

Identity Crisis

Joe Slater

Do you know who you are? Of course I don't mean your name! I'm talking about knowing your roots and where you fit into the world. We usually associate an identity crisis with the young; but today we have identity crises in the church. Individually and collectively, we have lost track of who and what we are.

If you are a Christian, you are a blood-bought child of God, a member of His spiritual family. You are an heir of Heaven, with your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life. You are a citizen of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. You are in the world, but not of the world. You are a saint (a holy person), for you have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus and set apart from the world by the Lord Himself. We could go on, but this is enough to make the point. When you see yourself in this light, life takes on an entirely different appearance!

Why do Christians have to be exhorted to attend services? Because we don't know who we are! If we knew, wild horses couldn't keep us away, nor would we whine about being bored, nor would we jazz up our assemblies to appeal to the flesh.

Why do Christians crave the world's approval? Because we still identify with the world rather than with the Lord! We don't know who we are! If we knew, we would be exposing and rebuking the darkness that surrounds us rather than participating in it and becoming angry when we are rebuked for it.

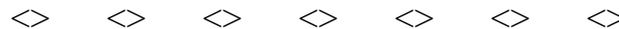
Collectively, the church has an identity crisis. Jesus' church never has been, is not now, and never will be a denomination; nor will it ever be a conglomeration of denominations. The Lord's church is the spiritual body

of Christ. Jesus is its head, and redeemed sinners are members of the body. It is the spiritual temple of God, every Christian being a living stone within its walls.

Why are some identifying the Lord's church as just another Evangelical denomination? And why are so many Christians eager to embrace such apostasy? Because we have forgotten the true church's identity (assuming we ever grasped it in the first place). We have foolishly given in to those saying, "*Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do*" (Ezra 4:2). Under the guise of graciousness, we have been seduced into compromise.

Identity crises are normal for teens; the vast majority resolve the issues and move on. It's different with the church. I am not a prophet of doom, but I truly fear for the future of the church. Division has already occurred, virtually identical to that which transpired a century ago.

Let us take comfort in the knowledge that Jesus reigns, and that He promised that the very gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18).



Decisions, Decisions!

In making decisions about choices you face, ask four questions:

- Does it glorify God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- Does it cause a brother or sister to stumble? (Romans 14:13, 21)
- Does it bring me under its control? (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Does it help me grow in Christ? (2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:15)

Pleasing God

An elderly man was leading a donkey down the road. The man's young grandson was walking behind.

In one village the townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding. To please them, he climbed up on the animal's back.

The people of the next village chastised the old man for making the child walk. So, to please them, he got off, set the boy on the animal's back, and continued on his way.

In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk. They suggested that they both ride. So, the man climbed on and they set off again.

In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey, because he was made to carry two people.

The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road.

When we try to please everyone, we find ourselves frustrated, disappointed and irritated that we let others control us. The best thing to do is to work at pleasing God. The Biblical record commends this approach.

Jesus said, "*. . . I always do the things that are pleasing to Him*" (John 8:29). The apostle Paul states, "*Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him*" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

What good news! What a marvelous ambition it is to be pleasing to God. When we try to please everyone, we will never succeed. When we seek to please God, we always succeed.

Dennis Russell (Santa Maria, CA)