

## **EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH – Nov. 2022**

Southview Bible Church \* 135 Bennett Ave. \* Council Bluffs, IA. 51503

Phone: (712) 322-5743 E-mail: pastor@southviewbible.org \* Web Site: www.southviewbible.org

### **IDENTITY CRISIS!**

One's IDENTITY involves the most important issue in life! There are multilayered facets to the issue of identity. For example, I identify as an American, as a husband, and as a member of Southview Bible Church, etc. But for a true Christian our core identity is found in Christ and this core identity affects every other aspect of our lives. The Bible breaks down every person's most fundamental identity as either being of the world or in Christ. There is no in-between identity. Either one identifies with the world's system in self-oriented rebellion against God, or in conversion they have come to identify with and align with the truth of Christ as Lord and Savior.

We commonly call believers in Christ "Christians". But that designation is only used three times in the New Testament. (**Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16**). Jesus never used this term and neither did Paul. The most common designation in the NT for God's people in this, the Church age, is that of being "**in Christ**". Paul used it 164 times. The significance of baptism is that it outwardly portrays our union with Christ and the reality that is termed as being "**in Christ**" (cf. Rom. 6:3-5).

There are a number of word-pictures given in the NT Scriptures to help us understand the significance of what it means to be "**in Christ**". Christ spoke of Himself as the vine and His people as the branches. We are organically and vitally connected to Him so much so that Christ said, "**without Me you can do nothing**" (Jn. 15:1-5). The oneness of a husband and wife portray this intimacy of union and the relationship we now have "**in Christ**". After stating the marriage formula of "**the two shall become one flesh**", Paul then in 1 Cor. 6:17 says, "**But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.**" One flesh is close, but one spirit is even closer. Paul also likes to use the head and body analogy. Christ is the head, and we as His people are His body. Head and body are inseparably connected. All of these illustrations give us a sense for the intimacy of union and communion expressed as being "**in Christ**".

As Saul of Tarsus (who after his conversion was called Paul) was persecuting Christians suddenly Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and said, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**" (Acts 9:4). What Jesus said to him illustrates the idea of what it means to be "**in Christ**." Jesus is so identified and connected to His people that to lay a finger on one of them is to lay a finger on Jesus Himself (see Acts 9:1-5). To persecute those "**in Christ**" is to persecute Christ Himself. This speaks of the intimacy of relationship and union with Him found for those who are "**in Christ**".

So, the idea of being in Christ is to be so intimately identified with Him so as to be joined to Him. It speaks of the union and communion we now have with Jesus. It speaks of an intimacy of relationship where we now share in His very life.

Yet today so many professing Christians are compromised in their identity. They profess intimacy with Christ and yet get embroiled in politics; they become absorbed in social activism; they give their heart and soul to "good causes"; their professional occupation becomes lord of their lives; they give themselves to recreation where they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. They identify with Christ but not supremely!

In a host of ways many Christians betray their CORE identity which is that Christ is our all-in-all. Wokeism is all about worldly "tribalism", but Paul said that in Christ, "**there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.**" (Col. 3:11). In Christ, "**there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, Paul could tell slaves to serve heartily as to the Lord, "**knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.**" (Col. 3:24). Our IDENTITY in Christ changes everything. It changes our whole approach to life as we now have a BIGGER cause than self. We now live for Christ as our all-in-all in light of eternity (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Ja. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

**Thot:** When anything other than Christ is our MAIN essential identity, we have become idolaters!

***Earnestly Contending, Pastor Dwight J. Oswald***