

Our Identity in Christ

Richard Dawson

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John 15¹⁻¹¹ Romans 6¹⁻¹¹

Identity: Over the last two weeks I've been

focusing on our identity and I've pointed out how important our identities are to us.

Identities give us a place in the context in which we live so they help us relate to those around us.

Furthermore as they do this they contribute enormously to our sense of self-worth and self-understanding.

Finally they give us a sense of purpose and of vision since when we can see ourselves as something we provide ourselves with a platform and a foundation from which we can pursue a life direction.

The question is, where do we get our identity from and, in answer to this, I went on to suggest we look to God because

1. God created us 2. God loves us and 3. The future is in God's hands.

Last week I suggested that much of our identity lies in the

Name God gives for us and because of this we have to be very

carefully about the names we call ourselves and about calling others by certain things. I pointed out also how important names were to God and that the Spirit uses names to do certain things in our life. He uses names to

1. Separate us from our past
2. To direct us towards a new future and
3. To help us focus on Him.

When God's calls us by name He calls us first to '**believe Him**' that is to believe the Name He gives to us over and above names we may have given ourselves and especially over and above the names others may call us.

Journey: However this new name doesn't come to us in the same way our old names have. Those names were the result of a single word – a naming act by our parents or by others. God's name comes to us over time and through a journey and that journey is the journey of getting to know God and learning recognise His voice.

In Christ: In short, it's through a relationship with Christ that we discover who we are so our identities begin as Paul puts it... 'in Christ'. But there is a problem...

The problem with identity from a Christian point of view is twofold.

1. We cannot trust our own point of view because we're inclined either to overstate who we are or, more commonly, to understate it. So our point of view is to be suspected and, frankly, alongside that – everyone else's'. Have a look at this... [video]
2. The true source of our identity is God but sin has distorted that relationship so the One trustworthy source of information about ourselves is now greatly obscured. The result in regard to self-knowledge is something Paul reflects on in his first letter to the Corinthians –

¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor 13v12)

So we see dimly and we are far from God... what's the key to knowing our name and to discovering our identity? Again I want to return to those words 'in Christ.'

In Christ?

Roms 6 is a passage where Paul attempts to unpack the idea of being 'in Christ' and in it we find one clear and dominant theme which is the idea of sharing Christ's death that we might share His life.

¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Roms 6)

1. Being 'in Christ' = dead to sin, alive in Christ... dead to the old, alive to the new... how?

Note: 2 fold action...

= 1. dead to sin – in Christ AND 2. alive to God – in Christ.

2. Dead and Alive/ Dead and Alive – this is theme for being in Christ and it means basically that we are dead to some things and alive to others – that there's a constant live issue before us in regard to what we consider to be a part of our lives/identity and what we don't!

Process: So identity 'in Christ' doesn't refer to some new 'persona' that we suddenly become or put on – rather, it refers to a process we go through every day sorting out what's us and what isn't.

Choice: So identity is about choice and I believe the NT is clear about this. We need to choose God's new identity and one way of doing this is to die to some things and another way is to become alive to other things. To say 'No' to some things and 'Yes' to others.

It's not rocket science but it's also not easy.

[**Leaving Rugby:** Me – choosing to leave Rugby – huge for me because I loved it but I really felt God saying leave it – so I did. Left room for a whole new ministry to young people.]

Corporate Dimension: It's also not something we can often do simply by ourselves. When Jesus speaks about being 'in the vine' He's clearly speaking about maintaining our connection with God through Him. And we need to realise that this is our true source of strength. But there is an oft missed implication of this 'being in Christ' which we should note and it this...

When we're connected to the vine we're also connected to all the other branches!

Frankly we need others around us supporting us and strengthening us so there's a corporate aspect to this.

[I resisted going into ministry for quite some time until the weight of people saying to me that I should train became quite convincing.]

Finally let's reflect for a moment on how we feel about this dying and coming to life again dynamic within.

Dying: Now most of us feel pretty stink about dying so there's no real wonder there that we might struggle to die

to some things. Again the corporate dimension of Christian life should help us. We need others and they needs us and often we can defeat something only with the help of others.

Coming Alive: But how many of us know that we can have the same struggle to become alive to something Christ has for us? How many of us realise that to wake up to Christ's new name we often have to take on tasks that we simply don't want to do; that we have to open our hearts to people and situations which simply aren't attractive and don't push our buttons at all.

[change of direction in study]

God is in the business of helping us to know our true identities and he does this by taking on a journey of discovery. That journey is always one of death and resurrection/ of giving away and of receiving/ of turning from and turning towards. How many of us a willing to open our hearts and lives to this journey – to give ourselves to it?

If you are please pray with me...

AMEN