LEADING GRACE

SPRING, 2024

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE



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A word from the president

I recently read that because we establish most of our identity through our family of origin, and the breaking down of the traditional biblical family, many millennials, Gen–Z's and those even younger struggle to understand their identity. Many say we are living in a time where many are having an identity crisis.

I love the focus of this issue of Leading Grace where "identity" is unpacked in different ways. No matter what our upbringing is or our life experiences, understanding God's Word with a Free Grace theology, in my opinion, establishes us with the strongest roots for our identity no matter what storms may beat against us.

- We hold strongly to God's justification as an unconditional free gift.
- We also are clear that assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer and is founded, not in our experience or in anything inside of us, but upon the testimony of God in His written Word.

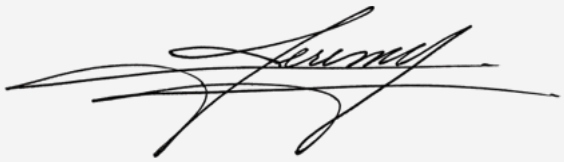
I like to say, once we are adopted into God's eternal family (cf. Romans 8:15-17) we cannot be unadopted. My wife and I have two biological children and two adopted. I can tell you that our love for and commitment to our adopted children is absolutely no different than with our biological kids. I've always thought this is true of the heart of our heavenly Father toward us, his adopted kids, as with His only begotten Son. That blows me away. This eternal security and love that the Father has for us, His children, is the key to having a solid sense of identity.

As an alliance we work together to graciously and enthusiastically advance this message—this good news—of the gospel of God's amazing grace to those inside and outside the Free Grace Alliance.

Let me just share some great things with you: Jeremy Mikkelsen has come on as our Executive Director. I am so hopeful for the strength and effectiveness of the FGA with him in this critical leadership role. Please show him and his family support by praying for them as they step out in faith go where God has lead them.

Also, our International Free Grace Alliance conference has changed from our traditional Monday through Wednesday format to a Thursday through Saturday format. We feel this will give more people the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful time of connecting, encouraging, and equipping. So, mark your calendars for October 17-19 and plan on joining us at Faith Bible Church in The Woodlands, TX (see the advertisement on page 14 for details).

Still amazed by His grace,



Jeremy Vance

FIGHT THE ALGORITHM

The next generation needs to hear about grace. But who can convince the **AI overlords** that FGA content is great and should be shown to all these young people?

Actually… **you can**, you increase the reach of our social media tools is by liking, subscribing, hitting the bell, and following us on social. It is free, and takes a few moments of your time.

Use your phone and these QR codes to go to our respective social pages.

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YOU ASKED, WE ANSWER

Humberto Marcos of Brazil writes *"...I would like to know your position about the doctrine of predestination. I have been studying this subject and I still struggle with that."*

Thank you for writing in. You are not alone in your struggle with the topic of predestination– the Church has been debating the nature of God's "election" for thousands of years.

The Free Grace Alliance does not have an official position on predestination, and if you surveyed the grace community you would discover that grace folks hold several different views– ranging from a full moderate Calvinism (i.e. Charles Ryrie), to what might be labeled "Provisionism" (i.e. Leighton Flowers), but whatever you want to call it, on that specific issue of predestination– many are teaching what could be called Armenian "foresight election".

There are also many folks in our community who teach that election has more to do with vocation (to be God's ambassadors) than salvation. (i.e: Daniel Weierbach's and the LOTUS crew). Shawn Lazar's book, *Chosen to Serve*, published by the Grace Evangelical Society, is helpful on this topic.

Some interpreters note that election is in the plural, "us" rather than "I" which leads some to teach that election has more of a corporate focus rather than individual, God has elected "The Church" and when individuals believe and are sealed "in Christ" that we become part of the "elect", a corporate identity.

Lots of options, but our encouragement to you would to not to over spiritualize the word "predestination". The Greek προορίζω, proorizō, simply means to pre-decide. What exactly does God pre-decide?

That believers would be conformed into the image of Jesus (Romans 8:29). That believers would be adopted as children by the work of Jesus (Ephesians 1:5). That believers would have an inheritance (Ephesians 1:11).

The fact that God has pre-planned blessings for you and other believers should be an encouragement for all of us. Paul does not leave anyone confused to how one enters into these amazing blessings– the climax of Ephesians 1 is found in verses 13 & 14:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Two simple conditions: hear the gospel and believe it– and the result: being sealed in Him.

That is the essence of free grace. – *The Editors*

Do you have a question? Write us:
Free Grace Alliance
8909 Cochrans Crossing Dr
The Woodlands, TX 77381

Or online at contact@freegracealliance.com



PUT YOUR CHURCH ON THE MAP

The Free Grace Alliance is kicking off a mapping project to identify churches that teach free grace. We will start with member churches (and highlight them) and then start adding other grace-friendly churches. If you would like to add your church to the list visit the Free Grace Alliance website and check out the map and choose the option to add a church.

Is your church interested in being highlighted as a member church? If so, reach out to our Executive Director: jeremy@freegracealliance.com

USE THIS LINK:

freegracealliance.com/mapupdate

A Graceful Identity

By Joe Duke

I recently stepped away from my role as the Co-founder and Sr. Pastor of LifePoint Church. For over 35 years I worked in the trenches of ministry. I watched God do the amazing. I saw people at their best. And I saw them at their worst. Like all pastors, I experienced the joys and heartaches of "the people business." But God was always among us working His generous plan of redemption and reaching kindly in our direction. Eventually, I was reminded from pastoral succession experts that "every pastor is an interim pastor."[1] One day, every pastor leaves. Now it was my turn to pass the baton.

Years ago, a spiritual mentor offered a piece of advice that I took to heart: "Don't underestimate the emotions you'll feel when you drive off your church campus for the last time as the pastor." Turns out, that was good advice. Because that's a long drive. You'd better grip the wheel at 10 and 2 because every intense emotion and memory are involuntarily summoned for thoughtful review. Fortunately, I survived, and the pastoral succession process at our church was remarkably positive. Textbook perfect if there's such a thing. I'm grateful.

But my departure as the Sr. Pastor was bigger than tending to the details of an exit strategy. I knew I had some other work to do—work inside my own soul. At one point, I called it *ministry detox*—the gradual rebuilding of my inner life that may have been sacrificed on the altar of *church progress*. And I knew I had to pay precise attention to one area in particular. *Identity*.



IDENTITY

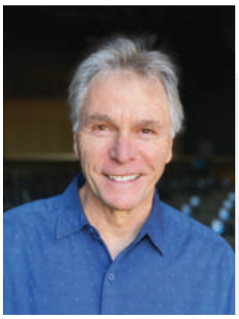
WE CANNOT FULLY EMBRACE OUR IDENTITY UNTIL WE HAVE EMBRACED JESUS. AND WE CANNOT FULLY EMBRACE JESUS UNTIL WE HAVE EMBRACED HIS GRACE. JESUS IS INSEPARABLE FROM GRACE.

JOE DUKE

Who am I *now*—since I am no longer who I *was*? Have my accomplishments as a pastor accidentally sabotaged the simple truth that I am also a *child of God*? Is my sense of worth resting on what I have done for Christ or what Christ has done for me? Is my true identity flourishing even though my name is missing from my office door? These are not trivial questions.

The concept of our identity is foundational in our Christian experience. It's at the core of who we are in God's eyes. And it answers the question of our intrinsic worth. Like every human being, the believer in Jesus is created in God's image and is the object of God's affection. But the believer in Jesus also has a unique identity. Something extraordinary. He or she is *in Christ*.

