

is dethroned and not dominant, it still lusts for sin and against the spirit (Gal. 5:17). There is a battle within us and this too is part of our identity while here in this life. Yet it is the new man that is “me” in the deepest sense (cf. Rom. 7:14-25) for it is dominant and everlasting, whereas my old man will die with my physical death.

This is your identity, child of God. You are a loved person—loved by God. You were loved by Him before you were converted, before you were born and even before the foundation of the world, for you were beloved in Jesus Christ in God’s eternal decree of election!

You are a redeemed person. Jesus Christ bought you back from sin and death and hell by paying the ransom price for you by His blood on the cross! “This is my only comfort in life and death,” says the child of God, according to the opening words of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, “That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil.”

We are in a gracious covenant with the Triune God in Jesus Christ. The Ruler of the cosmos, who inhabits eternity, dwells in the high and holy place with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa. 57:15). My Maker reveals Himself to me in His beautiful creation all around me, in His infallible Word and in the cross of Jesus Christ.

How else does being in Jesus Christ determine our identity? In Christ, we have “got a life,” abundant life (John 10:10), not a life in the slavery of sin. In Christ, we have purpose: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, A. 1), whereas most people drift through life not knowing what they are supposed to be doing or why they are here.

We have dignity because we are prophets, priests and kings in Jesus Christ, and not mutated protoplasm. This affects our life and work! We are rich for all things are ours, serving our salvation (I Cor. 3:21). We are not spiritual paupers!

We know the difference between right and wrong (ethics) and for us it is not being redefined every few years by new civil laws, opinion polls, the PC elite or the false church. God’s moral law (unlike ungodly man’s law) is written in stone and in our hearts, according to the promise of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33; II Cor. 3:3)!

We know what to do with our bodies. Our bodies are for the Lord and not for fornication (I Cor. 6:13). Our bodily members are to be used as “instruments of righteousness,” not as instruments of uncleanness and iniquity (Rom. 6:13, 19).

In short, in Jesus Christ, we have become truly human, better men and women, those who image God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer. After all, we have been stamped not with 666, the number of the beast, but with the seal of the Spirit! *Rev. Stewart*

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Covenant Reformed News

June 2017 • Volume XVI, Issue 14

Our Identity in Christ (3)

Men and women truly know and rejoice in their identity as human beings, and as male and female, only in Jesus Christ! We entered our new, spiritual life through the new birth. We had a first, physical birth and we were born again with a spiritual birth. Our first birth was here below; our second birth was from above. For most of us, our first birth took place in a hospital; our second birth was from heaven.

This second birth enables us to understand our earthly identity as human beings and gives us a spiritual and heavenly identity as Christians. Through our new birth, we are children of God in the Son of God, not spiritual orphans. God is our Father, “Our Father which art in heaven,” as the address of the Lord’s Prayer puts it. To Him we cry out, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

As those with a new life through a new birth, we are new men and new women in Christ. As II Corinthians 5:17 puts it, “old things are passed away.” These include the old, sinful ideas of identity—pagan ideas, secular ideas, the vain traditions handed on to us by the world (cf. I Pet. 1:18).

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, *he is a new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, *all things are become new*” (II Cor. 5:17). This is our new identity and new life in the Lord Jesus.

It is an amazing thing that we find our real identity through our identification with Jesus Christ! What is the believer’s justification? What is the righteousness of God that He imputes and reckons to my account? It is not any righteousness that I have wrought but the righteousness of another, even Jesus Christ.

What is my sanctification? Not any holiness or goodness that I have worked up of myself. It is the holiness of Jesus Christ Himself wrought in me by His Holy Spirit. “Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20). I died in the first Adam; I live through the last Adam!

So what has happened to each and every believer? Just what Jesus said! We find our true selves by denying ourselves and losing our lives for His sake (Matt. 16:24-25); we find our true identity by losing our old, sinful identity.

The believer also knows that he or she is not perfect—far from it! “Simul justus et peccator,” as Martin Luther famously put it, that is, “At the same time just and sinner.” The child of God is just or righteous with the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ which is received by faith alone. But also and at the same time, he is a sinner. In me is not only the new man in Jesus Christ but also the old man or indwelling sin. Though the flesh

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The More-Loving-Than-God Argument (3)

In my last two articles, I began a series addressing a reader's concerns over the heresies of common grace and the gracious or well-meant offer of the gospel (the notions that God loves absolutely everybody and passionately desires to save those He has eternally decreed not to save). With this *News*, I continue my answers to his questions.

