



Timeless Truths – Week 3 – The Two Kinds of Righteousness

Connection Group Guide

Opening Thought

Who am I? What is my purpose? These are some of life’s most basic questions. Whether we realize it or not, all of us are seeking answers to these questions. These questions influence our work, our dreams, our aspirations, and the deepest parts ourselves. Every human being craves **identity and purpose** – we want to know **who we are** and **why we matter**. This week, we will tackle these questions with the help of another “Timeless Truth” of the Christian faith.

- Why are identity and purpose so important?
- What are some common ways people search for personal identity or purpose?

The sixteenth-century German reformer, Martin Luther, gives an interesting answer to the questions of identity and purpose in the life of a Christian. In a work entitled, *The Freedom of a Christian*, he says:

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.”

“A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

- What are your reactions to these quotes?

Luther is famous for uttering statements like these. If you’re anything like me, you’re wondering how these words can be true. It is understandable that a person could be either a lord of all or a servant of all, but to be both simultaneously seems impossible. How does this work?

In the Bible

The Vertical Dimension and the First Kind of Righteousness

For Luther, Christians live and interact in two separate dimensions. First, Christians in a vertical dimension before God. In this dimension, Christians have been “made right” or “righteous” by God’s grace alone. They receive Jesus’ own righteousness as a free gift, and it is this righteousness that becomes the foundation for their identity. Since they have been made

righteous in God's sight, the Christian has no more work to do to earn God's favor. In a sense, they are subject to no one.

Read Romans 3:21-26

- What does Paul say about God's righteousness? (There are lots of right answers. Don't be shy.)

Read Galatians 3:23-29

- What kind of impact does Christ's gift of righteousness make on a Christian's identity?

Read Galatians 2:20

- What does it look like for you to find your identity in Christ?

The Horizontal Realm and the Second Kind of Righteousness

Yet at the same time, according to Luther, Christians also live in a horizontal dimension before the rest of the world. If Christians find their identity in the vertical dimension, they find their purpose in the horizontal. God calls Christians to produce a second kind of righteousness that is the fruit of the first kind of righteousness they have already received. Christians perform good works, and in relationship to the rest of the world, good works count for a lot. Christians are called to respond to the love of Jesus by loving the people around them. So, in a sense, Christians are also servants of all too.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19

In this passage, we find Paul discussing his purpose. Even though God has freed Paul through the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the cross, Paul chooses not to use his freedom for his own purposes, but for God's. The same is true for all Christians. It is precisely because God has freed Christians from sin, death, and the devil that they are now free to live for the people around them.

- What people has God put in the world around you that give you a sense of purpose?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

Here, we get a sense of how the second kind of righteousness flows from the first kind. Purpose flows out of identity.

- How do you see the second kind of righteousness flowing from the first kind of righteousness in this passage?

Read Philippians 2:1-13

- Paul says in verse 5 to “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” What do you think this mind is?
- In verses 12 and 13, Paul calls the Philippians to work out their salvation because it is God who is working in them. How do you see God working in you to help you work out your own life of faith?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, your grace and mercy know no bounds. We thank you that you have graciously given us the gift of your son and his righteousness apart from anything we did to deserve it. Remind us of our identity in you and may the righteousness we have received from Christ propel us into the world as your servants to do the things you call us to do. In Jesus' name, Amen!