

# *New Identity - True Security*

2 Cor. 5:17 - March 21, 2010

## **Introduction**

I knew a man who at the time was probably in his mid-forties, who was raised in a devout Christian home, attended Sunday School and church right up through high school, went to a Christian college, married his college sweetheart, attended seminary, had 3 great kids, taught adult classes in his church, served on the Elder Board, and by all appearances was a spiritually mature Christian. But something was missing. He got caught up in some addictive behaviors, went through some major career changes, and found himself in a downward spiral of dark feelings of anxiety, depression, and worthlessness. At one point, he considered suicide. There were multiple factors involved, but one thing that was missing in his life was a deep sense of his worth as a person. Apparently, in spite of all his years of Christian instruction and involvement, he had never taken hold of his new identity in Christ, and developed a deep sense of security in God's unconditional love for him for who he was, and not how he performed.

**I. Our Sense of Identity Plays a Crucial Role in Our Lives** and that's what I want to talk about this morning. But just what is our sense of identity? In a nutshell, it's our collection of beliefs and feelings about ourselves. We begin to form a sense of identity from the moment we're born, and every bit of feedback we get back from the world around us compiles in our consciousness to form our sense of who we are.

Originally the most vital input Adam and Eve received about themselves was from God, who created them and the world around them for his purpose and pleasure. Enjoying the intimate love relationship and partnership with God, for which they were created, their sense of identity was one of being deeply loved and valued by their Heavenly Father, along with their awareness of their very distinctive place and role in his creation. From their relationship with him, they possessed an inherent sense of love, belonging, worth, and purpose in the world.

But all that changed tragically when Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to doubt God's benevolence and defy his will. They lost their direct spiritual union with their Heavenly Father, and their needs for divine love, belonging, worth and purpose, were no longer fulfilled as intended.

Ever since then, every one of us reflexively strives to fill our void of perfect divine love, belonging, and worth, with all kinds of substitutes, but we can never successfully replace divine provisions with earthly imitations.

Furthermore, because of our selfishness and sin, our ability to meet each other's needs has been corrupted as well. So even the best parents are incapable of perfect unconditional love, and every child is faulty in receiving and responding to the love that's given. And siblings, peers, and other people are inconsistent in demonstrating love at best, and terribly destructive at worst.

[Though certainly not terribly destructive, I remember being very hurt and embarrassed when teased by my sister for my "Dumbo ears and my stupid-looking glasses." Pic.- it was very painful, even if she did have a point!]

## II. Thankfully God Has Provided a Solution for Our Intimacy and Identity Needs in Christ

If someone walked up to you on the street and said, "What is Christianity about anyway?" How would you answer them? If you had to boil it down to one sentence, what would you say? Here's one way of summarizing it:

*Christianity is about God's loving initiative through his son, Jesus, to rescue us beloved human rebels from sin and condemnation, so we could come to enjoy intimate relationship and partnership with him now and forever. That's how I see the essence of it.*

And if we recognize our need for God's forgiving mercy for our sin and guilt, and humbly embrace Jesus in faith, as our Savior and Lord, not only are we fully forgiven, we become a new creation who's spiritually reborn into new intimacy with God as his child in Christ!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself in Christ.... (2 Cor. 5:17-18a)

*As you leave this morning, there will be a handout which summarizes what it means to be a Christian. If you want to understand more, pick one up for yourself, or perhaps to share with someone else.*

Among many other incredibly rich provisions God gives us through Christ, he gives us a new identity, as one who is deeply and unconditionally loved just for who we are, as a uniquely special image-bearing child of His!

But for that new identity to become a source of true emotional security I've got to embrace it and absorb it deeply over time. And then it can become a vital part of my growth into all God designed me to be. In other words,

## III. Our Sense of Identity Shapes Us and Our Sense of Security

But can a sense of identity in Christ really make that much difference? Dr. Neil Anderson writes, "No person can consistently behave in a way that's inconsistent with the way they perceive themselves. Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are *in Christ* is the most important truth you can possess." (Victory p. 41-42; italicized text implied from context.) In other words, our sense of identity pervasively influences our thoughts, feelings, choices, behaviors, and virtually all other facets of ourselves. The two most important beliefs in your life are what you believe about God, and what you believe about yourself.

### A. The Impact of Unconditional Love on Our Sense of Security

To see what a difference a sense of identity in Christ can make, let's consider just one facet of our identity in him - that we are deeply and unconditionally loved for who we are - and look at its potential impact on our sense of worth and emotional security.

- Scripture is clear that God loves us unconditionally, but we're incapable of experiencing God's love apart from intimacy with him in Christ.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

- Through Christ we find out that even at our sinful, selfish worst – we were still so precious to God, that he underwent tremendous sacrifice to provide us forgiveness, and new identity and security in eternal intimacy with him.
- But I must recognize where I've sought to find my core sense of worth outside of God, whether my personal attributes or abilities, my associations with others, my position, accomplishments, possessions, or any other earthly source, and instead reground my worth and security in God's unconditional love for me, as a uniquely precious image bearing child of his in Christ.
- If we don't recalibrate our core sense of worth to the love of God, our emotional security will be functionally atheistic – without God at the center. And our sense of worth and security will continue to depend on the shifting sands of personal resources and earthly circumstances – not a solid foundation to be sure.
- So the question becomes, how do we recalibrate our core sense of worth and security to the unconditional love of God as a child of his?

