

## Who Am I?

***“1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***

*5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must **consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**” Romans 6:11*

How would you answer this question: **I am** \_\_\_\_\_ “blank”? I am rich. I am poor. I am young. I am old. I am smart. I’m stupid. I’m single. I’m married. I’m divorced. I’m successful. I’m not successful.

“Young? old? I am black? I am white? I am rich? I am poor? I am a Republican? I am a Democrat? I am smart. I am not so smart? I am beautiful or I am average? I am single? married? divorced? I am widowed?”

How do you see yourself? How does your identity alter and affect your destiny?

It’s a question that we all ask ourselves. Sometimes others answer it for us. It starts when you’re little. Were you the first-born? Or were you the baby in the family? Were you the middle child? Were you the funny kid? Were you the chubby kid? Were you the athletic kid? Were you the nerdy kid?

What names and nicknames did others give you? Was it a good nickname? Was it a bad nickname? How did others see you, and how did you see yourself?

As we continue forward in life and we hit the teen years, then it becomes incredibly complicated. In junior high you have no idea who you are. Clothes become more important than ever, and hair care, and how we appear, and how we size up to others. “Am I part of the crowd that I want to be a part of or am I an outsider?”

You hit college and all of a sudden you’ve got an opportunity to completely reinvent yourself. You get to make decisions about your lifestyle: “Will I go to church or not go to church? Will I drink? What life course will I put myself on? Who am I and who will I be?”

You graduate and it’s an identity crisis. Now you’re supposed to be an adult. “Will I get a job? Where will I work? Will I make enough money? What will I drive? How will I pay my bills? Will I be in a relationship? Will I be single forever?”

Then perhaps, one day, you get your career job. It becomes your identity. “Now I know who I am, and if I succeed and thrive in this vocational path, that will define who I am.”

If you get married, all of a sudden your identity gets very conflicted. You thought they were going to marry you to help you become who you want to be, and they were thinking the same thing, and suddenly two selfish people with separate identities collide into misery. (We call that marriage.)

And then you have children and all of a sudden your identity totally changes. For the woman, it starts with a change in her appearance, which affects so much of her identity. Now she’s showing and she’s feeling different, and now she’s turning into a mother, whole new identity. And the man feels that weight of responsibility, or at least he should, because now he is a father.

And all of a sudden, the child becomes this center around which the family orbits. They determine when you eat, when you sleep, if you do, how money is spent, and how vacations are

planned. Your hobbies, your friendships, your free time, the things that defined who you were, they're gone, or altered, or affected in some way.

Your kids get older and all of a sudden they don't need you like they used to. They're starting to move away from home. You hit that empty nest season and suddenly your identity is shaken. "Who am I? Who are we now that the kids are gone?"

Your identity is in the process of changing all the time. Do you feel that? I do, do you? Who do you think you are? How would you answer the question: I am "blank"?

The question of "who am I?" has become more puzzling today than it was for generations before us. Back when this church was founded, almost 150 years ago, in 1875, people didn't spend time thinking about who they were. Mostly they just worked to survive. Your identity was something you were born into. And there were about 4 options then – boy, girl, farm folk, or town folk. That was about it.

Then came the time when this area had lots of ethnic groups. They all got along, and yet people thought of themselves as German, or Hungarian, Czech, or Polish.

Today, with social media, who I am has become something people work hard at. Today identity isn't something you get from a group, from your family, or from your town. Identity is individualistic. It is your personal achievement. The goal is to stand out in some way. People try to stand out by being pretty enough, thin enough, tattooed enough, sexy enough, tough enough, on and on it goes. People want to be enough of something to be noticed – to get viewers on the internet to click the like button. Nowadays we create an image, a persona, that we present to the world. That image may or may not be reality.

These days because we use technology so much, many people only connect with others over the internet. So people feel more lonely and more isolated than ever before. This is why when a young person is criticized or ridiculed on the internet, it is so crushing to them. They feel their whole personhood is taken.

