

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life (16);
Following Jesus Christ Rightly #10: Our Identity in Christ**

Introduction:

We hear much today about “identity politics.” This phrase signifies a wide range of political activity and social theory regarding “the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups.”¹ Because members of a particular group believe themselves to have been marginalized socially or politically by the larger established culture, they strive together to affirm their identity and their common experiences, even as they attempt to correct past and present injustices of the culture, which they believe strongly has maltreated them.

At the heart of identity politics is the identification one makes of being a member of that group. People identify themselves with these groups—“it is who they are.” This identity becomes central to how the individual sees himself, values himself, and of how he relates to others in the world in which he lives. At the heart of much of identity politics is the insistence of marginalized groups to be identified and valued by others outside of their group. To continue to marginalize, sometimes criminalize, stigmatize, and even demonize another’s identity is viewed to be the unforgiveable sin of modern society.

If there is a reality which identity politics has reinforced, it is that one’s personal sense of identity shapes one’s world view, value system, and opinions of himself and of others both within and outside of the group to which one identifies himself. Who you view yourself to be will influence and affect how you view others. And as we will consider today, the Holy Scriptures speak about this principle. *In order for you as a Christian to follow Jesus Christ rightly, you must understand and affirm your identity—who you are in essence-- to be in Jesus Christ.* Knowing and embracing this scriptural truth will shape how you view yourself, your relationship with people about you, your conception and attitude toward personal sin, and most importantly, your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Now it is very important for us to consider the foundation of the Christian self-identity in *the believer’s union with Jesus Christ when He died on His cross, was buried, and when He rose from the dead.* The Bible teaches that when Christ died, He died not only as the *substitute* for all believers—on their behalf-- but He died as a *representative* of all believers. In effect, when Christ died, we died with Him. And when Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we rose with Him. This has implications for how we are to view ourselves and how we are to live as Christians. There are two passages I would like us to consider, Colossians 3 and Romans 6.

I. Our union with Jesus Christ set forth in Colossian 3:1-14

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

⁵Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

⁸But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and

¹ From the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html>.

have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

In this third chapter of the epistle to the Colossians, Paul became very practical about this matter of the believer's union with Jesus Christ. After asserting believers' union with Christ, beginning in **verses 5 and 6** he stated how they were to live in the light of their union with Christ in His death.

⁵Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. ⁸But now you yourselves are **to put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (Col. 3:5-8)

And then in **verses 12ff** he sets forward their responsibility in the light of their union with Christ in His resurrection. There we read,

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and **have put on** the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. ¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ¹⁴But above all these things **put on** love, which is the bond of perfection. (Col 3:9-14)

We are "to put off" our sin; we are "to put on" Christ. These two aspects of Christian living have been given terms. Putting to death sin in our lives has historically been referred to as **mortification**. Purposing to live for God has been called **vivification**. This is a work of faith that all of us who have been baptized are to undertake continually throughout our lives as Christians.

Now in order to enhance our understanding of our union with Jesus Christ, let us consider **Colossians 3:3**. It reads, "**For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God**" (Col 3:3). Here we have the truth of our union with Jesus Christ stated. When the Lord calls a man or woman to salvation, the Lord will often bring to him and her a very vivid sense of guilt and of the pollution of personal sin. Sometimes, perhaps even frequently, the intense awareness of one's sinfulness, remorse for past actions, frustration with present failures, fear of God's judgment, will push forward this sense of one's sinfulness so that it becomes the basis of one's self-identity. The awakened sinner, and often times even the converted sinner--the true Christian, if asked the question, "Who are you?", will answer with something like this: "I am a poor, wretched, helpless sinner, who has been forgiven my sins by the grace of God that is in Jesus Christ." And of course, on the one hand that statement is true to the experience of every child of God. But on the other hand, it might suggest an incorrect and faulty concept of self-identity as a Christian. For the Christian is not to identify himself principally with his sin, but rather, he is to see his identity, his true self, to be centered in Christ, not centered in his own sin or sinfulness. Again, Paul wrote, "**For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God**" (Col. 3:3).

