



THE BORN AGAIN IDENTITY

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From
“THE BORN AGAIN IDENTITY”

Rediscovering Your Identity

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Matthew 5:48

In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you. (The Message)

In 1980, Robert Ludlum wrote a book—recently turned into a blockbuster movie—about a man who wakes up only to realize he can't remember who he is. The rest of the story, as fast-paced and riveting as it is, revolves around his quest to answer one of the most elementary questions of life: Who am I? You may have read it—*The Bourne Identity*.

We can identify with this search for self-discovery because we've all asked the same question: Who am I? You've undoubtedly heard people (possibly yourself) say things like

this: “I’m just trying to find myself” or “I’m just trying to discover who I really am!” These statements reveal the intense craving every human being has for a clear sense of identity.

Erik Erikson, the psychologist who coined the term “identity crisis,” believes the struggle for identity is the most important conflict human beings encounter when they go through eight developmental stages in life. According to Erikson's psychosocial stages, the onset of the identity crisis is in the teenage years, and only individuals who succeed in resolving the crisis will be ready to face future challenges in life. This means a failure to resolve the identity crisis could very well result in perpetual struggles through the individual’s life. Unfortunately, even if the crisis is successfully resolved, it may well be recurring, as the changing world around us demands that we constantly redefine ourselves.

So, many people are still left asking the question: Who am I? The answer to this question is vitally important, because your perception of who you are impacts your life in numerous ways, including: 1) your approach to God; 2) the way you live your life in the blessing and power of God; 3) your perception of your

purpose and mission in this world; and, ultimately, 4) your understanding of who God is.

Without a clear understanding of who you are, you will often approach God ineffectively. Instead of coming to God as one of His children—a child who has a right to “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16)—you might approach him as a slave. It is not unbiblical to consider yourself a servant of God. Paul certainly did (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1) and Peter encouraged all Christians to do the same (1 Peter 2:16). But there is a radical difference between considering yourself a servant of God in the sense that you want to submit to His plan for your life and be led by His Spirit and thinking of yourself as a slave with no right to be in His presence. Most believers would emphatically deny such a perception of themselves, but their actions reveal otherwise.

Without a clear understanding of who you are, you will not be able to fully appropriate the blessings of God, perhaps because you feel like you don't deserve them. This is not the “God-wants-you-to-be-rich” prosperity-babble so prevalent today. It is truly God's desire to bless His people and He longs to demonstrate His power in our lives (2 Chronicles 16:9), but if

you've lost the sense that you are indeed one of His people, you will end up living far below your privilege as a child of God.

Without a clear understanding of who you are, your perception of your purpose and mission in this world will be skewed. You will eventually forget who you are and be tempted to buy into a false, purposeless identity. But God does have a plan for you. He has a purpose for your life. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). Grasping who you are is vital because your purpose is related directly to your identity.

Without a clear understanding of who you are, you will ultimately see God inaccurately and limit your ability to enter into an intimate relationship with Him. In psychological terms, projection is a defense mechanism whereby we assume others share our thoughts or feelings. This happens frequently in our walk with God. We have an acute awareness of our faults. Like David, our sin stares us in the face (Psalm 51:3) and we feel shame and guilt, and, to some degree, this is appropriate. But how many times have you asked God to forgive you of some sin and later found yourself still feeling guilty or that God was

angry with you? You know in your head that the cross of Jesus Christ provided forgiveness for every sin and you've probably obsessed over your application of 1 John 1:7-10, but there is still a nagging suspicion that God is angry. The truth is that you are angry at yourself! If you approached God in faith and confessed your sin, it has been washed away and God has no awareness of it. You are simply assuming that God feels about you the way you feel about yourself! This misconception will cause you nothing but problems and intimacy with God will be next to impossible.

As you can see, it is absolutely imperative that we rediscover our identity! I've come to realize that most of the time we struggle with our faith it's not because we've forgotten who God is. It is because we have forgotten who God has declared us to be. We know all too well the magnitude of our failures. We are uncomfortably aware of our inadequacies. We know the reality of our weaknesses and that knowledge causes us to frequently forget our God-granted identity: *The Born Again Identity*.

To rediscover our identity, it is first necessary to realize how easy it is to lose and what forces might be at work to promote its loss. In the next few pages we will consider the problem of

identity theft, a contemporary yet ancient problem for believers. When it comes to our identity, we need to constantly remind ourselves that one of the thief's primary purposes is to steal (John 10:10).