Thumb through the pages of the New Testament, and you'll see the phrase *in Christ* or *in Him* peppered throughout. Paul said it as succinctly as possible when he wrote, "For He made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*."[2] Jesus temporarily changed His identity to a suffering sin-bearer so our identity could be permanently changed to a forgiven sinner. It's a change that affects our spiritual DNA. "All things have



Joe Duke is the Founder and Executive Director of GraceWorks International and the Co-founder and Pastor Emeritus of LifePoint Church where he served as Pastor for over 35 years. Joe is a graduate of Asbury College (University) and Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM). He is a writer and speaker who is obsessed with helping people grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Joe's book, *Reflections: Words to Inspire, Challenge, and Encourage You* is available on Amazon.

become new."[3] Through belief in Christ, we "become the righteousness of God in Him."

Living in your identity in Christ means you're convinced what God says about you is true. You know, for example, you're forgiven. You're made new. You're one with every other believer. You're dead to sin and alive to God. You're declared righteous. You're a temple of the Holy Spirit. You're accepted in the beloved. And you'll be with God forever. You *experience* your new identity because all those things are true about you, and you've taken God at His word. The degree to which you believe those truths is the degree to which you enjoy the reality of your identity in Christ.

During an especially grueling season of ministry and personal challenges, I met with a counselor to help me process life. In one of our sessions, I was recounting what I believed about God. I went on to affirm that "I am completely and perfectly loved by God. Nothing I could ever do, say, or think could cause God to love me more or love me less." A declaration dripping with biblical profundity. But the way those words rolled off my tongue created a push-back from my counselor, "Did you catch *how* you said those words?" Apparently, my statement about God's love for me—profound and earth-shattering as it was—had escaped my mouth void of passion and conviction. It must have sounded like a casual weather report. Partly sunny with light wind. What was I really saying? Maybe my words were just a rehearsed, theological talisman. Or maybe I said them because that's the kind of thing preachers are supposed to say. Truth be known, I believed my words, but I didn't feel them. And I wanted to feel them.

Those who know me might refer to me as a champion of grace. At least I'd like to think that's the case. Through all those years of ministry, I've been committed to clearly communicating the free grace perspective of life with God—a completely free salvation accompanied by an invitation to apprentice with Jesus and invest our lives in what matters most. I believe it's the greatest message in the world. But my wife has reminded me more than once, "You freely give God's grace to others but not always to yourself." She's right, again. Maybe it's like the plumber whose leaky sink is never fixed. Or the lawyer who hasn't bothered to draw up his own last will and testament. Even pastors can come up short in experiencing God's grace. I'm guilty.

Grace is awesome and, at the same time, elusive. It slips through our fingers like liquid gold. Even while proclaiming its priceless value, I've felt grace flow through my heart without sticking. And sometimes I didn't even realize it.

We cannot fully embrace our identity until we have embraced Jesus. And we cannot fully embrace Jesus until we have embraced His grace. Jesus is inseparable from grace. I know I'm more likely to fully embrace my identity in Christ when I fully embrace His grace. Sounds like the Apostle Paul figured it out and I think we can too. Here's how he said it:

> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been in vain. In fact, I worked harder than all of them—*yet not I, but the grace of God with me*.[4]

As strange as it sounds, grace is passively received. That's a hard admission for me especially since I consider myself a recovering control freak. But "one cannot summon grace with a whistle."[5] Grace refuses to be manipulated by our clever strategies. Instead, it's free and all around us. David Benner paints a picture that I'm finding more and more compelling when he suggests that "surrender is the discovery that we are in a river of love and that we float without having to do anything."[6]

When the tentacles of an unsanctified worldview wrap themselves around grace, a struggle is likely to follow. Grace is offensive to many. It hardly makes sense. No wonder John Wesley is said to have observed, "Nothing is more repugnant to capable, reasonable people than grace." Maybe grace seems repugnant because nothing we can do will position us to earn it or deserve it. Grace



dodges our claim to moral superiority. God's grace is free. But we'd rather work for it. Or at least try. We're in trouble and in desperate need of help from God.

In the traditional definition, grace is *unmerited favor*. It's a kindness directed toward all who have done nothing even to ready themselves for it. While *unmerited favor* is a beautiful picture of grace, I also appreciate Paul Zahl's refreshing description of grace as "one-way love."[7] God's love and grace are lavished on us without the requirement of a behavioral contribution from us. It's *one-way*; coming from God to us. And God's grace illuminates His *prodigal love*—wasteful and poured out without insisting on a payback. That's because reimbursing God is impossible.

The more time I spend in the wonder of grace the bigger and more profound it becomes. Grace is enormous and enormously offensive. It is liberating and off-putting. Grace is ready to free us at every turn, of every sin, through all offenses. Grace is the way God works. We might even say, it's who He is. "None of us, if left to ourselves, would devise a plan like God's plan to rescue humanity .... You should be slightly uneasy with grace! That probably means you're beginning to understand it."[8]

Seems like some days I live out of my identity in Christ. Other days, not so much. But I've caught the scent of where real life is found. And I hope you have too. I never want to settle for cheap substitutes. I want to enjoy a graceful identity— an identity full of grace.

Notes

1. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), p. 9.

2. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV. (Italics mine).

3. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV.

4. 1 Corinthians 15:10 NET. (Italics mine).

5. Scott Russell Sanders, *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 191.

6. David G. Benner, *Surrender to Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 63.

7. Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), loc. 510, Kindle.

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THE MORE TIME I SPEND IN THE WONDER OF GRACE THE BIGGER AND MORE PROFOUND IT BECOMES. GRACE IS ENORMOUS AND ENORMOUSLY OFFENSIVE. IT IS LIBERATING AND OFF-PUTTING. GRACE IS READY TO FREE US AT EVERY TURN, OF EVERY SIN, THROUGH ALL OFFENSES. GRACE IS THE WAY GOD WORKS.

JOE DUKE

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

My sense is that identity in our society has become a euphemism for specialness or status and therefore the banner under which many of us work out our self-justification. That is, our identity constitutes an attempt to answer the deeper question of, "What is it that makes me valuable/worthy/lovable?" But experience (and Scripture!) teaches that the search for an identity that will satisfy the voices of accusation in our lives is a road that has no end.

To find one's identity in Christ means that our ultimate identity is bestowed, not earned or established. And that identity is not just unshakable but good! This is vital and urgently good news to anyone unsure of who they are, which, I'm convinced, is everyone at some point or another.

David Zahl
Mockingbird

Knowing "who I am in Christ" can determine how you live your life. We hear a lot about how we "identify" these days, but knowing our "Jesus identity" will determine how we live our spiritual lives. This isn't easy; it's supernatural. It takes us into the spiritual realm. 2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it well: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (NKJV). This means that "who I am" at the very core of my being has radically changed. I am a brand new creation. Things that were once true of me are not true any more. In fact, everything about me has become new!

You say, "I believed in Jesus as my Savior years ago, but I don't feel "new" most of the time. In fact, old problems that used to get me down still do today!" That's confusing who I am forever 'in Christ' with 'who I am becoming in this life.' 'Who you are' is true no matter how you feel. If you're a new creation in Christ, but you don't feel like it, that doesn't change the fact that you are a new creation. It's in the spiritual realm, it's eternal, and it's unseen. 'Who I am becoming' is in the here-and-now, in space and time. It's in the physical realm, and we see it every day, and that's why we often forget who we really are. The Bible puts it this way: For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18, NET). As we learn who we are in Christ, the invisible, unseen person I really am in Christ will become visible. This is a process of sanctification.

Phil Congdon
New Braunfels Bible Church, Texas

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

In Jesus Christ, I am not who I once was and not who I will become. Then who am I? I am a Christian, one who belongs to Christ. Union with Him means that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. This gives me my true identity. It means that on my best day it is Jesus and me, and on my worst day it is also Jesus and me. When I serve Him, He is with me; when I sin, He is also with me--indeed in me. Shouldn't this make a difference in what I do, what I say, where I go, and what I think? Jesus said He would never leave or forsake those who are His, but it is mind-boggling that He would hang with me when I sin, as grieved as He might be. Such is His faithfulness and persevering love.

FGA Executive Council Member
Charlie Bing
GraceLife

Have you ever written an obituary? I helped with one recently. What a challenge! To sum up a person's life in a few words. When we do that, we ask, "What is this person?" We ask how they're related to the rest of the world and what they've accomplished in that life of relationships.