The Christian is to identify himself with his new life in Christ, not with his old life in sin.

Earlier in Colossians 2, Paul wrote, “And you, *being dead* in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, *He has made alive* together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...” (Col. 2:13). And similarly in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians he contrasted the former life of Christians when they were dead in their sins with their present existence in life in Christ.

And you *He made alive, who were dead* in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even *when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ* (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:1-6)

Now as we look more closely at **Colossians 3:3**, we might say a few words about the manner in which Paul expressed this truth. Again, it reads, “*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*” The Greek language in which Paul originally wrote was very precise in the way the verbs expressed their meaning. When Paul wrote to these Christians, “For you died”, he was referring to when each of them was converted to Jesus Christ. When any sinner truly believes on Jesus Christ for salvation, he at that moment of faith died to his former life. He had formerly been in his sin. He was identified with his sin. That sin defined who he was before coming to Christ—he was a sinner. But when he believed the gospel, he died with respect to his sin. Being a “sinner” is no longer *who he is*--he is now a Christian. He was formerly a sinner, but now he is a Christian.

Now this is not to deny that the Christian still sins or that sin is still with him. John wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But whereas before coming to Christ that was who he was--a sinner. Having come to Christ in repentance and faith he died to that former existence. He is now a Christian, granted, who has a sin problem. Paul could write from this new world view that he had come to experience:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, *it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* (Rom. 7:18-20)

Here Paul the Christian states how you and I as Christians are to identify ourselves. We are not to see our identity as equated with our sin and sinfulness, but rather our true identity is with the new life that God has given us in Jesus Christ.

We read in Colossians 3:3 that the believer’s “life” is now “hidden with Christ in God.” The Greek word translated “hidden” is actually a perfect passive verb. What this expresses is that the life of the Christian *has been hidden* (by God) in Christ. This act of God in which the believer’s life was hidden took place at conversion, but the effects of that act of God continue to the present time. In other words, God had hidden our new life in Christ and it remains hidden there even until now.

What is meant by the idea of our life having been hidden in Christ by God? Paul was probably speaking of the security of that life in Christ that each and every true believer possesses. God has it hid in Himself. It is secure. It can never be lost or forfeited, for God Himself has hidden our life in Him. **Matthew Henry** wrote on this:

Our true life lies in the other world: You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (v. 3). The new man has its livelihood thence. It is born and nourished from above; and the perfection of its life is reserved for that state. It is hid with Christ; not hid from us only, in point of secrecy, but hid for us, denoting security. The life of a Christian is hid with Christ. “Because I live you shall live also” (John 14:19). Christ is at present a hidden Christ, or one whom we have not seen; but this is our comfort, that

our life is hid with him, and laid up safely with him. As we have reason to love him whom we have not seen (1 Pet. 1:8), so we may take the comfort of a happiness out of sight, and reserved in heaven for us.

And **John Calvin** wrote on this verse:

It is worthy of observation, that our life is said to be hid, that we may not murmur or complain if our life, being buried under the ignominy of the cross, and under various distresses, differs nothing from death, but may patiently wait for the day of revelation. And in order that our waiting may not be painful, let us observe those expressions, in God, and with Christ, which intimate that our life is out of danger, although it does not appear. For, in the first place, God is faithful, and therefore will not deny what has been committed to him, (2 Timothy 1:12,) nor deceive in the guardianship which he has undertaken; and, secondly, the fellowship of Christ brings still greater security. For what is to be more desired by us than this — that our life remain with the very fountain of life. Hence there is no reason why we should be alarmed if, on looking around on every side, we nowhere see life. For we are saved by hope. But those things which are already seen with our eyes are not hoped for (Romans 8:24). Nor does he teach that our life is hid merely in the opinion of the world, but even as to our own view, because this is the true and necessary trial of our hope, that being encompassed, as it were, with death, we may seek life somewhere else than in the world.