The Crisis of Identity Theft

Let me share something with you from the Federal Trade Commission, published on September 3, 2003.

The Federal Trade Commission today released a survey showing that 27.3 million Americans have been victims of identity theft in the last five years, including 9.9 million people in the last year alone. According to the survey, last year's identity theft losses to businesses and financial institutions totaled nearly \$48 billion and consumer victims reported \$5 billion in out-of-pocket expenses. The agency also released a Commission report detailing its ID theft program since its inception.

"These numbers are the real thing," said Howard Beales, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. *"For several years we have been seeing anecdotal evidence that identity theft is a significant problem that is on the rise. Now we know. It is affecting millions of consumers and costing billions of dollars. (FTC)*

It is increasingly clear that identity theft is a growing problem. The technological advances of the past twenty years may include heightened security protocols, but today's criminals

tend to be more sophisticated, with computer savvy that would make Bill Gates envious. Today's victims are shocked when they discover a nameless, faceless perpetrator has stolen their identity and often find their lives turned upside down even though the robbery may have been initially undetected.

The Impact of Identity Theft

I know what it's like to be robbed. Robin and I moved to Hawaii in August 2001 and we decided it would be best to put all of our belongings in storage. When my grandfather passed away later that year, we flew back to California to attend the funeral and while we were in Stockton we went by the storage facility. Everything was as it should be. We shifted some furniture around, moving a beautiful bedroom set out of the space for a few minutes and then returning it once we had found a couple of items we were looking for. I hardly noticed the people standing near their car several spaces away. Two months later we moved back to Stockton. When we found a place to stay we decided to get some of our things out of storage to help us reacquire that sense of home that often accompanies familiar things. When we arrived at our space I noticed the padlock on

the door was completely different than the one I had originally used. I immediately felt sick, but I tried to minimize the situation by telling myself that someone must have banged into the door with their vehicle and the storage facility felt it necessary to put a different padlock on the door. When I went to the office they had no idea anything was different. My nausea grew. The woman behind the desk found a large pair of bolt-cutters and followed me to the space. In a moment I had the padlock off and breathlessly began to lift the roll-up door. Empty. Well, almost empty. The thieves had left a small box of paperback books—I guess they were illiterate. But there was nothing else. No luxurious bedroom set purchased with an early inheritance from my wife's grandmother. No cedar hope chest cherished by my wife for almost two decades since her grandfather had given it to her. No wedding pictures! Nothing. My wife began to shake and her eyes filled with tears. I put my arms around her and tried to think of something positive to say. Just like the storage space, nothing!

I felt violated. They had no right do this. They took things with sentimental value. They took things with practical value. They took things I didn't truly value until I felt the loss,

including all of my notes and the papers I had written in my masters degree program.

I felt exposed. They took documents with personal information—tax records, bank statements, and credit card information. That's when fear made an appearance. My mind began to conjure up all kinds of terrible scenarios, from fraudulent credit charges to extortion. Violated, exposed, and afraid. Robbery will do that to you.

Satan's primary weapon against the church is identity theft and the theft usually takes place in the mind. We simply forget who we are. When this happens, our identity from the past merges with our perception of who we are in the present and we lose sight of who God has declared us to be. When we forget, we walk by sight instead of faith. When we forget, we are ruled by feelings instead of divine facts. When you consider the truth of these statements, it is not hard to understand why Satan would want to steal our identity. So what is the real impact of identity theft? Let me go back to the report from the Federal Trade Commission.

Sixty-seven percent of identity theft victims-more than 6.5 million victims in the last year-report that existing credit card

accounts were misused and 19 percent reported that checking or savings accounts were misused. (FTC)

Identity thieves do utilize certain personal information in nonfinancial ways, but they are primarily interested in spending money that is not theirs. The victims are usually devastated.

Mari Frank (2005) said, “Not until I became a victim of identity theft did I know how devastated, overwhelmed and really frightened I could be. It was a nightmare.” Several years ago, Mari received a telephone call from a creditor asking why she had failed to pay an \$11,000.00 credit card bill. She didn’t have a credit card from that creditor. More than \$50,000.00 was spent in her name. A car was rented—and wrecked—in her name. In her words, “My carefully woven rug of financial security was pulled out from under me” (Frank, 2005). Her description of identity theft is as accurate as it is heartrending.