#### **B. We Must Move the Truth of God's Unconditional Love from Head to Heart**

- Have you ever heard it said that the most difficult distance to cover is the 18 inches from your head to your heart? That's what it means to internalize a belief – to translate the truth in my mind to the feelings of my heart, so it becomes the conviction of core belief. A core belief shapes my perspectives, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, choices, and actions.
- For example, if I internalize the core belief that I am loved passionately and unconditionally by my Heavenly Father, just for who I am, at my best and at my worst, it changes me.
  - I'll have more authentic gratitude and love for him, and desire to honor him.
  - I'll have less need for the approval of others and more freedom to be myself, and give my best with less fear of failure.
  - I'll have more love for others, just as they are, instead of seeing their shortcomings out of a critical spirit.
  - I'll have more peace and joy in the settled conviction that in his love for me, God is working all things together for my good forever!
  - Like ripples in a pond, the impact of my core belief that God loves me unconditionally, will reverberate throughout my life.
- I find helpful to consider the specific steps involved in internalizing a core belief: Know it; Believe it; Own it; Live it; and Share it. Let's take a brief look at each one.
  1. **Know it** – I must first be aware of God's love for me before I can consider it or come to believe it. And because it's expressed and demonstrated throughout his Word, my first step to internalizing it is to seek out and learn the Bible's teaching

on the incredible love of God! For just one verse to become aware of and learn for example,

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

2. **Believe it** - I have a personal proverb, *The heart can't receive what the mind won't believe*. I must be able to believe that God truly does love all people unconditionally, or I'll disqualify myself. If in all honesty I have doubts, the idea of his unconditional love for me personally won't get through my mental filters to the domain of my heart. And there are legitimate questions, for example:

- How can God really love me on an intimate personal basis along with 6.5 billion other people in the world?

[Illus - Picture - Have you heard about the TV show about the Duggars who have 19 kids - it's called "19 and Counting." They are an amazing family and parents, and the mother, Michelle is so calm... But those parents know and love each of those kids personally... Well God's relational capacities are absolutely infinite, and he has no problem engaging an intimate personal relationship with an unlimited number of people simultaneously, and can be just as focused on and concerned with each as he is with every other, all at once!!]

- Or perhaps I struggle with one of the most difficult sources of doubt - adversity and tragedy. Our faith can be like the daisy petal game:

*I got a promotion and a raise - He loves me  
I lost my job - He loves me not  
I received an unexpected inheritance - He love me  
My child is seriously ill - He loves me not*

We must never calibrate God's love by our circumstances - but always calibrate his love by the cross.

- And we must be humbly willing to call out to God to help us overcome our doubts, as the father of a demon possessed boy cried out to Jesus, Lord, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief !" (Mark 9:24)
- One of the regular prayers of my heart to the Lord goes like this:  
*Help me believe your love for me; Embrace your love wholeheartedly;  
Receive your intimate love deeply; Remember your love constantly;  
To live in your love consciously; And live out your love passionately.*

3. **Own it** - This step gets to the very heart of the internalization process, so to speak - where the belief of my mind becomes the core emotional conviction of my heart.

- As with every other step, owning God's truth involves a joint effort by us and the Spirit of God. I must take hold of the truth with my mind, while the Spirit instills it within the deeper recesses of my heart and soul - places only he can touch, heal and grow within me. Romans 8:16 tells us, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."
- The Word of God is our main grist for the mill of owning the truth - reading, meditating, memorizing, and rehearsing the rich expressions of God's love is

essential. [over pic. of the Bible]. As we saturate our minds with scripture, the truth percolates into heartfelt conviction over time.

- And if there's anything we can "name and claim" in faith as believers, it's the unconditional love of God, and to own it deeply, we need to do just that! Name it, claim it, rejoice in it, delight in it, thank him for it, praise him for it, and live it it!
- [Illus. of Anabel Gillham and her son Mason from The Confident Woman pp. 26ff]

4. **Live it** – The whole purpose of internalizing God's truth is to be transformed more and more into who he's designed us to be, to live more fully and fruitfully the life he's given us in this world, for our fulfillment and his glory.

...be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...(Rom. 12:2b)

Paul's saying, be transformed by new core beliefs, so you will better understand and live out God's will and ways for your lives.

- God's truth is not just for information, but transformation, but not just for transformation, but incarnation – a big theological term that simply means to flesh it out.
5. **Share it** – the last step. When we have come to find our deepest security and joy in the unconditional love of God ourselves, we will experience its fullness by sharing it with others.

- God loves us not only for our well-being, but for the purpose of loving others as we have been loved by him.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."  
(John 13:34-35)

- Sharing God's love with others not only completes the internalization process in our own lives, it starts the process in another, by helping them begin the first step of knowing the truth themselves.
- And this fulfills the purpose of God's truth for our lives - for information, transformation, incarnation, and multiplication – all for the praise of his glory and grace!

## Conclusion

Remember the man I described at the beginning of the message, battling anxiety, despair and feelings of worthlessness? I knew him well – because I was that man. My painful struggle launched me on a quest to figure out what was missing in my Christian life and experience, and through that process I learned much of what I've shared this morning, and I'm internalizing it further by sharing it with you! My prayer is that it will help you do the same!