But perhaps because it is “hidden” from our view, it is not as apparent to us as it should be. But the fact is certain, God has caused us to die to our former life governed by sin, even our life in sin, and He has caused us to be alive in His Son. We are to live according to this principle.

II. Our union with Jesus Christ set forth in Romans 6:1-14

Let us turn to Romans 6, where we will read the first 14 verses.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace should abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been untied together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Let us make several assertions based upon our passage:

A. We believers are in union with Christ

Allow me to first describe the context of our passage. The Apostle Paul had just concluded in chapter 5 a lengthy explanation of the believers’ justification through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Sinners are forgiven of all their sins and they have Christ’s righteousness credited to them when they embrace Jesus Christ as their crucified, buried, and risen Lord and Savior. The free and full pardon of sins and the gift of

eternal life is through faith alone. It was not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by the work of Christ on our behalf that we are saved. Ours is to believe on Him for our salvation.

We sinners could not save ourselves, no matter how we tried. We were condemned not only because we as individuals sin, but because we are members of the fallen human race, we were all guilty and condemned. **Adam**, our representative, or our *federal head*, as he is frequently called, brought God's condemnation upon the entire human race when he first sinned in the garden. His sin incurred God's wrath upon us. We were *in him* (Adam) when he first sinned; thus, his guilt brought guilt to us.

But not only did Adam bring guilt upon us, his initial act of sin made him *a sinner in his very nature*. He was a different sort of fellow after his first act of sin than he was before sinning. He had not simply committed an act of sin, but in doing so he became a sinner. His nature was corrupted. Thereafter he was bent on sinning. **Arthur Pink** described Adam, the sinner:

No sooner had Adam revolted from his gracious Maker and Benefactor than the evil effects became apparent. His understanding, originally enlightened with heavenly wisdom, became darkened and overcast with crass ignorance. His heart, formerly fired with holy veneration toward his Creator and warm with love to Him, now became alienated and filled with enmity against Him. His will, which had been in subjection to his rightful Governor, had cast off the yoke of obedience. His whole moral constitution was wrecked, had become unhinged, perverse. In a word, the life of God had departed from his soul. His aversion for the supremely excellent One appeared in his flight from Him as soon as he heard His approach. His crass ignorance and stupidity were evinced by his vain attempt to conceal himself from the eyes of Omniscience. His pride was displayed in refusing to acknowledge his guilt; his ingratitude, when he indirectly upbraided God for giving him a wife.²

But what happened to Adam, did not happen to Adam alone. It happened to us as well, for we were in union with him. When Adam became a sinner, he made all of his descendants sinners. You and I are sinners not because we commit acts of sin, but because our very nature is corrupt. Something terrible happened when Adam sinned. The human race became sinners.

But whereas Adam brought condemnation upon all his people--the entire human race--through his *original sin*, in a similar way Jesus Christ brought justification--full pardon and a right standing before God--upon all of His people, that is, believers. As we read in Romans 5:18f.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Our free justification before God through faith alone greatly magnifies the grace of God in bringing us salvation. Here we were, condemned, and yet God enabled believing sinners to become righteous in His sight through faith alone. This greatly glorifies God. In fact, the glory of God in His mercy and grace is more greatly enhanced due to the enormity of our depraved condition. Just consider the greatness of our sin, which had to be overcome, in order to bring us salvation! Great sin requires greater grace. Great sinners need a Great Savior.

But we could not know fully the depth of sin to which we were fallen simply by considering Adam's sin alone. For this reason God gave His law, so that we would know what He knew, just how wicked we are apart from His grace. Please look at **Romans 5:20f**,

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

² Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings from the Scriptures: Man's Total depravity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 59.

Now one of the false conclusions that some of Paul's detractors were publishing about his teaching was that he was promoting loose living through his teaching about Christ's substitutionary death. "If we may be saved through faith alone, then it does not matter how believers live", so they said. In **Romans 6** Paul begins to refute this notion. *He shows that the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection impels the Christian to live according to righteousness, not sin.*

1. When Christ died, we believers died with Him (6:1, 2).

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace should abound? Certainly not! How shall we *who died* to sin live any longer in it? (6:1f.)

