



Your PERSONAL Identity in Christ

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Personal Identity

This article, which deals with the subject of “personal identity”, is an excerpt from the book [*“Wrestling for the Blessing”*](#), in which I endeavored to show that the scriptures reveal God’s desire to offer **each individual in Christ a unique expression of their personal identity**. This was clearly initiated in the Garden, lost through the Fall, restored *collectively* to the people of God in the Old Covenant, but restored on *an individual basis* for each person in Christ. Further, the *personal* application of this redemption – that is, the “working out your *own* salvation in fear and trembling”, is contingent upon the individual *“personalizing”* the promised blessing.

I think my simple definition of “personal identity” will basically coincide with the definitions given in contemporary philosophy or psychology. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the opening statement of the subject says: “Personal identity deals with questions that arise about ourselves by virtue of our being people (or, as lawyers and philosophers like to say, persons).”¹ The article then goes on to survey the main questions of “personal identity”, the answers to which define our “personal identities”. The questions in the article are basically the same ones I discuss in this message:

¹ *Personal Identity*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2010):
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/>

- ❖ Who am I?
- ❖ What am I to do?
- ❖ Where do I belong?
- ❖ Who do I belong with?

I'll go through those questions again, extending them to be a bit more definitive:

- ❖ Who am I? i.e. What is my self-image?
- ❖ What am I to do? i.e. What is my purpose in life?
- ❖ Where do I belong? i.e. Where or what is that place or context in which I will be able to freely pursue what I am supposed to be and do?
- ❖ Who do I belong with? i.e. Together with what other people can I pursue what I am supposed to be and do?

Man-Made or God-Given ?

In non-biblical worldviews, a person chooses his own identity and makes his choices in the context of situations and experiences that have been randomly imposed by life and other people. So, according to these worldviews, a person forms his own personal identity in response to “nature and nurture”. This is only natural. We have all done this, because before we come to Christ, we really have no other option available to us. By choice, we are living independently of God, and are on our own, doing our best to

respond to what life throws at us, much of which is the result of our own decisions and actions. And so, we piece together some sort of a persona which we have drawn from others in the world; and we are either happy or unhappy with the results.

In the Biblical Worldview, answers to the questions about personal identity were given to Humanity by God right from the beginning of creation – the answers to the questions are recorded in the early chapters of the Book of Genesis. While the Biblical Worldview upholds a person’s freedom of choice, it also sees a not-so-random *frame of reference in which those choices can be made, namely the will of God revealed in the Scripture and revealed by the Holy Spirit*. This is to say that a person can know and choose to accept God’s revelation regarding one’s personal identity. If we abide in Christ, we live dependent upon God. If we are “children of God”, we can receive the “our inheritance in Christ”, part of which is the **“blessing of the Father” – our personal identity**. If we are “sons of God”, we can be “led by the Spirit of God”, as He causes all things that life has thrown at us, even the results of our own choices, “to work together for good to conform us back to the image of His Son”, and to walk in our God-given calling.² These things frame the personal identity of everyone who is in Christ.

² Romans 8:15-17, 27-30

The Father's Blessing

I use the phrase, “The Father’s Blessing” to represent the imparting of one’s personal identity. The basic archetype is the laying on of the father’s hands and pronouncing of a blessing.³ This can be a decisive moment defining one’s life and ministry. It can be public, or probably more often, private, but always an intensely personal experience between an individual and God. In [*“Wrestling for the Blessing”*](#), we look specifically at the life of Jacob, who *“wrestled for the blessing”*. It is pictured differently for others in the Old and New Testament scriptures. For example, with David, the blessing of his personal identity was given with the anointing to be king.⁴ For the prophet Elisha, it was given with the receiving of Elijah’s cloak as a mantle.⁵ For the apostle Paul, it was given through an encounter with the living Christ on the road to Damascus.⁶ But because Jesus is the “Pattern Son”, I would like to point to an event in His life on earth which portrays the significance of The Father’s Blessing to impart personal identity. And that event was His baptism:

³ The “Laying on of Hands” is a foundational doctrine of Christ, which is often overlooked. Hebrews 6:1-2. In many ways, this message essentially deals with the truths and realities contained in the doctrine of the Laying on of Hands. Recommended reading: *Laying the Foundation* by James Lee Beall. The concept of the father pronouncing blessings over his children has also by and large fallen into obscurity in the Western world. Recommended reading: *The Blessing* by Gary Smalley & John Trent. e.g., Abraham blesses Isaac: Genesis 25; Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau: Genesis 27; Jacob blesses his 12 sons: Genesis 49.

⁴ 1 Samuel 16:12-13 (2 Samuel 2:1-7); 2 Samuel 23:1-7

⁵ 1 Kings 19:19-21

⁶ Acts 9:3-20

“⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”⁷

This simple but powerful statement by the Father God equipped Jesus for the temptation in the wilderness which was to immediately follow; and equipped Him for the public launch of His mission and ministry as God’s Anointed One.⁸ Without this affirmation and assurance, “sin will be crouching at the door”⁹ and we will fail the temptation in the wilderness. Without this affirmation and assurance, we will get wiped out in public witness and ministry.

Assurance

As the apostle Paul prayed, each one of us absolutely needs the personal faith and experience of being *“strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”¹⁰*

⁷ Mark 1:9-11; also, Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:31-34.

⁸ Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4.

