

Counseling God's Way

IV. Foundational Truths for Counseling

Lesson 17 - Who We Are in Christ

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[Matthew 10:8](#)

All right, let's pray.

Lord, again we come seeking You. You've told us to pray without ceasing, pray about everything. And Lord, especially now as we come into Your Word, we don't want to do it in as an academic exercise of the mind. We want to come by the Spirit of God, having our spirits exercised, built up in Christ. We come humbling ourselves, Lord, confessing our need for You as our Wonderful Counselor, our need to be counseled. Lord, we all need to have a word of counsel from You in many general ways and particular ways. Lord, we come desiring to be built up too. Others are looking to us for direction at times. And we're coming to be warned. We want to be alert to the ways of man that are infiltrating the church of Jesus Christ on many levels. And we ask You to pour out Your Spirit in our time together in the Word and accomplish the big picture work You want to do, right down to the details of our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're continuing in the foundational truths for counseling God's way. We are looking at our fifth study now, out of eight units of study, under "Foundational Truths for Counseling God's Way." Asking God to show us some of these foundational realities that we are to stand upon and grow in. And we are asking the Lord to equip us to use these when folks come to us for a word of counsel. And sometimes we won't be able to share a specific, particularized word of counsel—when you are in this situation, here is what God says as far as how to proceed. And those are certainly great times to share foundational truths, but also, beyond that, these are great truths to share along with particular, specific counsel.

We looked at the vital issues, they are just great to have in our hearts and lives when we have no particular, specific word for folks and still be able to edify them. But these foundational truths, they are just great to share often, using the particular issue that stirs someone to seek counsel from the Lord, to take them beyond just the specific issue they are facing to just some of the bigger issues of life. Then they will be more equipped, not only to go through what they are facing, but for other things that come down the road. And it really is my heart that it's great and it's blessed of the Lord to be watching for opportunities to share foundational truths.

Here is a very important one in the Scriptures. Again, one that is not heard a lot in the teaching of the Word of God. I didn't even notice it for years as a Christian, or for years as a pastor. Once the Lord began to catch my eye on it, I noticed that the Lord speaks in the Scriptures much on this subject. And that is, who we are in Christ. It is a critical foundational issue because that is the person the Lord is wanting to deal with, who we are in Christ. Any other perspective on ourselves the Lord just wants crucified, buried, and move away from that. And yet so many people, and many in the church of Jesus Christ, do not see their lives as what has happened now that they are in Christ. They are still thinking of that long history from physical birth up to today.

So many counseling situations involve confusion in the lives of believers concerning who they are. Sometimes people will be in a predicament and get a little hot tempered and they will say something like, "Well that's just my Irish temper. I'll never change." Well, that is not right and whether that came to you from Ireland or elsewhere that is not your identity. It ultimately came from Adam and it is stirred up by the enemy. And it is sure not your identity. It's just some problem you are facing.

Others say to people, “I’m sorry but with your bad upbringing or with your bad adult experiences, or with your years of not growing as a Christian, and on and on it goes. Then they might add, “You’re just marked for life the way you are. That’s just how it’s going to be.”

That is not right. That is totally humanistic thinking. It flies right into the face about who we are in Christ. The devil or others might pound on us and say, “You’re a failure. You always were. You always will be. That’s just you.” No. If we are in Christ that is not just us! Sure, we may have struggled with some defeats and might be struggling right now, but that is still not our identity. It’s just a matter of growth and learning and maturing and victory we have yet to experience.

Believers in Jesus Christ are not who they were before they came to Jesus Christ. They are not. They may struggle with some of the same matters, but they are not the same person and that is a vast difference.

I think right now people say in the twelve-step movements things like, “I am a recovering alcoholic.” Well, if you’re a born again believer, that is not your identity. And I would urge you, if others have coaxed you and coached you to say that, as you are trying to be set free or get or wiggle loose from something like that, that is not your identity. You may be a believer who is stumbling in drunkenness or temptation toward indulgence in alcohol, but you are not a recovering alcoholic. That’s not your identity. That’s not who you are.

We are not even who we were, maybe in carnal days before a deep commitment to Christ took hold of our lives. Our identity in Christ is not a fleshly, carnal believer. That is not our identity, that is a problem of lack of growth or disobedience or rebellion or other things, but it is not our identity.

