

Col 1:1-11
Jesus is the Image Restored

Introduction:

- I. Last week we began a new series of messages looking at our identity.
 - A. A hot topic in our society at the moment, unfortunately, it is also a seriously misunderstood topic.
 - B. Our society preaches a message to us 24/7 that proclaims. . .
 1. You are the one who shapes and fashions your identity. . . you can be anything you want to be. . . the only limit to you discovering your potential is the limitations you or others set for you.
 2. Now, we stand at a point in history where three deadly philosophies, and world views converge.
 - a) **Post-modern/relativism:** no moral absolutes- “no one can tell me what is right or wrong”
 - b) **Expressive Individualism:** meaning and purpose attained by following inward passions/desires— “Repression of my deepest longings prohibits me from finding my true identity.
 - c) **Identity politics:** individual identity discovered through isolating and prioritising a single /group of identity markers over others. — “My gender is my identity. My sexuality is my identity. My possessions are my identity” etc.
- II. Now, when all three of these world-views converge, as they do in our contemporary context, there now exists a collective assumption in our society, which basically uncritically accepts these proposals as truth.
 - A. What we have as a result is a society that is in an identity crisis. . . detached from their past, present and future. . . we have a society consumed by individualistic ideals.
 1. It has produced a real breakdown in the unity of our society.
 - a) For example, just this week Britain has brexited the EU. . . is that right or wrong? Good or bad?

- (1) There is real no foundation to return to for an answer, since in a sense Britain is just pursuing their own unique identity and their own self-interest. . . Britain is just following her heart. . . Britain is just being true to herself. . . Brexit is in a real sense a corporate manifestation of our societies' adoption of expressive individualism.
2. Or, if this hits too close to home for some of you. . . let's go over to America and see what happens when these three worldviews are taken to the absurdly extreme. . . America happens to do this very well.
 - a) In 2015 Bruce Jenner, former olympic athlete and father of some of the Kardashain clan. . . publicly transitioned from a man to a woman, saying "I am a woman. . . I was not genetically born that way. . . But I still identify as a woman."
 - (1) America rejoiced. . . lifted him up. . . praised his bravery. . . and he could do no wrong. . He even voted for Trump and people loved him.
 - b) That very same year, Rachel Dolezal made headlines as a white women running a local arm of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
 - (1) An organisation aimed at advocating for equal rights and justice for African Americans and other minority groups.
 - (a) Dolezal insisted that she identified as an African American, despite having two caucasian parents, declaring "white isn't a race; its a state of mind."
 - (b) Now, in contrast to the media's praise of Bruce Jenner's bravery, Rachel Dolezal's transition was met with outrage, anger and outright disgust.
 - i) She lost her job and was put through a series of publicly humiliating interviews, editorials, and news segments. . . she was the laughing stock of every joke on late night television.
3. But let's pause for a moment and ask a question. . . why is Jenner Celebrated and Dolezal outcasted?
 - a) Whose feelings count. .. whose right wins?

(1) One is affirmed for defining themselves based on their feelings. . . and the other is ridiculed and mocked and then promptly told that their feelings are not a substantial basis for her claims.

(a) How are we to decide which feelings are legitimate and relevant and which should be repressed?

(b) Why could Jenner self-define his gender, but Dolezal not self-define her race?

i) This, brother and sisters is a picture of our contemporary society. . .

III. But thanks be to God, the Bible has much to say about this topic, in fact, in many ways you could say the Bible's main story line is a question of Identity. . .Who God is, primarily, and then who we are in light of it.

A. That is why we are taking this month to focus in on this huge topic. . . youth you are in here today because you are growing up in a society that is teaching you self-destructive truths. . . which are tearing families apart, and our society apart. . . and we want you know that there is an alternative.

1. The bible is God's blueprint for a happy, joyous, meaningful life. . . when we follow it. . . it leads to a good life. . . when we reject it. . . it leads to depression, hurt, brokenness, and confusion.

