

Colossians 10 – Christ Above Identity
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If I asked you to describe yourself – what’s the first thing that comes to mind? Would your first thought be what you do for a living or your ethnicity or your gender or your family role or something else?

I’m speaking today on Christ Above Identity. We hear a lot about identity these days: identity politics, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnic identity.

The Apostle Paul addressed identity issues in his letter to the church in the city of Colossae. Many people there had wrong ideas about who Jesus is and about who they were. So – Paul wrote this letter to deal with those identity issues.

The theme of Colossians is Christ Above All. Before we can deal with our identity issues – we must understand who Jesus is: God in the flesh and Lord of all!

In the first two chapters Paul addresses positional truth – who Christ is and who we are in him. Then Paul moves from the doctrinal to the practical – the “how-to’s.”

I’ve already preached on Colossians 3:1-4, which says:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

In these verses Paul reaches us that we were raised with Christ. Were raised – this is past tense and this is positional. In these verses Paul contrasts our position and our condition. Here’s who you are – now here’s what you should do as a result. What you do flows out of who you are. We need to become in experience who we are in position. We do that by seeking those things which are above and setting our hearts and minds on the kingdom of God. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

The kingdom should be the first thing that comes to your mind when you describe who you are. First and foremost – you are a child of the King!

Where do we get our identity anyway? From our heritage, our family, our name, from our accomplishments and failures, from what people tell us we are and what we are worth.

But when we are born again – our identity is now found in Christ. Revelation 5:9-10 says:

Your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And You have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.

Believers come from every nation, tribe and people group. We have different backgrounds, cultures and political beliefs - But in our diversity – we are united in Christ as a kingdom of priests. That’s who we are – the redeemed – the blood bought church – kings and priests. Royal and holy.

People who grow us as royals are told from an early age that they are royalty and must behave as such. They are disciplined to live in a way that is above “common.”

When Britain’s Prince William was a young boy he would sometimes have to be disciplined by his caretakers. One time he refused the discipline and said, “Don’t you know who I am?” He was young, but he already knew he was somebody. He knew he was special. He knew he was royalty. What did he do to deserve this? Nothing – he was born into it.

Do you know you are somebody? Do you know you are special? Do you know you are royalty? What did you do to deserve it? Nothing – you are born again into it. We are royalty because our heavenly Father is the King of kings and Lord of lords! Colossians says that we must set our hearts and minds on this! Why is this important? Because what we think controls how we live. Proverbs 23:7 says that:

...as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

We must be sure that our thinking about who we are lines up with what the word of God says about who we are! Because of that, Colossians 3:11 says that in Christ:

...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Paul is addressing identity here. Obviously – in the flesh – there are different ethnicities and backgrounds and income levels and education levels and religious beliefs. But in Christ – none of that matters! The Living Bible says:

In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant; such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and He is equally available to all.

This reminds me of Galatians 3:26-29:

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.

As a Christian – your primary identity is not found in your ethnicity, your gender or your nationality or anything other than Christ.

I think it is great for people to take pride in their ethnicity. I'm for celebrating Juneteenth and Cinco de Mayo. But we cannot allow our ethnicity to overshadow our identity in Christ.

After Paul teaches us about our identity - he shows us in Colossians 3:5 what we need to do because of who we:

Therefore, put to death whatever in you is worldly: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

Therefore: Because of who Christ is and who you are in Him... Put to death all your worldly desires. This means to put away completely – to cause to have no more influence over you. Paul lists the sins that we're to put to death. Most of them are sexual sins.

Sexual immorality - This is a general term and refers to any form of sexual behavior outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

Did you know that Paul talks about sexual sin more than any other sin? 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The emphasis we hear today is on “safe sex,” but there is no safe sex outside of marriage. Sexual sin will take you further than you want to go and cost you more than you want to pay. It is a sin against God – your spouse – yourself.

Sexual sin destroys people. Satan knows that he can trip up almost anyone by using sex. David paid a huge price because of adultery with Bathsheba. Sex was Samson and Solomon's downfall. And many marriages today are destroyed because of sexual sin. Think about all the people in high places of government, entertainment, education, business and church who have fallen because of sexual immorality. There's always a price to pay!

Impurity, physically or morally - Literally, a dirty mind. This is a mind that is filled with thoughts that make every situation sexual.

Lust - Lust seeks quick fulfillment and always wants more. Love gives; lust takes.

Evil desires - Our physical desires are divinely given but they become evil when they are motivated by the lusts of the flesh – especially when they long for something that is forbidden by God.

Greed, which is idolatry - This is lust for things, the sin of always wanting more. It speaks of a person who is never satisfied with what he has and is envious of what others have. This leads to idolatry, when things and people end up taking the place of God.

After listing these sins, Paul says this in Colossians 3:6-7:

Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the disobedient. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

You don't hear much about the wrath of God these days – but if you study it out you'll find a lot of verses about it in the New Testament.

By the way – when you are saved – what are you saved from? From hell. From yourself. From sin. Yes, but also from the wrath of God. Romans 5:8-9 says:

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

The Bible teaches that there will be a day of wrath for those who refuse to repent of sin and place their faith in Jesus. Romans 2:5 says:

Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.