Question 2. "Jesus told us to love our neighbour as He loves them. If He loves just a few, how come He asks us to love everyone? Does He not want us to be like Him? If Jesus loves only a few, and yet we aspire to love and have concern for everyone, are we not making ourselves more loving than He is?"

This question is very much like the first one (which we covered in the last issue of the *News*) and has the same errors. It assumes ideas that are unscriptural and untrue.

The assertion that Jesus loves His neighbours who are all men is a purely human invention that is found nowhere in Scripture. I beg of the objector that he read such passages as John 17:9 and John 13:1. In fact, I know of a minister who used this very argument and so fell into the heresy of Nestorianism, the error that teaches that Jesus has *two* persons, a human and a divine. This view was condemned by the church early in its history at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). The argument here goes like this: Jesus, in His human nature, loved His neighbour; His neighbour included all men head for head. Therefore, Jesus loved all men in His human nature, while in His divine nature He loved only the elect. That is heresy.

We are in the world and do not know who are God's elect and who are not. God and Christ know. They love the elect. We are witnesses who are called to love our neighbour. That means that we seek the salvation of all those whom we know and meet in life. God wills that the reprobate hear the gospel, as well as the elect. He uses our witness through the preaching and personal witnessing to save His elect. He also uses our preaching and witness to bring the wickedness of the reprobate to a full manifestation so that God may be justified in His punishment of those who reject His truth.

What is so hard to understand about that? It is biblical and glorifies God.

The defenders of common grace may not, as they do, argue from our love for all men to a universal love of God. We do not and cannot love all men. In any case, we must not manufacture a god who is like us (Ps. 50:21).

Question 3. "Paul in Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1 reveals that he has an ardent, earnest desire and longing for all his kinsman (head for head) to be saved. Yet you deny that God Himself desires all to be saved. Does not that make you more loving than God?"

At last, we have some texts with which to deal! It is the only appeal to Scripture in all the six questions. It is a relief, for it brings us back to God's Word, instead of engaging each other in the arena of man's philosophizing.

Yet I find the argument puzzling. Yes, Paul expressed his desire that all Israel be saved. Moses did something of the same thing when he prayed to God that He would spare Israel after their sin of worshipping the golden calf at Sinai. Moses loved God's church

so much that he was willing to go to hell for them (Ex. 32:32).

Has the defender of common grace never pleaded with God to spare someone whom he loved? His wife dying of cancer? his son who has fled home and lives a godless life? Have not godly parents, while watching their little child writhe in pain, wished that they could suffer in the place of their child?

God showed Moses and Paul that His will was not to save everyone. Moses learned this when God declared, "[I] will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (33:19). Paul wrote that, in spite of his personal desires, God does not save all Israel; He desires to save (and, therefore, saves) the true Israel of election (Rom. 9:6-8). God does not desire to save reprobate Jews or Gentiles: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I *hated*" (13); "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he *will* [or wants to] have mercy, and whom he *will* [or wants to] he hardeneth" (18); "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, *willing* [or wanting or desiring] to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ..." (21-22).

And so the believer, in his anguish, prays, "Thy will be done," and seeks the higher purpose in life's sorrows: the glory of Almighty God.

I might add that neither Moses nor Paul had to go to hell because of their sin or the sin of the church, for Christ suffered for all His church so that, by the power of His particular and efficacious atonement, all the elect are saved from the hell we deserve.

Question 4. "You aspire to treat everyone with kindness (i.e., love them) and share the gospel with them (i.e., you want them to be saved) and yet God only loves a few. Are you making yourself more loving than God?"

It is true that the elect are, according to Isaiah, a hut in a garden of cucumbers, a besieged city and a very small remnant (Isa. 1:8-9). Isaiah was describing the church on earth which, at the time he prophesied, was limited to Israel, an Israel that had become mostly apostate. But the true church for which Christ died is described as being greater in number than the stars in the heavens and the sand at the seashore (e.g., Gen. 22:17). That number cannot be described as "a few," although it is probably true that the number of the whole church is less than the number of all the reprobate.

Eternally, God chose to reveal and glorify Himself through Jesus Christ and the salvation of the elect in Him (Eph. 1:3-14). Eternally, He determined that the reprobate would serve the purpose of saving the elect (Rom. 9:12)—as the chaff serves the purpose of bringing forth the wheat or as the scaffolding serves the erection of the building itself.

Yet the gospel is preached to elect and reprobate alike, because in the gospel the ungodly also are called to repentance. God's judgment upon them is just for they have refused His command to repent and believe in Christ. They are damned for their unbelief, according to God's eternal purpose: "them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (I Pet. 2:8). The reprobate were appointed to destruction in the way of their unbelief.

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