

# Identity in Christ, Key to Authentic Living

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Poem Who Am I?

Marcus Borg says American culture bombards us and undermines our lives with these three goals: Attractiveness, Achievement, Affluence. So let's try this on:

When a person goes to a prostitute, that event can say to that person, I am attractive enough that this person is willing to offer her or his body to me. I have achieved some kind of acceptance because another person is willing to put their life on the line for me. They regard me as so worthy that they will risk everything to satisfy me. Also I have some degree of affluence such that I can not only buy a car, buy a house but also buy sexual privileges. I can buy a person for a period of time and do whatever I want. So all three of these are fulfilled in a bizarre, weird, fantasy making way that gives me some degree of acceptance. I scored. I am somebody. I am no longer a reject. See somebody is there for me. Somebody cared about me enough to offer themselves for me in a very personal way.

Obviously this is to overlook the reality that there is no love being expressed to her or him, no fond regard, no self-worth relationship building. No, they are coming through with just the opposite message. Those being used have their own interpretation: "I want to use you as a thing. I want your money and I am willing to use every ploy possible to get it from you. Once you run out of money and cannot afford me, I will reject you whole-heartily. The truth is I despise you for treating me like a thing. A thing is all you are to me and I really don't see you as a human being but as a trick—somebody to be tricked and taken in, deceived by me so I have just revealed how dumb, how short sighted, how useless you are as a human being without substance, without dignity, without love. I have fooled you and you have bought into my game as only a fool would."

Now we need to clarify what is going on here. Both sides are losing but may not realize it. Both lives are being used up in a "dog eat dog" world. No one is winning here. So how many drink the Kool-Aid (The phrase "drinking the Kool-Aid" refers to the 1978 Jonestown massacre, in which more than 900 people committed mass suicide by drinking a flavored drink mixed with Valium, chloral hydrate, cyanide, and Phenergan) of the sex industry and think that using pornography, using other people for sexual purposes is a way of being built up instead of a way of being broken down, torn down, minimized instead of maximized? As a sign on the outside of a pornographic movie theatre once said, "Those who come here to view porn can't get a real one." In other words, buying and using other human beings has nothing to do with love, acceptable identity, being valued, winning the heart of someone, being perceived as trustworthy and lovable. It is a destructive force telling the world that the user is willing to be regarded as subhuman without dignity, positive purpose or an ability to love. Is not this why so many who use pornography seek to hide that fact even to their spouse, kids or friends?

The challenge here relates to what I am focused on. American culture would have me focus on looking good, being entertained, on winning, getting good grades, becoming somebody, on becoming satisfied with fulfilling sexual and greedy desires. Jesus would have me focus on his invitation to come unto him, learn of him—his gentleness and lowly heart, to take his yoke upon me and find rest, give him my burden, abide in him, rejoice in him, forgive others as he has forgiven me, love my enemies. The Christian life and the ability to keep giving one's main priority to whom Christ is for that person. It is living as John the Baptist said, **"He must increase and I must decrease."** **John 3:30.**

Now even though this may sound like a good idea, ultimately it means the Holy Spirit must be involved in guiding us to our true light and enlightenment. This becomes obvious when we remember two passages. One is what Jesus told his disciples in Gethsemane, "Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial, the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Paul recognizes the same challenge in **Ephesians 1:17-19** **"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."** In other words our grasp of what God has given us in Christ is a result of answered prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit as we hear God's word and not of our will power acting on its own. Faith is created in us by the Holy Spirit as we hear what Christ has done and accomplished for us. Once we distance ourselves from God's Word our faith begins to fade. We lose track of whom God in love has declared us to be. Our sense of our identity in Christ loses focus.

So let's try this on. Say, we really believe that God loves us, that God is for us, that our main identity is as a child of God destined to live with God in eternity. This is our core belief. More than anything else we are a child of God through Christ's finished work for us which he accomplished by dying for us, for taking on himself our sin, our sinful nature, our death and the power of the devil over us. Then the substantiation of all that came when God the Father raised him from the dead to reign throughout eternity. So as we trust in that, we have a secure identity in Christ. So far, so good.

But Satan and the principalities have not given up on us. They will attack us in many varied and crafty ways. Often, they will use other human beings to be in their front lines. The work of these human beings is to shift our sense of identity away from the love God has for us as we are adopted into his family. This can go in at least two directions. One is that a person is tempted or tricked into committing sins that seem to disqualify the person from ever believing they are a child of God. Now Satan attacks by accusing the person, "You don't belong in God's family anymore. Look what you've done. Look at the way you are thinking. You have no worth. Forget about church. Get real. You don't belong with that community of faith crowd."

The other direction is pride in one's performance. "I've got life handled, I've made so many strides in my life. Look how far I've gotten, the money I've made, the success I've had. Compare me with so many others and you will find I'm a mile ahead of them. I really don't need God. Yes, I might go to church but that's not the big deal for me. I'm a self-sufficient, self-made person."

Now Satan loves to hear us talk and think these ways. He will bring people alongside us and support us to the max to keep those kinds of conversations going in our heads. Connivers and manipulators are aware of that kind of self-talk and they will find all kinds of ways to use it against us. This is why as Christians we need to be in the Scriptures, go to church to hear the Word of God and receive Holy Communion, find fellowship with other believers. Equip our offspring to fend off evil, and pray for each other. We are in a war and those constant battles will continue until we no longer are living.

Here is the rub. Our children will meet up with many who are skilled at getting these kinds of messages through to our beloved ones. It is the job of the parent and/or grandparent to prepare them for this. We family leaders are called to make sure our offspring are ready in Christ to ward off such deceptions!

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