⁹ Genesis 4:7

¹⁰ Ephesians 3:16-19

Each one of us absolutely needs the personal faith and experience of having a strong inner conviction that as *“sons in the Son”* we each have an inheritance, part of which is a personal identity which guides our life and ministry as it did for the Man Jesus of Nazareth. Such assurance only comes through faith and experience. Such assurance, although absolutely necessary, is rare and lacking in most Christians, young and old, even in those who serve as church leaders. In fact, many who head up prominent ministries have an assurance in their personal identities that is based on their outward success, rather than their inner man being “rooted and grounded in (God’s) love”. If for whatever reason the outward success were to be threatened or removed, they would crumble. Authenticity is playing to an audience of One.

Collective or Personal ?

At this point, I’d like to state some propositions: Whereas in the non-biblical worldviews, “existence precedes essence”,¹¹ in the Biblical Worldview, which holds that people are created in the image of God, “essence precedes existence” – these are two totally opposite ways of living life. The non-biblical worldview of personal identity is essentially the perspective of fallen Humanity. The Biblical Worldview offers the redemption from the Fall of our personal identity. In the original creation, through His revealed will,

¹¹ A phrase used by phenomenological and existentialist philosophers.

God provided answers for the questions of personal identity. Under the Old Covenant, through His revealed will, God began to establish a “collective” identity for His people – those who belong to Him. Under the New Covenant, through His revealed will in the scriptures and by the Holy Spirit, God offers a redeemed *“personal” identity for each individual.*

The Lord had Jeremiah prophesy the following about the New Covenant:

²⁹ “In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ ³⁰ But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. ³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart, I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”¹²

So, we see that God’s ultimate intention is that both judgment of sin and redemption from sin would no longer be on *a collective basis*, as it had been

¹² Jeremiah 31:29-34

under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, the application would be also on *an individual basis*. To say that the restoration of the image of God and redemption of the identity of God's people applies only collectively but does not have a personal application for the individual, is to hold a curious theology which sees Christ's work as incomplete, a partial atonement, a covenant which does not embrace the whole of life, failing to secure our full Identity in Christ.

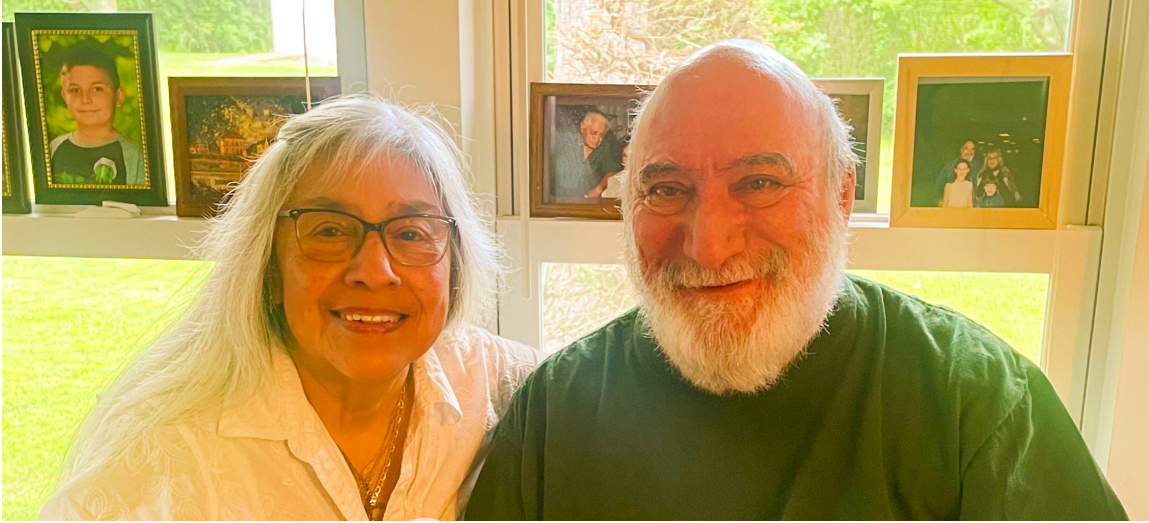
In fact, personalized blessings were also a norm in the Old Testament: Abraham blessed Isaac in Genesis 25; Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in Genesis 27; and Jacob blessed his twelve sons in Genesis 49, and two grandsons in Genesis 48 – each receiving a personalized blessing which defined their life and calling.

Those who have not yet found their personal identity have only two other options available – both of which fall short of authenticity: Those who haven't yet found their personal identity tend to identify solely with a collective. In the world, various collective identities can be adopted which primarily have to do with "types" and "styles" - that is, styles of dress – formal or informal, preferred types of entertainment, hobbies and pastimes, fans of certain styles of music, or particular sports, etc. These people may be authentic in their preferences, but their identities have not gone beyond the collective to the personal. In the Church, various collective identities can be worn which, again, primarily have to do with types and styles - types of

theology – conservative or progressive, styles of community fellowship - conventional or loose, types of church ministries – majoring on outreach or upreach, styles of worship - traditional or contemporary. Again, these people may be authentic in their preferences, but their identities often do not extend beyond the collective to the personal.

The other option for those who have not yet found their personal identity is a type of “hero worship” – that is, identify with the personal identity of someone else. In the world, people identify themselves as fans of particular rock stars or sports stars, etc. In the Church, people identify themselves as followers of particular pastors and teachers, etc. The unspoken – or maybe even unconscious – implication is: *“These people are esteemed and respected; I follow them; therefore, I am esteemed and respected.”* The personal identities of these people may or may not deserve esteem and respect; but that’s *their* personal identity, not *yours*. God created them for that; why are you here? As Oscar Wilde said: *“Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.”*

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... <https://www.AtChristsTable.org>

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of Biblical Christianity

with a view to

REVELATION of Christ

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