IV. And last week we saw that we are a composite sketch of several varying factors. . . and various identity markers. . . and we cannot simply reduce our identity to any one of these characteristics.

A. And we learned from our study last week that because we are created in the image of God. . . he is the cloth out of which we were cut, so if we want to know who we really are. . . then the more we know about God, the more we will find out about ourselves.

1. He is the external standard by which we can order and prioritise all of our identity marker making up our unique identity.

2. In the past, people found their identity by looking outward (family, ethnicity, culture). . . today people find their identity by looking inward (education, gender, sexuality, accomplishments). . .

- a) But the bible teaches that we cannot find our identity by looking inward, nor outward, but rather we find our true identity in looking upward.

V. One of the key texts in the NT to help us understand this better is Col 3:1-11.

Introduction (after scripture reading):

I. Pray

II. Last week we learned that God made us in his own image. . . and we read in Genesis that after completed everything he took a step back and to everything else he made he said up this point: “This is good”, but when he saw humanity alongside his creation. . . he could say: “This is VERY Good.”

A. So, what happened. . . what went wrong?

- 1. Well, of course we all know about the Fall. . . Eve and Adam trusted and obeyed Satan’s lies rather than trusting and obeying the Lord. . . they placed their faith in Satan’s words rather than God’s.

III. Now, studying the temptation passage in Genesis 3 in light of our theme identity. . . it struck me how similar Satan’s lies are. . . to the lies that we are being fed today.

A. Youth you are being raised in a society that rejects our faith.

B. Look how similar the secular gospel of expressive individualism is to satan’s lies.

1. Just compare the two side by side:

a) Our society vs. satan:

(1) Happiness is realising your full potential vs. God wants to keep your eyes closed and stop you from realising your full potential.

(2) Personal autonomy is the path to a meaningful life vs. Independence from God is the path to life. . . you will not die!

- (3) Follow your heart you will find your true self vs. Look how good the fruit is and how it will help you gain knowledge . . . you will know good AND evil!
- (4) Authentic living comes through breaking with tradition/religion/ other's opinions vs. Shutting your ears to God is the key to authentic living. . . did God really say?
- (5) You determine who you really are vs. You can become like God and your eyes will be open to discovering your true self.
 - (a) And just like the fall of humanity in the garden. . .our society's current idea of identity, the values and the message of discovering your own identity APART FROM GOD truly does have a demonic origin.

IV. As Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1-3:

A. Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared. . . - 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

- 1. He goes on to warn that people will be lovers of self. . . surrounding themselves with teachers who tell them what they want to hear.

V. So, from eden until today, Satan's false gospel continues to deceive and lead astray.

A. ANd, now that once perfect image of God has now become distorted and fractured and broken.

1. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. — Genesis 6:5

a) We were made to image and reflect the goodness of God and the great tragedy of history is that now we also image and reflect the evil of satan. . . having not fully lost the image of God, yet sadly more often than not, we fall short of our true potential.

b) So, in a deeply profound sense the fall is really a loss of our true identity. . . sin has so to say caused us to have a type of ontological amnesia. . . sin has made us forget who we really are.

. .

VI. Now, what does the NT say about Jesus and the work of renewal He brings into this mess?

A. Our Colossians passage provides a great window for us to dive into the NT teaching.

VII. So, keep in mind, in our OT introduction we established the central point to discovering our true identity is in the fact that we were created in the image of God. . . and now after the fall this image has not been lost, but rather distorted and confused.

A. I think John Stott says it best when he writes:

1. "I am a Jekyll and Hyde, a mixed-up kid, having both dignity, because I was created and have been recreated in the image of God, and depravity, because I still have a fallen and rebellious nature. I am both noble and ignoble, beautiful and ugly, good and bad upright and twisted, image and child of God, and yet sometimes yielding obsequious homage to the devil from whose clutches Christ has rescued me. My true self is what I am by creation, which Christ came to redeem. My false self is what I am by the Fall, which Christ came to destroy." — John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p285

B. So, what is our hope?

C. Colossians 3 is one of those key NT passage which will help us to discover where we should begin searching for our true identity.

