



BEAUTIFUL TRUTH

Lesson 4

The Truth of our New Identity in Christ

Introduction, Objectives & Prayer

React to/Evaluate the following comments from your perspective:

One of those distortions is a trend we could describe as ‘elective identity,’ the idea that people can and should define their own identity, that the individual—there’s that word again—is the ultimate arbiter of what is true about herself or himself.¹

- Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*

The battle over [Gen Z’s (~1997-2012)] identity is maybe more fierce than any generation before it.²

- Andy Byrd, *ChurchPulse Weekly*

Lesson Objectives:

- Participants evaluate common sources of identity/answers to the identity question today.
- Participants grasp the surpassing greatness of identity in Christ, especially as realized in the resurrection.
- Participants grow in the ability to share the truth of this beautiful identity in Christ with others.

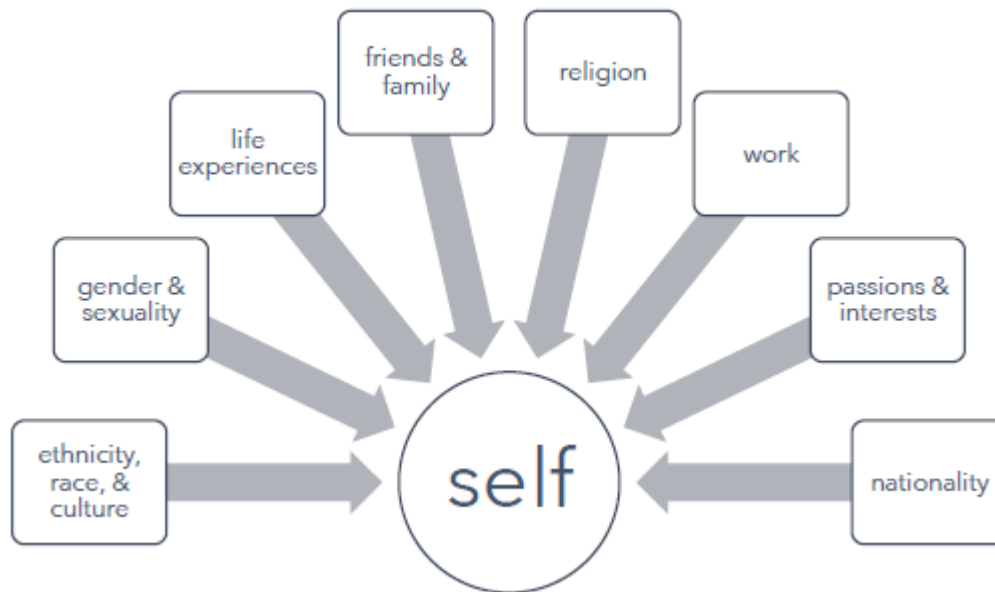
WHO AM I? OUR ANSWERS

“The deep search for identity—*Who am I, really?*—is going on in each person, and no one should accept shallow answers.”³ Though identity has become an especially hot topic today, our sense of self has always been a critical aspect of being human. Generation after generation has been shaped by a combination of internal and external factors, giving us points of connection with one another and contributing to our sense of individuality. While not exhaustive, the diagram below is a visual summary of common factors that influence our answer to the question, “Who am I?”

¹ Kinnaman, David, and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 47.

² Carey Nieuwhof and David Kinnaman, hosts, “107 | Andy Byrd on How Identity is the Core Issue of Gen Z and Ways We Can Maximize Their Zeal,” *ChurchPulse Weekly* (podcast), 30 March 2022.

³ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 57.



1. In your observation or experience, how has the relative importance of the above factors changed over the generations? (i.e., What factors influence the younger generations more or less today, compared with the past?)

2. In the recent past we've experienced a tremendous shift in the relative of authority of various factors, with an increasing emphasis placed on personal experience or choice. The idea that my preferences, desires, and feelings define me is the core of what has been called *expressive individualism* and the similar concept of *elective identity*. Consider the following excerpt and evaluate each of the three individualistic assumptions listed:

"Most people today, including Christians, believe identity can be discovered and decided on by the individual... A majority of Christians have succumbed to wrong-headed ideas such as:

 - You discover the truth about yourself by looking inside yourself.
 - You can believe whatever you want as long as those beliefs don't affect society.
 - You should pursue the things you desire most."⁴

3. Even though many today emphasize a self-determined identity, external influences still play a large role. In fact, the evolution of media, especially in the realm of social media, has allowed new voices to gain authority and influence on subjects such as gender, sexuality, religion, etc. How have you observed this playing out?

4. Social media has also given rise to a whole new aspect of identity—one's *digital* self. From the content we share to the likes and follows we accumulate, our online experiences can affect our sense of self in profound ways.

