, is a new creature; his old state is changed: he was a child of Satan, he is now a child of God"!

In Colossians 1:25-27 Paul talks about the mystery, how God manifested to His saints "what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, **which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory!"

As Dan Stone writes, "The mystery, hidden from the past ages and generations, but revealed to us, is this: CHRIST IN YOU. Not your life, but His. Not you, producing His life, but you expressing His life, as you, by faith, trust Him to live through you, as you."

I submit to you that this is our truest and deepest identity -- Christ in us! Christ in you! Christ in me! The God of the universe living His life in you and through you!

Isn't this incredible truth a whole lot more exciting than the insidious lie that tells us "we are just sinners saved by grace"?

So how does this magnificent reality impact us? How does it affect the way we live our lives day by day, even minute by minute?

There is another concept I need to introduce here briefly and that is the concept of the Flesh. But time doesn't allow me to get into this too much tonight, so you'll just have to come next week as we explore more in depth how we live out of the life of Christ in us.

But Paul exhorts us in Romans 8:6, "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the things of the Spirit is life and peace."

Here is a concept I want you to meditate on from Romans 6:7, "For one who has died has been set free from sin". Since we are no longer enslaved to sin, when we sin, it is because we have made a choice to do! Let that sink in for a few days; and we'll explore it more next week.

Gregory Boyd, in his book, Seeing is Believing, writes this, "The flesh state of being starts with deception, leads to performance, requires hiddenness, and finally, ends in destruction".

Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3: "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?"

The flesh, in the words of Boyd again, "is a deceptive state of being". It is not a nature that is essential to our identity, but it is a belief system, a way of pursuing life, an attempt to make our lives work through our own effort and apart from dependence on God.

Hold on to this thought, because we're going to explore it in more detail next week. But now, I want to conclude with these thoughts:

Back to the question of how we walk in the truth of our identity in Christ?

We know from experience, at least I do, that the "try harder" solution doesn't work. Changing my behaviour doesn't last. My self effort is a trap and only really leads me into deeper futility.

Boyd writes, "If we are going to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we need to know who we are in Christ".

I am a transformed person. Because I know that I am accepted in Christ, I no longer have to find my acceptance through others. Because I know that Christ has perfected me in my spirit, I can stand against Satan's lie when he whispers to me, "Oh, see how inadequate you are?"

Now don't get me wrong. I still sin. But I have tasted the abundant life. I have experienced victory. I have, by the grace of the Lord Jesus, conquered!

We are, very literally, a person who has become someone he was not before!

Let's take a look at some key truths (from Seeing is Believing):

- All that is part of our old self, all that is sinful and contrary to God, has been crucified. It is dead! (Romans 6:2-11; Galatians 2:20)
- We are completely forgiven, perfected for all time, and hence completely reconciled to God (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 1:4, 7-8; 2:13; 4:32; Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 10:14)
- We are completely made new and given Christ's eternal resurrected life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:5-6, 10; 3:1; 1 Peter 1:3-5)
- We are indwelt with the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God Almighty (2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27). We are thus made into a temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- We are redeemed and set free from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13; 5:1; Colossians 2:13-15)
- We have died to sin and it has no longer dominion over us (Romans 6:6-7, 12-13)
- We are seated "in heavenly places" and made partakers of the eternal inheritance Christ purchased from us (Ephesians 1:3-11; 2:6; 3:6)
- We are hidden in Christ and united with Christ (Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Colossians 3:3). As such we are made partakers in the eternal love that flows from the Triune God (John 17:20-24; 2 Peter 1:4)
- God the Father completely redefines our state of being. Whereas, we were in Adam and "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3; cf 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:15-19), now we are in Christ and are the recipients of the very same eternal, perfect love he has for his Son (John 17:23,26)
- The Father has chosen us and made us "holy and blameless before him in love." He loves us and lavishes on us "his glorious grace" as he relates to us as we are "in the Beloved," Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6). This means that the relationship God has with us now is defined by the eternal, unsurpassable, loving relationship he has with his own eternal Son!

Knowing our true identity in Christ and living from the power of His life in us is the beginning of an incredible journey of adventure!

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13.

Through Christ's life in me, through His strength and power, we can be free from those sins that so often defeat us.

Through Christ's life in me, through His strength and power, that negative attitude can be healed.

You know that dislike you have for that other person? Through Christ's life in you, through His strength and power, that dislike can turn into love for your brother or sister. And the list goes on and on and on!

We can know the truth and it will set us free!

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