The importance of identity stands out here. Identity is the context of our life. From identity we live out our life, our walk. There are all sorts of identities, some important, some false, some trivial. In recent years we've been repeatedly and regrettably reminded of the significance of identity, for better and worse. However, believers in Christ have an identity that transcends any other identity.

No other identity has the importance or immense implications of our identity in Christ. Died with Him. Buried with Him. Raised with Him. Ascended with Him. Seated with Him in the heavenlies. All because we are *in Him*. And much of church doesn't even know, they're hung up on moralistic platitudes while those that do know squabble about relatively unimportant things, not seeing that identity also means unity. What a perplexing situation! But I encourage you in it, apprehend our identity in Christ. Grasp it, teach it, model what it means to walk out of it, and enjoy the security of being in Christ.

Andy Stacy
Tumwater First Baptist, Washington



From Position to Condition

By Dennis Rokser

As I was teaching at my church I came to 2 Corinthians 5:17 where Paul wrote, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. All things have passed away. All things have become new.”

I have heard many who must have been listening to the Beatle’s,“twist & shout”, as hermeneutical inspiration as they used this verse “exegetically” to teach that “all things have” not “become new” practically, instead of positionally, failing to observe the key words “in Christ”.

In doing so, one can take the spotlight off Jesus Christ and the believers new creation position “in Christ” and place it on the believer’s practice or condition, erroneously concluding that you are not a new creation in Christ if you still struggle with sin or fruitfulness in your life. This sliding scale of subjectivity is utilized to discern what is true in a person’s life.



Have they not read the New Testament Epistles such as 1 & 2 Corinthians, or Romans 7? Can we be self-deceived about our own walk with the Lord and the sin that so easily besets us? What saith the Scriptures?

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren *(their position in the family of God)*, **could not speak to you as to spiritual people** *(controlled by the Holy Spirit in their practice, 2:15-16)* **but as to carnal** *(controlled by the flesh in their practice)*, **as to babes** *(spiritually immature in their growth)* **in Christ** *(their position in union with Jesus Christ as a member of the Church).*

A Conundrum for Lordship Salvation

Yet there are those today who preach what is called "Lordship Salvation" who would deny the reality of a believer's eternal salvation if they were still living lives characterized by carnality.

In this view, a "professor" of Christ would lack the needed "repentance of sins" and "total surrender to Christ's Lordship" evidenced by "ongoing faithfulness and fruitfulness" subsumed under "faith in Christ" to prove he had "true saving" faith.

There are certainly "false professors" of salvation, but they are those who have faith in "Christ plus" instead of faith in "Christ, period", see Matthew 7:21-23.

Apparently, Paul did not receive the memo of the alleged eleven tests of practical godly living derived from a Chubby Checker *"let's twist again"* interpretation of 1 John to prove whether one is a "true" believer in Christ or not. Notice how 1 John addresses the issue of believers having daily "fellowship with God", see 1 John 1:3-7, while the Gospel of John was to encourage the unsaved to believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life, see John 20:30-31.

Instead, the apostle Paul taught if you have trusted in Jesus Christ alone as presented in the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4, 11) that you were justified before God (Rom. 3:21-28), saved by God's grace from sin's penalty (Eph. 2:8-9), and were now "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17) regardless of your progress or lack thereof in practical sanctification. This conclusion was true though Paul desired that all believers spiritually grow to live practically holy & fruitful lives (see 1 Cor. 6:11, 19-20).

Too many Bible teachers fail to rightly divide the Word of God when distinguishing the believer's unchanging position in Christ vs. their changing condition or practice with Christ, which then creates confusion for those who now focus on their walk instead of Christ's work to find absolute assurance of eternal salvation.

Defining Being "In Christ"

The New Testament Epistles are replete with numerous verses highlighting the believer's incredible position, union, or identity in Christ (Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:3,6-7; Col. 2:6-7, etc.) because positional truth forms the foundation for the believer's identity, walk, growth, and service for our Savior. The words "in" or "with" highlight the believer's union in or relationship with Jesus Christ. When someone says, "I'm in a marriage", it means I am in a certain personal relationship with my spouse that involves certain benefits and responsibilities. It also acts as a form of "identity" in contrast to those who are single or unmarried. Before we were saved by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone, we were "in Adam" by way of our position and identification relationally, but now we are "in Christ" forever – from God's point of view (1 Cor. 15:22). We must embrace this position by faith yet be careful to distinguish this from our daily condition.

Ongoing Sin Problems at Corinth

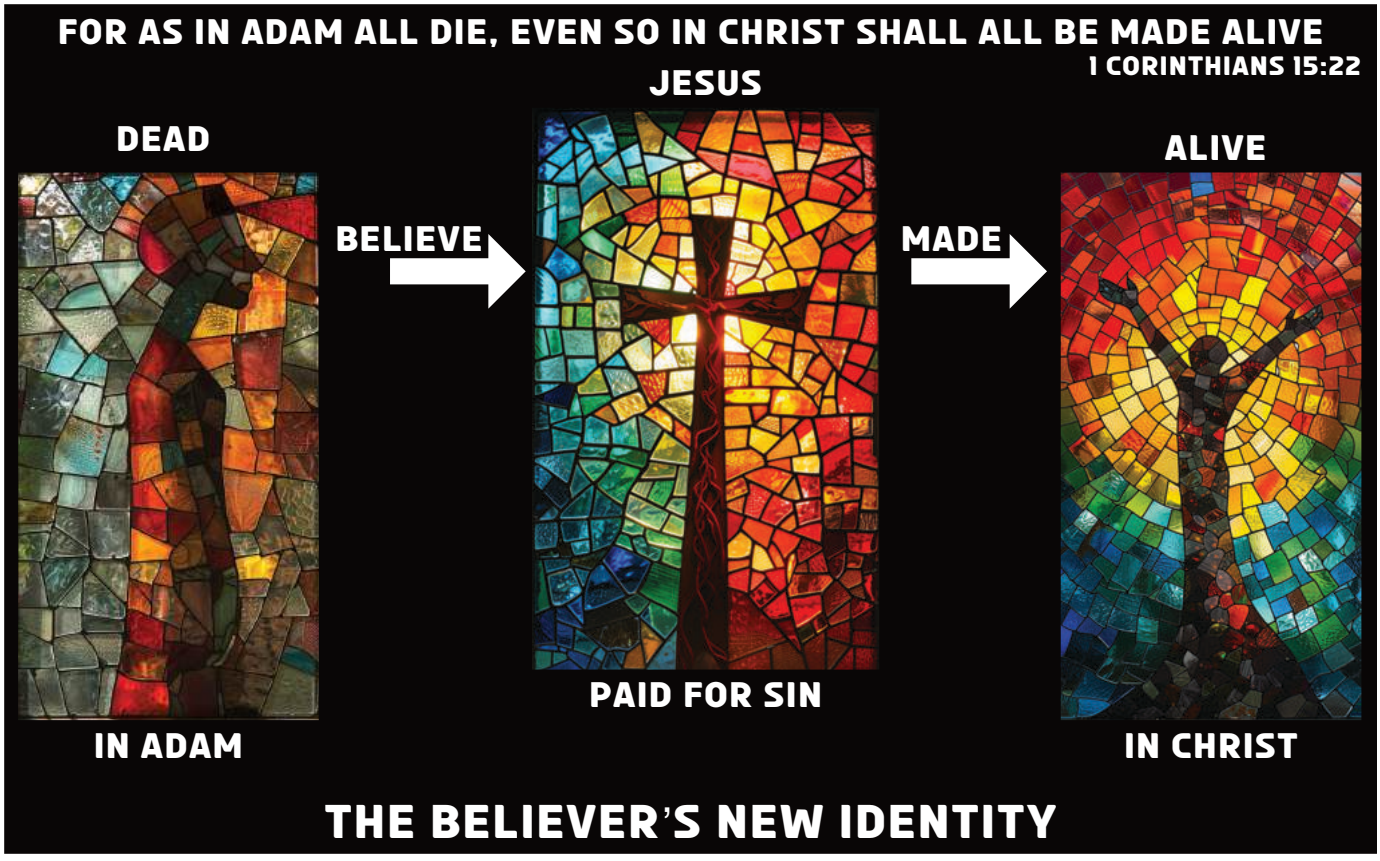
In his second epistle to the Corinthian Church, the problems of carnality persisted in this local church for Paul wrote: **But we do all things, beloved** (*a term for loved believers*), **for your edification** (*spiritual growth, not spiritual birth and evangelization*). **For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish** (*spiritual*), **and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish** *(having to correct you again)*; **lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced. (2 Cor. 12:19-21)**