Believers in Jesus Christ are not who other people say they are. “Oh, you are just the greatest thing to ever hit the kingdom of God.” No, that is Jesus! Wrong. Or “You are the most pitiful excuse for a Christian I ever saw.” Well, surely there is one worse somewhere. Anyway that is not our identity. That just might be where we are struggling or learning or growing, but that’s not who we are.

We are certainly not who Satan says we are. He’s a liar. He won’t deal honestly. He won’t tell us who we are. He’ll tell us everything from puffing us up like a hot air balloon, to trying to mash us out like a pancake under a steam roller, to try and immobilize us. But he won’t tell us who we are.

Who are we? We are who God says we are in His Word. That is who we are. We don’t walk by circumstances, by experience, even by our own history, or by feelings. We walk by faith. And faith is in God and His Word.

We also don’t have to get caught up in the crazy things that people do to, as they say, “find themselves.” You know, people do bazaar things. I often think of, what to me is one of the most bazaar kind of things and you see it a lot. You know a man married thirty years leaving a wife and six kids and going off to Tibet somewhere or something. You know and someone tracks him down and he’s sitting over there on mountaintops “oohming” and contemplating on his navel and thinking maybe the Dalai Lama might come by or something. Why would you do something like that? And the answer is supposed to be so sane, so contemporary, so intellectual, and so responsible. “Well, I’m just trying to find myself.”

Well, we can understand why the world would do insane things to try and find an identity. But Christians do things just about as crazy. That isn't how we find out who we are. We find out who we are by God telling us who we are. And then we learn to walk in it. We don't go out and try to walk some way that kind of works and say, "Oh that is what I am, a rodeo cowboy. I thought I was a preacher, but no, I'm a rodeo cowboy." No, we let the Lord tell us who we are. If the Lord tells you that you are a rodeo cowboy, that's perfect. But if you just found something that's kind of fun and kind of works and kind of exciting, it gave you some kicks and everybody cheered you on—that is not the way to find a life. Let's find what the Lord says we are.

For example, 2 Corinthians 5:17 is one of these amazing places in Scripture that tell us who we are in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he *is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

See, this is how we know who we are. We are new creatures in Christ because the Lord tells us we are. And sometimes that will seem to fly in the face of experience or feeling. "Hey, I don't feel so new. I'm not walking so new right now. I must not be a new creature in Christ." Wrong! You are a new creature in Christ, but maybe not walking in it in fullness, or significance yet. And the same with others who come to us trying to find who they are. Let's take them to the Word of God.

And see the Word speaks straight forward. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ..." Okay, it is talking about every Christian. "...He is a new creation." That is talking about identity. Not just what you do, but what you are. And we will see it's important to know who we are, not for self-serving or self-centered reasons. That's why the world wants to know who they are, or build an identity. It's for self. We want to know who we are in Christ so we can walk in what God wants us to walk in. So we can relate to the Lord in the way He has created us to relate. That is why and it is not for self-serving, self-centered, self-introspective reasons. It's ultimately to know and please and serve and glorify the Lord.

We are new creatures in Christ. If anyone is in Christ—it applies to every believer. If we are in Christ, then that is where we now live. We now live in Christ. Maybe we have mentioned pictures like this. But we are in Christ, living in Him and by His life and His resources, as surely as a fish lives in the ocean and on the resources of the ocean. We live in Christ. It's where we live and how we live spiritually. You can't see it. You can't always feel it, but we don't walk by sight, we walk by faith. We walk by trusting and believing what God has says.

We are new creatures. Christians, those who are born again are new creations. We are a new person. What often fools us is that we still live in this same old tent, the same body. You know, we tell people, "I'm a new person. I've been born again." And they think we are talking religious reformation because they look at us and go, "You're the same person." You look the same. You walk the same. Talk the same, a little bit. Your talk's getting a little weird. It is losing some of its color, but you're the same person. No, we're just living in the same tent with a new tenant.

And what fools us so often is not so much the same tent, this house we live in, the physical body, but what kind of gets us is that we still have the same physical brain that we had before we were saved. Boy, that's where the rub is. And we will talk about that in our next unit of study, "Renewing of the Mind." We still have the same old brain, but a new person now having to deal with that brain.

