

Identity Check: Are You Independent or Dependent In Christ?

Our Life in Christ

Philippians 3:1-11

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Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
(Philippians 3:1-11, ESV)

Introduction

The passage this morning is one that speaks to a contemporary issue that is not new. It is a discussion concerning identity. Humans are often obsessed with identity. In the spiritual best seller, "Snow White," there was a queen with a magic mirror who answered the question of who is the fairest of them all. When the queen's identity as the most beautiful in the land was challenged, she would stop at nothing to keep her identity. So it is with some of our kids today. They see their identity in their looks, grades, or friends. As adults we are often not much different. We identify ourselves by our health, wealth, vocation, marital status, or sexual preference. It is a never-ending and futile world, where people look internally to gain their identity. In August we will begin our LIVE14 series on identity that will be great for the soul of College Park Church.

Our text this morning begins with a great imperative: "REJOICE in the Lord." What a great way to start a sermon. Paul will deal with identity and give the great news that identity can be found outside of us. This text and sermon is intended to cause the people of God who are in the Lord to rejoice! Why? This passage deals with the gospel, which is the good news of the person and work of Jesus. The theological term used to describe Paul's discussion in this section is "justification." This helps Christians to know their identity in Christ.

Justification is one of the greatest and most joyful messages in the world. Here are some comments from people on the joyful message of justification:

- Paul, in AD 57: “therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1
- Question 33 of Westminster Shorter Catechism, in 1646: What is justification?
- Answer: Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone
- The hymn “On Christ the Solid Rock”: “when he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found, Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”

If you are in Christ, rejoice that Jesus has justified you. If you are in Christ, that is who you are. This is our identity. We are justified sinners. God’s work of justification includes at least four realities:

1. Jesus forgives our sins
2. Jesus declares us righteous
3. because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us,
4. and it is not of works, but through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone.

This is the theme of our text today. Paul will talk about the question of identity. He will present two diametrically opposed views.

In Philippians 3:1-11, Paul describes two identities that characterize people in a fallen world. The question for us today will be how do we identify ourselves?

I. Identity #1 Independent and self righteous—3:1-6

a. Warning concerning the self righteous-1-2

The passage starts with a statement of Paul’s desire that the Philippians would rejoice in the Lord from an understanding of what He would write to them. It is a warning, followed by the truth that brings about joy. Paul, in verse 2, then gives a three-fold description of the false teachers (Judiazers) who were self-righteous in such an extreme manner as to negate the beauty of the gospel. The descriptions would not win friends and influence people. The self righteous Jews were called dogs, which was not a reference to our cute pets, but rather to the scavenger, dirty, wild dogs that no one wants. The term “evil doers” was also used to indicate

that even with their perceived righteousness, they were really evil because what they did was done for themselves and not for the glory of the Lord. The final negative statement was that they mutilated the flesh. That is a play on words with the word “circumcise.” They so missed the purpose of circumcision. Their obsession with the outward sign of circumcision caused them to miss their need of Jesus, and their circumcision was only flesh mutilation, not covenant commitment. Paul wanted his brothers to see the fallacy of self-righteousness in no uncertain terms.

b. Brief picture of those who are not self-righteous-3

The next verse gives a short and concise summary of those who are in Christ. A full sermon could be preached on this verse, but its brevity is beautiful. Three marks of the “true circumcision” (people in Christ) are that they:

- Worship by the Spirit of God: They are not creating their own worship, but they are led by the Spirit in submitting their wills to God and in allowing the Spirit to lead them.
- Glory (or boast) in Jesus: They are not pointing to their deeds but to the deeds of Jesus.
- Put no confidence in the flesh: They are not listing their accomplishments of righteousness because they realize the futility of that approach.

This kind of person is one who has learned the flaws of self-righteousness and the glory of Jesus’ righteousness.

c. Paul’s autobiography of his self-righteous history-4-6

In a brilliant piece of literary style, Paul gives a brief and edited picture of his life before Christ, when he was attempting to be righteous by himself. He lists seven items on his resume that would make Jewish heads turn. The first four items concern his heritage, which was very important to the Jewish mind even though none of them had anything to do with it. The last three are actual accomplishments that Paul performed to attain a righteous standing. Here they are for your reading delight:

d. Elite heritage-4-5a

- Circumcised on the eighth day—exactly what was required; Of the people of Israel—not from proselyte parents—true Jew genetically
- Of the tribe of Benjamin—tribe of Saul, the first king, and the only tribe to stick with Judah, the Messianic line
- Hebrew of Hebrews—He was not a Jewish/Greek mix but a true Hebrew who spoke the language and was a true-blooded Hebrew

e. Performance success-5b

- As to the law—Pharisee. The Pharisees started in the inter-testament time (400-200 BC), and they added much to the law in a desire to fully abide as law-keepers
- As to zeal—persecutor of the church. He was so dedicated to his self righteous life that he sought to eliminate all opposition
- As to righteousness—blameless. What a statement. He was a full law abider and had the right to claim himself self-righteousness. He had, however, missed the first commandment, which was to love the Lord with all your heart . . .He made God in his image and worshipped that

APPLICATION- If your identity is independent and self-righteous, here are some results:

1. **Pride:** This is what caused the fall of the devil. We can get to really believe that we are great and independent, and our life centers on proving that. We obsess with jobs, families, relationships, money, pleasure, perfection, etc. We see ourselves as independent and need to continue to prove our independence and our identity, and thereby we become enslaved to our identity.
2. **Prejudice:** This is one that is taboo in the USA, but we all struggle with it anyway. We can see ourselves as better than others who differ in terms of race, social status, finances, health, education, heritage, etc. Few, if any, can live up to our standards.
3. **Poverty:** Many people realize they do not measure up to the standards of society and become depressed and defeated. They see their bodies are deficient; they are not as smart as others; their kids are not what they desire; they are not married; they are under-employed etc. These people buy into a society that argues for independence and “being yourself,” but they are not able to achieve the ideal, and they kill themselves in frustration, trying to achieve the unrealistic dream.

