

So far in Colossians, we learned that we are called to be faithful to Christ, who is supreme, and to stand firm in the gospel in a changing world full of enticements that threaten to pull us away from Him. Chapter 1 taught us about the supremacy of Jesus. If we know the supreme Christ well, then we will be able to identify what is fake and inferior, just as knowing all the details of a \$100 bill enables us to spot a counterfeit. Last time we learned that, as a result of His supremacy, we must be rooted and built up in Him, as we continue to walk in Him. Today's passage tells us that we must also know and be secure in our own identity in Christ in order to stand firm in Christ.

Identity theft is becoming an increasingly significant risk we face today. But the kind of identity theft we must be most concerned with is not the kind that costs us money, but the kind that impoverishes our souls by taking away the sense of identity we have in Christ, and diminishing our experience of the fullness of Jesus in our lives. Some root their identity in relationships, family, popularity, power, success, wealth, or fame. But these things rob us of our identity in Christ and of the fullness that comes with Him. In today's passage Paul addresses this threat by urging us to hold firm to our God-given identity and live out the knowledge of who we truly are.

But first we must know who makes us what we are. Reading 2:11-15 we see that it is not us but God who gave us this identity in Jesus. To describe what God did for us, Paul uses two metaphors. The first is that of circumcision (v. 11), which was an "identity marker" distinguishing those who were in the covenant relationship with God (the Jews) from those who were not (the Gentiles). But even in the Old Testament, the idea of circumcision was extended beyond a merely physical marker (Deut. 10:15-16, Jer. 4:4). The idea of a circumcised heart was used to express that physical circumcision must be accompanied by right conduct motivated by internal purity. God wanted Israelites to also be separated for Him in their hearts, rather than to follow after the ways of the world. And in Deuteronomy 30:6, God promises that He Himself will circumcise their hearts. God is the one who saves by changing our hearts. We can see this also in v. 11, when Paul says the circumcision is not done by human hands. This phrase is

commonly used to denote something from God, in contrast to things made by man (like powerless idols). For example in Daniel 2, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the rock that was not cut out by human hands represents the kingdom of God that will conquer the kingdoms of the earth. So when Paul uses this phrase he is emphasizing that the circumcision of our hearts is from God, not from our own effort in following rules. Having hearts transformed by God is the marker of our identity in Christ.

The second metaphor is that of baptism, which is ritual purification by water. Romans 6:3-6 tells us that baptism symbolizes being buried with Christ (immersion in the water) and being raised with Him (rising from the water). We are united with Jesus in His death, and so we die to sin. And we are united with Him in His resurrection, so we have new life in Him. The power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is also working in us daily. Through Jesus we die to sin and gain access to the power of God which defeats sin. Our salvation extends beyond the time of conversion. The power of God still works daily in those who remain in Jesus.

Verses 13-14 explain the basis for this new life we have in Jesus. We have new life because God forgave our sins. We were dead in our transgressions, which is a word that denotes defiant rebellion. Though we wouldn't turn to Him, God made us alive by forgiving our sins. God cannot tolerate sin, but in v. 14 we see that He cancels our debt, (which is both our guilt and the record of sin committed) by nailing our sin with Jesus on the cross. Jesus erased our sins by having them placed in Him when He died. So we are secure in Christ. Why look elsewhere for our identity?

Second, v. 15 tells us we have new life because Jesus triumphed over the powers and authorities (referring to demonic spiritual forces behind false teaching and deceptive philosophy). This brings to mind a Roman triumphal procession where the general rides in front of a train of captives destined for enslavement or execution. Jesus triumphed, so we are no longer in bondage to the ways of the world, which have been defeated. Jesus is supreme, so why should we look to anything else for our identity? Don't let the things of this world rob you of your identity in Christ. He is the North Star that guides ships to their destination. Shooting stars light up the sky, but following them leads only to shipwreck.