We are new spiritual beings. We are not the old person we were reformed or reshaped. We literally have a new life in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ. In Him, we are made new. And because we're in Christ, we're brand new people. We have a new life. We say it right, "I've been born again. I've been born of God by the Spirit from above." And then we talk about ourselves, we deal with problems and issues as though we are the same old person we always were. And people are digging back in there to explain what's going on here. That's not God's way, that's the world's way. And we'll talk more and more about that. It's a critical issue.

We say, "I've been born again." Then we spend all our time talking about something that happened before we were born. You wonder if we believe in reincarnation or something, you know? I'm a new creature in Christ, born again. And then, "Well, let me tell you what happened to me back before I was saved. And I just can't get over it and I can't shake it. And it's just shaped me. Wait a minute! Have you been born again or haven't you? Are you a new creature or aren't you? Well, I don't know. What are you talking about? Well, what does God say about you? And are you spending all your time thinking and talking about things that happened to someone that got crucified on the cross of Christ?"

I mean, it really changes things radically, knowing who we are in Christ. We are who God says we are. On the basis of who Christ is, what Christ has done, and what Christ has provided for us and our new place and position in Him changes everything.

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). One of the great ways God sets us free from that old life is He tells us all about the new one, so we can walk in it. Not so we can spend all of our Christian experience trying to rehash, reshape, reform the old man in Adam. That new creature in Christ is the life that is to get developed.

How did we get in Christ?

Ephesians 1:13,

In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

We came in Him through trusting in the word of truth, the Gospel. In whom we believed and then we are sealed by the Spirit, put in Christ and sealed, marked, possessed, gathered there, held, owned by God Himself. We got in Him by faith and we are to live by faith.

We're new creatures in Christ. Back to 2 Corinthians 5:17, "And if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...." And here's some of the implications. "...old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." The old things have passed away, which is the old life in Adam. The old life we had before we came to Christ. It has passed away. It is gone, as far as God is concerned. Sure, it might still be in our memory bank. Sure, it might be natural and easy to just fall into those patterns of walking, thinking, relating. But as far as God is concerned, He crucified that life and buried it and gave us a whole new life to develop before Him. The old things have passed away.

New things have come. Things in Christ are now ours: a new identity, a new us, new resources, new opportunities, and new lessons to learn.

Here are some of the old/new contrasts. In the old life we were dead in sins; in the new life we are alive in Christ. See the old and the new again. The old man was crucified; and then we were

raised to newness of life. Another contrast is that old/new. Old things have passed away; new things have come. In the old life, we walked in transgressions and were transgressors; now we are forgiven. In the old life we were spiritually blind; but now we see. Can you remember people trying to explain to you things about the kingdom of God before? And they may have even been yelling at you. "Don't you see this; don't you see this!" You know, we're going, with no eyes, "No, I just don't see it." It is because we were blind! Now we are excited and talking about the things we couldn't see then. We're telling others and they are going, "What? What?" Now we see. Things that made no sense before at all, now excite us. We used to think people were weird. Now we are the weird ones.

Old and new again! We once were held captive; now we're set free. We once were far off; now we are brought near. These are major changes. We once could operate in nothing but the deeds of the flesh. That was our best hope. Now we can walk in the fruit of the Spirit. We once were citizens of earth alone. Hell was our destiny. That has changed now, we are actually citizens of heaven.

You know that our hometown is actually heavenly Jerusalem? We are strangers. We are aliens. A lot of us are getting homesick. This world is not our home, the old song used to say, "I'm just passin' through." I mean, that is absolutely right. We are pilgrims. We are sojourners. This used to be our turf. This was where we belonged. And we learned how to survive here. Now we can't wait to get out of here. We are waiting to head home. And we are on the way and there are a lot of things to learn on the way. There are a lot of things to do in the name of the Lord, but it has all changed now that we are in Christ. We are new creatures.