It’s a vicious, largely faceless crime that takes an enormous financial and emotional toll on its victims. No one physically mugs you, robs you at gunpoint, or kidnaps you. No, this crime is hidden, insidious, -- most times you never meet your imposter. But you’re still left feeling battered. Your self-image is beat up, your financial reputation is ruined, your sense of who you are is stolen, and your identity, in a manner of speaking, is taken hostage. It’ll probably take you months (maybe years in the scenario where someone commits crimes

in your name) before you get your good name back, and before your life returns to normal. (Frank, 2005)

It's not too hard to figure out what happens to a believer who is a victim of identity theft. You feel battered spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even physically. Consequently, prayer is hindered, spiritual growth is stymied, and you feel unable to effectively conduct business in the kingdom of God. You were created to live with certainty about who you are. Tragically, the loss of identity may tempt you to live according to the principles of a prior identity and that is the first step back to slavery.

It is no great surprise that Satan would want to steal our identity. He knows that by stealing our identity he can limit our potential in the kingdom of God and minimize the quality of life we enjoy. The purpose of the thief is to steal our identity, kill our vision, and destroy any hope we have for a future. Jesus' purpose, on the other hand, is to give us life—not just any life, but abundant life (John 10:10) characterized by a clear sense of who God has declared us to be.

If you only receive one thing from reading the pages of this book, please get this: You are not who the enemy says you are!

You are not who others say you are. You are not even necessarily who you think or feel you are. You are who God has declared you to be and God has called you to live out the brand-new identity He created for you (Matthew 5:48, *The Message*).

It really doesn't matter who or what you were in the past. Paul reminded the church at Corinth that their past had been taken care of by the cross of Jesus Christ.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

To be washed means every sin you have ever committed has been cleansed and that cleansing is perpetually available for the rest of your life through the cross of Jesus Christ. To be sanctified means you have been set apart from the world and set apart unto God. To be justified means you have been placed in a position of right-standing with God. Every one of these benefits is directly connected to your new identity which is available in

the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of God. Although your past may include evil intentions, immoral behavior, and vulgar words, all of that has been removed and you have been given a new identity. Paul said, "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is as simple as it is clear. If you are born again, you have been given a new identity—the born again identity!

You may not have a new name on your driver's license. You may not have a new social security number. You may still have the same bills, the same debt, and maybe even some of the same habits you had before coming to the Lord, but there is no question: You are not the same person! You have been given a new identity—a God-created identity—and the enemy of your soul will do anything to steal it away from you! In most cases, he succeeds in stealing our identity in the simplest way.

The Method of Identity Theft

Identity theft can happen in any number of ways and Robin and I have been the victims of several! For example, our bankcard number was stolen at the same restaurant... twice!

Whoever wrote down the number purchased several hundreds of dollars worth of prepaid phone cards. Fortunately, the bank determined the purchases were fraudulent and reimbursed our account. There really wasn't much we could do to prevent the theft of our bankcard number (other than using cash), but the next theft was completely my fault. I was up late one night working on our bills. After writing out several checks and preparing the envelopes, I walked to our roadside mailbox, inserted the mail, and lifted the red flag. It was 2:00 a.m. Sometime during the night they came. Before my bleary eyes opened the next morning, they were going through our credit card statements and examining our checks to determine our bank account number, routing number, and whether they could copy my conveniently provided signature.

Computer databases, containing extremely sensitive information, are hacked on a daily basis. Just yesterday, I heard a news reporter describe the newest form of computer hacking: acoustical theft. Purportedly, hackers can listen solely to the tapping of a computer keyboard and decipher screen names, passwords, and other supposedly secure information. Of course,

some identity thieves aren't so clever. They'll go through your trash to find what they need. But the end result is still the same!

Satan tries to steal our identity in a number of ways, but the primary method he uses to promote the loss of our identity is the very human tendency to forget. There's nothing weird about forgetting. We all forget something at one time or another and some things really don't matter. Forget a bottle of ketchup at the grocery store and it's really not that big of a deal. But if you forget some things, it can really cause problems. Forget to pay your house payment for several months and see what happens. Trouble! Forget to pick up your child from school and see what happens. Big trouble! Forget your wife's birthday or your anniversary and see what happens! You might want to steal someone else's identity and live under an assumed name!

Satan knows if he can get you to forget your God-created identity, you will never be everything God has called you to be. You may make it to Heaven, but you won't enjoy the fullness of God's blessings on earth. You may eventually overcome the works of the devil through the power of Jesus Christ once you are glorified, but you will never live within the full spectrum of the authority and power God wants to demonstrate in this life.