The Scriptures not only teach us that Christ died for us, that is, on our behalf, but the Scriptures also teach us that *when He died, we died with Him*. He was our representative. He was so identified with us in His life and death that it could be said that when He died we died with Him.

There are other verses in the New Testament that testifies to this teaching. **Galatians 2:20** is one. It reads,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

As we were in Adam when he sinned and died, we believers were in Christ when He died.

2. When Christ rose from the dead, all true believers rose with Him.

We not only died with Him, we rose with Him. This is stated here, but also in Colossians 2:12f, in which it tells us that you were...

Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him having forgiven you of all your trespasses.

There is the fact of the matter, God regarded us in union with His Son when He died on the cross and was raised from the tomb.

B. We show forth our union with Christ in our baptism

1. Baptism is identifying with Christ

In Romans 6:3 and following, Paul appeals to these Christians that their union with Christ was portrayed in their baptism.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

When we are baptized, we show forth our inward faith of our union with Christ by an outward visible sign. As Christ died and was buried and rose, we do confess in our baptism that He died for us, and that we died with Him, that He rose for us and we rose with Him, and that we as believers, do resolve to live out this spiritual reality before the Lord and other believers who witnessed our baptism. Our baptism is a formal declaration of our faith that we identify ourselves with the Savior. Baptism is the believer's confession of faith that he is a sinner, worthy of death, but nevertheless who believes that the death which he deserved was born by Jesus Christ who died in his place, but who was also buried and raised in his place as well. So

baptism is a confession of one's faith in Jesus Christ and of his identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection life.

2. Baptism is identifying with Christ's people

We all come to God through this means. We all profess like faith in baptism. We collectively died, were buried, and were raised with Him. There is an identification with Christ in baptism; there is also an identification with Christ's people in baptism. This is why baptism has been a prerequisite to church membership in all churches everywhere. It is not just "me and Jesus"; it is "we and Jesus." (See the plural pronouns of Romans 6:1ff).

Baptism not only shows forth our faith in our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, but it shows forth our resolve to live our lives in the light of His death and resurrection.

We are to demonstrate our union with Christ in the way we live. We read in Romans 6:4:

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even so we also should walk in newness of life* (6:4).

Because Christ died to sin, we resolve to follow Him in dying to sin, that is to repent or turn from committing acts sin. Further, because He was raised to life, we resolve to follow Him by living for Him, seeking to live righteously, that is, in a manner that is in accord with God's will, that is, in accordance with God's law.

Living the Christian life is not only not doing what the fallen world does, and what sin would have us do if given half a chance, but it is a life that is actively doing what pleases God. Our baptism illustrates how we are to live the Christian life and it demonstrates our resolve to live that life, which is in our identity with Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. This is taught throughout these verses in Romans 6, but perhaps it is most clearly set forward in verse 12. In the light of your baptism...

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

C. More precisely, how are we to think and live according to this truth?

Consider Romans 6:11, which we read earlier. Paul wrote, "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 6:11). This verse is quite significant in that it is the first command that the Apostle Paul gave in this epistle to the Romans. From Romans 1:1 until 6:10 Paul had given instruction about God and His dealings among sinful humanity. But it is not until this verse, Romans 6:11, that he gave his first imperative, his first command in this epistle. Many commands would follow, but this was his first.

What is the substance of this command? We, who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, because of our union with Him in His death and resurrection, are to identify ourselves with our new life in Jesus Christ. For example,

"I am not to see myself as I was before being in Christ--a sinner condemned by God's judgment; rather, I am to see my identity as a new man in Jesus Christ. Yes, I still sin, or rather, sin dwells within me, but I, myself, am a new man, a new creature in Christ Jesus. I am no longer "Lars" the guilty sinner, but I am "Lars" the Christian, the new man in Christ."

