

How to Prevent Spiritual Identity Theft

By Jay Wegter

Our identity in Christ is a battle front because this present world offers a host of counterfeit sources of identity. The devil is an identity thief—he is a master at identity theft. He baits his hook with the false sources of identity: *beauty, bucks, brains, power, pleasure, prestige, and possessions*. The world with its glory and pomp are at his disposal (**Lu 4:6**). He knows everyone's 'price'—what they will give in exchange for their eternal soul. He uses the allure of the world's values to set his hook firmly and secure his hold on his followers in order to bring them into the mouth of eternal hell. What I want you to see is that the world's counterfeit sources of identity are not merely 'non-true options' of identity, but real soul-destroying idols.

The serpent's lie in the Garden of Eden was a demonic offer of autonomy: complete independence from God; "nothing outside of you defines you," thus, you may define yourself. This lie has gone mainstream in our culture. Which is the ultimate source of the transgender phenomenon. For, the lie urges us to cast off our accountability to God so that 'breaking free' becomes an act of being true to oneself. "I have to be true to the 'real me' has become the controlling loyalty;" it is not even questioned anymore. So when you think of the commands in Scripture about avoiding worldliness, don't think merely of greed, sexual immorality and substance abuse, include the fact that the world is seeking to conform you to its value of being true to self. As if, self can be the architect of the real you, your identity and not God Almighty.

'Will your identity survive the grave?' That ought to be a very simple question to answer. For example, name a famous athlete, actor, or pop music star. You know for a fact that they will not be holding a basketball, a movie script, or microphone in the next life. Only the identity graciously bestowed by Christ will survive the grave. EX. Some young 'wanna-be' gang members were walking down the street in my neighborhood. I stopped them and asked, "What do you think the key to greatness is?" One answered, "Pump iron until you are like massive." The other said, "get a multi-million dollar basketball contract." I replied, "The key to greatness is get in submission to someone great, there is no one greater than the Lord Jesus Christ." EX. In a recent poll, high school students were asked, "Would you rather be righteous, or famous? Nearly 90% said famous (another example of the 'cult of status'). Do you know why so many students opted for fame and not righteousness? It was because they imagined that identity comes from temporal things. But, the only kind of identity that will survive the grave is the identity of sonship given graciously in Christ. In fact, the entire creation is

awaiting that event when the ‘sons of God will be publicly revealed’ (**Rom 8:19**). So I want to you to see that this issue of one’s identity is of eternal importance.

Do you know for certain who or what is the source of your identity? In a genuine Christian education students study such fundamental questions as: *Who am I? What am I? Why did God create me? Why am I here? What is my eternal destiny?* One’s perceived source of identity is never a fringe issue; for the source of your identity sets up an inverse proportion: to the degree that your identity is carried by Christ, you will not look to this world to establish it. But, those who live for the approval of this world, and the glory of man will find that they will not be inclined to rely upon Christ. Listen to what our Savior said in **John 5:44**, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and only* God?” If your identity is not established by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the world will establish a counterfeit identity for you.

You will ultimately live out your source of identity. And if it is found in this world, it will be accompanied by heartache. Countless individuals who base their identities on temporal things are assaulted with depression and thoughts of suicide. But thanks be to God for the gospel; for God in Christ is recovering His own image, rescuing His people and restoring them from ruin in Adam that they might fulfill their created purpose. My friends the world does not know us because it does not know Him (**1 Jn 3:1; Jn 15:14-16:4**). Christ as the only true source of identity restores and establishes communion with God so that the believer is a new creation in Christ—enabled to live again according God’s purpose—for we are creatures made for God, formed to live a life of fellowship with Him as His image.

The Gospel is the VIEW of God’s glory in the face of Christ

To receive the good news of the gospel is NOT merely the acceptance of the historical facts of Jesus’ life. No, to become saved is to have ‘seen’ the glory of God in the face of Christ (**2 Cor 4:4-6**). It is to behold by faith the divine identity of the Good Shepherd. A saved person has Christ revealed to him as the Lord of Glory, the Jehovah of the O.T.—for no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit’ (**1 Cor 12:3**). Even the Apostle Peter could not say “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” apart from the revelation of the Father (**Mt 16:16-17**). Paul’s own testimony extolled God as the One who ‘revealed Christ in me’ (**Gal 1:16**).

I want you to understand that salvation restores our ability to behold the glory of God and to be captivated by His majesty. We are all familiar with the verse, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (**Rom 3:23**). But what often goes

unnoticed in this verse is the fact that by our sin we have *forfeited* not only our ability to reflect God's glory, but also our *capacity* to see (behold) God's glory. The glorious gospel restores our ability to see, by faith the glory of God (**Heb 1:1-3**).

The new birth gives God's glory back to us; the glory to which we had become blind by the fall—it is a miracle of revelation and restoration. By the Spirit's regenerating work, we are given a revelation of Christ seeing who He really is; seeing the glory of God in Christ (**2 Cor 4:4-6**).

