

Gospel and Identity in Christ — Bride of Christ

Outline

1. Our identity in the world
2. Our identity in Christ
3. Our identity as Bride of Christ
4. The battle between our identity in Christ and the world

1. Identity in the world: Identity is how we view ourselves deep in our hearts. In the world, we measure our identity by our function (what we do), our status (in terms of earnings and work responsibilities), our heritage (family name, caste), and our possessions. But also, we constantly measure our identity compared to other people around us. And then we are troubled by comparisons, fear, rejection and strife. Everyone faces the same problems concerning identity — even communities, nations, and races have identity problems. The result is human misery.

The problem began when our first parents, Adam and Eve, turned away from a loving God to live independently rather than trust God as their Maker. It happened because Satan, a rebellious angel, tempted our first parents, and they listened and became rebellious themselves. We inherited their rebellious spirit, and it deeply affected our hearts. We can't find our way back again. So, sin, death and human misery reign throughout this world. Satan seemed to have won.

But God sent His Son to rescue us. The Son of God became man—Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died for our sins. Then on the third day, He rose again. He **transformed** all who repent and believe in Him by giving them a new heart and spirit (prophesied in Ezk 36:26). Believers in Jesus are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). This is the good news — **the gospel**.

*2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

2. Our Identity in Christ: As part of the new creation, God gave believers in Jesus two essential new spiritual identities or spiritual relationships — children of the Father (John 1:12-13) and Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-32, Rev 19:7-8).

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Eph 5:31-32 "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

But there is a difference between these two spiritual identities in Christ. When it comes to being children of the Father, we are individually a son or daughter of the Father. But when it comes to being the Bride of Christ, the church is **the Bride of Christ** (Eph 5:32 above).

3. Our Identity as the Bride of Christ: Though it is a collective identity, each believer is individually responsible for their actions within the church.

Our responsibility is to honour the Bride of Christ. When we do that, we honour Christ (Psalm 16:2-3). We know our sins are forgiven and have the assurance of salvation. Yet, most believers continue to live in their old worldly identity—causing comparisons, strife and divisions in the church. Then we dishonour the Bride of Christ and we dishonour Christ Himself. **The Church is His bride** that He bought with a great price — by His blood. We must see ourselves the way Jesus sees us—His bride. This is recognising or discerning the body of Christ when we have holy communion. *(1 Cor 11:28-30 Everyone ought to examine themselves before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and many of you have fallen asleep).* To discern means to know what is happening within a local church, especially the relationships with one another. Poor relationships will make the church weak, and bad relationships will hinder healing.

To understand our new identity, we must renew our minds. It means to see Jesus on the cross and seek God by reading His word, praying for revelation of who He is and His ways. On the cross, I see the Almighty Son of God become a man who is holy and humble. He lived that I should have lived but couldn't and then died for my sins instead of me because He loved me. And continuously seeing Jesus on the cross does four vital things to my heart:

- i. It makes me **secure in His love** because Jesus went to the cross because He loves me and tells me to remain in His love. (John 15:9, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love).* The Father loves Jesus infinitely. And Jesus loves us the same—infinitely. On a day when you do good deeds, Jesus doesn't love you more. And on a day when you do evil deeds, Jesus does not love you less. You can be secure in His love.
- ii. It makes me **humble** because I know I am the worst of sinners. Yet, Jesus died for me (*1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst).*
- iii. It makes me **rejoice, even in trials**, because I am reconciled with God eternally (Rom 5:11). Nothing and nobody can separate me from His love (Rom 8:31-39).
- iv. It makes me **want to know Jesus more** and identify myself with His death and resurrection (*Phil 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead)*

4. The battle between our identity in Christ and our identity in the world

The devil rules the world system. Jesus called him the prince of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

The devil wants to make the church (Bride of Christ) weak and ineffective. He makes us measure our identity by what we do with our hands (function) rather than what we do with our hearts (love for our Bridegroom—Jesus). And it appears the devil is succeeding because the church is full of strife and division.

Illustration from an earthly marriage. Generally, in a marriage, the husband works hard as a provider for the family, and the wife works hard as a homemaker. In modern marriages, both husband and wife work as providers, and both share in homemaking. But in all cases, what will make the marriage successful and joyful is love between the husband and wife. In fact, without love, marriage becomes dull and mechanical. So, in principle, the primary focus is what we do with our hearts towards each other, and the secondary focus is what we do with our hands that make the marriage successful.

Similarly, in our bridal relationship with Jesus, our primary focus must be our intimacy with Him (what we do with our hearts). Notice in John 15:9 that Jesus loves us the way the Father loves Him—which is enormous. And He calls us to love him with our whole hearts, soul, mind and strength. Our secondary focus should

be our ministry to the world, which is also important but secondary. Then, when you face trials, criticism, rejection etc. — it will not shake you.

Paul was careful to insist that our primary focus must be our intimacy with Jesus

2 Cor 11:2-3 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

What was the joy set before Jesus that He endured the shame of the cross?

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people).

The joy couldn't be to sit at the Father's right hand because He was there before the foundation of the world. But the joy Jesus sought when He went to the cross and endured its shame was to win a holy bride for Himself.

But why is Jesus called the Lamb on His wedding day? Because the Bride will see Him face to face and know the price He paid for her. She will look deep into His heart to find the cost of ultimate love. And she will love Him also.

Conclusion: My dear friends, our primary identity should be that we are children of God and, collectively, the bride of Christ. In both cases, our primary focus should be what we do with our hearts (love Jesus) rather than what we do with our hands (work for Him). When we get our primary focus right, the secondary focus will be an outcome of our love for Him. Only when we are precise on our primary focus will we recognise the beauty of the church (His bride) and discern the Body of Christ in an honourable manner.

*Psalm 16:2-3 I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing." ³ I say of the **holy people** who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."*

The holy people in Psalm 16 refer to God's covenant people. In the New Testament, they are the Church, His Bride; We delight in her by encouraging, respecting, loving, and meeting the needs of every local church member. Jesus said, *"By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."* (John 13:35)