

## Our Identity in Christ

One of my favorite shows when I was a teen was CSI. You may still remember the theme song of the show: “*Who are you? Who? Who? Who? I really wanna know.*” Actually, the opening of the show was my favorite part. I don’t fully know why, but I was fascinated and thrilled by the question, “Who are you?”. The reason I am mentioning this is because the question “who are you?” explores the issue of identity.

Having an identity is very important. One of the first things that happens to us is that we are given a name. And, such name defines part of our identity throughout our earthly existence.

But identities go beyond our names. We all have identifying characteristics that make us different and unique from everybody else. We are profiled and stereotyped as black, white, Hispanic, tall, short, skinny, chubby, rich, poor, educated, ignorant...you name it! People use certain aspects of who we are to refer to us or simply recognize us.

On top of the physical, there is the intellectual. I have been in several events and one thing I have noticed is that we identify people by their titles and accomplishments. The initials before and after our names become a very important part of who we are.

If you were asked this morning, “who are you?”, what would your answer be? Will you refer to your name, profession, or achievements?

The reason I am talking about identity is because our culture has made us believe that our value as human beings comes from prestige and positions of influence. Most people place their confidence and base their worth on secular standards. Actually, these worldly perceptions are far away from the true identity we can find in Christ.

There are several characters in the Bible that had opportunities to brag about their achievements, but they decided not to do so because their identity came from another source. For instance, the apostle Paul wrote:

*“[I] can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God’s law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God’s law Book. The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I’m tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master... **Philippians 3:2-9 MSG***

After his conversion, Paul’s highest priority was to find his identity in Christ. He cared less about his titles and credentials. His main concern was to know Jesus and find his own self as he engaged in a personal relationship with the Savior.

There is another character in the Bible that had every right in the world to boast about his qualifications. John could have identified himself as an apostle, as a member of Jesus' inner circle, as an evangelist (one of the writers of the Gospels), as one of the "pillars" of the *first* church in Jerusalem, as the one who received the revelation of the end of times, and many other titles that would have brought him more acclaim.

John was an eye witness of Jesus' transfiguration and many other supernatural signs that Jesus performed. But, instead of using all these credentials to refer to himself, John decided to identify himself by another expression. Let's turn to the Bible to find out what phrase John uses to refer to himself.

*One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. **John 13:23 NIV***

*When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son." **John 19:26 NIV***

*So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" **John 20:2 NIV***

*Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. **John 21:7 NIV***

*Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") **John 21:20 NIV***

John refers to himself as *the one whom Jesus loved* at least five times in the gospel that bears his name. John's way of expressing his identity is not based on the many things that our world would consider important. You may be thinking that John is not as humble as I am describing him because he called himself, "**THE ONE**" whom Jesus loved.

There are two ways to read these verses. Reading them as arrogant statements is certainly one. While the term John uses to describe himself may seem a little prideful at first, I think it can also be read exactly the opposite way—as a sign of humility. Notice John does not say he was the "only" disciple Jesus loved. He simply refers to himself as "*the one whom Jesus loved.*" I honestly think that John referred to himself this way because to him, this was the most precious credential he had. John chose that label not based on worldly standards, but on his identity in relation to Christ.

In this world, everything changes. Fashion, music styles, our paradigms, our judgment and perceptions of what is really important change over time. We live in a world of constant change,

but in the midst of this ephemeral world there is one thing that is steadfast, God's love. The psalmist wrote,

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.  
*His love endures forever.*  
Give thanks to the God of gods.  
*His love endures forever.*  
Give thanks to the Lord of lords:  
*His love endures forever.* **Psalm 136:1-3 NIV**

Church, John could not have been any wiser. The only permanent and eternal foundation where we can base our value as human beings and our identity is the love of God. The many roles you fill in life (as a spouse, parent, friend, employee, volunteer, etc.), are important, but they don't represent who you are as a person. Instead of basing your identity on roles that can change, base it on God's love for you, which will never change. Place the confidence of who you are on the love of God and know that you belong to Him (Adapted from *Deeper: Living in the Reality of God's Love*).

The apostle Paul gave a great advice to the Colossians. This is what he wrote, "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*" **Colossians 3:2 NIV**

As Christians, I think this is a great way to think about ourselves. Rather than thinking about myself and my accomplishments (or shortcomings), I think about my identity as the way Christ sees me. I am simply a recipient of undeserved and unconditional love. Remember this, God's love is not based on our actions; it is based on His character. "God is love" (1 John 4:8 NIV).

Your identity is much more than just your temperament, the opinions that other people have of you, or your ability to achieve success in your pursuits. Your real identity is nothing less than God's beloved child, made in God's image, with His Spirit living inside your soul.

I want you to go from this place knowing that truth. *When you base your identity on the love of God, and know that other people can do the same, you will be able to relate to others with the love and respect that come from knowing who they really are, people loved by God.*

Like John, you are "the one whom Jesus loves." That is your identity, too. When you are worried that the people in your life do not appreciate or recognize all the things you do, remember that your ultimate identity rests in the love of the Savior who gave His life as an act of love for you. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [for our Salvation]" (John 3:16 NIV).

Be secure in the truth that you are also "the one Jesus loves."