

## *Solving the Identity Crisis*



**Pastor J.D. Hatfield**

Friends, do you know what the great epidemic in the world is today? It's not the financial downturn or looming depression, global warming, poverty, terrorism, or even AIDS. It isn't something that people normally talk about when they talk about the problems that plague mankind. So, what then is the great epidemic in the world today?

Let me give you a clue. It is the same problem that has been around for centuries. People have been asking the same questions and trying to fill the same voids, and will continue to do so, through history. Give up? Well, the great epidemic in today's and every day's society is the great *identity crisis*.

The problem of identity crisis is much larger than the church. In the history of mankind, a running theme is to be found among all tribes, nations, and tongues. This stretches to all times, all genders, and all people groups. It cuts across all social, religious, and political strata. This theme is best stated in the questions, "Who am I?", and "What am I here for?" The great yearning for identity is the warp and woof of religious studies, cultural research, philosophical and theological inquiry, as well as consuming the thoughts of the rank and file of society.

This manifests itself in any number of ways. You hear of it in an almost constant drumbeat of desperation: so and so is "trying to find themselves". The mid-life crisis seems to have crept into the teenage and every other

“age” as well. Popular culture feeds us with movies and books that promise to help us find our purpose. Religious minded works speak of finding out God’s will or finding one’s calling. Most assuredly, the desire of everyone is to find out who they are, why there were created, and what to do about it. Everyone wants to know where and how they “fit in”.

Because of this all-encompassing desire, there are myriad “solutions” offered. The advertisers and marketers have picked up on this, and tell us if we just have this or that item, that we will find true fulfillment. “It will change your life”, if you go to this place, see this person, do this thing, etc. If you watch television, notice the movies that are released, read the paper, and look at the banner ads on your computer, you will see that there is no end to the search for significance, the desire for sufficiency, and the need to feel secure.

To put it another way, every person who was and who will ever be born is really looking for only three things: *safety*, *satisfaction*, and *rest*. Think about it and you will agree that any desire can fall into one or more of these categories. This is why it is so critical that Christians understand that it isn’t *who* we are, but *whose* we are. Jesus said that if we seek to find our life we would lose it, but that if we lost it for his sake we would find it (Matthew 16:25). Instead of needing a certain social or political status, religious, professional or community standing, we need to identify with who we are in Christ. The truth is that in these days of increasing tension, compromise, and apostasy, unless we find ourselves in Christ, we will find ourselves in hell.

When the pressure is on and life becomes hard or boring, the temptation is to let the world begin pressing us into its mold. Christians are in danger of falling away if their faith hasn’t matured to the point of Jesus living his life

through them (Galatians 2:20). The great need of this or any hour is for Christians to know and experience who they are in Christ. Indeed this seems to be the thrust of the Pauline revelation (cf. Colossians 1:27).

Unfortunately, most in the Church today have no perception of who and what they really are in Christ. It would seem that there are four chief reasons for this: the lack of belief, the lack of understanding, the lack of knowledge, and the lack of application. Some believe that they are living only for the sweet by and by, and that this life is only to be endured, and never to be enjoyed. They fail to realize that *"godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* (1 Timothy 4:8)." The hope of glory is only for the future, they reason, and don't have the revelation that this hope should vitally affect life for the Christian in the here and now (1 John 3:2-3).



Others are trying to live out the Christian life in their own strength. They are trying to work to please God. However, the thing about working to please God is that you never know when you have done enough or performed well enough. The devil will tell you, "You could have prayed longer. You could have gone to one more church service. God is not pleased with you." But when you understand God's grace, when you understand God has already done all the work, then all you need to do is receive His gifts of grace. All the pressure is off, and peace is the result.

Thirdly, there are Christians who don't have any knowledge of this, they have never been taught who they are in Christ, or haven't grown in their knowledge of God. 2 Peter 1:2 points out that grace and peace can be

multiplied to us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Understanding of God's Word always increases our capacity to handle more of His blessings. As we increase our capacity, God increases the amount He gives.

The lack of belief, the lack of understanding, and the lack of knowledge have led us to where we are today, where Christians, who are supposed to be enjoying "life more abundantly (John 10:10)" are languishing in a sea of despair. When such a weak life is presented, it is no wonder the world is not turning to this Christ. No wonder self-empowered (instead of Spirit-empowered) Christians are becoming like the world. We haven't applied

Unfortunately, most in the Church today have no perception of just who and what they really are in Christ. It would seem that there are four chief reasons for this: the lack of *belief*, the lack of *understanding*, the lack of *knowledge*, and the lack of *application*.

the identification truths of Christ to our lives.

