

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Identity Crises

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Introduction

In these days of identity theft and the problems caused by it, it seems that many are doing a lot of thinking about protecting their “identity”. Most of this is in the context of the world and how the world knows us in terms of our credit rating or our profile as a citizen. While there are various ways that the world knows our “identity”, none of these are applicable to our walk with the Lord. Paul said, *“Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.”* [2 Corinthians 5:16 NASB] The natural identity is not how we recognize each other. We don't even know the Lord by his “natural” identity as the Son of Man. We now know Him in His resurrected identity as the Son of God—King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The next verse tells us *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* [2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB] In Christ, we are a “new creature”, that is, we have a new identity—old things have passed away and new things have come. We are to know and be known by this new identity—not our old one.

Who We Were

The Scriptures make it very clear who we were before we were born again as a new creature in Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-12 NASB Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is performed in the flesh by human hands--* (12) *remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Colossians 1:21 NASB And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged in evil deeds,*

This is who we were before knowing Christ. Our “identity” had little or no spiritual value. It is part of the “old things” that have “passed away”

Who We Are

The Scriptures also make it plain concerning who we are in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:13 NASB But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:19 NASB So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,

Colossians 1:22 NASB yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--

These verses begin to show us our new identity—who we are now. It is part of the “new things” that “have come”.

Now we have both an “old identity”, the old self, and a “new identity”, the new self.

Ephesians 4:22-24 NASB that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, (23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (24) and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Conflicting Identities

Because we now have within us these two identities, we have an identity crises. There is a conflict between “who we were” and “who we are”. It is the Spirit of the Lord who empowers who we are and it is the world system that empowers who we were. That is one of the reasons why we are not to love the world nor the things in the world [*I John 2:15*].

Paul shows that our old identity controls the flesh and epitomizes sin.

Romans 7:18-20 NASB For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. (19) For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. (20) But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

When Paul says “I am no longer the one doing it”, he is saying that his new identity is the “real” him not the old one. As shown in the earlier verses in Ephesians, we are to “lay aside the old self” and “put on the new self”. This is the arena of our identity conflict. Our new identity is in our inner man while our old is in the members of our body.

Romans 7:22-23 NASB For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (23) but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

So, Paul reaches the conclusion that his old and new identity operate from a different power and have different goals: “ . . . *So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*” [Romans 7:25]

The Problem

Our minds are being renewed so that our thinking processes operate according to the new identity and not according to the old. However, if the renewing process is not occurring then our focus will be on our old identity with the results described by this verse:

Romans 8:5-8 NASB For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, (8) and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Our old self, that is, who we were, our old identity, cannot please God. It is not subject to the law of God and is actually hostile toward God. However, through the sacrifice of Christ and through the power of the Spirit, we are no longer obligated to live in our old identity. We are a new creation with a new identity.

The Solution

Since we have probably operated in our old identity much longer than in our new, we have to become actively involved in learning how to put off the old and put on the new. The Scriptures tells us how to do this.

Colossians 3:5 NASB Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Our old identity that operates in the members of our body is considered dead. The word translated by the NASB as “consider” and KJV as “mortify” means “put to death”, implying that it will live as long as we allow it even though it is under a death sentence. Our problem is that the moment we see our old identity in its death throes we want to resuscitate it rather than letting it die.

Notice that our old self involves the desires of our baser tendencies:

- immorality—every form of improper sex
- impurity—both physical and moral
- passion—improper, inordinate desire or lust
- evil desire—depraved lust
- greed—avarice, fraud, greediness

These are all part of our identity that is dead if we are alive in Christ. They only have control over us if we allow it. We call upon the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life.

After reckoning our old identity with its influences on the body as dead, we now have to address the aspects of the mind that have to be renewed from the effects of the old identity.

Colossians 3:8-9 NASB But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. (9) Do not lie to one another, since you

laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,

Notice that this list of things that we are to put off or put aside all involve our mental processes and actions: 1) anger, 2) wrath, 3) malice, 4) slander, 5) abusive speech, 6) lying. These are only expressed in our relationship with others. Our relationships suffer or deteriorate because we are no longer being taught about putting to death the old self and renewing our minds in these areas.

[Colossians 3:10 NASB](#) and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--

In fact there are many ministries that tell us how to be secure in our old identity. They tell us that we need strong self esteem; that we are “OK”. There are many “christian counseling” ministries that help us resuscitate our old self and try to “fix” its problems. There is no fixing the old self—it is dead! Let it die.

Our victory is who we are in Christ—a new creation, born of the seed of God, destined to be conformed to the image of the Son, empowered for purpose and the fulfilling of the desire of God.

[For further study and related teaching you might want to consider these lessons: “[Called to His Purpose](#)”, “[Circumstances of Temptation](#)”, “[Foundation of the Inner Man](#)”, “[The Place of Temptation](#)”, “[Spiritual Maturity](#)”, “[Treasure in Earthen Vessels](#)”]

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