Observe the words, "Beloved" yet "have sinned ... and not repented", but still viewed "in Christ". Certainly "all things have not become new" practically in their Christians lives, though Paul still urged them to holy living as believers (2 Cor. 7:1, 8-10) and desired to see this problem corrected and changed in their daily walk. These distinctions of position vs practice are consistent with both the scriptural doctrine of eternal security (John 10:28-30) and also the reality that God wants believers to possess the absolute assurance of eternal salvation (1 John 5:9-13) from the moment they trust in Jesus Christ alone apart from works, ritual, or law.

These realities are settled scriptural facts regarding one's justification before God regardless of the inconsistency of their practical sanctification in time.

More Questions from 2 Corinthians 5:17

Studying 2 Corinthians 5:17 made me ponder, "what" and "when" are the first mention of the believer being "in Christ"? I knew that to be "in Christ" would also



mean to be in the body of Christ, the Church, via the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28) which began on the Day of Pentecost – the birthday of the Universal Church (Acts 1:4-5).

I also knew that the first prediction of Jesus Christ's intent to build His Universal Church was found in Matthew 16:18 which was after His offer to Israel to set up His long-awaited Kingdom was postponed, not cancelled, by the Jewish religious leaders in the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:30-31). Our Lord made it abundantly clear that the building of His Church was yet future when He declared, "I will build My Church".

Upon further study, I believe the answer to my search ended when I observed the first mention of "positional truth" is found in the Upper Room Discourse of our Lord, John 13-17, observe three elements:

1. The prediction of positional union with Jesus Christ. (John 14:20)
2. The proclamation of positional union with Jesus Christ. (John 15:1-7)
3. The prayer for positional union with Jesus Christ. (John 17:20-23)

Jesus' Prediction of our Position/Identification in Him
On the night in which our Lord was betrayed, He met with His disciples in an upper room (Luke 22:12) to celebrate the Passover, institute the Lord's Supper, and explain important truths regarding His future death, bodily resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, His coming again, and so forth. Listen to His words in ...

Listen to His words in John 14:16-20 **"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day (*i.e. Pentecost)* you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."**

It is in this historical context that Jesus Christ predicts "**At that day you will know that I am in** (union with) **My Father, and you** (are) **in** (union with) **Me, and I** (am in union with) **you.**" Observe how this new positional unity with Christ is closely tied to the future ministry of the Holy Spirit, whom would be sent to believers in the near future. From my study, John 14:20 is the first prediction of positional or identification truth which would become so prevalent later in the Epistles.

The Emphasis on 'Positional Truth" and Paul's Pattern of Teaching

Paul demonstrated the importance of positional truth by his epistolary pattern where he would explain the believer's position & possessions in Christ to lay the foundation for His following exhortations and appeals to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" (Eph. 4:1). First, God wants you to understand your position in Christ; then He desires for you to walk by faith and live practically in light of this new creation position by means of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8).

We observe this teaching pattern in Romans 6 where he expects believers to "know" their position or identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection in explaining how they are "dead to sin" and "alive to God" (6:2-10) in order to now walk in newness of life (6:3-5). This "walk" would occur by choosing to "reckon" this position / identification / freedom to be true by faith "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:11) and to then "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead" (Rom. 6:13). May those of us who preach the Word of God learn from this pattern of teaching from position, to condition, to practice, avoiding the legalistic approach of so many.

Jesus' Proclamation of our Position/Identification in Him

If my observation is correct of John 14:20, it should not surprise us to hear the Lord Jesus Christ just thirteen verses later declare to His saved disciples (unsaved Judas has already departed to betray the Lord Jesus – 13:27-30) as if positional truth was a foregone reality by stating the following words,

John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away (lifts up); and every branch (in Me) that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

The prediction of the believer's living union with Jesus Christ is so certain that He now teaches it as a spiritual fact and reality with important practical ramifications. John 15:1-11 is not a passage to discuss true vs false believers as it is only spoken to believers who already were cleansed from their sins (15:3). Instead, this passage sets forth the importance of believers now learning to abide in Christ to bear fruit as a result of being placed "in Me".

From Position to Condition with Divine Purpose
The key instruction that our Lord gives is the necessity to "abide in Me" (15:4-5) with an emphasis on the "Me" as branches do not produce fruit but merely "bear" it. Once again, we observe the difference between the believer's position in Christ (15:2), their needed condition of abiding (15:4-5, 7), or not abiding (15:6) as Jesus Christ is to be depended upon as their divine resource to be a fruitful believer. To abide in Christ results in glorifying God the Father by bearing much fruit (15:7-8). To not abide in Christ as a believer is to live a wasted life of struggle and misery through carnality or self-effort (15:6). Since to "abide in Him" is a command (imperative mood) that is freely chosen (active voice), this indicates that abiding in Christ and

SALVATION BY GRACE

DELIVERANCE IN THREE STAGES BY GOD'S GRACE

JUSTIFICATION

- Saved from the penalty of sin
- Personal sin debt paid – past, present, and future
- Happens once for every believer, at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone
- A free gift from God which guarantees eternal security

SANCTIFICATION

- Saved from the power of sin
- An ongoing daily process of spiritual growth with some ups and downs
- Involves learning to abide in Christ resulting in present spiritual fruit via the power of the Holy Spirit and faithfulness which yields future rewards

GLORIFICATION

- Will be saved from the presence of sin in Heaven
- A guaranteed hope for all believers
- When we see Jesus face to face
- Enjoying freedom from sin and God's presence forever
- No longer faith or hope, but sight



bearing fruit are desired by Jesus Christ but not automatic or guaranteed for believers. Believers must willingly choose to yield & depend upon Jesus Christ for Him to produce His fruit through them by means of the Holy Spirit for His glory and the benefit of others. Are you learning to "abide in Him" by faith?

The Prayer for our Position/Identification in Him

Later that same night, Jesus Christ prayed (John 17) regarding the future reality of our positional union in / with Him when He asks the Father:

John 17:20-23 "I do not pray for these His disciples who were present with Him) alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (that would be you & me – His coming Church); 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Observe the preposition "in" (*en* - 5x), along with the word "one" (*heis* - 5x), setting forth positional union or unity. It is interesting to note that the word "one" (Greek - *heis*) found here is the exact same word as found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 2:24 where "they shall become one flesh" referring to marital positional unity and relationship. Thus, Jesus Christ prays for the future fulfillment of the Church-age believer's position in or union with Christ.

The Historical Fulfillment of Jesus' Prayer

While positional truth was predicted, proclaimed, and prayed for by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Upper Room Discourse, it became a reality on the Day of Pentecost when the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, which places believers into Christ, actually & finally began (Acts 1:4-5, 2:1-4; 11:15-18; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28).

The Personal Fulfillment of Jesus' Prediction, Proclamation, and Prayer to You

When does an individual get placed "into Christ"? For this to be true of all believers, this must occur at the moment of faith in Christ alone, otherwise if it was later, there would be the "haves" vs the "have -nots" when the Bible states "you are complete in Him". (Colossians 2:10). "All" have been spiritually baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), while Galatians 3:26-28 indicates this occurred "through faith in Christ Jesus". This means practically that if you have transferred your trust from all other faulty objects of faith for your eternal salvation and have trusted in Christ and His finished work alone, you are "in Christ" and He is "in you". PTL! Now let's learn to "abide in Him". Amen?