Psychologists will tell you there are many reasons we forget; let me just share a few (and I won't include age). First, we forget because we want to. This is called motivated forgetting. In some cases, memories can be painful. We wish to avoid the pain, so we are motivated to forget. But pain isn't the only motivation for forgetting. We are sometimes motivated to forget because of the consequences of remembering. Our born again identity calls us to radical life change. This is not always comfortable, so forgetting is easy. Our born again identity calls us to embrace a new set of values while rejecting the world's. This is not always convenient, so forgetting is easy. As strange as it sounds, Christians sometimes forget who God has declared them to be simply because they want to!

We also forget who God has declared us to be because there are too many other things to think about. This is called distraction. Perhaps we are thinking about our problems or circumstances. Perhaps we are so busy digesting the latest rumors that we don't have time to think about who we are. There is a sound reason why Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to think only on things that were true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8).

Another reason we forget who God has declared us to be has to do with a lack of use of that knowledge. This is called decay. By failing to consistently confess the truth of God's declaration about who we are, we neglect to lock the knowledge of the born again identity into our long term memory and ultimately into our spirits.

One final reason we forget who God has declared us to be is called displacement. We take in so much new information that previously acquired information (e.g., related to the born again identity) is pushed out. Think of the hard drive on your computer. It has an enormous but finite capacity for memory. If you fill the hard drive with an operating system, programs, databases, games, and media content, eventually the hard drive will reach its memory capacity. If that happens, you can do one of two things. Stop adding new information (which may cause you to miss out on something vital) or remove previously stored information (which can be just as damaging). Of course, with a computer you can also add to the size of your hard drive, creating more room for additional information. But human beings are not so fortunate. If you constantly fill your mind with irrelevant or useless information you will eventually find your

mind unable to recall information as vital as the reality of your born again identity. There's just not room to think in terms of the world's values and continue to remember who we are at the same time.

Satan will use whatever method is effective to get you to forget. If you find the ramifications of your born again identity a little uncomfortable, he will use that as a motivation for you to forget. If you are easily distracted by the vicissitudes of life, he will use that to cause you to forget. If you do not take the time to consistently confess the truths of God's Word about you, he will use that to cause you to forget. If you are tempted to fill your mind with extraneous information, he will use that to cause you to forget. He will use whatever means necessary to cause you to forget your born again identity. If he succeeds, you'll end up a spiritual billionaire living like a pauper.

The Solution for Identity Theft

So, what's the solution? How do we avoid the devastation which results from identity theft? The solution can be summed up in one word: Remember!

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:10-13)

No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred--and you, remember, are the temple. (1 Corinthians 3:17)

The solution to spiritual identity theft is to remember who you are! It's as simple as that. No long lines at the Social Security office attempting to obtain a new identification number. No need to cancel the credit cards or close out your bank account or apply for a new driver's license. You've just got to remember!

The enemy of your soul would like nothing more than to make you forget. Just forget you're a child of God. Just forget you're a part of a holy nation. Just forget you're a royal priest unto God (1 Peter 2:9). If the thief can get you to forget—if he can steal your born-again identity—it will alter your approach to God. It will impact how you live your life. It will impact your

perception of your purpose and mission. It will impact your perception of who God is.

But God has another idea . . . remember! Remember who you are. Go beyond your feelings about yourself. Go beyond the perceptions of others. Go straight to God's Word and you will remember who He has declared you to be! Memorize it.

Confess it. For example, Paul said that the "Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"

(Romans 8:16). If you are born again, you are the child of God.

That is not what I say about you. That is certainly not what Satan says about you. It might not even be something you can say about yourself. But that is exactly what God does say about you. You are the child of God!

Memorize that verse. Confess it every day and you'll find when the thief comes to steal your born again identity, you'll be able to use the words of Paul with confidence: "*But by the grace of God I am what I am*" (1 Corinthians 15:10). You will be able to say, "I am who God has declared me to be!"

Paul taught the church at Rome the power of confession. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

This verse was written to believers. In other words, people who are already born again should make it a practice to consistently and verbally declare the truth of God's Word. By doing so, you will avoid the pitfalls of forgetfulness (motivation, distraction, decay, and displacement) and overcome the purpose of the thief.

DEVOTIONAL IDEA

Write out the Identity Confession below and put it in a prominent place in your home. Every morning when you wake up and every evening before you go to bed, read the confession out loud with confidence because it is based on the Word of God.

Identity Confession

I am not who Satan says I am.
I am not who others say I am.
I am not who I think or feel I am.
I am who God declares me to be!