If you, the Christian, assume your new self-identity as a Christian, then you will not feel condemned and estranged from Your God when you sin. Because you have identified yourself as the new man (or woman) in Christ, bound in spiritual union with the life of Your Savior, then you will see sin as a foreign and invasive principle, a common enemy of yours and God's, which is seeking to defeat you and defile you. You

will be able to call upon the Lord as a Friend and a Savior to help you defeat the sin that dwells in you, which is the common enemy to both you and your God. This is in contrast to the Christian who fails to identify himself in union with Jesus Christ. When he sins, he is fearful that the God of all wrath is against him and will most certainly punish him for his sin. No, the Father rescues and delivers from sin those who are in Christ. God the Judge condemns and punishes, and will destroy those who are outside of Jesus Christ, who are still in their sin.

Now there is a matter that is closely related to this that is not expressed here by Paul, but he does teach elsewhere in his New Testament Christians. Not only is each Christian to identify himself with his new life in Christ, but in the same manner *he is to identify other Christians as ones who are in Christ Jesus*. In other words, we Christians are to view other Christians' identity as in Christ, just as we are to view our own selves in union with our Savior. We are not to "identify" or characterize, or relate to other Christians on the basis of external *criteria*, but rather we are to view them and treat them as they are in reality—new creatures who are in spiritual union with Jesus Christ. Paul expressed this to the Corinthians:

¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:14-17)

Paul was explaining to these Corinthian Christians that their new life in Jesus Christ should shape their thinking about who they were. The same idea of Romans 6:11 is substantively set forth here. But there in Romans 6 Paul was commanding the individual Christian to identify *himself* to be in Christ, however here, Paul is telling the Christian to view *other Christians* to be in Christ. Paul reasons that the love that Christ manifested when He died for us should move us to live no longer for ourselves, but for Him, just as He gave Himself to die for us. Paul declared that from now on, that is, because of the death of Jesus Christ for us on the cross and upon our knowledge of this reality when we were converted, we should now view other Christians to be in union with Christ. If we are Christians, then we are not only to identify our individual self with the new life we enjoy in Christ, but we are to view and treat other Christians as they are in truth—ones who are new creatures, enjoying life with one another in the new creation.

Paul had declared in 2 Corinthians 5:16 that upon his conversion he no longer regard Christians "according to the flesh." What is meant by this is that he no longer assessed a Christian's identity or evaluated a Christian's person according to external or worldly criteria, but rather according to who they are in Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul made a statement that raises some interesting questions. Paul declared, "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer." Some have speculated that Paul was saying that he had formerly seen and heard Jesus Christ when He ministered on earth and before he, Paul, had been converted. Now it is possible, perhaps even likely, that Paul had seen and heard Jesus teach and witness Him doing miracles.

Probably Paul had heard and seen Jesus in Jerusalem, where he studied under Gamaliel for many years (cf. Acts 22:3). It would have been unlikely that Paul had never heard Jesus or of him during his student years. But whether or not he had heard Christ is not the point that Paul is trying to make. He viewed Jesus in those days with an unspiritual and worldly mindset (cf. 11:18). He refused to accept Christ in faith and repudiated his teachings to such an extent that he persecuted Christians.³

Now, when Paul wrote, "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh", we should not think that the expression, "according to the flesh" is modifying Christ, which would suggest that Paul was

³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1997), p. 516.

not concerned with our Lord's identity and person when He ministered on earth but is only concerned with Jesus as the risen and enthroned Lord. No, the expression, "according to the flesh", refers to Paul's action conveyed by the verb, "once regarded." He had once regarded Christ "according to the flesh", but did no longer. The expression, "according to the flesh" should be understood as Paul saying that he had once assessed or regarded Christ according to worldly or external criteria. He had judged Jesus according to the outward appearance of things.

