

Christian, God has Given You a New Identity

- I. When?
- II. What?
- III. Why?
- IV. How?
- V. What for?

*‘But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Tell me, do you know what I mean when I say that someone is having an identity crisis? You know, when someone starts to question who they are, what they are really like, or what their purpose in life is? Maybe you've experienced something like that in your life. I remember when I first entered high school. I was coming from a one-room parochial school where I was the only 8th grader in the school. I was like the king of the hill, top dog. All the kids looked up to me. And suddenly, I'm a freshman in high school and I'm at the bottom of the totem pole. Upperclassmen were beating up on me; kids were making fun of me, I'm wondering, "Man, who am I? Where do I fit in?"

Or maybe you were in a situation where you are suddenly unemployed. Maybe your job was downsized or you recently retired and you're wondering, "Now what am I supposed to do? I mean, I've been a carpenter, or a mechanic, or a soldier, or a preacher for practically my whole life. Now that I'm not one of those, what am I supposed to be? Who am I? Or maybe you're 40 years old and you're suddenly single. Maybe your spouse died or your marriage ended and you're wondering, "Now what? Am I supposed to start my life all over? Am I supposed to start dating again? Will anyone even consider me attractive?" Or maybe you're a teenage girl who would rather play sports with the guys. Or you're a teenage guy who would prefer to take a class on cooking or sewing and you're thinking, "Am I normal? Who am I?" Or maybe even "What am I?"

But you know, of all the different forms of identity crisis that we might experience in our lives, do you know the one that is most common for Christians? It's the one the Devil creates in our hearts and minds when he leads us into sin. But not just any sin. Rather, the sin that we always said we'd never commit, the one that we swore would never commit again, the one we prayed to God to help us stop doing, the one that we hate—and yet, the sin that we committed again. It's the sin that Satan points to and says, "You call yourself a Christian, when you think those kinds of thoughts? No true Christian would use the language you use. God would never call you one of his own, when he knows what you did."

You realize, these are the things that Satan whispers in our ears. In fact, it's not just Satan who's telling us these things. So is our conscience. Our conscience looks at what we say and think and do and compares those things with the law that God wrote in our hearts. And when

they don't line up, our conscience says, "You're busted. You broke God's law. You should be punished because you are a sinner. That's who you are. And to a certain extent, that's a true statement. By nature, we're all lost and condemned creatures. By nature, we live in rebellion against God. We're sinners, through and through. And if the only voices I hear is the voice of Satan and my conscience, then that's the only identity I'll ever know is that I'm a lost and miserable sinner.

But here's the thing. There is another voice I can listen to, a voice that once spoke from heaven on the day of Jesus' baptism, a voice that still speaks through God's holy and inspired word. And what does that voice of God say? He says, and this is our theme for today:

Christian, I've Given You a New Identity!

Here in our text, the Apostle Paul describes what that identity is, and how God gives it by answering a series of 5 questions, namely,

- I. When?
- II. What?
- III. Why?
- IV. How?
- V. What for?

So, let's take a closer look. God's plan to give you and me a new identity was first put into action **when**? Paul tells us in the opening words of our text. *When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared...* Do you realize what event Paul is referring to there? He's referring to the birth of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that the way we know that God is kind, the way we know that God loves all mankind (the Greek word there for love is philanthroPIa, literally, love for humans)—the way we know those things about God is through the birth of Jesus Christ. That's when the kindness and love of God really became visible. It's when it literally took on flesh and blood. It could be seen and touched. The Greek word there is epiPHANae. It's what gives us word epiphany, that is, a revelation. In the person of Jesus Christ God's love and kindness was fully revealed.

Next question? **What** did that loving kindness of our Savior God lead him to do? Paul tells us, simply, *he saved us*. Boy, think about the implication of the word save. The fact that God saved us implies that we were in a desperate situation. Isn't that right? You don't say, "I saved that person from enjoying an all expenses paid trip to Hawaii." No, firefighters save people from burning buildings. Rescue teams save people who fall though the ice. God saves sinners from the fires of hell!

And, (next question), **why** did God do that? What was God's motivation for rescuing sinners like us from the eternal punishment that our sins deserved? Well, Paul tells us, *God saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy*. In other words, God didn't rescue us from hell because we have some redeemable qualities. You know, we tried hard to be good people. We did our best to help those in need. I mean, we aren't criminals or anything. No, the fact is, we are far worse than criminals. We are idolators. By nature, we love ourselves more than we love God. And yet, God saved us anyway. Which means that God saved us not because we are good. No, God saved us even though we are bad. Or to put it another way, God saved us not because of something in us, but rather because of something in him, namely, his mercy. God took pity on us. That's what motivated God to rescue us from the hell we deserved.