God's wrath is not an outburst of uncontrolled fury. God's anger is not an irrational, emotional reaction - but a holy, justified response to man's willful disobedience and unrepentant sin.

That's the bad news – the good news is that faith in Jesus Christ saves us from the wrath to come! 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says:

You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Aren't you glad for that! Aren't you glad Jesus saved you from who you were in the past and the wrath to come in the future!

Our identity is no longer based on who we used to be in the past. Colossians 3:6-7 says:

Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the disobedient. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

We used to live in ways that deserved the wrath of God! But when we are born again, we are no longer children of wrath, but children of God. This makes me think of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

This passage does not mean that everyone who ever commits a sin like adultery or theft or homosexuality is doomed to hell. This is speaking of those who never repent of their sins, but instead they find identity in their sin.

I know it's popular today to believe that people cannot change their sexual behavior. But the word of God says otherwise.

What I'm about to address has the potential to offend some people – so please listen to me closely. I love gay people. I had a brother who was gay. I have other family members and friends who are gay. Many of them do not believe that homosexual behavior is a sin. But the fact is: all of us are sinners. In fact, we were born that way. Psalm 51:5 says:

I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

The King James Version says:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

The words “iniquity” and “sin” are different. Biblical definitions for sin include things like: missing the mark, falling short of God's glory, going astray, trespassing. Sins are things we do or don't do that are outside the will of God.

But iniquity is different. Vine's Dictionary says iniquity means, “to bend or deviate from the way.” Iniquity means to be twisted, crooked, or bent. We can see this described in Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus bore our iniquity – which is described as going astray – going our own way. While sins are outward actions, iniquity is the inner motivation that drives people to sin. Sin is the fruit, but iniquity is the root! And iniquity shapes us all.

Everyone is born with a bent or orientation toward certain sins. For some it is addiction – for others it is lying – for others it is sexual sin.

This explains why some people who struggle with the sin of homosexuality say, "I was born this way – so it must be okay." No, it's not okay because the Bible calls it sin, just like the rest of us sin. Some homosexuals believe that since they were born that way, God must have made them that way. No way! God would not make you in a way that He calls sinful. The truth is you were born that way because you were shaped by iniquity, just like the rest of us.

A problem arises when you allow your iniquity to become your identity! That's when you end up excusing your sin! That's when you stop fighting against sin and start going your own way rather than God's way! We must guard against allowing our iniquity to determine our identity because as a man thinks in his heart, so is he! You will become what you believe!

Contrary to popular belief - we have had many people in our church who have left a homosexual lifestyle. They struggled with homosexuality all of their lives, but they were radically changed when they turned from sin to faith in Jesus! That change included identity change.

Understanding this is very important. You see, man was originally created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 says:

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

We know the fall occurred in Gen. 3 before Adam and Eve had any children. Then in Genesis 5:3 we read:

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

When Adam fell into sin – everyone since then has been born in his fallen sinful condition. That's why the Psalmist said in Psalm 51:5

I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

All of us are born in Adam - born sinners. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Romans 5:12 says:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.

We are all born in Adam – in his fallen, sinful condition. That's why we need to be born again and placed in Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 says:

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second Man from heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the Man from heaven.

When we are born – we are born in Adam and so we live like Adam.

When we are born again – we are born in Christ, so we live like Christ.

I want you to notice that Jesus is called the last Adam and the second man. Some people call Jesus the second Adam, but the Bible never calls Him that – He's the last Adam. That's because when we are saved – Jesus is the end of Adam for us and the Father of a new royal family.

Look at this - when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land – they had to cross the Jordan River. Joshua 3:14-16 says:

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam.

I believe there is spiritual significance to this. To enter the Promised Land – God had to miraculously roll the water back. And He didn't roll it back a little way – He rolled it all the way back to Adam – about 20 miles away! He's saying something here.

Now I know a lot of people think that crossing the Jordan River is symbolic of going to heaven. But actually, it is symbolic of coming out of bondage into freedom. Out of sin into righteousness. Out of darkness into light. Out of Adam and into Christ!

And when we are born again, God rolls away everything back – not just a little way, but all the way back to Adam – God cuts off that old source and gives us a new one! We are taken out of Adam and placed into Christ and now everything flows from His source!

We need to realize we are new creations in Christ – we are not now who we once were. That was then; this is now! We are now children of God.

- We used to be in Adam, but we are now in Christ.
- We used to be guilty, but we are now forgiven.
- We used to be sinful, but we are now righteous.
- We used to be destined for wrath, but now we are destined for heaven.

You might have grown up poor – but now all your needs are met in Christ. You might have grown up fatherless – but now you have a Heavenly Father. You might have been rejected and discriminated against – but how you are accepted in the beloved!

Because of Christ we have a brand-new identity!
We are saved from sin and our identity is now righteous.
We are saved from Hell and our destiny is now heaven.

Can you thank God that Jesus is above all and He is Lord of your identity!