

The Quest for Identity

by Douglas Weaver

A phenomenon which consistently occurs in those who are beginning their journey with God outside the camp is the sense of a loss of identity. It can be very disconcerting at first as God systematically removes the religious landmarks that once gave us a sense of belonging, providing nothing as a replacement - or so it seems.

There are often questions such as, "Where do I fit in?", or "How do I exercise my giftings?", or "How do I relate to God now?". For those of you reading this article who either have or are now experiencing this phenomenon be comforted in knowing you are not alone. It is a natural by-product of being detached from a system that has neatly prescribed definitions for every member of the body. A religious system based upon the reformation of Adam, where purpose and position are determined by a change of mind and lifestyle rather than an exchange of life-source.

For the period of time during which we wandered in that wilderness called modern Christianity, who we were was defined by activity and accomplishment. Titles, callings and visions became the expression of our pursuit of and position in God. It is then no small surprise that upon exiting the system we would experience a loss regarding self-definition, for our previous definition was inextricably bound to the system. Our life supply was not being found in Christ, but in the soulish stirrings of common agreement and the noble aspiration of something called "purpose".

The perceived immediate need then is to reestablish a sense of identity - to catch ourselves from this free fall and once again establish landmarks. Unfortunately this effort subsequently sets us on the path of defining a new system based on new principles through which we define a new identity. An identity which is typically centered around the proclamation of our new or "reformed" system. And so the trap is reset. Given time and the right set of circumstances a new perversion of Christianity will arise - a new camp outside the camp from which God will again call people out. A new manifestation of Christian religion which has the common foundational element of fear. Fear of losing one's identity. Of being swallowed in ambiguity. That most basic of fears--the fear of death.

So then how does one escape the trap and rediscover their identity? Simple - you must die. I don't mean the pedantic "death to self" ideal propagated in messages that encourage you to defer to your brother when deciding what movie to see. Rather the death Paul is speaking of in Philippians when he speaks of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death. You see, when God calls you outside the camp the first leg of the journey leads to Mount Moriah. The place where everything you have given birth to must die, even if it is the promise of God. Your ministry, your vision, your identity, your security - In fact, what-so-ever-things were gain to you - every self-generated element of your person that defined your access to and position in God - must be counted loss so that you might gain Christ. And be found righteous in Him; not by the good meaning, God-fearing, noble expressions of your human nature, but by the true righteousness which issues forth from His life. For as Jesus said, if you would find your life you must first lose it. But continuing to find your life by subscribing to the latest so-called "move of God" will only cause you to eventually lose it. You see Jesus has not drawn you outside the camp to reform, revive, renew or restore you - rather He seeks to kill you. Or better said, He is drawing you into a deeper application of His cross so that a more true manifestation of His person can be expressed through you. For it is only His life that matters.

Now let's examine three portions of Paul's letters beginning with Philippians 3:7-21.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. More than that I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish that I might gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become mature (perfect), but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us then, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Now I realize that is a long passage but it is imperative that we examine Paul's continuing thought regarding the God's purpose for the individual believer, for in seeing clearly His purpose we are brought to rest regarding our own purpose and subsequent identity. So then pay close attention to the second part of vs. 12: "...but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." It is clear that Paul understands he has been apprehended by Christ for a specific purpose, and he is diligently pursuing that purpose. In fact, in vs. 14 he calls it "...the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." So then what is the purpose, the goal, the prize? He tells us in verse 11, "...in order that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead." And this, brethren, is a matter of great importance.

First let's establish that all humanity will raise from the dead. Some to everlasting punishment and some to everlasting life. So then what does Paul mean when he suggests that resurrection is something to be attained? I submit to you that Paul is not speaking of a bodily resurrection here but of walking in the reality of resurrection before our physical death. In fact the Greek clearly bears this out in the usage of *katantao* which means to arrive at. As W. E. Vine says, "Not the physical resurrection assured all believers, but the present life identification with Christ in His resurrection." But the key which is generally avoided is found in verse 10: "...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." Many desire to walk in the power of His resurrection, but few accept the fellowship of His sufferings, let alone being conformed to His death.