You might want to add here Colossians 3:3. See, we once had a life we got from Adam. And we and others kind of labored to develop it. Now look at Colossians 3:3, "For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Colossians 3:3 is an amazing truth. You and I are believers and we died. Who we were before, the independent, old, Adamic us, we died with Christ on the cross. And your life, your new life, is hidden with Christ in God. We will talk a lot about that also in our time on "The Renewing of the Mind." Your life is hidden with Christ in God. The world says, "Find a life." Well, the world is out scurrying to make one up. We are to find a life, but we are already told where it is hidden. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The amazing thing is that the more we get to know the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we dig into who He is and what He has done and what He has provided, the more we find the life that we are to and can learn to walk in down here. We learn so much to make a way for ourselves with ingenuity and a knack here and a trick there and a little persuasion there and a little overwhelming here. And if need be, yeah, maybe now and then a little begging here. Whatever would work. And it's too easy as a Christian to keep on trudging along that way. Where the life that is to be unfolded as our experience is found, your life is hidden with Christ in God. It is not one we sort of discover by putting it together piece by piece. We pursue Christ, get to know Him, who He is and what He has done and we find in Him the life that we draw on and walk in. It's so different than we ever knew before. It's too easy to approach the Christian life the same way we approach the old life. But we are new creatures in Christ.

We better press on here. We have a lot of things to look at. This is one you could just almost camp on until the Rapture. But we have to touch on the first part of verse 4 though, "When Christ, who is our life appears...." The verse is talking about the return of the Lord, but look at this

phrase of truth, “Christ, who is our life.” If anyone tells you to go find a life, the way to rightly respond is, “I am. I’m pursuing Jesus Christ. He is my life.”

Everyone knows that Jesus Christ gives us eternal life. But few Christians stop to notice the Scriptures defining that life as Christ Himself sharing His life with us. He doesn’t just say, “Boom, you’re alive forevermore. Now go make it work. Go turn it into a life.” He is our life as sure as the vine is the life of the branch. In fact, the Lord uses that kind of language. He is our life. We learn to draw on His life to walk and talk and think and decide and relate. Again, it’s Christ living in us and through us. Those are all implications of being new creatures. The old life died. A new life is given to us. But it’s hidden with Christ in God.

It may be a good point just to take a warning that psychological counseling cannot remove the old or provide the new in its place. Psychological theory cannot help develop the new life. All psychological theory can do is give you a shovel of introspection to dig into your own life. And maybe a baseball bat of blame to swing at others. That’s where psychological theory fits in. It cannot remove the old life or give a new life.

And again I ask you, at this point maybe rhetorically, but *why* is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ so intrigued and excited about psychological theory? Well, a lot of it relates to Biblical illiteracy. This is a shame on us! We are just not spending time listening to God, letting Him tell us the way it is and the way it isn’t. The American church is in a rage on this. I was on the phone this morning talking to my partner and friend that worked with me at Calvary Chapel of Irvine, and man after thirty or forty minutes on the phone we had each other so riled up we were about ready to go out and conquer the world in the name of the Lord, to clean house. Where’s our whip? We’ll turn over these merchandising tables of psychological counseling and all. When you just get to thinking out loud with someone on it, and you can kind of go nuts. Have we totally lost our spiritual minds? And the weird people in the church world, to other church people, are those who aren’t buying into and excited about psychological theory. Yet the more I look at it I can’t believe I wasn’t shocked twenty-five years ago, when I first noticed it being used in the church. I thought it was kind of clever. Yeah, clever of Satan! What a clever undermining of the Gospel and the cross of discipleship.

Just taking one look at who we are here in Christ, new creatures in Christ, how is Freud or Jung or Adler, Erickson, Maslow, any of them, how are they, who were godless geniuses and the Spirit of God not in them, how are they going to offer anything that can provide this or improve on it? They can’t. They are dealing with a life that must go to the cross and get buried. Not analyzed through therapy. Not worked on, but executed. And how about the new life in Christ? What can they offer to Jesus Christ to improve Him? He’s our life. Are we going to go to them to have them tell us how to live like Christ? There’s no way! It cannot be!

