

Identity I (paragraph format)

By Rene P. Brown

As believers, it is crucial that we understand who we are in Christ. Generally speaking, we tend to live up to what we perceive as our identity or our characteristics. For example, if we teach our children they are winners, that they are intelligent, that they can overcome, then they will tend to live up to that as they believe that is their “natural” identity. They will tend to do well in school, overcome deficiencies in learning, and tend to succeed in life. On the other hand, if we continually call them stupid, lazy, losers, and failures, they will live up to that as they think that is who they are. It will be their perception of themselves.

Now what about our identity in the spiritual realm? It is vital that we know our true identity spiritually also as we will tend to live up to what we perceive ourselves to be. If we see ourselves as sinners, it will be difficult if not impossible to overcome sin in our lives. We will not be surprised when we sin and may even excuse our sins on the basis that we are sinners. Wrong understanding of our identity in Christ will cause undue harm to our walk with the Lord Jesus.

First, let us consider the identity of unbelievers. Those who do not believe and trust in Jesus Christ still have the nature of their forefather Adam. All humanity has inherited Adam’s sin nature except for our Lord Jesus who was uniquely conceived by the Holy Spirit of God. In the scriptures the unbeliever is called “sinner” as in Rom. 3:7 (RSV) "But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?" Also 1 Pet 4:18 (NKJV) Now “IF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IS SCARCELY SAVED, WHERE WILL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?” The unbeliever is not a sinner because he sins but rather because he has inherited the sin nature of his forefather Adam. Rom. 5:19 (NKJV) “For as by one man's [Adam’s] disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's [Christ’s] obedience many will be made righteous.” In this scripture in Romans, we see that Adam’s disobedience [sin] caused others to be sinners. All of mankind have inherited the sin nature of Adam, our forefather. No one with this sin nature can have a relationship with God. It must first be removed.

We also see that the unbeliever is called “lost” in scripture as in Luke 19:10 (RSV) "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” Lost in the spiritual sense means separated from God. If this identity is not changed, they will remain lost or separated from God for all eternity. One of the horrors of hell is the separation of the lost from God. After death it will be obvious what the sinner could have had by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. True repentance is turning to and trusting in Christ for eternal life and for forgiveness of all our sins. (Rev 1:5 RSV) "and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rom 5:9 RSV) “Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." (Eph 1:7 RSV) "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses [sins], according to the riches of his grace"

The unbeliever is also dead in sins and trespasses just as his forefather Adam: Gen 2:17 (NKJV) "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Eph 2:5 (NKJV) “even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)," and Col 2:13 (RSV) "And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses," The dead in these scriptures are those who have dead spirits which means their spirit is separated from God. When Adam sinned, his spirit was separated from God and he thus "died". (Obviously, neither

Adam's body nor soul died so it must have been his spirit that died - was separated from God.) Rom 5:12 NKJV "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned;"

Now let us look to the identity of those who believe in Jesus Christ [that is, those who completely trust in His sacrificial death for the forgiveness of their sins, His burial and His resurrection and who have received His eternal life]. First, we find that they are "the righteousness of God" in 2 Cor 5:21 (RSV) "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (See also Romans 5:19 above.) "The believer is "holy and beloved" of God as in Colossians 3:12 (RSV) "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience," So right now, in their present state and situation, He calls God's chosen ones [believers] "holy". Now we know that all of mankind sins - both unbeliever and believer alike. No one can deny that. And yet we find the Lord describing His chosen ones as "holy". So the Lord says you are holy - not will be holy (in the future) - but holy now - in this life.

We find in Colossians that we are complete in Him: Colossians 2: 10 (NKJV) "and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." The word for complete in the Greek text also can be read "perfect". Heb 10:10 (NKJV) "By that will we have been sanctified [made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." So Hebrews 10 confirms that we have been made holy - not will be holy someday but have already been made holy.

We are called blameless in Col 1:22 (NKJV) "in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight;" In the New Testament, believers are referred to as "saints" some 62 times and not referred to as "sinners". "Sinners" are always those who have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ.

In the previous paragraphs, we have described two identities: The unbeliever is identified as a "sinner" and the believer is identified as "saint". When do we achieve these identities?

