

“The Steward’s Identity”—Galatians 2:20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Steward’s Identity”, is Galatians 2:20 → *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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Who are you? This question requires you to describe your identity. You may identify yourself by your relationships: “Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker” (Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, © 2017 Concordia Publishing House.) in a myriad of other tasks which place you in relationship with others? Your identity may be characterized by your job or hobbies: Are you a carpenter, teacher, scrapbooker, fisherman, clerk, laborer, and so forth. Your life is also packed with negative experiences and perceptions which can produce identity confusion and struggles in sin, as seen with gender-identity issues, self-sabotaging behaviors and victimized living.

At the same time, your identity is very important. We are constantly reminded of this by businesses as they strive to protect us from “identity theft” where someone “posses” to be you in an effort to wipe you out

financially and/or destroy your reputation and credibility. In our text Paul was striving to get the Christians in the region of Galatia to avoid “identity theft” **from a spiritual perspective**. Identity theft from a spiritual perspective? How does “identity theft” from a spiritual perspective happen?

It happens more often than you may realize in a given day. It happens anytime you are tempted to define your justification and your sanctification in a way which is contrary to who you are **in Christ**. In the context of our text Paul was dealing with Christian teachers who were trying to get the Christians of his day to base their eternal life on the works of Jesus plus their own works. This teaching was in direct opposition to salvation *by grace . . . through faith as the gift of God . . . in Christ Jesus*. (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10)

Titus 3:4-7 describes your salvation as **completely** God’s work: *When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*. Thus, “spiritual identity theft” happens when Christians take on teachings which “rob” Jesus of His Person & Work in grace. These teachings are called

“heresies” and their teachers are called “heretics.” In the end, it leaves one with a different spiritual identity than that which God has created in Jesus. It is very dangerous because when you undermine God’s pure grace and love in Jesus you undermine your salvation.

Many a Christian does this every time they view their identity as a Christian on the basis of their own “interpretations” and perceptions of life, placed before them by the devil through the world which stirs up their sinful hearts into a “spiritual identity crisis.” For instance, they think their religion is their own private business. Jesus says, *Let your light shine before others, **so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven.*** (cf. Matthew 5:16) No privacy there. They believe gathering in worship with other believers is like some kind of “extra-curricular” activity. God says, *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.*** Or they may think they’re doing a pretty good job of serving the LORD, believing it will merit them a higher place in heaven when God says our salvation is *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* (cf. Ephesians 2:9) And so the “spiritual identity crises” continue to be fueled by such heresies and many more.

In such a “crisis” it is crucial to recognize your identity as expressed in our text: *You have been crucified with Christ.* This is the point of your identity from beginning to end. Christ was crucified to deal with the

punishment which your sins deserved **once and for all—for all your sins, for all time**. Thus, your identity begins and continues with Jesus on the cross as you repent of your sins, turn away from your heresies and live *the life you now live in the flesh . . . by faith in the Son of God, Who loved you and gave Himself for you*.

As a result of your *washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit* in your baptism you get to live a new life today, released from the guilt and punishment of sin and released to live for the Lord Jesus. Our text says *it is no longer you who live, but Christ Who lives in you*. You become a “steward” of God’s gifts of grace in Jesus which affects every other area of your life! The steward’s identity is characterized by the desire and striving to be faithful to the Lord Jesus *Christ Who lives in you*. You confess the truth of God’s Word which says *your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, Whom you have from God. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore you desire to glorify God in your body*. (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Thus living a life of sanctification—that is, living by doing holy works which serve your Lord Jesus by serving others—is governed by the Holy Spirit living God’s Word through you. It changes your reason for serving others based upon a proper understanding of Who is Lord. For instance, fathers and mothers usually desire to raise their children so that they will grow up to be “successful” in life (whatever that may mean to those

parents). Thus, they may seek ways to be “good” parents or believe they’re good parents simply because they have children and are providing for them. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees how your children will “turn out” in the life choices they make, and many of those choices could disappoint parents or affect them adversely. Where do these parents turn when they feel like failures or it seems all is hopeless?

In contrast, **Christian** parents desire to be faithful **to Jesus** as they raise their children, recognizing those children belong to Him and have been **entrusted** to their care for a time. Christian parents desire **His Will** to be accomplished in their lives. They recognize the temptation to fall into some kind of idolatry thinking and acting as if they’re in control of their children, thinking they can make them “turn out” a certain way. Rather, you *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (cf. Ephesians 6:4), praying for the Holy Spirit to mold them into the godly men and women **He wants them to be**. The peace comes in knowing they all belong to Jesus Who is Lord of all, both parents and children!

This identity as a steward of God’s gracious gifts in life affects how we function in all our vocations of life. Colossians 3:23-24 tells you as a **Christian** worker to strive to do *whatever you do, working heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing . . . you are serving the Lord Christ.*

Scripture is filled with instructions about doing good works which serve your neighbor all because *it is no longer you who live, but Christ Who lives in you*. Scripture is filled with instructions about using the good gifts of God in service to others all because *it is no longer you who live, but Christ Who lives in you*. Scripture is filled with instructions about loving sinners with the desire to bring Jesus to them all because *the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved you and gave Himself for you. We love **because He first loved us!*** (cf. 1John 4:19)

Thus, as Christian stewards we are filled with the Holy Spirit Who brings us to faith in Jesus and gives us a whole new identity. He also keeps us in that one true faith as He nurtures it through the written Word and Sacraments we share together in worship. He expresses that faith as He bears fruit through us in service to Jesus while we serve our neighbor. We do not commit “spiritual identity theft” by “robbing” Jesus of His gracious works which have made us whom He desires us to be in this world with our new identities. Rather, we uphold our identity in Christ and *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* so that it will affect every area of our vocations in life. This is why we pray that God’s “Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached **to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people.**” When you are built up in your faith it will be the identity you display in every

area of your life. Amen.

Let's pray this prayer together, printed on page 305 in your hymnal:

Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.