I don’t want to be a raving maniac, but I do feel like raving. I tell you this thing just pounds on my heart. The only thing that runs a close race in my own life of just perplexity to just wanting to shout, “Wait a minute!” is Christians and churches and leaders that want to build ministries and Christian lives by the law of God instead of by the grace of God. Both of them are just massively doubly perplexing to me. Now, I’m not condemning them because I did both. I’m not saying, “How could they do it?” I mean, but those who have had their eyes even slightly opened, you know, where you just get a peak, a sliver of light on these, you can’t stop seeking more or shouting out, “Whoa” when you see another path. It’s critical. We are not talking about the things that make denominations, you know. Are you going to baptize this way? Are you going to do your church government this way? We are talking about spiritual life or death. Oh, we need to know these things and walk in them and shout them abroad.

Here's another old/new and it leads us to the next issue of who we are in Christ. We were by nature sinners. Do you know what we are now by nature? Saints. "Me?" Yeah. How do we know that? Not by some higher echelon of religious activity or wonders you have performed, but because God tells you that is your identity.

Philippians 1:1,

Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops [that is, the elders] and deacons [the church leaders].

That could just as well have been said to all believers in Jesus. It could just as well have been said, to all disciples following Jesus Christ. This is just a synonymous term giving a different aspect of the identity of a Christian.

I know we so often say things like, "Well, after all we're just forgiven sinners." A lot of dear teachers I respect greatly say that. I've said it. I personally don't say it anymore because I don't think that gets at the heart of our identity. Yes, it is our history, but it is not who we are now. We aren't just forgiven sinners. That would be a weak identity. It would mean by nature you're still a sinner and the basic thing about you is that you are just prone to sin. Now I'm not saying our flesh is not looking for a chance to be indulged and to sin. I'm talking about our nature. Who are we? We are saints. All it means is "holy ones" or "set apart ones." We're not in Adam anymore. We are in Christ. And since we are in Christ, who is the Holy One, we are saints, which just means "set apart holy ones." That's all. It doesn't mean we have arrived. It doesn't mean we never sin. It doesn't mean any of that. It just means we have a different identity now.

See, if we were just sinners, forgiven, we could praise God say, my sin will never be held against me. But I have no hope of change because I'm just a sinner. And what do sinners do? They just sin, you know. So forget trying to change me if that's my identity. That is not our identity. That touches on our history that was changed at the cross. And I know we still have a problem carrying about with us. I think the Scriptures call it "flesh." Many speak of it as the old nature. I think it's more accurate Biblically from Romans 7 and elsewhere like Galatians, to describe it as "the flesh." But maybe we need to hear more studies on the new nature in Christ. That's the one that has capacity in the Lord to mature and grow and become more and more like Christ. The flesh can never change. It never will. The old man had to be executed.

So where does the growth and development occur? In the new nature that can keep growing up in the life it's receiving from Christ. It has to do with who we are, our very essence, our being, our identity. Sure, we still sin but we don't have to sin tomorrow, as much as we did yesterday. We don't have to sin next year, as much as last year. And this in no way says that we are going to be reaching sinless perfection here upon this earth. No way. Why? It is because the flesh will always be with us, including the fleshy brain. We'll talk more about that.

But now that we have a new nature, a new identity, it does mean we can grow. We can. We can love God more next year than this year, and have more fruit five years down the road, if the Lord does not return, than we had the last five years because we are new creatures, joined to the Lord Himself. Saints in Christ Jesus. We are saints because of Jesus Christ. We're holy ones. We have new righteous natures because of Christ. It is not our own. This is not us, it's what Christ gives us. Philippians 3:9, the end of verse 8 says, "...that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law."

How would you like to have a righteousness measured by how well you do before the law, and then that's how you could relate to God. That's what we were talking about earlier. That would just spiritually suffocate every Christian, because no one can live up to the perfect standard of the law. "Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ." See, that's the righteousness we grow in, the righteousness which is from God. That's why we can grow in godliness because it comes to us from God. It isn't something we try to manufacture and paste on. It's something we draw from our relationship with and in the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith.

The more we trust in Him, trust in who He is, what He's done, what He has said, what He has promised and what He offers, we grow in that new life in Christ.

We are saints. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. That is credited to our heavenly account to stand before God. But also that righteousness is imparted to us now. Praise God for imputed righteousness! It lets us have a "righteousness account" acceptable in heaven before God. In other words, we can come before the Father clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But let me ask you something. How about down here on earth in daily living? It isn't imputed righteousness we draw on, it's imparted righteousness. And I praise God for imputed righteousness, that in heaven I'm righteous like Christ before the Father. There is nothing barring our relationship.