They feel their whole life, their identity is destroyed while the entire world looks on. It's so painful that some even take their own lives.

We also talk about "identity politics" these days. Who I am becomes wrapped up in a social view, in a battle mentality. Nobody in generations before would have thought to have their sense of who they are, found in a political party.

And who hasn't heard of "gender identity" these days? Gender has always formed a big part of who an individual is. Being a boy or girl, a man or woman affects so much of how we see ourselves, dress, act, and the path in life we choose. What's new is that gender is no longer given to a person, but an achievement a person creates. And two options are no longer enough to stand out. To be a unique person with an individual identity some people choose a gender that is unusual enough to be noticed.

Running through all of these new trends is the Big Lie that you must create your own identity. It's a lie that your worth as a person comes from within yourself – that it's your accomplishment.

The first book of the Bible is called Genesis because it's the book of beginnings. And there, we find the beginning of everything, except for God, of course, because he is the Creator of all things. And there we find the beginning of our identity.

And here's what the Bible says: **"Then God said, 'Let us.'"** There's an allusion there to the Trinity: one God, three persons, us. **"Make man."** That's mankind. That includes men and women. **"In our image, after our likeness."** I want you to see, that's identity language. Who are you? God says, "I've made you in my image and likeness." That's your identity.

**"And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."** People are given significance as a gift from God. God gives us the job of caring for His world. You are a

person made in God's image, a person with an eternal soul and God wants an eternal relationship with you. You are a person of significance, given an important role by God to care for the world God has created, and loves.

What this means is that you don't have to determine or worry about working to prove who you are because God has revealed it to you. So we don't need this one-up-manship, this conflict that goes on all the time between people trying to prove they are worthy because they are top dog. What we need is simply accepting God's truth. Just simply accept the truth of who God is – He's the Creator of all -- and we need to know our relationship to this Creator. You are made to receive His blessings. He blesses you with everything you need to live. Why? Because God is love, and He loves you. You then are a responder to this God of love. You respond by trusting God and loving Him back.

This is God's good plan for who you are. The problem is that it didn't take long for the Devil to come along and ruin God's plan.

The devil hates. The devil hates God, and hates the people God loves. And the devil's tool is his lies. Jesus called him the father of lies. So the devil came to the first people and laid down a big fat whopper of a lie and made it sound so good. Satan said to Eve, ***"God knows that when you eat of it – the fruit on the tree they were told not to eat from -- your eyes will be opened, and you will be"*** – be what? -- ***"like God, knowing good and evil."*** *Genesis 3:5* That's an identity statement.

Satan shows up and says, "Adam and Eve, I have a way for you to be like God." What did God just say in Genesis 1? "Let's make them in our image." Satan comes along and says, "Here's a way for you to be like God." God says, "I already made you like me."

God tells them their identity: "You bear my image and likeness." Satan lies to them, "There is a way for you to be in the likeness of God." "Adam & Eve, you can leave your place under

God – leave your God-given identity, and instead ACHIEVE a place EQUAL with God. You can be like Him.”

Adam should have opened his mouth and he should have said, “God made us in his likeness. Our identity is received from God. We are already blessed, and now we only need to trust what God has said, what He has revealed to us.”

Do you see it? It’s amazing, isn’t it? Satan is going to lie to you, telling you that in some way, your identity can be achieved by you, not received from God. His lie is that you get – gain – achieve your identity APART FROM God.

**I – ITEMS** A huge lie of Satan is one we believe all the time. It’s the lie that you gain your identity through things. ITEMS.

We BUY things – clothes, furniture, houses, especially cars – to gain an identity. “Will I drive a truck because I’m a man? Will I drive an SUV because I’m a man with a family? Will I drive a minivan because I used to be a man until I got a family?” Because your car, it’s not just transportation; it’s identity.