Paul had despised and hated him because he had judged him only according to his outward appearance as a poor suffering man, yet claiming to be the Christ the Son of the living God. His Jewish notions of what the Messiah was to be led him to regard with indignation the claims of Jesus to be the Christ.⁴

But when Paul was converted, he saw Christ for who He truly is--He is the crucified, buried, and risen Christ the Lord. And Paul was telling the Christians at Corinth that they were in the same way to view one another as Christians who are in union with Jesus Christ.

Now, we have emphasized in the past that Christians are to have a high view of the nature of humanity as God having made man in His image. This should result in us regarding and treating every human being with dignity and regard. Of course being made in the image of God actually aggravates a man's guilt before God and condemnation by God because of what man has done with God's image through sin. Nevertheless, we are to treat all people everywhere with respect for the dignity that they have as made in the image of God.

But the Christian is to view another Christian to be on a much higher plane. If you are a Christian, you are in union with Jesus Christ. But your brother or sister in the faith sitting near you is equally in Christ. I am to have the same regard for you as I would have for Christ Himself, for you are in Christ. We are not to view one another as "sinners", but as "saints", that is, ones who are separated from sin and this fallen world separated, or holy, before the Lord.

This may be difficult for you if you are not "spiritually minded" sufficiently to see this truth. This maybe most difficult for some of you who have known one another your whole lives. You have established an opinion or an assessment of the character of another based upon what you have observed in his or her life for many years. But if you took this spiritual lesson to heart, you would resolve henceforth to "regard no one according to the flesh." Why? "For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." You should say, "From now on I will regard my brother or sister with the dignity which is his as a Christian. As I see myself in Christ, I will regard and treat my fellow believer as also a new creature in Christ.

How may we live according to our identity in Jesus Christ? *First*, in our union with Jesus Christ *we may live our lives with a sense of newness and freshness.* We are new creatures in Christ Jesus. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). We are different than what we were. We are as new creatures, different human beings from what we were before becoming Christians. Our sense of radical transformation should be evident to ourselves and to other who know us. Now granted, this may be more evident in those who came to salvation in Christ later in life, but it is true, nevertheless, that our sense of identity should be with the new life that God has given us in Jesus Christ.

Second, in our new identity in Christ, *we are no longer slaves to sin.* We read in Romans 6:5 and 6, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." God has set us free from sin as a cruel and hardened taskmaster, having set us free in Jesus Christ.

Third, in our new identity in Christ, we are to see that *God has reconciled us unto Himself*, although we were formerly His enemies due to sin. We read in Romans 5:10, "For if when we were enemies we

⁴ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1063), p. 140.

were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Fourth, our new life in Jesus Christ should be seen as *a new and vital relationship that we have with God and with His people*. When we became new in Jesus Christ, we became His children through an act of adoption by God our Father. He became our heavenly Father and we became His children. The Lord Jesus is the Firstborn Son in the family, which is filled with fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Fifth, in our new identity in Christ, we are to see ourselves in *our privileged relationship with God our Father*. We have come into a relationship with our Father that is characterized by our love for Him, but also by His love of us. Our Lord Jesus prayed to His Father regarding His disciples, “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). We are now able to call Him “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15-16), which is a call of familiarity and close relationship.

Because of our union with Jesus Christ, we no longer fear God as a Judge, but we may feel free to come unto Him with the access and privilege as sons, knowing that our heavenly Father loves us, cares for us, and will provide for us.

We can approach our Father with confidence. We may ask freely from Him our petitions (1 John 5:14). We may bring before Him our every need, whenever we see our need (Cf. Heb. 4:16). We may ask for wisdom from Him that He would guide us through our daily lives.

Sixth, in our new identity in Christ, we are to view ourselves as *joint heirs with Jesus Christ of all that the Father has promised to His Son*.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. ¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:16-18)

Seventh, in our new identity in Christ, *we are to view ourselves no longer primarily as citizens of this world, because we are citizens of heaven*. We are citizens of heaven, and serve here as ambassadors of our King.

And **eighth**, one of the greatest blessings of our union with Jesus Christ is *the calling and equipping of our Father to enable us to be conformed to the holy character of Jesus Christ*.

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake,
that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:11)