What about while we walk down here, to please and serve Him? It has to be related to the same righteousness. But not imputed in a heavenly account it is imparted in an earthly walk. The righteousness that lets us stand before the Father is the righteousness that's in the very life of Christ. Well, what's going to let us walk in righteousness down here practically? The same life imparted to us. The same life flowing through us that, as it were, was credited to our heavenly bank account. It is the same life drawn on and spent down here. That's how we live down here. That's how we grow.

Christ's holy life is now beating in our spiritual heart of hearts, in our spirit where the Holy Spirit dwells. And that is where Christ can be our portion to draw on in thinking, in behaving, in speaking, and in relating. You know it is "...Christ in us is our hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). That is our hope of a glorious life down here. We are also saints. New creatures, it is part of our identity. It is who we are in Christ. We are also saints, not because of our great performance, but because of who we live in and whose righteousness is ours to draw upon.

Here's another old versus new that leads to the next issue. In the old life we had no sufficient resource to draw upon. Now, we are branches in the true vine. It's part of our identity.

Ephesians 2:10, old/new contrast. In our old life we tried to craft and shape a life for ourselves. We've touched on that earlier. Now we're God's handiwork.

Ephesians 2:10,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

"We are"—that is another way to know who we are in Christ, whenever there is a Biblical statement, inspired by the Spirit, confessed by us, the believing family of God. We are His workmanship. That is how we know who we are.

We are the saints, we're told. We are new creatures in Christ. We also are God's handiwork. It is our identity. It is who we are. It's not what we are trying to do, it's who we are, His handiwork, His artwork, His project. God is reshaping us. His *poema*. That is the word from which we get poem directly. *Poema*, we are His work of art. We are created in Christ Jesus. Created. Made new. And then we are developed by being placed in His Son. That's how we are made new and made His handiwork, a creative work of God the Creator.

We are created *for* good works, not *by* good works. The two previous verses make that clear. "But for good works." We aren't saved by good works; but we are saved for good works, which God prepared beforehand. Before He created us and before we do any good works, He already created the good works that we are to experience. What does He want us to do?—"that we should walk in them."

Part of our identity is we are God's creative handiwork. See, in the world you have to shape your own life or maybe get others to give you a little help. In the kingdom of God you can become a handiwork of God. What are you essentially or in essence, innately? What is your very nature? This is part of who you are, who I am. We are God's ongoing art project, in construction. It is kind of exciting isn't it? It isn't, "Hey, come on. Will you change yourself?" No I tried that for years. I couldn't do it then. I can't do it now. But here is my hope. I'm God's handiwork. Yeah, I'm a jar of clay, but He is shaping me. Sometimes we feel the pressures here and there. "Whoa!" Yeah, well, that's part of the shaping. All the while spinning, you know. A lot of those stresses and stretches, that's just God shaping us, as He's pumping that wheel of life and us on it. We are God's handiwork. That is our very nature.

And then back to this other old versus new. We had no sufficient resource to draw on in the old life. Now in the new life we are branches in the true vine. In John 15: 1, Jesus says, "I am the true vine." Verse 5, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

See, it's not some subtle kind of esoteric, "I'll tell you who you are." And then I grab some obscure phrase out of Numbers or the Song of Solomon or something. And this is your identity. How could it be more straight forward? "You are the branches." Lord, who am I? I'm trying to find myself? Who am I? "You are the branches." Lord, I just can't get it. I'm just trying to find a life. "You are the branches." I mean, it is just as straight forward as it can be. There is no mystery here. God just lays it out.

And even in light of the fact that the kingdom of heaven is unseen by the natural eye, He gives us physical, visible illustrations to help us understand. He is the vine. We are the branches. "He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He's the true vine, the true source of life. We are the branches. We find our life in Him. He wants us to be fruitful. We yearn to be fruitful, but we don't produce any of the fruit. We just bear it on the limbs of our Christian life, the branch that we are. He produces it and we just let it grow there. How? It is by abiding in Him.

