



Beliefs and Identity

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. — Galatians 3:27-28

The foundation for the Church is and will always be Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone. He is the Rock upon which His Church is built that the gates of Hell shall not prevail. He is the Head of the Body. Without Him there is no Church.

But to make disciples, there is always some contemporary culture that weaves through the message of the Church. And some should. Ask yourself, “Why are we not wearing tunics and speaking in Aramaic or Greek?” Jesus even looked and sounded like the culture He was in when He walked this earth. He didn’t look or talk like Abraham. Nor Noah. Nor Jacob. John 1 says the world didn’t even know Him or receive Him. He didn’t stick out in appearance which means if He had come in 2024, he’d dress like the culture we’re in.

But what happens when the culture starts to deviate from Jesus or Scripture? Most of us would think it’s simple. “Get the disobedience out!” Sounds simple enough, doesn’t it. But how do you know if you’re buying into the culture more than the Bible. How can you tell when you’ve crossed the line and are worshipping culture? That slippery-slope isn’t so obvious.

Here’s an example from our culture that I see crumbling our church communities from the inside out. Our culture intertwines our identity and our beliefs so tight that they appear as one thing. From an airplane’s view it’s not that big of a deal. Afterall, shouldn’t our beliefs dictate our identity. Yes. And no.

A belief that you have about your Christian walk is very important to you, even if it isn’t scriptural. It helps you strive to become more like Jesus. That doesn’t necessarily make it wrong...FOR YOU. The difficulty comes when a brother or sister doesn’t share the same belief. Please don’t hear what I’m NOT saying. If scripture says something, it is to be obeyed. But what about those things we must shape into OUR understanding of the Bible.

Our culture says that to disagree with our beliefs is a rejection of us (identity). If you tell me I am wrong we can’t be friends. If your eyes see something in a different way than mine, there is no community nor love. But how can that be? Have you ever met someone that believes EVERYTHING just like you in EVERY way? Not even my wife and I are able to do that. And what do you do when those beliefs change? Make everyone in your circle change? By whose authority? And what are we suppose to do with those people that see things different than us? Especially in the Church? Cast them out to the next church down the road that doesn’t believe like us either?

Maybe all of this is because we want a significant identity in the eyes of Jesus. A “look at me” type of show on the heavenly stage. “See me Jesus? I’m doing better than him!” Maybe you think, “If people would just realize that I am right. You know, if the Spirit would just open their eyes to me, they’d get it!” And therein

lies the problem. See me. Follow me. Do like me. You become the identity of righteousness even though you (and the rest of us) know you're not. We aren't either. We want heavenly trophies and medals, but we have failed like an Australian breakdancer.

Truth moment: Any identity that is dependent on your abilities cannot be sustained. That's probably why we get so mad at different people. We don't want to see ourselves as weak...but we are. We want to be seen as spiritual giants, but we keep failing the spiritual physical. That's why we demand people see our effort and expect them to do the same. The problem is my spiritual weaknesses (temptations and sin) are different from others so our efforts will never be the same. But does that mean that I am rejected by them or that I should reject them? No. A thousand times, no. In fact, when I become angry and want to reject people, I am once again failing at sustaining my identity. Instead of recognizing my frailties, I want to make light of theirs or send them away all together. That way I can feel satisfied although nothing is accomplished.

We must understand that the only identity that can be sustained IN us is one that is given TO us. When we give our lives to Jesus, He gives us His identity. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus, His Son. And that is an identity that God has taken upon Himself to sustain in us. So if our identity is Jesus, how did He handle those who didn't believe? How would He live in today's culture? Exactly like He did in His.

Matthew 12:20 says, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;" When we see Jesus walking with people in His day, He is not looking for a fight nor an argument about who is right. He is not looking for reasons to reject people. Instead, He is always trying to make a way to Himself. He didn't worry about accolades or popularity. In fact, He is the most famous Person ever that made smaller audiences as He went. He didn't kick people when they were down. Nor caught. Nor hated. Jesus spent much of His time with people that didn't agree with Him. At least at first. He touched people. He healed the sick. He preached the Kingdom of God that invited people to it, not cast them out. He was more interested in showing the Love of the Father than in the rejection of sinners. Honestly, the only people He was ever harsh with were the ones that said the Father was more about rejection than saving.

So how do we live as Christians in this culture?

1. **Stay true to scripture** – You may believe in things that help you obey but that doesn't make it scripture that others must obey.
2. **Know that people can disagree and still love each other** – Community is common-unity and not uniformity.
3. **Remember the gift of Jesus' Identity** – In Him is where you find who you are. Not in your abilities nor lack there of so that you "cannot boast" nor try to prove yourself better than anyone.

Our call is to lead people in our culture to Jesus. May that be the passion of our hearts.

From My Heart,

Billy