First, we need to understand that our identity is present tense, that is, it is operative right now and not in some future time. It is not some identity that becomes operative in heaven after we die and go to be with the Lord Jesus. In other words, it is not something achieved in heaven or hell. If our identity is "sinner", we are a sinner right now and will be a sinner so long as we are "in Adam" and without Christ. If we are a believer, saved and in Christ, our identity is "believer" and "saint" - right now - and will be in the future. Believers in Christ, those who have truly trusted in Him for salvation, are immediately re-born in their spirits when they believe - not at some future time or at baptism but immediately.

John 3:3 (NKJV) "Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The spirit of the new believer is made alive - immediately upon believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus for eternal life. Thus your spirit is connected to God - now. (We will see more about our new nature in Christ in further paragraphs below.) In Adam our spirit became dead and dead refers to separation (in this case, separation from God). For example, what we call natural death is separation from this realm or this world.

When we believe, we also become sons: Gal 3:26 (RSV) "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. "This means we have been re-born into God's family. We are sons immediately upon our re-birth in Christ Jesus - not mature sons, perhaps, but sons none-the-less. God's great purpose is being fulfilled: that He would have a family with many sons [sons is not meant in a masculine sense but includes females and males just as the term, "bride of Christ" includes male and females].

It is put another way in 1Pet 1:23 (NKJV) "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,". This Seed is Jesus Christ and is incorruptible. Our spirits have taken on eternity through the eternal Life, that is, Jesus who now lives and abides in our spirits forevermore. Our spirits are redeemed and incorruptible. Our bodies are not redeemed as yet, and we still struggle in this visible realm. Our souls are still affected by Satan's attacks and by his temptation for us to sin. But in our spirits, the eternal Life of Jesus Christ dwells therein and is not subject to Satan's attacks anymore. In the unseen, eternal realm, where our spirits dwell, we have been born of incorruptible seed.

We are holy - immediately. 1Cor 3: 17 (RSV) "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." 1Pet 1: 16 (RSV) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy". There is only one way to become holy and that is to partake of Christ's holiness. All our righteousness and holiness is of Him and none of ourselves. We are not holy and righteous because of anything we have done, but it has been imputed to us because of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. In God's eyes, we are now beloved as we see in Eph. 5: 1 (RSV) "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." God has also cleansed us as in Eph 5:26, 27 (RSV) "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed [Note: this is past tense] her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. " From an identity standpoint, the church is already without spot or wrinkle in the unseen or eternal realm even though its members continue to sin in this seen or temporal realm. We should begin to see ourselves as God sees us and not as we see ourselves. He sees us through the lens of Jesus' righteousness because we are "in Christ." It's time to stop disagreeing with God and begin agreeing with His word and what He says about us. Is our view more important than His view? Not hardly!

How is this new identity achieved? Very simply it comes by believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus. John 6:29 (RSV) "Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'" When we believe in the Lord Jesus, that is, when we come to truly trust Him for our salvation from sin, trust Him to give us eternal life, trust Him to take us to be with Him when we pass from this life, we have repented because repent means to stop going the way you are going (that is, the way of the world) and go another way, the way of God. So when we turn from our way to His way we have fulfilled what Peter says about repent in Acts: Acts 2:38 (RSV) "And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

When a person turns from his life now and turns to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, he indeed has repented, has turned around and is now going another direction in life. In doing this we also begin to let go of our former ways of doing things that go against the Lord and His word, and we begin to take on the character of Jesus as we walk out our salvation. Baptism makes a statement to the world and to God that we have become separated from the world and its ways.

Romans also tells us to believe and confess Jesus as Lord: Romans 10:9 (RSV) "because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Again it tells us to believe. When we truly believe, it becomes like a fire shut up in our bones as Ezekiel says, and we cannot help but tell others.