See, it is so critical to know who we are in Christ because it tells us how to relate to the Lord. It tells us what true life is and where it comes from and how it's supposed to grow. If we don't find out from the Lord who we are in Christ, you know what we'll do? We'll shape an identity around the guidelines and the rules that we grew up with. And our goal will probably be to be a self-made man, like every good American Christian longs to be. A self-made man! Doesn't that have a hollow ring when you read that we are God's handiwork? It's like saying, "Lord, I'll take over

the shaping of this vessel. Thank You.” I mean, that’s what it comes down to. We’re branches in the true vine. We find our life in that vine.

Also, part of our identity—we are ambassadors for Christ. In the old life we had no significant purpose in life. Why were we here? What were we doing? Nothing! Wasting our existence! Now here is part of our identity that gives us purpose. We are ambassadors for Christ. People get so excited, you know. And when ambassadors go from country to country. Oh, trumpets, red carpets, armies.

Look at this, 2 Corinthians 5:20, there is our identity, ambassadors for Christ. Wow, “...as though God were pleading through us, we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

What is our identity? We’re ambassadors for Christ. Ambassadors represent their homeland in a foreign land. That’s us. We represent the heavenly kingdom in this foreign earthly land. Man gets so excited over human ambassadors. My goodness, the King of kings and Lord of lords sent us! And we don’t have to be offended that they don’t roll out the red carpet, you know. All we’re asking is that they’ll let us wash their feet anyway. We are not looking for crowns, you know, just let us serve. We are ambassadors for Christ. We are here to represent the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, live in His name, speak in His name, demonstrate His life, that others might leave this dry and weary land and get a birthplace in the heavenly kingdom. It’s part of our identity.

Another old/new, in the old life we had no way to ever become a whole person. There was no way. Well, old things like that are passed away. New things have come. Now we are complete in Christ. This is a mindblower, this one.

Who are you? In Christ you are a complete person. It’s part of your identity, your very being. Colossians 2:9-10,

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him.

Complete. Whole. Are complete means a present, ongoing condition. You’re not trying to be a whole person, in Christ you are. Why? It is because in Him all the fullness dwells. Everything it takes to have a full life is in Christ and you and I live in Christ. So, in Him, we have a whole, full, complete life. We are whole. There’s nothing missing. And to the extent that we draw on life from Him, wholeness of life, completeness of life is expressed out through us. We want to learn to draw on His fullness. Find our wholeness in Him.

See, it is futile to try to get it all together on our own. All these old bromides, you know—“Get a grip on yourself?” Why? I’d just let loose eventually or I’d slip through my fingers or something. Get a grip on yourself. How about rest in the grip of God? How about let His grip be the shaping, controlling, guiding influence? Try to get it all together on our own. How foolish. That is trying to patch up the old life again. Put that Humpty Dumpty back together again. Let him be nailed and buried.

We do have a whole life, but it is in Christ. To the extent we draw on the life of Christ, our life shows the wholeness that is in Him alone. The more we draw on that people will say, “Boy, you’re really maturing, aren’t you?” Well, take Christ out of our lives we would be spiritual babbling, just part of humanity. But the more we draw on Him we grow in Christ-likeness. Then more of Him comes forth and less of us. That whole life is there already.

Oh, this identity. One thing it says is stop working on yourself and continue to find new life flowing from Christ. God's Word tells us and it tells those who are coming to us for a word. We've got our fingerprints all over ourselves. We have our magnifying glasses and our mirrors to see "what am I'm like and how am I'm going to change?" Well, let God tell us who we are and how we change? We draw on His resources.

Finding our identity is critical. Oh, I can remember when the Lord started to open my eyes. And He did it through personal reading and prayer and some study and a book here and a Christian believer testifying there. When I first heard it, "who we are in Christ," I thought it sounds weird. I never heard that before. Well, that's weird, why don't we hear these things? We just pay more attention to our own life than to the Word of God. We are working so hard on ourselves. And sometimes the more serious we are as a Christian, the harder we are working on ourselves. And the Lord is saying, "You are My handiwork. Just put your attention on Me. Relate to Me. Give Me free reign with My hands. Open up wide to receive this resource of life I am holding out. It is My Son I want you to live by. Here is what you need. Get out of that graveyard. Get up here among the living." Find life in the living One, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are complete in Him. It's part of our very nature, our very being, our very identity.

