

# The Real You

May 23, 2010

Rick Carlson

## I) Colossians 2:6-15

## II) Introduction

### A) Who are You?

- 1) Let me ask you a very simple question. **Who are you?** To answer that question you would likely say your name but your name, like mine, is little more than a designation that your parents gave you to distinguish you from other people, especially your siblings.
  - (a) *Otherwise, there might be some confusion like with Larry and Darryl and his other brother Darryl.*
- 2) Your parents probably liked the sound of your name but rarely in this society does a child receive a name that reflects his or her character or even come close to telling others who you really are.
- 3) Dr. Klyne Snodgrass, a professor of Hermeneutics from North Park Theological Seminary has done a wonderful study on what he calls, a "Hermeneutic of Identity." In other words, how the Bible tells us who we really are. For us to answer the question, "who are you," Snodgrass suggests that there are many factors besides our name that must be considered. These include:
  - (a) **Physical appearance**
  - (b) **Psychological Profile.**
  - (c) **History** of your family, your education.
  - (d) **Experiences.** Any trauma or celebrations you may have experienced. In other words, what is your story?
  - (e) **Commitments.** Where do you live? How do you invest your time and money? You see, that to which you assign value, assigns value to you and defines who you are!
  - (f) **Opposition.** What challenges you? What are your handicaps? Who are enemies? What do you have to overcome them?
  - (g) **Attitudes.** What is your perception and opinions of the world? What realities shape your identity? What values do you hold?
  - (h) **Beliefs.** What beliefs or systems of beliefs define you?
  - (i) **Activities.** What is your job? What role do you play in your family, community or church? Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do."
  - (j) **Icons.** Who are the people you admire, more importantly, who are the people you try to impress?
  - (k) **Relationships.** This is very important because life is relational. Your identity cannot be separated from your friends, family or the people you serve.
  - (l) **Boundaries.** To be human is to be confined by certain boundaries. Skin color, geography, associations, marriage, ethics, political realities, etc.
  - (m) **Change.** Life is about change. We are always under construction until the day we die.
  - (n) **Internal Unity.** What holds you together? As Eric Ericson said, "What is the persistent sameness within yourself".

(o) **Sense of the future.** *Where are you going? What is your handle on hope or despair?*

- 4) Your identity is far more than your name. Unfortunately, the gospel is unimportant in most people's lives these days even if they say they believe it. Christ is little more than a piece of jewelry that you hang around your neck, an accessory you might include in a new car or app that you download onto your cell phone.
- 5) If your identity is to be "in Christ," as the Apostle Paul insists it is, then Jesus must take over your identity and can never simply be bling, or like an upgrade car accessory or a computer function to get something done.
- 6) What did you think, "Jesus is Lord," meant?

#### **B) Colossians 2:6**

- 1) **Paul said to the church in Colossae, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."**
- 2) When we begin to read scripture as not just a series of ancient stories, laws, poetry, or theology about God but read it to help us learn who we really are, it changes us. We see ourselves in a new light, going in a new direction.
- 3) James taught that scripture should reflect our identity. He said,  
(a) *<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Those who listen to the word but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like. <sup>25</sup> But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

### **III) Prodigal Son**

#### **A) Identity in Scripture**

- 1) Look at the story of the Prodigal Son. It is all about identity.
- 2) First, you have this boy who, in spite of being a beloved son and a younger brother, asserts himself to change his identity.
- 3) He flaunts his new identity with new friends and throws money around in wild living. He appears to love the new identity until his money runs out.
- 4) Then, he ends up doing things that he didn't want to do distancing himself as far from his true identity as he could have imagined - doing the work of a servant, a Jewish kid feeding pigs, starving.
- 5) Then, the story says, "he came to himself." This is a realization of how he had desecrated his identity. He came to himself and sought to retrace his steps through confession and contrition to his father so that he could at least eat well like the servants.
- 6) But in the end, the father re-affirms his true identity is as a son and not a servant.
- 7) The whole story is about identity. And as we read scripture we cannot escape that it tells us who we are and where we are going.

## **B) Christian Identity**

- 1) To be a Christian, is to call Jesus, "Lord." To be Lord of your life, Christ must not only be the center of your attention when you first turn your life over to him, he desires to become your identity as you continue to live in him.
- 2) When your life is over and you stand before Christ on judgment day he will not ask you, how come you were not Moses or Mary, Billy Graham or Mother Teresa? He will simply ask, "Who are you?"

