

## What is our true Identity?

By Santiago Lange



Martin Luther the controversial German Augustinian monk who started the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century staunchly taught that a Christian is “simul iustus et peccator” (simultaneously righteous and sinner). We often hear proclaimed in Christian fellowships that we are just “sinners saved by grace”. Are these statements true? Are these views contradictory, or are they reconcilable? To believe and accept messages like these out of context without an understanding of the proper background can lead to unnecessary discouragement or distorted conclusions. As a point of fact, human beings will not live faithfully in ways that are opposite to how they see themselves. This is a foundational question because it is an identity issue. Experience shows, for better or for worse, we will usually and consistently act like who we think we are. Again, our self-understanding will powerfully influence what we expect and do. Indeed, one major crisis of our day is an identity crisis. It is vital that we understand the truth of who we actually are, from God’s perspective. If we believe that we are just hopeless sinners, our default setting will be to act like a sinner. But, thankfully, the truth about who we are, is ultimately not determined by our feelings, or the opinion of others or even our behavior. The truth about our identity is determined by who GOD says we are.

Before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the three great pillars of popular Jewish piety were (1) the land, (2) the law, and (3) the temple.

These three tangible items were central to their faith, to their sense of security, and their identity as God’s people, their view of who they were. This was where their faith lay, in the land, the law and the temple.

(1) The land was their home, and theirs alone. It supplied their life’s needs, it gave themselves a sense of belonging, a place to call their own, and so it formed an important part of their view of who they were. They believed that if they were in the Land God gave them, then they were God’s people.

(2) The law was their rule book, it made plain not only who they were, but what they were to do and not do. It spelled out what God expected, and gave them something specific to measure whether they were measuring up, or failing to be good enough. They figured if they were observing the letter of the laws demands they were in the right with God.

(3) The temple was a tangible sign of God’s presence. They felt they knew where He was, that He was definitely with them. They also believed He was only with them and not other nations, they were His people, and He was their God alone.

Just as people rejected Moses and faith in worship towards God, many Jews at the time of Jesus rejected Him and continued to rely on the law, the temple and the land. In due time God

allowed these things they relied on to be taken away. The Jews' stumbling block was the refusal to adjust their worldview by moving from the "old covenant" to the "new covenant". They so identified with, relied on, and had become so emotionally and habitually tied into the land, the temple and the law, that many couldn't see or accept the Truth. Their personal worth and identity was so tied up in the sign posts and shadows, that many did not recognize that Jesus was the fulfilment of all those things. And yet, our Lord, who was born a Jew, unconditionally loves the Jewish nation, as He unconditionally loves ALL of humanity. The "new covenant" introduces an expanding and more inclusive widening circle in the Kingdom household. The "identity standards" have been redefined.

As Christians we may have also focused on signs and shadows, and found their worth and identity in them, dimly recognizing Jesus, but still allowing the shadows to overshadow Him. We can do it by hanging on to the old self and the ways we used to focus on – laws, days, prophecies, relying on our belonging to the right group. We can also do it by relying on our old worldview and worldly ways of doing or seeing things, of turning to the world for security, guidance and knowledge, for pleasure and identity.

In the midst of an outward show of devotion to God, while passionately flying the flag for various choices and ideals, our hearts can be far away from the simple and true religion (James 1:27). We can too easily use our old selfish ways of viewing things and reacting to people, circumstances and problems, insisting on our rights, judging, getting angry, gossiping, or distorting the truth. We also can be so caught up in legalism and an outward form of religion, our favorite doctrines and practices, our self-righteousness, prejudices and exclusivism that we dishonor the Son of God of whom all the law and the prophets pointed to. But, this is not the end of the story. The good news is that we have been graciously blessed by God through revelation, not by personal merit, to have our minds opened and freed by God's Spirit and to have the opportunity in deep humility to appropriate the truth of who we really are in Christ.

The Oxford Dictionary defines "identity" in one of its usages as *"The fact of being who or what a person or thing is"*.

In 2. Corinthians 5:17 we read: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a NEW CREATURE; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"*.

It is our Christian understanding that what we do does not ultimately define who we are. This is not to suggest that we never sin, but it is birth not behavior that gives us our identity. To be God's "born anew" people, delivered through grace from darkness into the kingdom of light through Jesus God's Son. That is our true identity, that is who we are.

In Ephesians 2:4 we read: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"*.

Let us pray that God will enable us and many others through the Spirit to lift the obscuring veil and to live our lives in gracious freedom and in consistent alignment with THE Truth. May God complete the work He has started in us. We have every reason to rejoice! ☐