Now by way of conclusion, let's conclude with this issue of Christ-esteem, not self-esteem. There's a temptation for the flesh of the believer—and I have heard it actually taught this way by Bible teachers—to sneak self-esteem theology in through the side or back door right here on who we are in Christ.

See, Luke 9:23 slams the front door on it. "If anyone desires to come after Me...." You want to follow Me? You want to be My disciple? No to self, death to self. "Take up your cross. Follow Me." The front door is slammed. No self-esteem. Not esteem self, no, deny self. Not pump up self, no, let self be put in the place of death.

But many times Christians hear these descriptions of who they are in Christ and the flesh vaunts itself. Or teachers trying to pump up and encourage people to make it sound like this is what you are producing. This is what you are doing. No, this is who you are in Christ. It's quite a critical issue.

See, we have no independent identity. We have individual identity in Christ. You can always tell each of us from the other. But never again will we have independent identity. That is, a life on our own apart from Christ.

You know, people sometimes hear things like this. They hear, "I'm a new creature in Christ. I'm a saint. I'm God's handiwork. I'm a branch in the true vine. I'm an ambassador for Christ. I'm complete." Wow, I'm starting to feel pretty good about myself. Wait a minute! You're not hearing the message. In every one of those it is in Christ. It is because of Christ. We are not talking about us, essentially. We are talking about Him, and then us related to Him. See, self is always looking to rear its ugly head, you know. The flesh is wanting a pat of the back. A "hey, you're getting better and better." Oh, right on. And the self-life is saying, "Oh I'm so happy to be down off that cross. It was killing me. And this a place where the flesh kind of has a religious—clears its throat, "I'm back." No. That's not why God tells us who we are in Christ.

You take Christ out of the formula here, out of the picture, a new creature has no independent identity. The newness is gone when Christ is gone. You take Christ out of our lives, there's nothing saintly about us, in any way. You take the Lord out of our lives and we are not God's handiwork, we are His objects of judgment and wrath. You take Christ the vine out, where is the

branch left? It's dead! It has no independent identity. Individual. You can tell one branch from another. Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah, not just two kind of blotches of eternity that once were humanity. I mean, there he stands, they're in heaven and He's talking on the Mount of Transfiguration. We'll always have individual identity, but not independent identity.

Complete in Him but take Him out of the picture—glorious incompleteness. That's all that's left. Brokenness. Emptiness. This is all about Him and us relating to Him. It's not something for self.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 1: 30-31 says,

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— [He did all of this for us in Christ] that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let Him glory in the LORD.'

We've got plenty to boast about as long as we are boasting in the Lord. We were created to be boasters. You can see it everywhere you look around humanity. The image and likeness of God. We were created by God to be boasters. We were created to boast, but only to boast in our Creator. And we've got plenty to boast about forever. And we can be doing it now. That's why we're told who we are in Christ. It's all about glory for Him.

In 1 Peter 4:11, again says that in all things God might get the glory.

...that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever—including now.

In 2 Peter 3:18, where's the glory supposed to go? "To Him be the glory both now and forever." That's where the glory goes. This whole story about who we are in Christ, you know what you could write at the bottom of it? Glory be to God. Not, "Hey, hey, how about me? Finally, I found something I could feel good about me over." No, you found some great things to feel good about Him. What about me? How about death to me? How about death to self? How about no to self? How about just boast in Jesus Christ. That's what this is all about.

Someone said to me once, "My goodness, where does this leave me?" I went home and thought and prayed and wrote down some things. Here are some of them. It leaves us blessed, humbled, accepted, overwhelmed, fully satisfied, secure in His love, and provided for time and eternity. It leaves us praising the Lord, thanking the Lord, loving the Lord, glorifying the Lord, and serving the Lord. It leaves us in a tremendous place! You know one place it doesn't leave us? Focused on self!

Who we are in Christ, it is life-changing, life-giving, and life-describing. And it is the kind of foundational truth that we can pass on to others when they come our way. I mean, this goes beyond, "Hey, how can I get my five-year-old to eat their oatmeal?" Listen, how can you show your five-year-old the life of Christ? That's kind of the way I like to shift gears in a session like that, you know.