## **IV) Hijacked**

### **A) September 11**

- 1) On September 11, 2001, United flight 93 was headed from Newark, New Jersey to San Francisco when it was hijacked by Al Qaeda terrorists. Through phone conversations passengers had with family members they heard about the airplanes that had already crashed into the two towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.
- 2) The intension of the terrorists was to turn the plane back east and head for Washington DC where they were going to fly into either the Capital building or the White House.
- 3) They would have succeeded had the passengers not taken matters into their own hands. After the cockpit tapes of the terrifying and harrowing last few minutes of flight 93 came out we were reminded once again what real heroes are made of.

### **B) Let's roll**

- 1) Todd Beamer, a passenger aboard United Airlines Flight 93, according to an operator who talked to him during the flight, led other passengers to take action against the plane's terrorist hijackers just before the plane crashed in southwest Pennsylvania. She said the last words she heard Todd say was "LET'S ROLL!"
- 2) In Colossians chapter 2, Paul makes a clear call to "followers of Jesus" that there are hijackers on board. Identity terrorists who through deception, manipulation and even violence to the soul will do whatever it takes to keep Jesus from being Lord of your life. Paul calls out to you and me over the centuries saying, "**Let's Roll!**"

### **C) So who are the hijackers Paul is talking about?**

- 1) In the case of the Colossians, the heretical philosophies had infiltrated passed whatever theological security system they had and then the hijackers sat back comfortably into the worship, thinking and practices of the church. The people probably didn't have a clue of the severity of their problem until Paul pointed it out.
  - (a) *Verse 8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."*
- 2) We have to ask the question, what hollow and deceptive philosophies have hijacked us today?

(a) *It may be easy to identify materialism, tolerance of immoral behavior, self-indulgence and self-gratification at the top of the list.*

- 3) But if we think about it, our identity can be overtly and subtly hijacked by various kinds of unhealthy teaching, secular values, attitudes, activities and forces outside and inside the church that are not who God intended us to be – it is not the identity we were created for.

**D) So how do we recognize these heretical hijackers.**

- 1) Some Biblical profiling is important here. Paul says it clearly,
  - (a) *You will be able to recognize the heresy by the fact that they, “depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”*
- 2) This brings us to Paul’s solution to the hijacker problem in the Colossian church. It is as if he holds up a mirror and says, “Who do you see? Who are you?”

**V) In Christ**

**A) Reflection**

- 1) Paul compels you to stare real hard at your reflection in scripture to see clearly who you really are in Christ. Because, you see, a person who forgets who they are, does not live the life God intended for them. They don’t know who they are.
- 2) So, when you look at your reflection in scripture you should see that you are:

**B) 1. In Christ...You are Family.**

- 1) One of the most powerful marks of identity for the Jews is circumcision. Paul wants you to see that in Christ, through his death and resurrection that you have been circumcised so therefore, you are family. Verse 11.
  - (a) *In [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*
- 2) In Christ, you are in God’s family.

**C) 2. In Christ...You are Forgiven.**

- 1) Have you forgotten what it felt like when you first came to faith in Christ and realized that your sins are forgiven? Do you remember the feeling of release and wholeness and the overwhelming sense of gratitude? Have you forgotten that this miracle is not just forgiveness for the sins of your past but all of your sins, all of **our** sins, **all sin**, once and for all. Verse 13.
  - (a) *He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*
- 2) Look at your reflection carefully. You are family. You are forgiven. And think about this,

**D) 3. In Christ...You are Free.**

- 1) One of the most controversial but yet, significant affirmations of the Evangelical Covenant denomination is that we affirm our freedom in Christ. It is controversial because, just like the church in Paul's day, many churches today, in spite of what scripture says, bind Jesus' followers with oppressive chains of religious rules, laws and regulations. Freedom is ignored thinking it will keep us from sin.
- 2) Paul said at the end of chapter 2,
  - (a) *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*
- 3) I remember as a kid that it made no sense to me that we couldn't go swimming on Sunday. Nothing against my parents or the church or anything but for some reason swimming on Sunday was somehow theologically wrapped up with the Levitical Law of work on the Sabbath.
- 4) As a seven year old kid it made no sense. In fact, now 47 years later, it still doesn't make any sense. Sunday is not the Sabbath, Saturday is. I learned that in Sunday School and worse yet, swimming was anything but work. I would have been happy to take a day off from cleaning my room but it was torture to not get to do something that I loved to do, and I might say, even made God happy.
- 5) Even as a kid, I somehow knew that following Jesus had to be more than a list of rules.
- 6) Paul said in verse 16,
  - (a) *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.*
- 7) In Christ, you are family. You are forgiven. You are free and finally,

