

How To Find Your Identity?

Colossians 3:1-17

Everyone has an identity – a sense of self. But some people aren't sure of who they are or why they're here.

They're also not quite sure what they want to do with their lives.

So how do you figure out your identity?

Your identity relates to your fundamental values that dictate your choices (e.g., relationships, career). These choices reflect who we are and what we value.

Heard on the internet, “Your core identity is shaped by many factors. It's based on your unchanging self, and the parts of you that are influenced by your environment and society.”

What Does The Bible Say?

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. (Colossians 3:1–2 NLT)

Where is your focus? Is it what this world offers or the next?

We are not to think about “earthly things.” This admonishment includes material possessions and immaterial things of this world: earthly honors, position, and advancement.

3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. (Colossians 3:3–4 NLT)

We live in a world where we are to be seen, noticed, and appreciated. Yet, we are to be hidden in Christ.

It is not about self-esteem but Christ-esteem. See the world as Christ sees it.

21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. (Matthew 6:21 NLT)

What Does The Bible Say?

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. (Colossians 3:5 NLT)

Christianity is all about self-denial and self-control.

6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world.

8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other,

for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. (Colossians 3:6–9 NLT)

Paul mentions three categories of behavior: (1) perverted passions, (2) hot tempers, and (3) sharp tongues.

10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. (Colossians 3:10-11 NLT)

Behavior always follows belief.

When you put away sinful behavior, you will fully experience this astounding removal of barriers in human relationships.

How Can You Obey:

We are to clothe ourselves with the following:

12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. (Colossians 3:12–15 NLT)

All these garments can be worn only in the community with others and in relationships.

16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a

representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:16–17 NLT)

I want to be a representative of the Lord because of my heart of gratitude.

How do you find your identity?

You find it in Christ.

Focus on His kingdom, not yours.

You strive to become like Him in attitude and behavior.

Spend time with people who get their identity in Christ.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Additional Notes:

The Insights To The Biblical World Segment is inspired by Michael S. Heiser, *Brief Insights on Mastering the Bible: 80 Expert Insights on the Bible, Explained in a Single Minute, The 60 Second Scholar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 89-91.

Additional Notes:

Passages in Insights To The Biblical World:

9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.” (Jeremiah 1:9)

²⁰ “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. ²¹ Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. (Exodus 23:20–21)

2 Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.” (Judges 2:1–3)

But in Deuteronomy 4:37–38 we read that God took Israel out of Egypt and defeated her enemies to conquer the land through God’s “presence.”

5 Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 5)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1 ESV)

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

1. Believers Focus on God and His Ways Rather Than the World and Its Ways (Colossians 3:1-4).

2. Believers Set Aside Old, Sinful Ways and Put on New,
Godly Ways (Colossians 3:5-17)

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: Paul likely wrote his letter to the believers at Colossae around AD 61- 62 while under house arrest in Rome. He continued teaching believers to obey all of Christ's teachings.

Explore:

In today's passage Paul gives moral and ethical instruction.

Believers are to live differently from the world, not to earn salvation, but because they have been given new life in Christ.

Today's passage forms a counterbalance to the false religious regulations in chapter 2.

Believers Focus on God and His Ways Rather Than on the

World and Its Ways (Colossians 3:1-4)

Verses 1 and 2 repeat the command to set our minds on things above. Above means above this world, beyond it, not a product of it. Jesus, raised from the dead, is there. Our union with Christ means that just as we were crucified and buried with Christ, we are also raised with Him. Persons raised with Christ need no longer focus on what we leave behind.

Paul was not saying that we should not deal with the necessary things of life on earth. He was warning against getting caught up in earthly things, fixing our gaze upon them rather than on the things of God—that is the problem. We make the everlasting things of God our primary focus. Learning how to assign things their proper value and importance is crucial for all believers. It involves setting our minds on things above.

Verse 3 speaks of life hidden with Christ in God, and it seems rather mysterious. What did Paul mean by that? The Colossian believers knew they were living on earth, not in Heaven. But

their union with Christ transformed their mundane existence. Through this union, they were crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), buried with Christ (Colossians 2:12a), and raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12b, 3:1). This was a spiritual reality, regardless of a daily life experience that surely appeared much more mundane. They might have difficulty seeing what their lives really were, so Paul drew it to their attention. God saw the true nature of their lives with Christ.

Eventually, the Colossians—and everyone else, for that matter—would see the true nature of the lives they were living (verse 4). When Christ returns, all will be revealed. Even some aspects of teaching are now hidden with Christ in God. Some results we see now. Others may remain beyond our view until Christ returns in glory.

Explore:

Believers Set Aside Old, Sinful Ways and Put on New, Godly Ways (Colossians 3:5-17)

Paul wanted believers to see an important result of our “death” in Christ: we can and must put to death those earthly things that so captured our attention before Christ (verse 5). People who have died no longer struggle with improper appetites such as lust, gluttony, greed, gambling addiction, and much more.

Why would we want to keep these appetites around anyway? God’s judgment will fall heavy upon them (verse 6). They are attractions that make us ashamed of what we used to say, do, or think (verse 7). Surely, they must be dead to us. It is good for believers of all ages to feel confident and secure in God’s love as they follow Him. At the same time, they need to understand that our loving God will also have to judge the sins of this world. They need to know that the coming wrath will be a righteous wrath that follows persistent refusal to repent.

