

Identity Rehab

Introductory sermon

A person's identity is the condition or character as to who a person is that distinguish or identify that person. In essence it is the distinguishing characteristics of someone.

To rehabilitate someone is to restore someone to their former capacity, standing, dignity, rank, rights, or privileges.

Why is there so much identity theft? It's because people see the power of having someone else's identity. It brings a lot of benefits. Nearly 60 million Americans have been affected by identity theft, according to a 2018 online survey by The Harris Poll. That same survey indicates nearly 15 million consumers experienced identity theft in 2017. In South Africa between 2018 and 2019 whilst creation of fake ID's went down by 48% the actual impersonation of real people by fraudsters went up by 99% according to The Southern African Fraud Prevention Service (SAFPS). Falsified employment details, forged payslips and false qualifications – has also seen a sharp increase. So, yes, the crime of identity theft is relatively common. People do this because of the power of an identity. For us believers Jesus has given us His identity and He is the heir of all things. Some criminals actually change their names after leaving prison because of the negative things that come with their identity. We saw this recently in a TV Series.

Hebrews 1:1-14

¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

- If everything was created through Him and for Him then our primary purpose should be to worship Him.
- We must desire to see all things functioning for Him (Music, preaching, churches, businesses etc)
- If we are to remain aligned to Kingdom purpose then everything we create and do should be through Him and for Him.
- Identity rehab is a processes of alignment with the King and His Kingdom.
- This understanding produces holiness. When you have the revelation that He is heir of all things you can only live to worship Him.
- When something is made for someone it is set apart for them. No one else can use it. It is customised for them. This ranges from a birthday cake to a custom fitted triathlon bike.

³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

- We were created by Him and are sustained by Him. This includes the cosmos, our health etc
- This is why His Word brings life to situations. It did so from the beginning.
- His Word is our source of growth and transformation

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

- Names are inherited or given and determine power and authority

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? ⁶ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him." ⁷ In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire." ⁸ But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." ¹⁰ He also says, "In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." ¹³ To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

- God desires a church that will overcome. His church is Christ's body. Our job is to enforce the defeat.

¹⁴ *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

Hebrews 2:6-11

⁶ *But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?" ⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet." In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. ⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*

- We are associated with His death and glory and all things coming under our feet.
- We are in the same family as Jesus so we carry the same name
- We are called to glory and dominion
- He was crowned with glory and honour so that we may also be.
- Because He died we also died in Him and now can reign as Kings in honour, glory and holiness

There is a battle for your identity. This is why the enemy wounds people in order to ruin their healthy sense of identity. He wants to distort our identity. Your identity determines your behaviour. It informs you of what you can and can't do. Many people's behaviour changes and they are liberated when their true identity is restored. A sense of identity is often the reason why kids that come from a family of doctors or lawyers still end up becoming that even if they are not naturally smart. Why? It's part of their identity so they overcome the obstacles. "When you know who you are, you know what to do." (Shelley Hendrix)

We have multiple (often competing identities). E.g. I am a husband, father, friend, brother, pastor, psychologist, business person etc. In the early church the fact that you were a Christian was a major factor and determined whether you would be persecuted or not. Today many people live lives that downplay their connection with Jesus.

Few people choose their identity, they simply internalise the value system of their parents or dominant culture based on things like materialism, power, appearance etc. Sadly, a lot of believers have an identity based on these factors more than the Word of God. We must remember there is a Kingdom value system that should inform us about what success really looks like. Paul the apostle had to go through rehab when it came to his identity.

Phil 3:7 – 11

⁷ *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in ^[a] Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

So choose now, will you carry the name of Jesus or will you have other labels attached to you. When you choose to carry other labels you weaken the effect of the new covenant identity on your life. Although we have multiple roles that impact our identity it is important that Christ is at the centre of all of these. Are you a golfer who happens to be a Christian or are you a Christian who happens to play golf?