1. Verses 1-4 set up a new dichotomy

a) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. — Col 3:1-4

(1) The theme of identity might not immediately jump out at you when you read these verses. . . but here Paul introduces us to the new reality Christ has created for us through his death, his resurrection and his ascension.

(2) And if skip down to verse 11, you'll see how closely linked this is to a few of our key identity markers. . . but before we get there, we need to first understand verses 1-4

(a) So the basic teaching here in these opening verses is not too hard to understand:

- i) Essentially, Paul is saying Jesus geographically relocates our vision away from seeking our identity in things here on earth or within ourselves. . . and shifts our vision upward to heaven, where Christ is seated next to the Father.
- ii) Paul is teaching an intentional geographical shift from placing ultimate value in created things to placing our ultimate identity in Christ. . . so Jesus has created a new dichotomy, our identity is now in Him.

(1) "Set your heart, set your minds above, on Christ, who is your life."

VIII. So, let's take a step back and consider what Paul means. . . how is focusing on Christ, going to help us find our true identity.

A. Yes, we know the Bible is primarily about God. . . He is the main character.

1. And for that reason when we speak about Jesus, we primarily speak about his divinity. . . Jesus is the son of God.

B. But Jesus is also very often referred to as what? . . . The Son of Man.

1. Jesus did not only come to reveal God to us, but He also came to reveal true humanity to us. . . to show us who we, truly, were created to be.

2. We must realise that Jesus is not only fully divine. . . he was also fully human.

a) Which means, Jesus is the perfect man. . . he is the ideal "image of God" in the flesh.

(a) Jesus is that undistorted, pure image of God in human form. . he is the true and better Adam. . . the true and

better Israel. . . who fulfilled what neither Adam nor Israel could. . . perfect faith/trust and perfect obedience.

i) **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” — Mark 1:11.**

(1) So, if we want to see who we are. . . if we want to truly discover ourselves. . . if we want to realise our true potential . . . then we must set our minds and hearts upward/above to Christ.

(a) And so this is why Paul tells the Colossians to set their hearts and minds on things above.

(b) Not on who our families say we should be. . . not on what our feelings tell us we should be. . . not outward, not inward, but upward.

(c) So, if Christ is the standard, then we have a clear guide to understand our own identity markers. . .

(d) . . .how do I live out my sexuality in light of Jesus.

(e) . . . how do I live out my race in light of Jesus

(f) . . . how do I live out my gender in light of Jesus.

C. But, there is more here in these 4 verses. . . if you really understand what Paul is saying it is not just looking to Jesus as a good role model. . . as some sort of glorified life-coach. . . that would be de-motivating, who could ever live up to that?

1. Paul is not just saying look to Jesus. . . Paul is also saying that our identity is derivative of Jesus. . . He IS our life (vs 4). . . some how we are destinies are wrapped up in His.

a) vs 3. You died with Christ

b) vs1. You were raised with Christ

c) vs 3 Your life is hidden in Christ

d) vs4 When he appears we will finally appear in our perfected glorified body. . . our true identity will be made perfect.