Verse 8 continues the list of things to put away Paul began in

verse 5. In verse 5 he focused on improper sexuality and greed. In verse 8 he moved to improper, unloving attitudes and language. Did the Colossians have a particular problem with dishonesty (verse 9)? Perhaps. On the other hand, lying comes into play in nearly every one of the particular ungodly activities he listed:

- Sexual immorality in all its forms nearly always involves lying, either about our activity or its motivation. No, honey, I swear I was working late! or I'd never wander if I had someone like you.
- Anger and rage involve lying to ourselves—our anger is surely righteous.
- Malice and slander involve similar dishonesty—we make ourselves and our viewpoint the center of a story designed to

run down or destroy others, for example.

Believers are called to be truthful with ourselves, and with others. Deception has no place with us.

Purity involves more than what we have or have not done.

Especially for someone with an impure past, it is important to understand that purity involves seeing ourselves (and acting) as people who belong to someone else. We are God's people—not merely our souls, but also our bodies. Purity involves respecting His lordship.

The negative action of putting off the old self (leaving the old self behind) works hand in hand with a positive action: putting on the new self (verse 10). In chapter 1, Paul had told the Colossians that Jesus was the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Amazingly, in this verse he told them that this new self is being formed in the image of its Creator. As

astonishing as it seems, God is at work, through renewing our knowledge, forming us into His image.

Verse 11 does not intend to indicate that the distinctions listed truly do not exist—Greeks did not thereby become Jews, for example. Rather, they are distinctions that make no difference before God. Christ is all we need to live in peace, regardless of those distinctions.

Verse 12 begins an extensive description of how we ought to be as God's chosen people. Paul uses the metaphor of putting on the traits of Jesus as clothing. We are to wear compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. God expected certain characteristics and behaviors of His chosen people Israel. Likewise, He expects to see the body of Christ bearing with one another and forgiving one another. Even the famous "70 times 7" of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22) seems miserly compared to our new standard for forgiveness: as the Lord forgave us (verse

13). Above all of this remains love, the supreme virtue that ties together everything else (verse 14).

Bearing with one another has applications throughout the life of the local church and beyond. It may even apply at times to the teacher/student or pastor/church attender relationship. Humility should remind us that our group members may need to bear with us as teachers.

Peace rules in homes, communities, and congregations when the peace of Christ rules in our hearts. This is the calling of all believers, for which we can indeed give thanks (verse 15). The virtues Paul described all find their place in home and family life as well, especially compassion, gentleness, and forgiveness.

Peace at home always begins with peace in our hearts. Where such peace is present, we should be ready to express our gratitude to God in any way possible, including through singing and music.

The word of Christ should mark the life of the local church and the family. We teach it to one another. We refer to it to admonish or encourage one another, and to express musically or verbally our heartfelt gratitude to Him (verse 16).

The immediate context of verse 17 appears to be the life of the local congregation. Still, we should not hesitate to apply it to our individual lives. The legitimate activity of a Christian believer should always be something he or she can do gratefully, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Explore:

Our struggle with and need to put to death the attitudes and actions of our sinful nature remind us we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

Explore:

The majority of Gentiles in Paul's day knew little to nothing of God's role as Creator, nor of the purposes for which He created us, including our sexuality. It is not surprising that sexual issues featured so prominently. One of our most powerful physical drives, we wrestle with it today, too. The Bible is clear that we are to reserve sex for the marriage relationship. Yet focusing strictly on do-this-don't-do-that is clearly insufficient for many, including those who claim Christ as Savior. Hafeez Baoku from The Gospel Coalition shares some helpful insight from Scripture: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/real-purity/>.

Explore:

Do we lose our national, economic, or ethnic identity when we belong to Christ? Certainly not! The importance of such identities changes remarkably, however. In Christ, even the

purpose of such identities changes. Instead of helping us exclude people who differ from our tribe, we recognize that God's grace overrules such distinctions. The body of Christ will welcome people from every group, every language, and every ethnic identity. This does not mean we may no longer recognize distinctions. No, God does not ask us to deny sociological reality. However, He does expect us to recognize that our distinctions should have no bearing on the gospel: how we preach it, those to whom we preach it, and how we live it out.

Explore:

Paul's instructions on how to treat each other in the body of Christ demonstrate how God established the Church to make disciples and transfer the faith.

Explore:

Seeking or setting our hearts on things above implies a continual effort. It is ongoing, not a once and for all thing. Repeated effort

will come into play. Some are tempted to see in this kind of mental activity a sort of meditative process. We must be careful, however, to distinguish between the proper spiritual discipline of biblical meditation, and mental and spiritual practices built on false religious principles. Here is a brief comparison and contrast of the two:

Biblical Meditation

Focuses on God and on what He has said, primarily as revealed in Scripture.

Seeks thoughts and attitudes from outside, from God.

Seeks to be filled.

Meditative filling equips us for active engagement as God's messengers in real life.

False Spiritual Meditation

Focuses on the self, or even on "nothing."

Seeks the treasure within us. “We have the answers we need.”

Seeks to be emptied.

Meditative emptying may leave us susceptible to unhealthy spiritual forces; does little to spur us on to love and good works.

Explore:

Some at Colossae blended angelic/spirit worship in with their Christian beliefs. They looked down on those who clung only to Christ and did not join in with them in their Christless worship. They pretended to be humble servants to whom God sent special intermediaries with special revelation. In practice, putting any intermediary between Christ and the believer is the very opposite of humility. It sets aside the sufficiency of what Christ has done. Paul struggled hard against such prideful conceits.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way

others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ- followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 5

When do we first learn about Christ in the Bible?

Question 2 of 5

Identity is primarily concerned with the question: “Who are you?” What does it mean to be who you are?

Question 3 of 5

What are some things above that you should focus on?

Question 4 of 5

What practical steps or actions will help us put sinful attitudes and actions to death?

Question 5 of 5

What is some attitude or action that I need to cast aside more thoroughly to pursue Christ wholeheartedly? How will I do that this week?