Often people look for identity (sometimes darker identities) to escape from a sense of meaninglessness. So they might get involved in a gang or "dodgy" subculture. So much of our behaviour in this generation is as a result of a search for significance. *"Part of her had hoped he would say something like, "I want you, Katie. You belong to me now. I'll take care of you." He didn't say that. But his answer was the best one, really. "You belong to Christ, Katie."— Robin Jones Gunn, Peculiar Treasures. Knowing your identity in Christ boosts your esteem and reduces anxiety and depression.* We saw this in a TV series where a wealthy young lady moved to a small town. At a certain point someone close to her

pointed out that she didn't know who she was. It was a journey for her to fully discover herself and the people close to her pointed it out when she did.

Because of this, it is important for us believers to meditate very strongly on our identity in Christ. If we don't then we will always be moved by the need for external validation to reinforce our pseudo-identity. Sometimes we overcompensate when we have been oppressed in the past. An example of this is in the Bruce Lee series when he shouts out "I am Chinese!" very intentionally after winning a competition. He wanted people to stop looking down on Chinese people. People relate to you according to an aspect of your identity. Sometimes they treat you badly because of it and other times it works in your favour (e.g. BBEE, affirmative action etc). The impact of this is a reinforcement of that identity or a pulling away from it.

We are also responsible for reinforcing our Christian brothers and sisters' new identity. So why are you trying to get people to remember what God has chosen to forget? I already know where I am seated with Christ, therefore I don't need validation from man. The more I need validation from man the more it shows me that I am not conscious of my new identity. Why do you need to be included or "IN"? Do you not know that you have been included by the God-head, hidden with Christ in God?

Colossians 3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When this becomes a reality in your conscience, the need to be included and all that comes with it begins to fade. Jesus says "abide in me". He speaks of having the Father's love in us. This is all to do with belonging. A big question in identity formation is "Where do I belong?" Hearing this some people will say to me "But Paul, it's normal to want to be included etc" So we want to operate like everyone else (human nature) but the next minute we are still expecting miracles. If we want to be people that function in the supernatural then we must be completely in Christ when it comes to our identity. This is why verbal abuse is so powerful because people often internalise what was said to them and it becomes part of their identity. We are not destroyed by what people say to us but by how we interpret and rehearse it. Come to God on the basis of the name of Christ and not on your own righteousness. Don't have a mindset that says "Now God will listen to me because I have done this and that..."

Jesus delivered us from sin, yes, and also from Condemnation, Unworthiness, a guilty conscience that came with sin. The enemy wants your identity to be built around these negative things, whilst God wants your identity to be built around the finished work of Christ.

He who has been forgiven much will love much. If you want to love God more, then meditate on His mercy and grace toward you more and more. This is important because many people receive what I am saying if they have had explicitly bad pasts. Sadly, others limit the new covenant power that is available for them because of their self-righteousness.

When you are praying don't confess your good works to God rather confess His finished work. Your good works will always come up short.

Many people know that they are saved by grace but they try to grow by works. So their prayers are work-based. Their fasting is work-based. They get very disappointed when they don't get a breakthrough saying, "I did this and that". And that's the problem; confidence in the flesh.

God has given you a new identity and we see name changes in the bible:

Simon meaning God has heard, became Peter meaning rock (John 1:42)

Jacob, meaning deceiver became Israel which means ruler with God (Gen 32:22-28)

Abram meaning exalted father became Abraham, which means father of nations.

Sarai meaning My Princess, became Sarah, which means mother of nations (Gen 17:4-6)

These were all people that God wanted to use for His purposes and because of this He gave them new names. A name speaks of your character, identity and purpose. They became what they were called.

What would change in you if you saw yourself completely as God sees you?

I believe that in the new covenant God exalted the name of Jesus and has made us one with Christ. We now bear that name. We don't just use His name, we bear it. As you go, keep reflecting this week on this scripture that highlights your new identity.

Eph 2:6

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.