Christians need to ask themselves some important questions: Do you really know who you are in Christ? How do you see yourself as a Christian? Do you see yourself as powerful? Or do you see

yourself as impotent? Do you understand the true extent of what it means to have the Son of God living inside of you? Do you hold your head up high because of your relationship to Christ, or are you sometimes embarrassed? Do see yourself in rags or in riches?

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32). Sometimes we emphasize the fact that the truth has the power to make us free. Truth is truth whether you believe it or not. Facts change, but truth does not. And truth is truth whether you know it or not.

Let us approach this from a different perspective. There are times when we can never be free unless we "know" the truth. If you do not know the

truth, you may be acting on a lie. If you act on the basis of an untruth, then the untruth becomes the reality for you. We often shortchange ourselves by believing we are less than God says we are. What a shame it would be to believe you are a pauper when you are really a prince.



I have got good news for you as Christians. The book of Isaiah, in its prophecies about the coming Messiah, tells us that safety, satisfaction, and rest are to be found in Christ. Isaiah 32:2 – *And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; (this is safety) as rivers of water in a dry place (this is satisfaction), as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (this is rest).* This was a prophecy looking forward to the coming of Christ, and to what he would do for us.

Now we look back and see what Christ has done for us. The first chapter in the book of Ephesians tells us of what God has done in Christ for us to be significant, so that we can rest from all our striving to be somebody. It tells us that we are sufficient in Christ, and that we have all we need and can find satisfaction in Him. It tells us that we are secure, that we have safety in Jesus. Today, I want to assure you of who you are in Christ, and call you to act in faith upon these truths. If you do, you will indeed have safety, satisfaction, and rest. Amen.

In the first nine verses of Ephesians, we discover at least three characteristics of who you are in Christ. And these three comprise a revelation that is most needed by the church today. If these three were understood, it would solve the identity crisis in the church.

The first point I want to make is that in Christ we are significant. Looking at our text, Ephesians 1:1 says that we are saints. Think about that. Not just a sinner saved by grace, but much more. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that we are the righteousness of God in Christ. If the clothes make the man, then we have it made, because Jeremiah 23:6 says the Lord Our Righteousness, it is His righteousness that we clothe ourselves with. Nothing can make us less or more holy than we are in God's eyes right now.

We are significant, we matter to God. 1 Peter 2:9 says you are part of a royal priesthood. That sounds important to me. Revelation 1:5-6 says that Jesus has made us kings and priests in the kingdom. In the Kingdom of God we are players, we are significant.

We are significant, we matter to other believers. 1 Corinthians 12:14-24 says that we cannot function properly without one another. Ephesians 4:16 says the body of Christ, that's us, must come together, using all of its parts. You are just as important to the body as me, and you are just as important as Billy Graham, or anybody else for that matter. When a team wins the Super Bowl, every person on that team gets a ring, even the backups. Everyone counts in the Kingdom of God.

This is how we apply this knowledge of our significance in Christ. Hebrews 4:16 says that we are to come boldly to the throne of God. Ephesians 3:12 says that we are to have boldness and access with confidence because of Him. Amen. Our prayers are like prophecy, we just call on God to fulfill in our daily lives what He has already deposited in us; we make a withdrawal on our heavenly, and inexhaustible account. 1 Peter 4:10 says there are many graces in God, we all have been given grace, we all have something to give. We all are significant.

The second point I want to make is that in Christ we are sufficient. Ephesians 1:3 says that he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings. It's not that he will bless us, but that he has blessed us. It's a done deal. Colossians 2:10 says that we are complete in Him. Complete is even more than sufficient, isn't it? Complete means lacking nothing, sufficient for anything. You have got what it takes, no matter what it takes. 1 John 2:27 says you have an anointing, and no man has to teach you, God will teach you by the Holy Spirit himself. You are sufficient; you are anointed. Romans 5:2 says we have been given grace which gives us peace with God, enough grace to stand in any circumstance.

To apply this we need to look at 2 Peter 1:4-10. We partake of the divine nature *through* the great and precious promises. We need to take the Word as the Word about us and act on it.

The third point I want to make is that in Christ we are secure. Ephesians 1:4-9 says that we are chosen, holy, blameless, predestined, adopted, accepted, redeemed and forgiven. We know His wisdom, insight, and His will. It says that this was a pleasure to God; it makes God feel good that we are in Christ. It says this gives Him glory. I ask you, does this sound like we are secure? Would you throw someone out of your house that made you feel good, and who praised you and brought you nothing but glory? Would you give them all these things if they weren't secure with you?