2. So, Paul is speaking here about the mysterious union we have with Christ. . . through the Holy Spirit in us.

- a) The cross will help us understand this union we have with Christ.
- (1) Jesus was our substitute AND our representative. I'm going to cite Stott's definition for these two words;
- (a) Substitute: One who acts in place of another in such a way as to render the other's action unnecessary.
- (b) Representative: One who acts on behalf of another in such a way as to involve the other in his action.
- i) This is what Jesus has done for us. .. he was our substitute, dying our death taking our punishment. . . but also our representative. . . we are incorporated into his actions.
- ii) As our representative we have been wrapped up, included and involved in his salvific actions on our behalf.
- (1) As an ambassador represents an entire nation, Jesus represented all of humanity on the cross.
- iii) So, on the cross, we see our sin nailed to the cross. . we see our rebellion being punished. . . we see our distorted, fractured image being destroyed and experiencing the full wrath of God. In Christ we are that "man of sin" crucified along with Him.
- iv) But the flip side of our union with Christ is that we are affirmed beyond measure: in the same judgement which accuses and condemns sinners we are pardoned and given new life. . . adopted into the family of God. . . he has given the right to be called children of God.
- (1) So on the cross we are condemned yet affirmed at the same time. . . our old nature dies and our new identity was raised with Christ on Easter.
- b) For those who have come to Jesus in Faith, confessed their sins, called upon the Lord, repented and turned from those sins. . .are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit we have been given a new identity in Jesus.

c) So Christ is our substitute. . . but also our representative. . . so we are condemned yet pardoned: judged yet in Christ pardoned.

d) Brian Rosner writes:

(1) The notion of being in union with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, draws together several threads of a biblical theology of personal identity. If in Adam we lost our status as God's children and damaged the image of God, in Christ we are being conformed to and renewed in the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Indeed it is Christ's purpose "to create in himself one new humanity (Eph. 2:15). — Brian Rosner, "Known By God", 147.

(a) So, we only know our true selves in relation to Jesus. . . .

(b) Now that is a radical statement in today's culture dominated by personal autonomy and individual choice which have become the keys to "being yourself". . . it is truly counter-cultural to say that we only know ourselves in relation to Jesus. . .

i) yet that is what we are taught in scripture.

IX. So, Colossians 3:1-4 is not just urging us to look to Christ as our model, but also reminding us of our union with Christ.

X. Now as we read further, we see how our union with Christ affects our identity.

A. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. — Col 3:5-11

B. And the entire language here is language of putting off and putting on. .

1. Taking off our old identity, which has been corrupted by sin and putting on our new identity, which has been redeemed and renewed in Christ..

a) Ridding ourselves of those behaviours, values, attitudes which reflect satan's lies, rather than God's design.

2. verses 9-11 are particularly instructive for us in our study of identity.

(1) vs. 9(last part) you have taken off your old self. . . we no longer identify with our old man or woman.

(a) And here the grammar is particularly important. . . this is a completed action in the past tense. . . we have taken off our old self. . . our old man or woman is dead: as Paul says in Galatians 2:20:

i) *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*

(b) This means we are not a slave to our twisted feelings, our distorted thinking, or our broken past . . . so our feelings, our thoughts our wounds do not dictate to us our identity. .. they can not tell us who we are.

i) We are not the product of sinful desires and feelings. . . we are new creations in Christ.

(1) And so we deny that old nature's command over us. . . we are free to be who God made us to be. . . who God intends for us to be.

3. Then look at vs 10, we have *put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

a) So, we put on our new identity, the new self: again the grammar is important.

(1) This new self, is "being renewed" present continuous, an ongoing process.

(a) We are being conformed, molded, re-created into the image of God. . .

(b) This is the process of discipleship. . . learning to live out our true identity in light of Jesus Christ, the pure and undistorted image of God.

i) Discipleship is learning to die to self and live out who we really are.

4. And so, we see, that our old identity markers. . . those things that used to define our identity become irrelevant. . . or at least secondary to knowing Christ.

a) And so Paul in verse 11, points out that we are no longer defined by those traditional identity markers of: ethnicity, religion, culture, social status. . . rather we are defined by how we relate to Jesus Christ.

b) This is why when Christ comes to us, his invitation is what?

(1) “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? — Mark 8:34-36

(2) The call of discipleship is a call to die to self and live for him. . . this is when we will truly be free. . . when we will truly be ourselves.

