

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

By

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A Professional football player was heard to say that he was quitting football in order to try to “find himself”. Millions of young people joined the “hippie movement” of the 60’s in the search for a purpose and reason for life. Millions more throng the college campuses with the haunting fear that they are only numbers, living computer cards, destined to go through life without living as persons, never knowing what it is all for, ever asking, “Who am I?”

A person can know himself only in relation to his Creator, a relationship as clay to the potter. The clay takes on meaning when it begins to be what is intended by the potter. The potter gives it form and fits it for use, then gives it a name — pitcher, vase or bowl. Meaning for the clay originates in the mind of the potter.

The human being is created by God for the purpose which originates in the mind of the Creator. A person knows his purpose only by knowing the Creator and what He designs to create.

The Psalmist wrote, “I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psa. 130:14). He is thrilled in knowing that he is created, seeing in his creation a marvelous, wonderful demonstration of the Creator’s infinite power and magnificent purpose. I am not a mere happenstance. I am a product of infinite wisdom and care.

Modern education has undermined today’s children by denying them the knowledge of this basic fact, that they are created by a loving, wise, just and merciful God. What kind of character is to be expected of the person who sees himself as the chance product of “nature”? What purpose can exist for something that is a mere step in the purposeless ladder of evolutionary development? Who am I? The ten-billionth stage of growth of a cell that began in primordial ooze 60 billion years ago? Even the thought of such meaninglessness chills the mind.

And to think that today’s children are compelled to sit under such teaching practically one third of the time, many of them continuing in public class rooms through college until they are past the twenty-second birthday. The official doctrine of the state school system is atheistic evolution, with the truth of God’s creation attempted only by a small minority of brave teachers who are generally ignored. Thus the very system that is supported for the purpose of education leaves the young people without purpose and direction, and apt to follow whatever voice is the loudest.

It is God’s intent that His purpose be seen in Christ. “Seeing it is God, that said, light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 4:6).

Moses said, “A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall you hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you. And it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to this prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. Yes and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days” (Acts 3:22–24).

Peter affirmed that Jesus is the One to whom Moses and all the prophets pointed. Now that He has come, His word is the foundation for all of life.

The result of rejecting the Creator's design was stated by Moses as utter destruction. God is the Potter, and has the perfect right to destroy all those who reject His specifications, who are spoken of as "vessels fitted for destruction" (Rom. 9:22).

Jesus boldly claimed, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). What could He mean but that all of life is to be lived His way, that the truth about life's purpose is stated in His commandments and promises, and that He is the authority over life? You reach the ultimate image of God, and receive eternal life ONLY by being in Christ.

As the educational process conditions people further away from Christ, gathering momentum through the media and the legislators who cowardly seek votes rather than righteousness, the gap widens between the followers of Christ and the rest. Yet, the Christian must work in the world and even bear a message to it, a witness of his own faith and fellowship in Christ. The result is that more and more he finds himself out of step with his peers, often isolated and even treated with hostility because his allegiance is to Christ's kingdom rather than to the kingdoms of the world.

Elijah lived in a time like our own in that the official religion was idolatry, and the teachers of godlessness filled the land. The Queen alone had 850 prophets of Baal under her hire, and altars to the corrupt gods and goddesses of sex and perversion were to be found everywhere. When Elijah spoke against the evils that were corrupting the land he was accused by the King as the "troubler of Israel". The King had the full force of official religion beyond him. The man who was giving his life to God for the sake of the nation was the one accused of being the enemy. Such is not uncommon today.

Elijah, refusing to unite and identify with unbelievers, was convinced that his efforts were futile because he was alone. But God declared that he had "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal" (I Kings 19:18).

While all Christians are not given the role of Elijah, many are receiving the same treatment as he did. It may be popular to belong to a church, but it isn't popular to take your witness of Christ into the office, the workshop, or the schoolhouse. Many are despised because they will not participate in dishonesty, profanity, impure conversation and the general tone of immorality that prevails. One man told me that while most of his office force were church members, none of them wanted to hear anything about Christ. This attitude is common.

But we are not called to identify with all those around us. In fact, this is one thing we are warned against. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," warned Jesus. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15). "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Why such warnings? Because man is always tempted to find power and security in the crowd, in unity, like the builders of Babel, and the urge for unity is often stronger than the will to stand with Christ and to be identified with Him.

Yet this is faith, to believe God, though all the world unites against Him. And while there are 7,000 other believers, it is each believer's part to face the idolatry in the strength of Christ — "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13) and not by the power of the Ministerial Alliance, The Evangelistic Association or The Crusade.

At this point another, more subtle, temptation appears. Religious movements and organizations arise to meet the force of the world with the force of organized religion. The subtle implication is that you cannot rely upon Christ alone; you also need the power of man's creations. Power is conceived as bigness. Bigness is realized in being able to sum up all the "members" who are united around a certain movement, or convention or school or publishing house. The greater this body of unity, the more it is convinced that IT is the right one, that all who identify with it are on the "right" side. The Christian is made to feel that he is outside the Kingdom, unless he unites with the group. He is a misfit, an oddball, a fanatic, even an enemy of The Faith.

There is a "unity of the Spirit" which we are commanded to keep (Eph. 4:3). It is the unity formed by our identification with Christ and our fellowship IN HIM. The only other identification needed is with a local assembly of believers. But there are those who would make one feel that he must join a certain movement or support a certain project in order to be part of the "brotherhood". Such agencies often would stand between the clay and Potter, as a kind of interpreter of His art. All extra-identification tends to produce division rather than unity, and results in loss of the personal identification before God.

Who am I? "A member of such and such a church, with two million members. A part of a special movement, etc." NO! All such identification weakens the faith and diminishes Christ's glory and power. It is like the Corinthians: "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."

Then who am I? One who is identified with the Creator through Christ. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). "For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. 3:3-4). It is Christ who tells us who we are. It is Christ who demonstrates what we are to be (He never supported the religious movements of His day). It is Christ who shows us what we shall be. "We know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him" (I John 3:2).

To know the Creator's mind is possible because He has revealed it in scripture. "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God" (I Cor. 2:12. Also 13-16).

Therefore the true seeker will search the Bible. He will study it, memorize portions of it and make it a part of his mind, just as food he eats becomes a part of his body. "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (II Tim. 2:15). Note that our study is for the purpose of being approved by God, not by the crowd.

Christ said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matt. 11:29). Since the object of our creation is that we might "be like Him", the most important subject matter for every child and adult is the study of Christ, according to the Scriptures.

Power, knowledge and unity are found, not by identification with movements and human agencies, but by identifying with Christ, the Lord of all.

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