

[Galatians 2:17-21](#)

The Gospel Truth

Introduction

If someone asked you how you would identify yourself, what would you say? Funny? Serious? Strong? Witty? Intelligent? For me, I would identify myself as shy and quiet. I'd also identify myself as a nervous-Nelly, which is who I am right now as your preacher. In whatever way you answered the question, you and me usually define our identity by the way we perceive ourselves, or the way someone else perceives us. The trouble with that is our identity can fluctuate wildly depending upon our mood or the circumstances around us. If life is going well, we're a champion. If the wheels are coming off, we see ourselves as less than desirable.

But what does God say in His Word, specifically in the text for today in Galatians, about our identity? What is the gospel truth concerning who a person really is in God's eyes? Why is Christ, and Him crucified, the good news message of the cross? And when I'm talking about the cross, I'm not alluding to the wooden cross on the wall behind me. The cross is the good news that the Lord Jesus came to rescue sinners, such as you and me, from ourselves, and from sin and death.

So, the main point of this message is that the Lord Jesus, and Him crucified, is the center of gospel truth. And the identity of anyone who trusts in Christ by faith alone through God's grace alone is marked by the following:

- Justified in Christ
- Dead to the law
- Crucified with Christ
- Live by faith through grace

Justified in Christ

In the current sermon series on Galatians at La Crescent Evangelical Free Church (LEFC), we've taken a look at chapter 1 and 2 so far. Last week, Pastor Ryan preached on the truth that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ ([Galatians 2:15-16](#)).

Remember, too, the law refers to the Mosaic Law, which is spelled out in the first five (5) books of the Old Testament. Adherence to the law meant obeying the Ten Commandments. In addition there were laws concerning festivals, ceremonial cleanliness, and circumcision. For example, the Judaizers were adamant that Gentile believers in Christ were to be circumcised in order for them to be justified in the eyes of God. Their contention was that salvation in Christ wasn't through faith alone, but also by keeping the law.

Consider Titus, who was a pastor and close companion of Paul. Titus was a Greek and therefore a Gentile. He was a living example of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Adherence to the ceremonial law of circumcision was not a necessary part of his

salvation in Christ as a Gentile believer. The truth of Titus' identity was in God's gospel, not in what he'd done or hadn't done according to the law.

Whether we'd like to admit it or not, we tend to identify ourselves by what we've done or haven't done. Wealth, prestige, or success can so easily be at the center of our identity. But we need to ask ourselves: Is our identity found in the approval of God or man ([Galatians 1:10](#))? Remember, John Young preached a sermon on that. So, today we ask: Is Christ at the center of our identity? Are we justified in Him? In fact, here's what God says about our identity, whether justified in Christ or not.

Here's the bad news for those not justified in Christ. In other words, for those apart from Christ, a person's identity means that they're dead in their sins; they're following the world and the devil, carrying out the desires of mind and body; they're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind ([Ephesians 2:1-3](#)).

Now for the good news for those justified in Christ: But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive in together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ([Ephesians 2:4-6](#)).

Of those two truths, which one do you identify with? Would you be the person who is apart from Christ and bound for an eternity in hell? Or are you in Christ because you've been justified by your faith in Him through God's rich mercy and amazing grace? If it's the former, God is in the business of rescuing people from the darkness of sin and transferring them to the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in whom there is redemption, the forgiveness of sin ([Colossians 1:13-14](#)). If you're drowning, would you say "no thanks" to the one who throws you a life preserver? No! Then what prevents you from receiving the life-saving gift of salvation in Christ?

And if you've received Christ through faith by the work of the Holy Spirit, God identifies you as His child; you're a son or daughter adopted into His family. As a result, there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus ([Romans 8:1](#)). Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus ([Romans 8:38-39](#)).

If you haven't put your trust in Jesus, you can repent and believe today, which means turning away from sin and turning toward Jesus. You become a new creation in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). Won't you do that today? Because when you do, the gospel truth is that your new identity means you're not only alive in Christ, but also dead to the law.

Dead to the Law

So, Paul asks a rhetorical question: Since we're seeking to be made right with God through faith in Christ, and then we're found guilty of being law-breakers, does that mean Christ has led us into sin? The answer is an emphatic: Certainly not! By no means! God forbid! Jesus is God; He and the Father are one, which means He has no sin. Christ is the servant of righteousness, not a servant of sin. He came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. Here's [Matthew 5:17](#).