⁴ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 47-48.

- a. How have your experiences using social media affected the way you perceive yourself?
- b. Can you observe ways you've used social media to construct an identity of your choosing? If so, how?

THE IDENTITY THAT ENDURES AND MATTERS: GOD'S ANSWER TO WHO I AM

5. God created the world, and above all human beings, as *very good*. Consider how Scripture describes God's creation of humanity. As we read these Scriptures note in what ways is God's answer to the identity question infinitely more beautiful than anything we can derive ourselves.
 - **Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
 - **Genesis 1:31** God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
 - **Genesis 2:7** The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.
 - **Genesis 2:22** The LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.
 - **Genesis 2:25** Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
6. Jesus Christ entered into our experience, into the curse sin has brought upon us, so that he might share with us his own restored and glorified humanity. Consider: The suffering, pain, hurt, and death that sin brings touches everyone personally and impacts our identity dramatically. We may try to make sense of this ourselves, but apart from Christ, that answer to sin's curse is ultimately confusing and unsatisfying. How does Christ's entrance into our sufferings and sharing in our curse change how these afflictions impact our identity?

Philippians 3:7-11 Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 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, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Hebrews 12:5-7, 10-11 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ...God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No

discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

7. The ways we struggle with sin's curse can at times seem to define us (cf. Job). But God proclaims that through faith in Christ we will share in his restored humanity, free from sin and its curse. How might this affect our sense of self in this life?

Job 14:15 "You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made."

Job 16:19-21 "Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend."

Job 19:25-27 "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

Romans 7:19-20,24-25 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The gospel of Christ reveals what is truly good, releases each of us from guilt, and shame and empowers each believer to live a renewed life even as we continue to struggle with sin. This fight is not the result of trying to forge our own new identity but evidence that we are living out whom Christ has *already made us to be*. As Paul told the Galatians, "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (5:17). It is a struggle of our new identity, fully ours already now, against what we once were and what has been crucified with Christ. Our ongoing struggle against sin therefore is the result of our forgiveness and freedom from guilt and shame, and it's the outcome of being set free from the rule of sin. In short, sin—even as we struggle with it—no longer defines us; Christ does.

8. Our identity in Christ will become ours in full at the resurrection on the Last Day. Such resurrection life will not *merely* be freedom from death; it will be full freedom from every shadow sin has brought. It will be the ultimate experience of life. In light of our current disappointment and dissatisfaction, what encouragement does our hope of the bodily resurrection give you?

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Revelation 21:3-4 I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

SHARING THE TRUTH OF A NEW IDENTITY

Ever since the fall, human beings have naturally found their identity by looking within themselves. This self-directed focus has only intensified in the recent past, enabled by advancing technology and encouraged by a view of humanity increasingly untethered from any transcendent reality. In such a context, we might be tempted to think that Christian truth cannot compete and can only be perceived as out of touch. Yet Christ’s truth remains as compelling, enduring, and good as ever. It provides real answers to our greatest questions and fully satisfies our deepest needs. God’s answer to the question, “Who am I?” is truly beautiful; our challenge is to deeply grasp this beauty for ourselves and to share it with the generations after us.

9. Contemporary culture embraces self-determined identity in a variety of ways, including in the arena of sexuality and gender. Younger generations especially are being shaped by this trend. Citing Barna research of Gen Z, Kinnaman and Matlock highlight that “today’s teenagers are much more open to the idea that gender is determined by how you *feel*, not by your birth sex. One out of three teens believes this is true.”⁵ Vox Media cites a similar statistic, noting that “44% of Gen Z believe gender is not a binary, compared to 34% who say gender is binary.”⁶ It’s important to understand that, generally speaking, those who hold to such flexible views of gender believe their views are *good* (appropriate, freeing, beneficial, just, etc.). How does a Christian understanding of human identity shape how you could respond?

Definition of Sex: being biologically/anatomically/genetically male or female

Definition of gender: the male sex or the female sex, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones, or one of a range of other identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female.

Genesis 5:2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man.”

⁵ Trueman, *Crisis of Confidence*, xvi.

⁶ Lightcap Meek, Esther, *Longing to Know*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003, 2011), 182.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Jeremiah 17:19 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

10. In what ways can we as Christians accept and validate the unique feelings and emotions of others?

Psalms 139:1, 23-24 O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. ...Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Jeremiah 31:3 “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

11. While it is excruciating to our sinful flesh, how does our new identity in Christ seek to re-write/re-wire those feelings and emotions?

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

NEXT WEEK: WELS 175 YEARS—Christ Through Us

Lesson 1: Lutheran Immigrants Bring their Faith to America

