

As in Adam, So in Christ

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Before anything can change on the deepest level in our lives, we have to lose the identity we have in Adam. As long as that identity remains the same, our outer actions may change to some extent, but such change doesn't amount to much in the ultimate sense. Losing our identity in Adam is different than losing our sin nature, as we will see later.

Consider our treatments for the common cold. We take nasal decongestants to reduce inflammation. We take aspirin for the headaches and pains. We may even take an antihistamine to dry up our runny nose. But one thing should be clear: none of these things will cure the cold. Such treatments only control the *symptoms* of the cold, they cannot cure it. That's because there *is* no cure for the common cold! Since we have no cure, we might as well at least try to control the symptoms. We have no better option.

Many Christians must have reached the same conclusion about their sin nature. They are trying different solutions to control the worst of the symptoms of the Adam-nature, but none of their measures are getting at the source of the problem. This is unfortunate, because with the Adam-nature, we do have a cure! It's a shame to see people dealing with their sin problems only on the symptomatic level when they could be experiencing real change.

An important qualification

Before going on, we need to make one very important qualification. When we argue that trying to alter our outer behavior is like trying to control the symptoms of a cold, you might conclude that any effort to deal with external behavioral problems is Phariseeism. You might even conclude that efforts in this direction will prevent or block real change based on who you are rather than on what you do. But this would be the wrong conclusion.

There is nothing wrong with controlling negative symptoms.

Controlling symptoms is not *wrong*, but it is *insufficient*.

We should find ways to decrease destructive behavior in our lives and to increase positive behavior. Such behavioral control only becomes a problem when controlling our behavior is *the only thing* we do. It becomes a serious problem when we begin to define our spiritual state on the basis of how well the battle with behaviors is going.

To state this differently, the issue is not whether we attempt to control behaviors, but how we view that attempt. Do we see controlling our behaviors, or our performance, as either the *definition* of spiritual growth or the *key* to spiritual growth? If we answer "yes" to either one of these questions, we have a very serious problem, not unlike that of the Pharisees. On the other hand, there may be certain areas of sin in our lives which need to be controlled in an external way, even though this is not the key to growth. We need to control some particularly destructive behaviors even if by external means, so they will not block our advancement toward maturity on a deeper level. We could say that, while controlling negative behavior is not the key to growth, it could be a pre-condition to growth in some cases.

Let's look at a couple of examples where this might be true. Suppose you are an alcoholic. Your drinking and your abuse of your family are sinful and destructive. Stopping these behaviors will not make you a mature Christian, but it may nevertheless be necessary to seek control of the behaviors, *even through external means*, like avoiding drinking situations or even entering a hospital. Stopping the drinking, may open the door for other, more complete solutions.

The same could be true of promoting positive behaviors. Suppose you are one who has problems with other people. You don't like to go out in the evening, and groups of people make you nervous. In such a state, it may be very difficult to take advantage of Christian fellowship. Unless you find ways to overcome such a reluctance to act, it will be difficult to fully understand God's plan for your life.

Again, a problem arises when the struggle to gain a measure of control over certain areas of behavior becomes the defining issue of our lives. It is all too easy to begin to view enhancement of our external performance as being equal to spiritual growth. But even non-Christians change their behavior! Many Hindu and Buddhist religionists undergo disciplines much more impressive than any we are likely to practice. But is this the same as being conformed to the image of Christ? It is not.

The fate of the Adamic person

If we received our identity in Adam simply by being born, how will we ever get rid of it? The Bible is crystal clear on this point:

The only possible fate for the person in Adam is death.

God will not set about renovating the Adamic person for use in the Kingdom. The verdict of death has already been decreed over this humanity. Verse 15 of Romans 5 states it plainly: ". . . by the transgression of the one the many died . . ." Earlier in Romans this message is repeatedly

emphasized. "The wages of sin is death," proclaims Romans 6:23a, and we can rest assured, God will not change his verdict. Yet, he is able to say, ". . . the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (6:23b)

We already know that Christ bore the penalty for our sin on the cross. This explains why God can forgive us and give us eternal life. But what about the effect of his death in *this* life? How will the death of Christ affect our spiritual growth?

Here is where our study of identity in Adam begins to pay dividends. Romans 5 and 6 teach that, like Adam, Christ has become a new federal head. This is what Paul means in Romans 6, verses 3 and 4:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

We saw earlier the only way to escape the domination of the Adam nature is death. Now this passage mentions death in the same connection, but with a different twist. Here we discover not only that Jesus died in our place but that somehow we died *with* him.