In fact, the modern gospel would suggest that resurrection power can be obtained almost quid pro quo for "Jesus died so I don't have to." Nothing could be further from the truth. Even Hebrews tells us "...it is appointed to man once to die and then comes the judgment." What Jesus did was provide for us a death that was pure, to which we could become identified through faith in Him and thereby incur His judgment rather than our own. Or as Paul said in vs. 9: "...and be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own derived from Law, but that which is through faith in Christ." And in order to walk this way we must be willing to suffer the loss of whatever things were gain to us, that which added value, purpose, meaning or identity in order to gain our true identity.

So we see that first of all our Adamic identity must be terminated. It must be rendered dead by the cross. And not just our "bad" qualities, rather more importantly our "good" ones. For nothing perverts and diverts the purpose of God more than our good intentioned, noble, god-fearing attempts to follow Jesus. Many have found their identity in being a Pastor, missionary, intercessor or other such Christian pursuit. And in so doing have never laid hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of them. They are lost in the wilderness of "Christian Service", having by-passed the cross to which they were called. As Paul said in vs. 18: "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ...who set their minds on earthly things."

In my personal journey coming outside the camp I can testify that when the season of exodus came many brethren responded to the wind of the Spirit. Deep down inside they could sense God stirring and knew He was speaking into our midst. As we gathered to pray and seek Him some of us caught a glimpse of Christ in a far greater dimension than ever before and set out on the journey to apprehend Him. Others, having seen the price of the cross, began justifying their current position so as not to lose it. Their identity was so tightly woven into the fabric of their "Christian Service" that they could not bear the measure of unraveling it would take to become unentangled. As one brother has said, "The degree to which Babylon profits you is directly proportional to the pain of coming out."

Now the season has passed and God has mercifully propelled several of us back on the journey of apprehending Christ. Those who refused to come out are more deeply entrenched than ever having rejected the killing power of the cross, but thanks be to

God that as long as the earth remains, so will the seasons thereof! My exhortation to you then is to reject the fleshly compulsion to regain your footing. If you would walk in the power of His resurrection you must first be conformed to His death. Remember that our Lord Jesus was stripped of His identity and took the form of a servant. He was forsaken of God while on the cross and left to die. More than any other, Jesus walked by faith, believing that God would raise Him up according to the promise, and submitted Himself to death that He might attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Now He is glorified bodily as we will also be someday for He "...will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory...". But for now we can walk in the reality of His resurrection, being transformed into His image, which is the very purpose of His laying hold of us in the first place. Now let's look at Colossians 3:1-4: Therefore if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the God. Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with Him in glory. It is here that we find peace and rest regarding the lose of identity. Having come to the cross and being conformed to His death we touch the reality of His resurrection.

In His resurrection we touch His life for He has become our life since we are dead. And when Christ, who is our life, is revealed through us then who we truly are is finally revealed. Our true identity, our unique expression in the earth, is only found when Christ is revealed through us. For though He has sought to kill us by way of His cross, He has raised us to newness of life such that we can express through our humanity a unique manifestation of His person. In fact it is for this very purpose that we were laid hold of by Christ - that we might, by being conformed to His death, attain to the reality of our created purpose in His resurrection. My brethren this is a great mystery - Christ in us the hope of glory. This mystery cannot be found in "church services", evangelism, praise and worship or any other human endeavor. There is no system or method by which to obtain it. No teaching or 3 point sermon can illuminate this truth. Only a lonely cross on a barren hill to which you must go willingly. Embracing His death so that His resurrection life can be manifest through you and when He is revealed, then and only then will you be revealed with Him.

For you see He is our destiny, our purpose and our identity To search for any other is to miss the mark of the prize. I leave you with the chorus of one of my favorite songs by our dear brother Larnelle Harris:

There stands the cost
And like a veil that has been lifted now I see
A glimpse of what the Father has for me
For there beyond the splendor
Lies a vision of the cross
And the Father calls to me
There stands the cost.

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