**D – DUTIES** Another lie is that you can achieve your identity through work and roles. “I’m a student. I’m an accountant. I’m a truck driver. I’m a mom. I’m a dad. We frequently think of ourselves just by what we DO.

**O – OTHERS** Satan will lie to you that you get your identity from OTHERS. “What do people think of me?” “I want them to like me. I want them to approve of me.”

**L – LONGINGS** Sometimes we strive to gain our identity through our LONGINGS – our plans and goals for the future. “*When* I graduate, *when* I get the job, *when* I get married, *when* we have kids, *when* we get all our bills paid off, THEN I’ll be who I want to be. Identity is coming, it’s almost there.”

**S – SUFFERINGS** It’s hard when people are suffering because they will take their suffering as an identity. “I have cancer. I’m divorced. My spouse cheated on me. My kids betrayed me.”

And I want to say this in love: Your suffering is not who you are. You may have cancer, but you are not cancer. You may be

divorced, but your identity is not divorcee. Who are you? Made in the image of God, and saved by Jesus. Your suffering, your cancer, your hard life, may *explain* you, but they don't *define* you.

You are not your worst day. You're not the worst thing you've done. You're not the worst thing that others have done to you. You are what Jesus has done for you. He lived without sin for you, gave His life to pay for your sin, rose to conquer death, and is coming again to end suffering.

Friends, for a follower of Jesus, there is wonderful, wonderful news! I want you to hear this. Who you are is not something you have to worry about achieving. Your identity is a gift you receive from your loving God. You are His. God's child. His man or woman.

This leads you to the font of Baptism. Whether you were an adult when God began to work in your life, or you were raised as a child always believing in Jesus – either way God worked faith in your heart. And Baptism is the event that guarantees God has given you His promises and you are His person from then on!

You can find peace at the font of Baptism. In your Baptism, you find your identity. There you heard your own name called. God singled YOU out as loved by God, forgiven and redeemed by Jesus' dying for you. In your baptism, you know who you are because you know WHOSE you are. You are God's beloved child. You belong to God's family. Baptism is a tangible act to guarantee this.

In today's New Testament reading, Paul is real blunt. Paul says we don't live by sinning it up, doing whatever awful, self-centered things we can. No! why not? Because that's not who you ARE! Paul wrote: ***"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*** *Romans 6:1-4* He is saying that your

choice of who you are is: (1) either you are all about you, self-centered, me first, living to just sin it up. Or (2) you are a person of Christ. That's it. Those are the only 2 real choices you have when it comes to who you are. I am either all about ME, or all about Christ Jesus.

For the Christian, your ME has been put to death. Dead. Drowned in the waters of Baptism. The you that tries to find yourself apart from God has been baptized into Jesus' death. You were buried with Christ by baptism into death.

You see, a corpse is a corpse. Dead. A corpse can't even *WANT* to make a name for themselves. That's what happened to you as a believer in your baptism. The part of you that believes the lie that you are who you make yourself to be, apart from God, is dead. And the result is, **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.** You have new life! You are NOT your old self. You are a NEW person! A new person. A new creation. A person of God. That's you!

I am reminded of the movie, *Les Miserables*. It is the story of a man struggling, really struggling to find a definite answer to who he is. As the story begins, we see a man being released from prison. Both the guards and the man himself refer to this person as "24601." He has no name, no identity other than the number the prison system has given to him. We see him struggling—as so many people still do today—to find a job and a home as an ex-convict. Seeing his desperation, one day a kind priest invites "24601" to have dinner and stay the night in the parsonage.

"24601" sees the wealth of the household and he tries to sneak off in the middle of the night with a bag full of silverware and other expensive items, but he is caught by the police, who bring him back to the priest. The priest, however, insists that he gave the bag of silverware to "24601." Not only that, the priest says his "guest" left without the most precious items—and gives him some silver candlesticks too.