(3) This is what we are doing in our discipleship groups. . . learning to live out our identity. . . and being ruthless at destroying what Satan has done to us.

(a) Being true to our true self and being false to our false self. . . meaning we affirm who we are in Christ and we reject who Satan wants us to become.

Conclusion:

- I. Over the next three weeks we will dive into a few particularly hot topics which will help us practically apply this teaching.
- II. But let me briefly summarise what we have learned today from the NT teaching on Identity.

A. Jesus is the Image of God in the flesh: our unique being created in the image of God has been distorted by sin/fall.

1. So, our minds, bodies and hearts (our whole being) have all been corrupted and fractured by the fall.
2. Which means, we cannot find our true identity by listening to our own feelings, passions, or our own thoughts.
3. To truly find out who we are, to discover our true identity. . .we must look upward at Jesus, who is the perfect reflection of Humanity. .. Jesus shows us who we really are.

B. In Christ: our union with Christ on the cross means the power of sin in us has been destroyed.

1. Because we are united to Jesus, we are no longer slaves to our past, or our burning passions, or our false thinking. . . we are new creatures.
2. There is no longer this power which dominates our being. . . no one of our several identity markers can have power over who we are.
3. Which means the Bruce Jenners and the Rachel Dolezals of the world are no longer held captive by their feelings. . . but instead can be free to be a whole person. . . instead of reducing their identity to one small, limited feature of their entire personhood, they are free to be completely whole person in Christ.

C. Finally, following Jesus is a life of denying our false self and affirming our true self.

1. Bonhoeffer famously said, when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die. . . which means we find our selves in loosing ourselves. . . if son has set you free, then you are free indeed.
2. Discipleship is the process of discovering our true identity as we destroy the old man, who desires to pull us down.
 - a) Affirming our true identity and at the same time ruthlessly destroying our false identity— and this is a community project.

**III. So, as we close today and prepare ourselves for communion. . . **

A. You remember the eagle-who thought he was a chicken?

1. Well, Agghiad asked me last Sunday. . “how did the story end”?

a) And I said well, that was it. . . it’s a tragedy.

B. But I guess we could say in light of what we’ve learned today. . . the story could be re-written.

1. If you remember, the chicken saw a majestic eagle passover and asked what that was. . and the other chickens told him, but reassured the eagle-who thought he was a chicken—that he was not one of those. . . so the eagle-who thought he was a chicken—put his head down and continued to cackle, cluck, and dig for worms and girts in the dirt.

2. Well, it turned out, Agghiad, that that Eagle soaring overhead was the father of the eagle-who thought he was a chicken— and he recognised his son in the dirt, cackling, and clucking, and digging for worms and grits in the dirt.

3. The father eagle said, no this cannot be. . my lost son!

a) So, the eagle sent many messenger eagles to tell his son who he was. . . but the eagle-who thought he was a chicken- and his brothers chased away those eagle messengers.

b) Then one day, the Eagle father. . realised he must go and become like a chicken to help his beloved lost son. . . and so he flew into the chicken yard and began clacking and cuckling, digging in the dirt for worms and grits.

c) And came to his lost son, the eagle-who thought he was a chicken- and told him who he really was. . and taught him to fly. . . and soar. . . and showed him who he really was. . .

d) Until one day, the chicken farmer, saw the second eagle and realised what the father eagle was doing. . . and chicken farmer was threatened because the eagle-who thought he was an chicken- was quite a celebrity and many people drove far and wide and paid the chicken farmer lots of money to laugh at the eagle-who thought he was a chicken.

e) and so the chicken farmer captured the father eagle. . . bound him up. . . and killed him. . . but right before he was carried away.

.. the eagle father was able to tell the eagle-who thought he was a chicken about his family and his home—

(1) When the eagle-who thought he was a chicken— heard the news of his father's death—- he flapped his large wings. .. and soared above the confines of the chicken coupe and was free to be an eagle again.

C. Lets' pray