

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-17

HOW DO I CHANGE MY IDENTITY?



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Some people have to change their identity based upon their danger, often as part of a witness protection program. That change of identity results in a massive change of life: their name, SSN, appearance, location, occupation, friends, outlook.

Other people choose to change their identity based upon their feelings. In 2014 Facebook allowed users to choose from 54 identities, but that was criticized as too limiting. They now have 12 preset gender identities but also a blank box to allow users to choose any word to identify themselves with. I saw this past week a mother complaining that Delta would not let her buy a ticket for her son, because he is non-binary, and Delta only had binary choices (male/female) in their booking system. People's identities are clearly very important to them.

Others want to change their identity because of what they have done. The first article that came up when I searched Google for 'change of identity' was one titled *How can I erase my identity and start over?* There are actually services that offer to help change your identity, but most of them are scams. The Boston Legal Services department issued a paper that deals with *The Myths and Realities of Identity Change*. Myth 1 is, "You become an entirely new person. Reality: You're the same person with just a new name or new SSN." People want to change their identity because of the difference it will make to their life, but can't.

Some of us simply try on different identities at different times in our lives, identities that will be reflected in our clothes, our hairstyles, our friends, our hobbies, our careers, our cars, and so on. Our chosen identity affects our choices.

"Who am I?" is one of the central and influential questions of human existence and wrong answers result in a lot of confusion, stress, uncertainty, and instability. What's the right answer to **"Who am I?" and what are the effects of the right answer?**

BACKGROUND

Paul was being attacked by spiritual enemies in Corinth who focused on his lack impressive credentials, appearance, and speech. He therefore defends himself, but does so in such a way that will benefit everyone with identity issues. He starts by describing his pre-conversion identity and then explains his changed identity through conversion to Christ. He had just referred to Christ's love in the atonement and now explains how that changed his whole outlook.



What was Paul's old identity and how did it affect him?



1. OLD CREATURES MAKE SUPERFICIAL JUDGMENTS (16)

We judged people superficially

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh...(16)

'Regard' means to evaluate or judge. 'According to the flesh' can mean evaluating using only our bodily or physical senses. But in many contexts, including this, 'flesh' goes even further than 'body' to mean 'carnal' or 'fleshly.'

Prior to conversion, Paul made judgments, decisions, assessments, estimates, and evaluations of people using his bodily senses and sinful criteria. As a Pharisee, he was an expert at external judgments. He judged and made decisions about people, based entirely on how they looked, sounded, walked, dressed, smelled, styled their hair, who their friends were, and so on. These were shallow, hollow, superficial, and sinful values.

He did not bring any spiritual or faith consideration into his decisions about people. Not once did he think about whether they were chosen by God, atoned for by Christ, or indwelt by the Spirit.

We judged Christ superficially

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer (16).

Before he came to faith, Paul also judged Christ with fleshly criteria. He came to a decision about him using only his physical senses and sinful standards. To him, and the Corinthians, Christ was poor, despised, rejected, judged, cursed, crucified, dead, buried, and defeated.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Our values reveal our spiritual state. If our judgments and decisions about people and Christ are based on superficial or sinful criteria, we are still old creatures. If all we see is what we see, we will only see what we see. If we judge people by appearance, sound, smell, school, house, car, job, children, degrees, etc. we reveal more about ourselves than we know about them.

Our people decisions reveal our Christ decision. The way we judge people is determined by how we judge Christ. If we evaluate people wrongly we are evaluating Christ wrongly (and vice versa). If we make wrong decisions about Christ, we will make wrong decisions about people.

OUR VISION
IS OUR VALUES



**What's the right way to make judgments and decisions?
We need to become a new creature to make new judgments.**



2. NEW CREATURES MAKE SPIRITUAL JUDGMENTS (17)

You are in Christ

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ...(17).

The Christ that Paul despised became the center of his identity. To be 'in Christ' was to be accepted by Christ, secure in Christ, close to Christ, comfortable in Christ, rich in Christ, free in Christ, happy in Christ, viewed in Christ. How did this transformation happen? How did Paul get from 'against Christ' to 'in Christ?' It was through a new view of Christ's love in Christ's cross (14-15). How did he get that new vision? God made him a new creation.

You are a new creation

...he is a new creation, the old has passed away; behold, the new has come (17).

Just as God created the original creation out of nothing in Genesis 1, so he creates new creations out of nothing every time someone comes to faith in Christ. If anyone has faith in Christ, it's because God has made him/her nothing less than a new creation out of nothing. The old has gone, the new has come.

You have new vision

We regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer (16).

A new creature has new eyes. New creations see the whole creation differently. Old ways of viewing ourselves, people, and Christ have passed away. New ways of viewing ourselves, people, and Christ have come. A new view of Christ results in a new view of Christians and a new view of ourselves. We no longer judge using the old superficial and sinful criteria but with new spiritual and holy criteria. The more we view Christ spiritually, the more we view people spiritually and vice versa.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Are you in Christ? There is no way into Christ apart from faith in his cross. Only the cross can re-create us. Christ's death gives new life. The Creator was killed to recreate us.

What's your identity? The more your identity is centered in Christ, the more it will re-create you. A changed identity changes us entirely.

Are you celebrating your new creation? David celebrated the original physical creation of all out of nothing (e.g. Ps. 104). How much more should we celebrate our new spiritual creation out of nothing

How do you see? Do you have a new perspective on yourself, on others, on Christ? Have you changed the way you evaluate people and come to decisions about them?

NEW CREATION, NEW VISION,
NEW CHRIST, NEW CHRISTIANS



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others stories



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Creator, thank you for creating me and for re-creating me in Christ so that I can be a new creation with new vision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer the question, "Who am I?" What's your identity?
2. "How does that identity influence your life?"
3. What criteria do most use to judge people?
4. How does being a new creation in Christ change the way you view yourself and others?
5. How can you improve your vision further?
6. Read Psalm 104 through the lens of this Psalm. What difference does that lens make?

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