**E) 4. In Christ you have a fantastic, phenomenal future.**

- 1) Paul points us to think of our life as upside down from what the world thinks, much like the picture on the front of your bulletin. He said in verse 17.
  - (a) *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*
- 2) Do you see it? Look closely, it's all upside down. Just like the picture. We look at our life in this world and think that everything that we perceive with our senses, learn from our books and know from experience is solid reality. But Paul turns it all on its head.
- 3) He says that this world is the shadow. The reality is in Christ. Do you realize what that means? Do you see how that changes everything?
  - (a) *People who see this life as the shadow live differently now so that they do not jeopardize the coming reality.*
  - (b) *People who walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death are not afraid, because they walk with God. Shadows cannot hurt you. They are only shadows.*

## F) The Great Divorce

- 1) C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful allegory about the shadows of life and the reality of heaven in his book, *The Great Divorce*. In it he describes a bus load of people who make a trip from hell to heaven. Upon arriving at the City of Light the passengers are confronted with a reality that they did not expect. In heaven, they are ghosts. Everything that they see and touch in heaven is uniquely real. They cannot walk on the grass because the blades of grass are like knives cutting into their feet. They cannot bite into food because it is far too solid and too heavy for them. They are but a shadow in the solid reality of the Kingdom of God.
- 2) In his preface Lewis wrote.
  - (a) *If we insist on keeping [a piece of] Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven: if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell. I believe, to be sure, that anyone who reaches Heaven will find that what he abandoned [from earth] was precisely nothing: that the kernel of what he was really seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectation, waiting for him in "the High Countries."*
- 3) In Christ, you are family. You are forgiven. You are free and finally, you have a fantastic, phenomenal future.

## VI) Conclusion

### A) Question

- 1) Who are you? When you look carefully at your reflection in scripture who do you see?
- 2) Paul's answer is, verse 6.
  - (a) *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*
- 3) The answer is simple, your identity is in Christ, so live in him. Don't be hijacked by hallow philosophies and worldly thinking.
- 4) Never forget that you are family, you are forgiven, you are free and you have a fantastic, phenomenal future.

### B) Process

- 1) I believe that being a Christian is a life long process putting off our old identity and taking on Christ's. Whether you began that journey a long time ago or want to start this morning, Jesus invites all of us into his heart – to live in Christ. This is your identity. This is the real you. Amen.

## VII) Prayer

- 1) Pray with me and make these your words.
- 2) Lord Jesus, This is so too wonderful to even understand that you would become human, live, die and rise again so that I could live. I want to be like you. I know that I'm a sinner and my whole identity has been corrupted and twisted because of it. I thank you that you have already forgiven my sin.

- 3) Help me to live in the fulness of my true identity in Christ. Help me to see who I really am in you. Forgive me for wanting to hold on to souvenirs from earth this live which are only shadows of the reality to come. Help me to live fully awake in the realization of who I am as a child of God.
- 4) I pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

#### **VIII) Hymn: I Then Shall Live**

1) I then shall live as one who's been forgiven.  
I'll walk with joy to know my debts are paid.  
I know my name is clear before my Father;  
I am His child and I am not afraid.  
So, greatly pardoned, I'll forgive my brother;  
The law of love I gladly will obey.

I then shall live as one who's learned compassion.  
I've been so loved, that I'll risk loving too.  
I know how fear builds walls instead of bridges;  
I'll dare to see another's point of view.  
And when relationships demand commitment,  
Then I'll be there to care and follow through.

Your Kingdom come around and through and in me;  
Your power and glory, let them shine through me.  
Your Hallowed Name, O may I bear with honor,  
And may Your living Kingdom come in me.  
The Bread of Life, O may I share with honor,  
And may You feed a hungry world through me.

#### **IX) Benediction**

- A) *All we can say after we see Christ's identity reflected in us is, Let's role!  
So go in the life giving, transforming power of the God the Father, Son  
and Holy Spirit. Amen.***