What happened in you and to you? First, there is forgiveness of sins. Mat 26:28 (RSV) "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Acts 22:16 (RSV) "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name". What sins

were forgiven? What sins is the scripture referring to? Since Jesus said this 2,000 years ago, and He was speaking about our sins, He must have been referring to all our sins. To Him, at that time, all our sins were future. So when we believe, it is not just our past sins that Jesus' blood removes but all sins for all time. This means even the sins which are yet future to us today. Many believe that Jesus' statement only refers to those sins which were past when we believed on His name and were saved. But if we think through this carefully we will see that He was referring to all the sins of someone who comes to believe in Him. All their sins are washed away by His blood of the covenant. Acts 10:43 (RSV) "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Now what is your new condition according to God's word? In 1Cor 6: 11 (RSV) we read the following: "And such were some of you. But you were washed [by His blood], you were sanctified, you were justified [Note: all verbs are past tense] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. "To be sanctified" means to be made holy! "To be justified" is to be made right before God. God has made provision for your sins that He might now have a relationship with you.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he gives us the gospel of Jesus Christ in a few brief lines. Here is the gospel in all its simplicity: 1Cor 15:3, 4 (RSV) "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures," ⁴"that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures," Put very simply, this is the good news that Jesus died for our sins but was resurrected. He could have gone on to say that in the resurrection we have the assurance of eternal life. For when He died, we died, and when He was resurrected, we were resurrected to eternal life. Rom 6:6 (NKJV) "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." That is how Jesus took care of our sin. The old man, who had the character or nature of Adam, was crucified along with Jesus. Once and for all, the old man within us died. He is no longer part of our problem! When we sin, it is not because the old man is still in there somewhere. He was put to death when Jesus was, and he is dead and gone.

Some people feel like their old man is still around causing them to sin but that does not agree with scripture. Paul again mentions this in Gal 2:20 NKJV "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul continues in Romans 6:7, 8 (NKJV) "For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him," Col 3:3 (NKJV) "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." So long as we believe we still have the "old man" within us with all his sinful character, we will never come to know our true identity in Christ Jesus.

Now it is difficult to see how we might have died when Jesus died. We must remember that in eternity where our spirit dwells, there is no time dimension. God exists outside of time which He created. Time cannot contain our God. When God looks at our situation, we exist alongside Jesus in the same picture so to speak. So in God's realm where there is no time, we can be and were crucified when Christ was.

If this is difficult for you, try to think of God's view from above and outside of time as a picture and in that picture are all the things that ever happened or ever will happen. In that picture, Jesus is born, Jesus preaches, Jesus dies on the cross. And right there in Christ on the cross is you - dying when He dies. On Him is all the sins of the whole world. That is the great pain of the cross - Him bearing all the sins of mankind of all time. It's very much like some of the huge paintings we see in European art galleries where painters of old painted many things going on at the same time in the same picture. That's how eternity is - no time dimension.

We have been made alive. After the old man is put to death on the cross, we have a new man alive in Christ. Eph 2:1 (RSV) "And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins" Even as Jesus rose from the grave, so we have been made alive also. Jesus has given us Life - actually it is His Life that has come into us. His Life is eternal so we now have Eternal Life within us. He is Eternal Life. Remember that we are principally spirit beings because we were created in the image of God who is Spirit.

One great mistake we make is not seeing ourselves as spirits. Instead we see our bodies as the real us, and yet, this is not at all the eternal part of us. Our bodies are decaying and will someday be restored, renewed by God. But our spirits are already eternal. They will never pass away. Man is first of all, a spirit. Secondly, Genesis 2:7, he is a living soul which lives in a body which the Lord created.

One tragedy for mankind from the fall in the Garden of Eden is that every human being now inherits the nature of his forefather Adam. Romans 5:12 (NKJV) tells us, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, [This refers to Adam.] and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned;"... Though Adam did not die physically for about 900 years, he died spiritually the day he sinned just as God said he would. Since Adam walked around for 900 years, and he walked and talked and had a personality (a soul), it is obvious that neither his body nor his soul died. The part of him that died was that part made in the image of God: his spirit. To die in this context means to be separated from your surroundings. He was now separated from God and no longer had communion with him. Unwittingly, he had turned traitor and become a slave of Satan, the god of this world. He now had a sin nature though the word does not say it exactly like that.

That which allowed Adam to have a relationship with God was dead towards God and alive in Satan in effect. The nature of Adam was now the nature of sin. Men with the nature of Adam do not need to decide to sin. They sin as a matter of their nature. Eph 2:3 (NKJV) "among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath just as the others." They do not have to choose to sin, it is their nature.