Dennis Rokser is the senior pastor of the Grace & Truth Bible Church of Warner Robins, GA. He also is the Bible teacher on the Grace for the Race radio program, has authored several books, and teaches at the Grace Institute of Biblical Studies and Chafer Theological Seminary.



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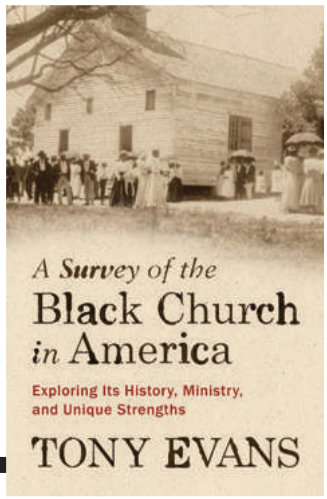
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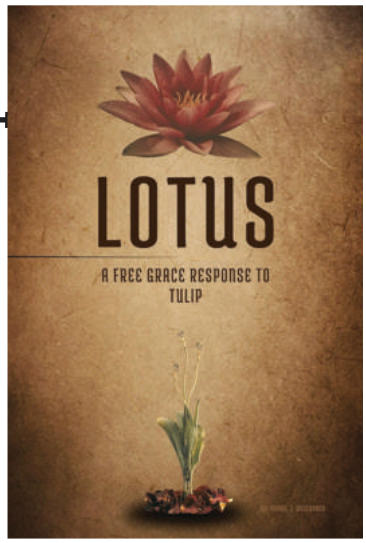
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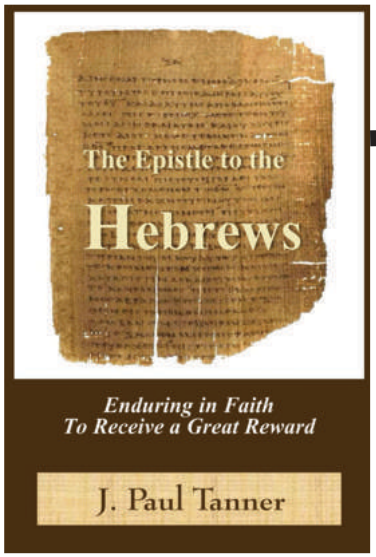
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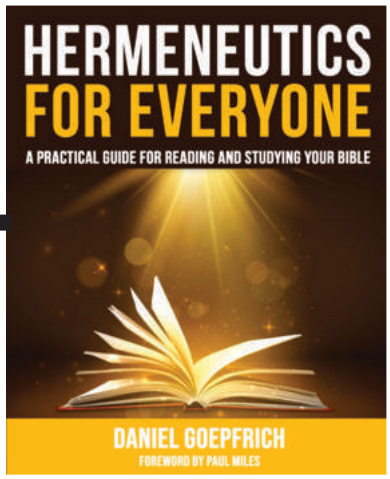


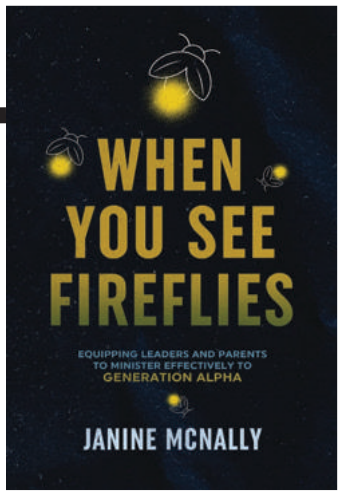


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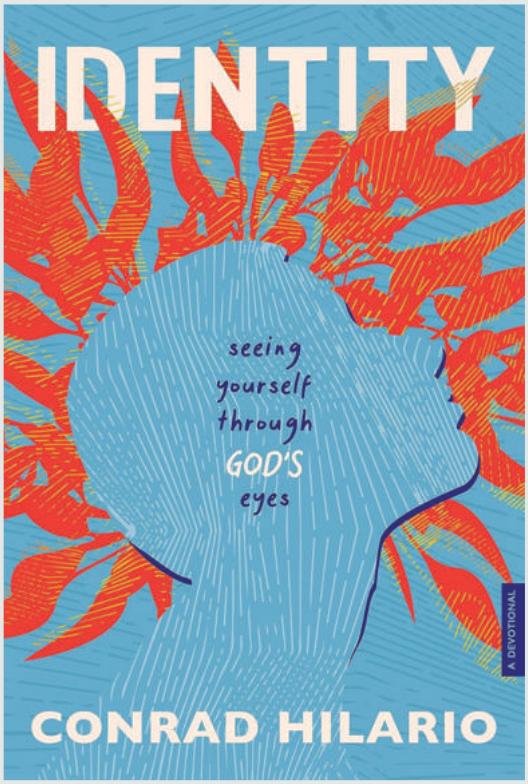


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Conrad Hilario is the senior pastor at Dwell Community Church – a non-denominational church in Columbus, Ohio. He completed his Bachelor's Degree at The Ohio State University and attained a Master of Arts in Theological Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He's also the author of "Searching for Wisdom" and "Identity". He and his wife, Hilary, have two sons.

EVERY CHILD IN HIS IMAGE

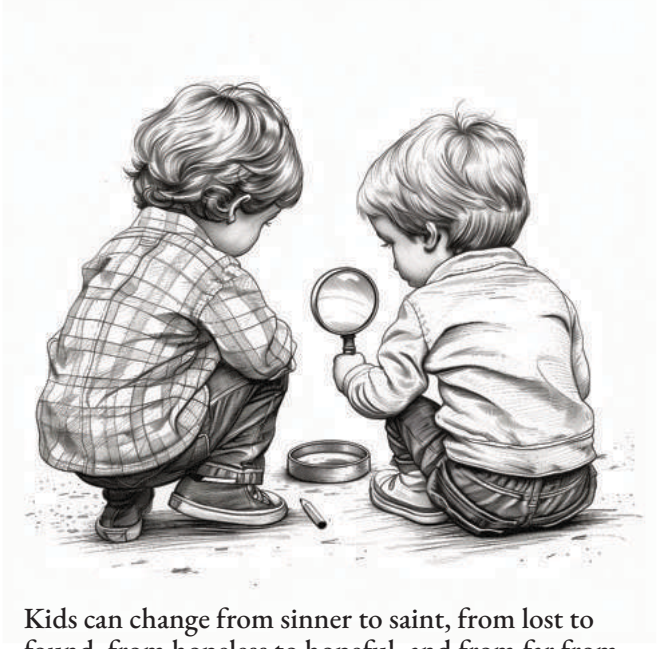
By Ed Gossien

Kids are searching for their identity, trying to answer the question "Who am I?" Things that seem fixed and stable years ago are being seen as fluid and changeable. The culture that surrounds our kids sends many messages that aren't true. True understanding of identity is found in Scripture.

The Bible teaches us that every child is precious and created in the image of God. But when Adam and Eve sinned they passed sin to everyone. Adam and Eve no longer walked in the Garden with God. They were separated from God. We are too. But the image of God within each and every person remains. The discussion of identity starts there.

Even though we all bear the image of God, our standing before Him from birth is that of a sinner. We not only sin, but are prone to sin by nature. But our standing can be changed. The grace of God that brings salvation is available to everyone by trusting in Jesus' atoning death on the cross.

Throughout the Bible we read about people who's identity changes after an encounter with God. Moses the shepherd became Moses the deliverer. Zacheus the thief became Zacheus who repaid. Saul the murderer became Paul the Apostle.



Kids can change from sinner to saint, from lost to found, from hopeless to hopeful, and from far from God to in Christ. As a child of God, kids can learn what really matters about their identity - what God thinks about who they are.