You might say, that's the when, what and why of God's plan of salvation. For the sake of Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death, God has declared every sinner in the world to be not

guilty in his eyes, purely because of God's grace and mercy. That's sometimes referred to as objective, or universal, justification. The whole world has been declared not guilty, for Jesus' sake. Or as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:19, *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.* That's what Jesus accomplished for all mankind on the cross of Calvary.

But now here's the next question, namely, **How**? How does what Jesus accomplished on the cross get applied to my personal account? How did that "get out of jail free" card that Jesus bought with his blood for all mankind become my personal possession? The answer is, it comes through faith, that is, by simply believing that the forgiveness that Jesus won on a cross is a free gift that God gives. And how does God work that kind of saving faith in human hearts? Well, Paul tells us here in our text. He says, *God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* With those words, Paul is no longer talking about universal justification, that is, Jesus' death for all mankind. He's talking about subjective justification or personal salvation, that is, how God applied Jesus' death to your personal account. It's taking the life ring of Jesus Christ which is big enough to save the whole world and putting that life ring in your hands.

And what is the life ring that God used to save you from drowning in the fires of hell? Well, actually, the life ring is water used in connection with the Holy Spirit, to work in your heart a rebirth. In other words, the life ring is a sacrament of holy baptism. Think about it. Your baptism is the tool or instrument, or better yet, the pipeline that God used to transfer his forgiveness from this massive reservoir that Jesus created on the cross of Calvary—through your baptism, God transfers that forgiveness into your heart, and just like that, the sin that once separated you from God, the sin that made you spiritually dead, once that sin was washed away, you became spiritually alive. You were, in effect, born a second time. You were born again. That's a miracle.

And even if there wasn't all that much water poured on your head, even if it was just a one drop of water as you lay in the NICU of the local hospital, that doesn't mean you received only a little bit of the Holy Spirit. How did Paul put it? *God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.* When it comes to giving you his Holy Spirit, God was not stingy. God didn't use an eyedropper. He used a bucket. In your baptism, God not only gave you THE gift of the Holy Spirit, namely saving faith, he gave you a variety of spiritual gifts, gifts of speaking and serving to equip you for your work as a member of the body of Christ we call the holy Christian Church. When your Pentecostal friends ask you whether you are filled with the Spirit, tell them what God has already told you right here in Titus, chapter 3. In the washing of rebirth God poured out his Holy Spirit on you generously.

Which brings us to the last question, namely, **For what**? In other words, what was God's ultimate purpose in saving you through the washing of rebirth? Paul tells us, *God saved us...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* There's the end goal of being born again through the washing of holy baptism. It makes you and me heirs of eternal life. What is an heir. It's someone who has an inheritance. And how does a person become an heir? For example, how did Prince William become heir to the throne of England? Not by anything he did. He was simply born into the right family. So it is with you and me. We become heirs of the kingdom of heaven, not by anything we did, but simply by being born into the right family. Not by being born into our earthly family, but rather, being born the family of God. That birth took place at the moment you were baptized. That's when God made you his child.

2,000 years ago, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, a voice from heaven identified Jesus with the words, *“This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17). At the moment of your baptism God, in effect, said the very same thing. “This is my son. This is my daughter, whom I love. With this new born child, I am well pleased.” As surely as God identified his son at Jesus’ baptism, so surely has he identified you as his child at your baptism. In your baptism, God has given you your new, your true identity.

You realize what that means? That means that when Satan whispers in your ear saying, “You call yourself a Christian after what you did?” You tell him to shut up. You tell him that your standing with God is not based on what you do. It's based on what God has done for you. He saved you through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He made you his child and an heir, having the sure and certain hope of eternal life. That, my friends, is your true identity.

Four days from now, I'm going to get on a plane headed to Chiang Mai Thailand. For 8 days, I'm going to be a foreigner in a distant land. Which means that if there is one thing I better not forget, one thing that I have to have with me at all times, it's my, can you guess? Yes, my passport. Why? Because that's what identifies me. It tells people who I really am. It says that I'm a citizen of the United States of America.

My friends, you realize, what that passport is for me on my trip to Asia—that's what your baptism is for you on your trip through life. Your baptism is what God uses to identify you. In your baptism God identifies you as a forgiven, beloved, spirit-filled child of God and an heir of eternal life. That, dear Christians, is your true identity. The who you really are, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.