Dogs bark because it is their nature. Barking does not make a dog a dog. If cats made barking sounds, they would still be cats because that is the nature God gave them. Lost men sin because it is their nature. No decision to sin is necessary. They have inherited this from their forefather Adam.

It is this sin nature that makes them children of wrath (meaning the wrath of God). Men go to hell primarily because of their sin nature, not because of sins. So long as we are in Adam - with a sin nature, we are consigned to hell because we are in the kingdom of darkness or kingdom of Satan. Only in Christ do we have eternal life because we have been transferred to the kingdom of light. Col 1:13 (RSV) "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,"

When we turn from the world to Christ and believe that He has died for our sins and been resurrected that we might have eternal life, we are born again or born "from above". We become partakers of His nature since His Life has entered into our spirits and given them life. 2Pet 1:4 (NKJV) "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Our spirit is made alive in Him. Our spirit is indwelt by God Himself, and thus we are partakers of His nature. Let me repeat that: We are partakers of His divine nature!

One wonderful blessing of having the nature of God within us is that we can choose not to sin. Rom. 6: 14 (NKJV) "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

So now we can see that through this marvelous transformation of our spirits from death to life, we have taken on an entirely new identity. In going from the kingdom of darkness and Satan to the kingdom of light and of Christ, we have gone from the identity of “sinner” to the identity of “saint”. The word of God assures us of this very thing.

Do saints sin? Indeed they do! The apparent contradictions we find in 1John can be understood in this light. Once we are born again and made alive in Christ and taken on the divine nature by Christ’s life coming into us, our spirits can no longer sin because the old sin nature of Adam is dead and gone. 1John 3:9 (RSV) “No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” John is speaking here of our spirit man that once made alive in Christ, cannot sin anymore because we now have the very nature of God.

However, it is plain that we do sin. So what is the explanation? Has God given us two natures, one good and one evil as some teach? **Not at all!** We only have one nature and that nature has the Spirit of God dwelling therein - in our spirits. God cannot or will not co-exist with evil, and we are told we are a holy temple of God. Our spirits are now holy and righteous and complete in Him. So how can we still sin? This is a subject for another teaching, but, in brief, we still have the old habits imprinted on our brains.

There is still something Paul calls “the flesh” in Romans and also something he calls “sin which dwells in us”. This “flesh” and this entity or personality he calls “sin that dwells in us” gives access to the devil to entice us in our thought life to sin. It does not originate in our spirits any longer but in our soul man. We do not have to sin, but, indeed, we can sin in our soul and body. It all begins with a thought, and it is here that we can defeat Satan by “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” 2Cor. 10:5.

So though we can still sin in our soul and body, we do not have to because we have an entirely new identity in Christ. That identity according to our new born, new alive spirit in Christ is that of “saint”. So though we have “sins” in our life, it is no longer who we are. The old man is dead and gone, never to rise again. The old man really, truly, actually, was crucified and died with Jesus. This is not something “positional” or “legal”. It really happened in the spirit realm, and in that realm, we are alive in Christ forevermore.

Most conservative theologians and teachers cannot bring themselves to say that any of the word is wrong or that it did not happen. But they do not know what to do with Paul’s statements that we “died”, that we were “crucified with Jesus”, etc. And yet, they do not believe that it really happened as they look at circumstances. They look at the temporal realm, and of course it could not happen in the temporal realm. No, it is not just some “positional” or “legal” truth. It is something that happened in the eternal, spiritual realm which the word of God assures us is more real than the temporal or natural realm which we can engage with our five senses of touch, smell, feel, hearing and seeing.

Until we begin to walk in our true identity, we will continue to buy into Satan’s lie about who we are, what we are. When we come to see that we really are made holy, righteous and complete in Christ, and that we have a new, sinless spirit that is the dwelling place for God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), we can begin to defeat Satan in the power of God. When we see who we really are in Christ, and that we have a completely new nature in Him, we can begin to walk in victory over sin. It will bring us to an entirely new relationship in Christ.

*******End of Lesson*******