A loving, caring adult and a welcoming church are a powerful pair. Kids fortunate enough to have both are receptive to biblical truth about their identity. They are each uniquely created by God, male or female, short or

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tall, skinny or stout. Like you and me, they are prone to sin because of Adam's sin. This includes a distorted view of self. But God's grace helps us see His love for us through Jesus' death on the cross. We can trust what God says about who we are. He loves us.

I believe that the most important work in the church happens between 1 and 4 feet off the ground. Loving leaders, eye to eye with children is where the action is. That is where kids hear about Jesus and his love for them which will shape the way they think about themselves. Kids' hearts are being formed by something. Let's make it Jesus.



Ed received his Doctor of Educational Ministry from Dallas Theological Seminary. Ed and his wife Kim have served in various capacities at Awana for 29 years. They have two grown children and four grandchildren. Ed currently serves as the Vice President of Spiritual Development and Ministry Alignment at Awana.

IDENTITY

KIDS CAN CHANGE FROM SINNER TO SAINT, FROM LOST TO FOUND, FROM HOPELESS TO HOPEFUL, AND FROM FAR FROM GOD TO IN CHRIST. AS A CHILD OF GOD, KIDS CAN LEARN WHAT REALLY MATTERS ABOUT THEIR IDENTITY – WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT WHO THEY ARE.

ED GOSSIEN

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

Spiritual inferiority is to have an inaccurate view of God and yourself. When your identity in Christ is wrapped up in your performance, false self-image, or "good works", you become more of a slave rather than functioning as a CHILD OF GOD. Slaves are unwilling servants. They serve under compulsion. Identity is the bedrock of the relationship we have with God and the greatest motivation for service.

The freedom we have been blessed with in Christ reveals and enhances identity. The same freedom articulates the power of identity. In effect, who you are gives meaning to how you live. The consciousness of heavenly royalty inspires a dignified earthly walk that bring glory to God. Knowing who you are in Christ is essential to living as He saved you to live.

"God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people" (1 Thessalonians 1:4 NLT).

(Barimah Kofi) Asare Kyei-Baffour
Grace Inspired Centre, Ghana

Does it matter who I think I am? Am I a sinner who is a saint or a saint who sins? There is a difference and it is essential that we understand it. Identity includes perceiving our essence and our existence. In our essence, a Christian is regenerated and has a sinless seed indwelling them. In fact, the sinless seed is them! (I John 3:9) In addition we have the Holy spirit indwelling us as we are referred to as a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6:19) The reality of my essence is why Paul can declare that "it is no long I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This is why Paul describes the believer as being "in Christ".

If this is my essence, then I should manifest this realty in the expression of my existence. This is why Paul having exposited the theology of my position then exhorts me live this truth out in the condition of my life. If my life is hidden in Christ above, then I am to seek to manifest who I am and whose I am every day of my life.

Fred Chay
Grace School of Theology

DIVERSE IN CHRIST

By Cody Wallace

I remember once, when I was a student in youth ministry, the youth pastor decided to show us how quickly our small youth group of 15 or 20 kids would turn on one another and segregate for the simplest of reasons. He approached a few kids and told them, "Do not say hi, talk, or associate with any other kids that do not have brown eyes." So the brown-eyed kids started going around in a group, talking badly about others, and being cold and rude toward the blue-eyed kids. The blue-eyed kids wouldn't have it, so they formed a group and only talked to each other and talked badly about the other group. Insanity happened as kids were being dropped off because the brown-eyed and blue-eyed groups would run up to individuals to check their eyes as soon as they got out of the car. And there I sat, the only green-eyed kid in the lot!



In moments like those, you see how quickly we can cause division amongst each other to find comfort and acceptance. Sadly, today, as in the days of the early church, divisions are what people like to focus on.

And this is true in the book of Galatians. The Judaizers or a sect of Jewish Christians who believed all Christians were required to obey the Law of Moses to be saved. To clear things up, Paul says that one's religious practice, race, color, parentage, house one lives in, and the camel you drive mean nothing in Christ.

> *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:26-29, NASB).*

One of the things I love about being in the family of God is that there is no difference between people of class, education, society, gender, age, race, culture, or creed.

To Those Who Believe

> *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"* (Galatians 3:26-27).

To you who believe, Jesus gave you His blessing and His inheritance. Not because of who you are or what you've done,, but because of who Jesus is and what He has done. You are then baptized into Christ and are clothed with Him. Paul says in Romans, *"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him"* (Romans 8:16-17). You are an inheritor and recipient of the Father's blessing, given the firstborn's right. Why? Because of the belief you have in the Firstborn Only Begotten, Jesus Christ.

And John says, *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:12-13). You were given the right, ***eksousía***, meaning legal power or jurisdiction, to be God's child, not out of obedience or birth, but because God wanted it, willed it, and the Son, Jesus made it happen.

People of the Promise

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

And in this family full of those receiving Dad's blessings and inheritance, there are *no* Jews or Greeks. God does not differentiate between peoples. We are now all His. He only sees Jesus. The grace we have in Jesus removes the boundaries of race, culture, and language.

There is also no longer slave nor free in Christ. No one owns you in the kingdom of God, you owe no credit and give no credit. There is no difference in class in God's kingdom so it doesn't matter if you were born on the wrong or right set of tracks or with a silver spoon, a plastic spoon, or a spork in your mouth because there are no financial divisions.

There is neither male nor female; there are no distinctions of legal rights to Jesus. Back then only a man could buy

property in most regions of the world, only a man could inherit to receive a father's blessing and own a business in most places. It was hard for a woman to get by. Paul is saying "No to misogyny!" and "No to misandry!" God looks at all His kids with the same love and same rights because when the Father sees you and me, He sees Christ Jesus. Or to quote directly, "*For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

> *And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise* (Galatians 3:29).

Paul then puts a stop to any arguments of religious practice, observance, and importance. You are heirs and recipients of God's promises, blessings, and riches. This inheritance is not passed down from Jacob, Isaac, David or Moses but from Abraham. This is prior to any law, prior to any sacrifice, prior to any religious practice or observance.

Regardless of skin, language, money, status, or education, there are only two types of people in this world. The saved and unsaved.

> *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3:16-18).

In this passage, we are told some beautiful truths. God loves the human race. He had so much love He sent Jesus to save all of humanity by dying as a payment for the wrongs, the '*mentiras'* (Spanish for white lies), the cheating, the stealing, the red-light-runs, which now leaves two people in the world - those believe in Him and are saved and those who do not believe in Him and are not saved.

Embrace Diversity

To heal the racism, the sexism, the favoritism, and all other sinful biases of people, we must look at people in light of this truth: God does not look at a man in view of differences; He looks at the man in view of have they trusted me or have they not. C.S. Lewis, from his weekly radio address said, "You do not have a soul. You are a soul with a body." Let's all start to look at humanity for the eternal beings we are, not for the race, sin, personality, or failures our bodies present. I think we need to remove the focus differences all of humanity likes to zero in on, and look at our similarities. For this article's sake, we will zero in on two:

#1 We are all great sinners.

> *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

The first commonality is that we all do bad things, think bad thoughts, and act out on them.

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

There's only one place in existence where we can find grace to help in the time of need. And we all have those times—when we're tempted, or in trials, or just tired and needing perseverance through difficult times. That place is the throne of grace. The problem is, the throne of Grace is in the presence of the Holy God, and no one with sin can be in His presence and live. If we want to enter such a place, we have to know we are in Christ, one with the Holy Son of God, and His righteousness belongs to us through His shed blood. When we know our identity—we're saints by grace—we can not only enter, but we can *come boldly* to the throne of grace, knowing we're accepted, and receive all the help we could ever need.

Grant Hawley
Bold Grace

Your identity in Christ is the basis for your freedom from the power of sin and your capacity to follow Him.

You are not who you used to be and do not have to live the way you used to live. Your life is commingled with Christ in inseparable ways. You have the life of Christ in you so that you now live in the environment of resurrection life.