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

[Matt 5:17](#) (ESV)

Indeed, the Lord Jesus fulfilled and adhered to God's law. Did He ever break the law? No! However, Jesus challenged and opposed the hypocrisy of man-made Pharisaical laws and traditions, which were a burden to the people. Jesus' ceremonial law-breaking, as perceived by the Pharisees, was done out of love, mercy and compassion. For example, He healed a blind man on the Sabbath ([John 9:14](#)). He touched a man with leprosy and healed him ([Matthew 8:1-4](#)). He ate with tax collectors and sinners ([Matthew 9:10-17](#)).

What was considered law-breaking to the Pharisees was actually a call to repentance and a display of mercy by Jesus. He shows us that God is the God of mercy and grace. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners ([Luke 5:32](#)). That's who God is. In essence, the identity of anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, black or white, slave or free, who puts their faith in Christ, without adding anything else, has died to the law. It's like a dividing wall of hostility has been torn down.

In 1961, the Berlin Wall was constructed by East Germany to prevent its citizens from defecting to West Germany during the Cold War. On November 9, 1989, the wall was torn down. No one in their right mind whose identity was marked by freedom would rebuild the Berlin Wall. In Christ, there is freedom. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed ([John 8:36](#)). Why would anyone rebuild the "wall of the law" that was torn down to bring us together as the church and set us free in Christ? That would be a transgression of what's right.

Likewise, the apostle Paul says that if I rebuild what I tore down, I'm the law-breaker; the law-breaker is not Jesus; it's me. In other words, to go back to adhering to the laws of circumcision, dietary customs, and participating in Jewish festivals and ceremonies in order to be saved would be like rebuilding the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The blood of Jesus tore down that wall ([Ephesians 2:13-16](#)).

The "wall of the law" also proved to be of its own demise. For by attempting to live and own the law, Paul realized, and we should too, that no one follows the law perfectly. And even though the law is good and right, and it gives knowledge of what defines sin, it cannot offer salvation or justification. In fact, the law proves to be death. Here's [Romans 7:10](#).

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.
[Romans 7:10](#) (ESV)

Adherence to the law brings death to the law. When a person dies to the law and is justified in Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals the gospel truth that Jesus is the center of our identity. With that assurance, there's the reality that not only have we died to the law, but we've died with Christ in order that we might live to God.

Crucified with Christ

If there were a "top 10" for Bible verses, I'd certainly recommend that [Galatians 2:20](#) be included in the list. In fact, I would argue that this is the flagship verse of the book of Galatians. A preacher could preach multiple sermons on this one verse. [Galatians 2:20](#) is indeed a summation of the gospel.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[Gal 2:20](#) (ESV)

Crucifixion on a cross is a brutal, inhumane, excruciating and painful way to die. Scripture states that Jesus was crucified for our sake. Here's [2 Corinthians 5:21](#).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[2 Cor 5:21](#) (ESV)

Let the power of God's Word in these verses permeate our hearts and minds. Teach us Holy Spirit that to be crucified with Christ means to die to sin and to self. Help us to realize the gospel truth that Christ is the center of these words. Yes, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#)).

How does Jesus, and the truth of Him crucified on the cross, identify with you? Is the cross a stumbling block or foolishness? Scripture defines the Word of the cross as folly for those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). Are you perishing or being saved?

Dying to sin and self isn't easy. By embracing the good news message of the cross, there will be an execution. The old rebellious man will be executed on the cross along with Christ. As a result, there's a new creature living; there's a new creation in Christ. John Newton, writer of the hymn titled *Amazing Grace*, said this about his identity in Christ: "I'm not who I once was; and I'm not yet who I'm supposed to be; but by the grace of God I am what I am."

Even though we'll all continue wrestling with sin in this earthly life, when one trusts the Lord Jesus, the sinner is crucified. There's a new birth, a new creation. The Bible calls this being born again. The soul, the very heart of the person putting their trust in Jesus has been given new life. And that new life in Christ is truly new. It's because God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has transformed, set free from sin, and regenerated that new life through Jesus' death on the cross. Here's [Romans 6:6-8](#).