In Christ you are *significant*. In Christ you are *sufficient*. In Christ you are *secure*. You can say it another way. In Christ you are *righteous*. In Christ you are *rich*. In Christ you are *received*.

We are secure. Romans 8:35-39 says that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ. Somebody say "nothing." We are secure no matter who is against us, what we do, and no matter what happens. 1

Thessalonians 4:13-18 says we have hope, that even when we die, we have a reception in glory, a resurrection of our body, and a reunion with the saints. These promises tell us that we are as secure as secure gets.

The application of this truth is found in 1 John 1:9. When we sin, we go to God and ask for forgiveness, and He does so not only because He is faithful to us, it says that He is just in doing so. It is the right thing to do, to restore our fellowship with Him. He longs to be in close communion with us. James 4:8 says that if we draw close to Him, He will draw close to us. In Christ we are secure in that we can never lose our salvation, our relationship cannot end because it is based on the Father's own relationship with His perfect Son, and we are in Him. We have an eternal, legal forgiveness. Justice has



been served, and we are justified, just as if we had never sinned.

Now we still make mistakes, we still sin, and we seem to lose fellowship. But take heart, because we can get right back into pure fellowship with God by coming to Him for daily cleansing, like washing our dirty spiritual feet. The holiness has been given, we are already made holy (Hebrews 10:10), we do not work for it; we work from it. We have legal, judicial forgiveness, what we need is parental forgiveness. Judicial forgiveness is what makes God our Father. Parental forgiveness is calling on God *as* Father. It is as if you have a child who tracks mud through your house and on your new carpet. They are still in relationship, but until they ask for forgiveness and the dirt is removed they are not in good fellowship. Judicial forgiveness deals with sin and eternal damnation, parental forgiveness deals with sin and temporal defilement (2 Corinthians 7:1). The

daily cleansing is a matter of humility, repentance, and devotion. Allow God to wash your feet. And learn to wash the feet of others. This is what Jesus was teaching in John 13.

You see you are a minister in God's kingdom. Sure we all have different roles, but we all have a part to play. We are instructed to be part of the process of one another's forgiveness. Not in the judicial or parental sense, but as a part of the fellowship of the saints. We all minister to one another this way. James gives us clear instructions on how we can fulfill this command Jesus has given us (James 5:16). The context of James 5 is that Christians can get really defeated in their spiritual lives. Persecution, trials, and the sufferings of this life can weigh so heavy on a Christian, he sins, he backslides, his spiritual feet get muddy and filthy, and his fellowship with God is broken, he loses his peace and joy, he gets spiritually sick inside, spiritually depressed, he doesn't feel like praying, he doesn't feel like reading his Bible, he doesn't feel like going to church. If this is you what should you do? You should confess your sins to a brother or sister in Christ. Let them pray for you. Let them wash your spiritual feet. Let them be significant. Let them fulfill their ministry.



We must realize that God loves us, and He has accepted us. There is nothing we can do for God to love us more. There is also nothing we can do for God to love us less. God doesn't change us so that He can love us; He loves us in order to change us. It is His love that changes us. If believers would surrender to that love, bask in it, and rest in their relationship in

Christ, they would feel secure and understand that they are accepted. Then they could wash one another's feet.

In Christ you are significant. In Christ you are sufficient. In Christ you are secure. You can say it another way. In Christ you are righteous. In Christ you are rich. In Christ you are received. You are a saint, so learn to realize your righteousness. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing, so learn to rely on your resources. You are accepted in the Beloved, so learn to rest in your relationship.

In closing, I want to stress how important this is to our everyday lives, and what it is that Christ has done for us in the here and now. If you live based on what others say about you, you may or may not be any better off. It depends on whom you talk to. If you live based upon who God says you are, then you can hold your head up high. You are somebody because Jesus lives in you. In Christ you have all you will ever need. And in Christ you are totally secure. There is no person, power or thing that can ever take that away from you.

We are significant, we are sufficient, and we are secure. We have found safety, satisfaction, and rest. We need to stop identifying with our hurts, our hindrances, and our harassments, and start identifying with Christ. He has already identified with all your troubles (Hebrews 2:14 / 4:15), and has taken them away if we will only allow them not to come back on us (1 Peter 5:7). When the world, the flesh, or the devil try and talk you out of your inheritance, you need to talk yourself right back into it. You need to help others identify also (Hebrews 12:12) – this is how we are filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21 / Colossians 3:16-17). Understand what Christ has done, identify and be filled with all the fullness of God.