You did nothing to earn this new life because God's Spirit placed you into the body of Christ the moment you believed. As you live out of who you are in Christ, you will experience grace in your everyday life and victory over the sin and shame of your life before you met Jesus.

Your part in all this is faith–trusting that God has made you new and continue trusting Him in your challenges, heartaches, failures, doubts, and dreams. This is a process of sanctification.

FGA Executive Council Member
Ed Underwood
Recentered Group



Thirteen years ago when my kids were much younger Isaiah 2 and Naomi 4, were playing with little flute recorders. They ran around the house all day, making those recorders squeal with noise. After a while, Meg and I decided we had had enough, so we put on a movie to quiet them down and enjoy a noise-free coffee break. As we sat down to drink coffee in a tranquil home, we heard a big thump, and Isaiah started screaming and writhing on the couch in pain, holding his head. I tried to calm him down, and after a good 5 minutes of this, he finally let me see the back of his head, where there was a lump with a little blood coming out. He was still distraught from it, so I could not make out what he was saying. So I asked Naomi what had happened. At that moment, she told us Isaiah was watching the movie, and she snuck behind him and whacked him with her pink recorder! When I asked her why she would want to do that to her brother she said, "I wanted to know what it feels like to be bad." She chose in a moment to be bad; she got tired of being our sweetheart Naomi and wanted to see what it was like.

Maybe it's not in you to hit others with musical instruments, but it's in you to speed in the 15 mph zone, roll through the stop, and tell little white lies. We all do bad things; some we consider small, and others we do big, some we are embarrassed if people see, and some we laugh off a "*chiquitico mentiras*." Put them all together, and there are a lot of bad things we do. We are all included in the word "all" - as in all sin, you, me, and the world. No one is exempt. Everyone sins, and we have a flawed commonality in that.

#2 God is a Great Savior.

Look at the second part of Romans 3.

"Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26).

Jesus died for the sins of the world. Does God's grace cover everyone? Yes, here we see Jesus died for all that sin and His grace covers all who believe.

So, how do we react to God's view of man? How do we react based on God's distribution of Grace?

I believe the answer, the only answer, is that we need to create a culture of grace in our own lives.

Diverse With the Same Father

To have a culture of Grace is not just accepting our differences of sin, race, creed, or language. It's not just in recognizing the good we do or even the accomplishments of others. It's accepting that God loves us all and died to show it.

Because when we trust Jesus as Savior, when we take His free gift of grace, we step out of being white, black, Hispanic, Asian; employed or unemployed; rich or poor; man or woman . We stop being a PhD, PE Teacher, good guy or bad guy, and we become a Child of God, we become a soul going to heaven because of His sacrifice on the cross.

"Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one" (Romans 3:27-30).

This passage finishes by telling us there are no longer chosen or un-chosen people through Christ. There are no cultural or religious divides. Similar to the language of Galatians 3, Paul speaks to how Jesus broke through the barriers of race,

GOD LOVES THE RACE OF ALL MANKIND, RICH OR POOR, MALE OR FEMALE, EVERY RACE UNDER THE SUN.

CODY WALLACE

religion, and creed when He died for the world. I put aside myself and my sin, when I became His child.

> *"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all"* (Ephesians 4:1-6).

We are royalty, adopted into the King of Kings' family. We have been united with God through Jesus Christ.

You cannot miss the emphasis on "one" that Paul makes as he comes alongside the Ephesians almost like a coach and says, "*Come on, team, walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*"

There are seven "*ones*" in his list. Seven, in the Bible, is never an accident. The number seven always represents completeness. There are two equal lists of three, and the final "one" is magnified by three other descriptors. This is no accident in Paul's writing.

He wants us to grasp the essence of "oneness" of unity. There is one body, one Spirit, and one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. All of this points to our oneness, our unity with the one God and Father of all who is over all, and through all, and in all. And as we, as individual members of the church, have been brought into the "oneness" of God, together we are ONE. You may not look like me, sound like me, speak my language, have my hair color, live the same way as me, have the same skin color as me, same finances, worship how I worship, or praise how I praise, but if you believe that Jesus died for you and rose from the dead you are my family, you are a joint heir to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a God that is King and says call me Abba, call me Daddy, you have been given the right, the privilege and legal ability to be called children of God. The family of God is diverse; you may not look like me on the outside, you may be in the blue-eyed or the brown-eyed group, but none of that matters in Christ; you and I are no longer different – we are found in Jesus. We are diverse but with the same Father.



Cody Wallace is Senior Pastor of Southwest Community Church in Miami, FL. He is a graduate of Liberty University where he received his Masters of Divinity in Biblical Studies and his Doctor of Ministries in Discipleship.

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

Recently I heard a story of a pastor teaching that we are to approach God by groveling out of fear and reverence. It sounds very spiritual, but incorrectly emphasizes our humility. When we believe in Christ, we are given His very identity and now can come to God with confidence and even boldness because our identity is no longer based on our own works (which are but filthy rags), but on Christ's work. Christ is our firm foundation. He is our solid rock on which we can now stand. Coming to God out of fear is coming to Him out of our old sin identity; coming to Him boldly is coming to Him in our new identity, as His child and heir.

Carri Mikkelsen
Sound Grace

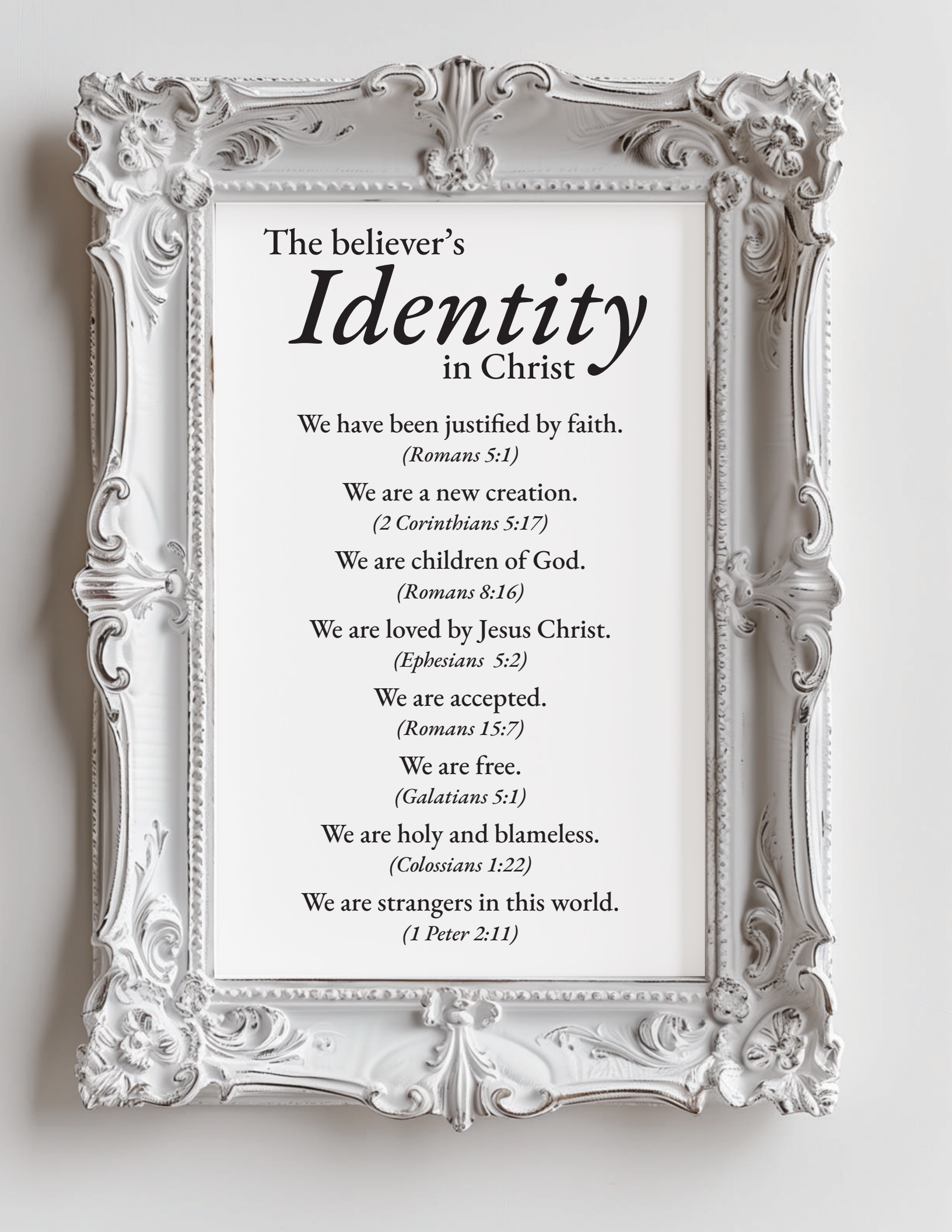
If we know that our Identity is in Christ (Col. 3:3), our Christian life is like living, moving and being (Act 17:28). It means that we don't need to ***try*** to be Christian - We just are as we are. It is a huge relief. We are allowed to be weak (as we are anyway, like broken vessels). The Light of Jesus shines via our brokenness (2 Cor. 4:6-7). When we fall, we just stand up from rock of Christ and we continue our life.