Jonathan Edwards, in his work on the infinite merits of Christ opens up aspects of the glory of Christ to our understanding. For, the glory of Christ is our Savior's 'equipment to save to the uttermost' (the equipment He earned by His obedience to the Father). Christ's mission in His incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension and exaltation, was to earn that equipment (**Acts 2:36; Phil 2:5-11**). God's wisdom is Christ, and Him crucified (**1 Cor 2:2**).

Concerning His glory: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever' so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. The former priests, on the other hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, **holds His priesthood permanently**. Therefore, He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (**Heb 7:21-26**). "After saying above, 'Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure in them' (offered according to the Law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (**Heb 10:8-10**). Every believer a priest (1 Pet 1:9; Rev 1:6), offering praise and thanks (**Heb 13:15**).

At the new birth, believers receive a new faculty of perception by the Holy Spirit known as "the eyes of the heart," in order to perceive these spiritual realities of divine glory. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the **glory** of His inheritance in the saints" (**Eph 1:18**).

The eyes of the heart allow us to grasp spiritual realities and be rocked and staggered by them. "For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one

knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God [by His grace], which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*” (1 Cor 2:10-13, 15-16).

While we were spiritually dead we could not see the Lord’s glory and His beauty. We did not love His glory or live for His glory—we had zero passion for His glory—no sentiment for His ultimate purpose to extend His glory. Therefore, we worshipped and served the creature and the creation (infatuated by world’s promises). Our hearts were not the temple of God—they were idol factories (a veritable ‘zoo’ of lusts, producing coveting of every kind as the Apostle Paul says—**Romans 7:8**). We had no problem letting our flesh set the standard for our behavior. “. . .The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God” (Rom 8:7). Made alive in Christ—loving Him and the way He saves (**Rom 8:3**).

APPLICATION: *Now, through the miracle of the new birth, believers have become the ‘unveiled ones’ able to behold the glory of the Lord. Our new identity is that of an unveiled one, and our new vocation is to behold His glory.* “But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor 3:16). God’s glory of course is the outshining of His perfections made manifest in Christ, and revealed in the wonderful plan of redemption. God’s majesty and excellence is put on display in our redemption (**Rom 3:24-26**). Beholding the glory of the Lord is now the vocation of the church that we might proclaim His excellencies (1 Pet 2:9-10).

To behold the glory of the Lord is to be ravished by the sight of His glory. The reason why is stunning—to begin to understand the vastness and supremacy and dignity of the Person who gave His life for us is to be rocked and staggered at His majesty. He lavished grace on believers for His Name’s sake. To take delight in God is to be ‘calibrated’ afresh to Who He is—and that activity has a rectifying effect; curing our lukewarm-ness, our double-mindedness, and our spiritual slothfulness. By His saving work, Christ is fulfilling God’s plan to reveal the divine perfections in an awesome manner—by the redemption of sinners. Let this sink in and it will blast you out of the ‘blahs.’ It will fill you with passion for the glory of the Lord. For in Christ, God’s glory and your eternal good are eternally joined (**Eph 2:6-7**). (The 2 prongs of God’s character: justice and mercy.)

Further Application and ‘Take-away’s’

Do you as a faithful disciple-maker understand the ‘practicality of glory’? Have you ever considered that the regular ‘sight’ of the Lord’s glory produces the following effects:

- Increasing conformity to Christ (**2 Cor 3:18**).
- The ability and desire and boldness to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (**1 Pet 2:9-10**).
- The motivation to pursue and cultivate Christian character (**2 Pet 1:5-8ff.**).
- The production of sanctifying hope (**1 Jn 3:2-3**).
- The motivation to grow into an effective disciple-maker (**Col 1:28**).
- The construction of a lens to see the impotence of human glory (**Jn 5:44; 12:43**).
- Spiritual sight and savor for the things of Christ (**Eph 3:10; 1 Pet 1:6-9**).
- The transformative knowledge that by an initial sight of His glory He saved us (**2 Cor 4:6**), by the ongoing beholding of this glory He sanctifies us (**2 Cor 3:18**), and by the face to face sight of this glory He will instantly glorify His own (**1 Jn 3:2-3**).
- Consider that the more pastors grasped the above, the less they would feel the need to ‘hype’ programs and pitch events. For, a sight of the Lord’s glory produces a desire to be like our Lord and to sacrificially invest in those He died to make His own.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Why is the glory of God only made sensible to us ‘in the face of Christ’?
- 2) How did Christ’s obedience in His atoning death make Him perfectly equipped to be the all-sufficient High Priest and Savior of sinners?
- 3) What do the ‘eyes of the heart’ enable believers to perceive?
- 4) Describe what is meant by Christ’s ‘mediatorial glory’.