II. Identity #2 Dependent—In Christ (justified)—3:7-11

Here is the time to rejoice! Paul uses the first six verses to set up this great message of GOOD NEWS. You do not have to achieve the unachievable. As a matter of fact, you cannot, but that is not a hopeless reality. You can make your identity one that is dependent on the only one worthy of our dependence. We can be **IN CHRIST!**

a. Identity change—count all loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord--7-8. We are too easily satisfied with realities that do not satisfy. C.S. Lewis admonishes us in the spirit of Paul to think bigger. He says, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Paul begins with another famous and glorious "BUT" in verse 7. He says that he counted all his accolades and accomplishments achieved for his own glory to be loss. In place of them he identifies himself with Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. 2:5-7). He amplifies this level of desertion of the old identity by saying he counts it not only loss but also rubbish or dung. There is debate on the translation of that word, but whether it is actual dung, rubbish or a dirty smelly trash heap, it is of no value at all. Paul totally deserts his old identity and embraces the identity with Jesus. What a change for the better.

b. What the new identity looks like—IN CHRIST—9-11 This description is governed by the word "in order that" (one word in Greek) in verse 8 and the word "that" in verse 10. Both are purpose clauses that show the purpose of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. There are two descriptions of this new identity:

1. The new identity (new position) is "I am in Christ" or I am justified—8b-9

This is not a full description of justification. Romans 4, and 2 Cor. 5:21 add to the definition of justification. In a wonderful clause Paul says that his loss is so great because he gains Christ and he is found in Christ. These may sound the same and probably are to some extent. When you look carefully, however, you can see that in the first verb, Paul has an addition to his identity. He gains Christ. In the second verb, Paul loses himself in the reality that he is in Christ. What does it mean to be in Christ? Some have used the term "union with Christ" as a way of looking at this concept. It is certainly a relationship such that Paul's identity was Christ. Paul did not boast in his own accomplishments and life, but in Christ's. That is his identity.

Paul then further describes a part of what it means to be “in Christ” by saying that he has a righteousness not his own. It is an alien righteousness, but it is a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. This is the concept of justification (that comes from the Greek word for *righteous*). Paul acknowledged that he needed more than his own faulty righteousness, so Christ imputed (credited) to his account the righteousness from God (Christ’s righteousness: 2 Cor. 5:21). What an incredible and almost unbelievable truth. That is probably why many reject it and try to do life on their own. Paul saw that Jesus justifies sinners by crediting his righteousness to them. If that is true (and it is), that is the best news any human can hear and believe. The justified stand before the Father clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. A great, but not perfect, illustration of this is when one is adopted and has imputed to him all the rights and privileges of the family. He is considered a true child and receives the name of the family and a place in their home (not just their house). There is a legal part to it, but the reality of it is that he is IN the family. That is so true for the justified child of God. Justification is the legal aspect to it—but it all is part of being in Christ. We are found in Him. He is our identity.

2. New practice of follows the new position or identity—10

Many commentators say that Paul now moves to his practice (or sanctification) as he identifies himself as a justified person who is that by virtue of being in Christ. Life for Paul is quite simple in one sense. He has two evidences of his justification that are ever increasing as he is being sanctified.

a. He knows the power of the resurrection of Jesus. That is a wonderfully encouraging statement. It must at least include the power or the resurrection gives power over the mastery of sin (Rom. 6). This powerful resurrection is the power that allows Jesus to justify sinners and bring them to new life in the Spirit (Rom. 4:25). This powerful resurrection gives future hope that God will cause all things to work together for good. He lives in light of the power of the resurrection. This is the power of the victory over all evil and will be fully realized in the future but is realized now in the lives of the justified.

b. He also knows Jesus in His suffering. This is not the most fun. The justified must (and will) persevere to inherit the kingdom. Christ suffered even to death (Phil. 2:8). The justified will also do battle with evil and will suffer. That is the reality of God at work in us even when we may not enjoy it. The passage ends with a hopeful statement that Paul desires to attain to the resurrection. That is always Paul’s hope, and it is possible since he is found justified IN the risen Lord. His identity determines his manner of life today and his destiny tomorrow. No wonder he is willing to call all loss to gain Jesus and his resurrection.

Conclusion:

1. Seriously evaluate your sense of identity. Are you counting on your own works and righteousness for your life? You will only find true fulfillment as you count all loss to gain Christ. Justification is a work of God accessed by faith. The call today is to come to Jesus by faith for your identity change. For believers, it is to live like who we are!

2. Remember, the core of your identity is not performance-based but position-based. Stop trying to make life revolve around promotions at work, marriage, perfect parenting and kids, and perfectionist expectations of yourself. Believers are declared righteousness, and let's live like it.

3. Be prepared for suffering. Dr. Piper helped us with that during his sermon. That is tough stuff, but we can endure suffering if our real identity is in Jesus, not in our health, wealth, or position.

Here is a prayer attributed to St. Patrick. It is called the breastplate, from Eph. 6:14, where Paul talks about the "breast plate of righteousness." What a beautiful way to see ourselves in Jesus:

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ in breadth, Christ in length, Christ in height,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

4. Get an eternal perspective. Find joy in the future resurrection.

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