When our identity is in Christ, it is not in law. We are not under law (Rom 6:14). In Christ we are living the life of Christ. Jesus did it all. He said at cross: "It is finished" (Joh.19:30). Jesus has paid our sins. He is risen Son of God. We just believed this, and yes, I believe it also in this day. We are free in Him to live as we are.

Toni Taiveaho
Greater Grace Church Salo, Finland

Before living with purpose, it helps to know who I am. If I am uncertain, always wavering, it is hard to accomplish anything worthwhile. Knowing and reckoning what is true of me...that I am identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6) is of critical importance in beginning to live life as Jesus intended...free from sin's penalty and power. Other helpful truths? I am baptized into Christ (In Him!), a new creation, born, indwelt and empowered by the Spirit, having been given all things that pertain to life and Godlikeness, secure and assured of my position by faith alone in Christ alone. Remembering who I am as a child of God is imperative to living out who I really am. A preacher years ago encouraged us to ask each morning, "Who is it in the mirror you are getting ready for the day?" Who am I indeed?!

Rex Schaffner
Ethnos 360


The believer's
Identity
in Christ
We have been justified by faith.
(Romans 5:1)
We are a new creation.
(2 Corinthians 5:17)
We are children of God.
(Romans 8:16)
We are loved by Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 5:2)
We are accepted.
(Romans 15:7)
We are free.
(Galatians 5:1)
We are holy and blameless.
(Colossians 1:22)
We are strangers in this world.
(1 Peter 2:11)

OUR IDENTITY

We are a missional community. We are a group of believers, churches, and ministries united by a covenant that affirms a clear and simple gospel message. We believe that our salvation, our mission, and our unity are found in the gospel of grace. We work to connect, encourage, and equip believers with the grace message so that we can all accomplish the mission given to all of us by the Lord Jesus Christ– to testify of the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24).

Free Grace ALLIANCE

The FGA Covenant

- The Grace of God in justification is an unconditional free gift.
- The sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross as our substitute, fully satisfying the requirement for our justification, and was raised bodily from the dead.
- Faith is a personal response, apart from our works, whereby we are persuaded that the finished work of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, has delivered us from condemnation and guaranteed our eternal life.
- Justification is the act of God to declare us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ alone.
- Assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, and is founded upon the testimony of God in His written Word.
- Spiritual growth, which is distinct from justification, is God's expectation for every believer; this growth, however, is not necessarily manifested uniformly in every believer.
- The Gospel of Grace should always be presented with such clarity and simplicity that no impression is left that justification requires any step, response, or action in addition to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking for a community of grace? Sign our covenant and join FGA!

Use this QR code or visit our website: freegracealliance.com

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our identity in Christ so important?

Our world is increasingly infatuated with "identity." How someone identifies himself is how he expects society to respond to him, even if that chosen identity has no connection to reality. In the Bible, God's spokespeople — whether prophets, prophetesses, apostles, or teachers—regularly called their listeners to remember and live out who they were in relation to the true and living God. Peter went so far as to say that the person who is not growing in his or her faith "has forgotten about the cleansing of his past sins" (2 Peter 1:9), while Paul reminded some readers that they the way they learned Christ should cause them to live differently than before (Eph 4:20). Knowing who we truly are—sinners delivered by God's overwhelming grace—is essential to help us "press on to maturity" (Heb 6:1) and conformity to the Savior (Rom 8:29).

Daniel Goepfrich
TheologyIsForEveryone.com

Knowing our identity in Christ is essential because we will act out who we believe we really are (Proverbs 23:7). The NT writers use our "whoness" (our identity) as the basis for not sinning. Their charge is not just to stop us from doing bad things, but to know and remember who we really are! We are new creatures in Christ! Our new behavior should be congruent with our new status. Let's not live down to who we once were but live up to who we are now in Christ!

Our new position must be the foundation of our self-image. In Romans, Paul spends the first 5 1⁄2 chapters giving truth, then finally he issues a command, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (6:11)". Re- searchers have found that we can think up to 1700 words a minute. Let's choose to think of things that are true, positive, and life transforming.

John Salvensen
Bear Creek Bible Church, Texas



PARTNERSHIP, AN ANCIENT PRACTICE

From very early in the history of the Church, you find people and churches sending out gifted workers to proclaim the gospel and strengthen churches. The apostles encouraged it– the apostle John writes: *Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may prove to be fellow workers with the truth* (3 John 1:8).

And the Apostle Paul: *... in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.* (Philippians 4:16)

It is not a new thing that a huge impact is made through the generosity of a few passionate people. Paul goes on to write about what would motivate such people: *Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account. ... what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:17-18).

In these examples the apostles are teaching that the fiscal support of gospel workers is actually a form of partnership, where those who serve as "senders" share in the rewards of those who are "sent". Obviously the rewards being discussed are not physical rewards to be enjoyed today, but they are speaking of rewards to be given out by Jesus at the judgement seat of Christ.

The Free Grace Alliance cannot exist without people like you partnering with us through the sharing of material resources. We are trusting God to provide for our needs and our invitation to you is to join with us to advance the gospel of grace.

You can partner with us online at freegracealliance.com/give or find the enclosed donation card and envelope.

Thank you again for prayerfully considering partnering with us to testify of the gospel of God's grace.

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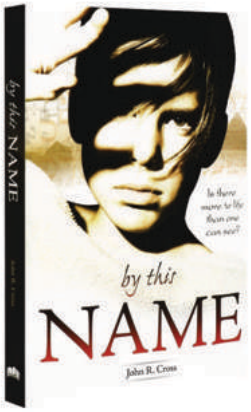


Above: FGA's Jeremy & Carri Mikkelsen (right) met John & Janice Cross (left) of GoodSeed, while representing FGA at the Annual Chafer Theological Seminary Conference in Houston in March 2024.

Left: Jeremy Mikkelsen, Jeremy Vance, Mark Haywood, and Kenny Hodges at the FGA 2024 Southeastern Regional Conference in Starkville Mississippi graciously hosted by FGA supporting Emmanuel Baptist Church. Above: John & Janice Cross, Carri and Jeremy Mikkelsen at the Annual Chafer Theological Seminary Conference in Houston.

Resource Recommendation

For the past seven years we have used *By this Name* with dozens of people here on West Coast with great results. It starts with creation and weaves together the essential context of the promises about the Messiah and then clearly proclaims Christ as the fulfillment. By the end we find that disciples have a clear understanding of the gospel of grace and are equipped to share what they have learned with others effectually. Literally disciples making disciples.



The ebook is available for free (use the code "goodseedfree") or you purchase the book on Amazon for $15. – Jeremy & Carri Mikkelsen

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Free Grace ALLIANCE

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