The priest won't press charges, so the police have to set free the man, 24601, who stole the items. What follows for the rest of



the story is an intense struggle to know who he really is. The thief ruminates on who he was *before* his imprisonment, and on who he became *during* his imprisonment. Finally, in light of the priest's kindness, he wonders who he could become now. Is he really a beast, as the prison system and majority of society have pegged him? Or is he a man worthy of dignity and trust as the priest's actions would indicate? He resolves to give up the identity of 24601 and live into the identity the priest has offered him. He reclaims the name he was given at birth—Jean Valjean—tears up his parole papers, and flees to another part of the country where he leads a respectable life, eventually becoming mayor of his town. He adopts an orphan girl as his daughter. Raises her. And when she is of age, he saves the life of the man she loves.

In the end, the old prison guard catches up to Jean Val Jean. The prison guard insists a man cannot change. Once a scoundrel and a thief, he will always be the same. Identity cannot change. There is no redemption, the prison guard claims.

When “24601” claimed his identity as Jean Valjean, he choose to live not as a prisoner, but as a free man who has been treated with mercy and can offer mercy.

In a similar way, you, as a daughter or son of God, you have arisen from your baptism as a new person with a new sense of who you are and how you can live. This is why God says to you today, ***“Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”***

*Romans 6:11*

You are NOT the old person – the unforgiven, unloved person apart from God. You are a NEW person. Loved by God. His child. Forgiven, and given the hope of heaven. This is who you are so hold your head high! This is guaranteed in your baptism.

Do not believe the lie that you are what you have achieved. Instead, receive from God His truth. Who does God say you are? A complete new life – alive in Christ.

In your baptism God has come to you and He made you His child, His Son, His daughter. The Bible tells the truth and the truth,

God says, is you are going to inherit a kingdom – the Kingdom of Heaven. God calls you forgiven, holy, a saint – now. You are a light of the world. You are the temple of God – where God lives on earth. You are accepted by God, chosen by God. You are a friend of Christ. Shall I go on? This truthfully is the new status God has given you. This is who you are. So in a world that tries to tear you down, hold your head high. Remember always the truth of the high status Jesus has won for you.

You are humbly honored. I want you to see here that there is God, and then lower creation made up of beasts of the field, and birds of the air, and fish of the sea. And between lower creation and God is mankind, men and women. We are below God, but above the animals.

This means we are not God, god-like, almost divine, we don't have a spark of the divine within us, and we are not part of some divine cosmic consciousness. We do not escalate toward divinity.

On the other hand, you are not just a more than highly evolved animal. You are not just lucky animals with thumbs, that got here by chance.

Who you are is tied to the place God has given you. Not to think too highly, or too little of yourself. Your place is under God, but above lower creation. You're not an animal, you have dominion over them as God's image-bearer. You're also not God, you're a created being. You are honored, and humble at the same time.

Every morning, most of us get up and look in a mirror, and that mirror is reflecting back to us our image, our likeness. It's a living picture of us.

God wants to have a living picture. He is a spirit – a real person but without a physical body. And God wants creation to know something about him, and so he's made you as His living picture.

And so the goal of our life is not for the world to know us, but our goal is for the world to know Jesus. We are to show something of what God is like to the world.

Like this:

“Oh, that was very loving of you.” “Thank you. Jesus has loved me so I loved you with the love Jesus has given me.”

“That was very generous.” “Thank you, I gave you what God gave me.”

“That was very truthful of you.” “Thank you, God is the one who tells the truth, and I’m happy to serve him.”

What this means is that we are not always asking: “What will this make me look like?” but “How does this rightly or wrongly reflect Jesus?” Do you see the difference?

So many of our identity decisions are about, “How will this make me look?” That’s the wrong question. “How could they see Jesus?” That’s the right question. “How could I show who God is in this moment?”

Paul said ***“Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*** *Romans 6:11* Think about who you are.

So close your eyes. Say it after me:

I am a child of God.

I am loved deeply and fully by God.

I am an inheritor of heaven.

I am a representative of Jesus.

I am baptized.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.