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

[Romans 6:6-8](#) (ESV)

In one of the songs we sing at LEFC, *Wonderful Cross*, part of the refrain goes like this: "O the wonderful cross, O the wonderful cross, bids me come and die and find that I may truly live." As a gentleman in our LEFC men's ministry stated: "The cross put me to death." I resonate with that statement. As I've come to know Christ more, I realize that failure or success doesn't define me; the Lord Jesus defines who I am. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Indeed, the cross put me to death.

Death is defined as an end; it's the cessation of life. However, the gospel states that being crucified with Christ is the beginning; it's the way to an abundant life. The gospel truth is that Jesus died for you; He loved you; He gave Himself for you. Your righteousness is totally identified with Christ and Him crucified. Do you believe that? Has the cross put you to death? If so, you're justified in Christ; you're living by faith in Him. You can draw near to the cross through God's grace.

Live by Faith Through Grace

Scripture states that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). Grace is about that which we didn't deserve, but received anyway. Faith in Christ and God's grace go together; you can't have one without the other. If justification in Christ were through the law, then everything that's in the book of Galatians, and for that matter, the whole Bible, would nullify, abolish, and invalidate the grace of God. The apostle Paul states that if that's true, then Christ died for no purpose.

But that's not the gospel truth. The truth is that Christ died and was resurrected. His death and resurrection validate everything that God has promised in His Word. Even though the law is good and right because it points us to what sin is, the law cannot save. Salvation is only through faith by God's grace that in the blood of Christ there is forgiveness of sins ([Hebrews 9:22](#)). Here's [Ephesians 2:8-9](#).

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
[Eph 2:8-9](#) (ESV)

How can it be that love and sorrow flow mingled down in the blood of Christ on the cross? God appointed the agony, punishment and suffering of the cross ([Isaiah 53:4-5](#)). Through Christ's suffering, all who receive Him by faith through God's grace are justified. Nothing need be added - no ceremonies, no rituals, and no nothing. Christ plus zero equals salvation. If that's you, your faith has made you well. You're justified by faith; you have peace with God ([Romans 5:1](#)). Your life has changed because of the law of Christ, not the law of man. Your identity is marked by faith through grace.

Speaking of faith and grace, in our men's ministry at LEFC, we're currently studying the book of Hebrews. One of the themes of Hebrews presents the truth that Jesus is better than the law; He's better than Moses; He's better than the Jewish religious system. In fact, one of the gentleman in our men's ministry says that Jesus is not better; "Jesus is best." And that's the gospel truth.

Another theme in Hebrews is an exhortation to the first century church to hold fast; don't give up; be careful; we're in a two-front war against Jewish peer pressure to keep the Mosaic law, as well as keep the Roman system of law. That truth was good for the church then. That truth is good for the church now.

The only way for the church to "hang in there" is to trust that Jesus is our identity; He's the best; He's preeminent; there's none above Him, none beside Him. He came down to save us from our mess; He came to be with us in our mess. He remembers us and never leaves us. That's because Jesus is faithful to those who live by faith through grace, even when I, you, the church, is unfaithful and ungrateful. Yes, the gospel truth is that Christ lives in me and I have died with Him. I live by faith in Him only because of His grace toward me.

Do you know what one of the best reflections of the gospel is on this Earth? It's the marriage of one man and one woman. It's a reflection of God's covenant relationship with His people, which says "I'll remain faithful no matter what." My parents were married for 73 years. In spite of my dad's weaknesses, failures and mistakes, he remained faithful to mom for a little over seven decades. And it was all and only through God's grace. The Lord Jesus says: "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." ([Ephesians 5:25](#)). That's a law we could all live by. That's what identifies those who live by faith through the grace of God.

Conclusion

All of us struggle to some degree with our identity as we walk through this life. Our flesh, the world, and the devil are always saying things like: "You'll never measure up. How could God ever love you because of what you've said, done and thought?" And all of those things are true apart from Christ. But if we've been crucified with Jesus, we're dead to the law. The cross has put us to death. Through Christ, we're alive. Whether champions or those in the dirt, all those who belong to Jesus are not identified by their wealth, success or prestige or lack thereof. We're not identified by what we've done or haven't done. The true identity of the Christian life is centered in Christ, and Him crucified. And that's the gospel truth! Amen.