This passage is teaching that God has declared us to be "in Christ," which, among other things, means we have died to what we were "in Adam." What does this saying, "in Christ," mean? It is easy to understand a similar statement; "Christ in me." I open my heart, and Christ enters as promised in Revelation 3:20 and elsewhere. But here we are hearing something completely different: not Christ in me, but me in Christ!

This is what theologians call "identification with Christ." It means God has acted in such a way that we have become *identified* with Christ. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, what is true of Christ's standing has become true of us. Did Jesus die? Then so did I. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Then I, too, rose from the dead. The comparisons can be pressed even further. Did Jesus ascend to the Father in heaven? Then according to my identification with Christ, I too ascended to heaven and took my seat at the right hand of the Father! This is expressly stated in Ephesians 2:5,6: "And even when we were dead in our sin and transgression [God] made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ." Of course we have not become the creators of the world, nor have we become deity, but the areas where we are identified with Christ go much further than many of us would think.

This seems quite abstract. In what sense am I seated with Christ in heaven? In what sense am I still seated right here? How can God say I died, when I clearly am alive? Wouldn't I have noticed this experience?

Using Our Insight

We already have the key to answering these questions. That key is federal headship. Adam was our federal head. We didn't feel or sense anything he did. There was no tangible experience on

our part. Yet, what we *are* was directly impacted by this man. In I Corinthians 15:45 it says, "The first Adam became a living soul, the last Adam became a life giving spirit." Jesus is the last Adam. He is a second federal head. He is called the last Adam because, just as Adam gave rise to a fallen humanity, Christ has become the source of a new, righteous humanity. One humanity is doomed to die; the other humanity has already died. One humanity lives in alienation from God; the other is alive to God.

Paul reiterates this in I Corinthians 15:21,22. "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive."

Baptism into Christ

These statements in I Corinthians are no different than what we have seen in Romans 6. According to our passage, the key to our new identity is that we have been "baptized into Christ." This is not referring to water baptism, but to spiritual baptism.

The word *baptizo*, which is translated "baptize" need not refer to a ritual where people are washed or immersed in water. Sometimes the term is used for immersing people into other things. For instance, John said Jesus would baptize people in the Spirit or in Fire. (Matthew 3:11) Jesus asked James and John whether they were able to undergo the baptism he would undergo, apparently referring to his suffering and death. (Mar. 10:38) There are other uses of the word as well. It should be clear that the exact meaning of baptism must be determined in each passage by considering the context. The word means "immersion" or a "putting into." But immersion into what?

Here in Romans 6 he is not commenting on our immersion into water, but into Christ. This the baptism by the Spirit. Paul says this "baptism," or immersion into Christ, is an integral part of becoming a Christian. He often refers to God's act of placing believers into Christ. In I Corinthians 12:13 he says, "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . ." This is why believers are called the body of Christ. In I Corinthians 1:30 Paul says, "by God's doing you are in Christ Jesus." The Spirit of God has somehow baptized, or placed us into Christ.

Theologians refer to this oneness with Christ as the "mystical union" of believers with Christ. Over 100 times in the New Testament the expressions "in Christ," "in the beloved," "in him" or similar phrases are used of believers. The mystical union of the believers with Christ is not an obscure concept found off in the corner somewhere. Many of the most important promises God has given us are linked directly to this union. Here are some important examples:

Passages	What is Promised
<p>Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are <i>in Christ Jesus</i>.</p>	<p>Freedom from condemnation</p>
<p>Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life <i>in Christ Jesus</i> has set you free from the law of sin and of death.</p>	<p>Freedom from the law of sin</p>
<p>Romans 8:39 [Neither] height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is <i>in Christ Jesus</i> our Lord.</p>	<p>Security and permanence in God's love</p>
<p>Romans 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body <i>in Christ</i>, and individually members one of another.</p>	<p>Unity with other Christians</p>
<p>I Corinthians 1:30 But by His doing you are <i>in Christ Jesus</i>, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,</p>	<p>God's wisdom, goodness, etc. imparted to us</p>
<p>II Corinthians 2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph <i>in Christ</i>, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.</p>	<p>Triumph, or victory in spiritual war</p>
<p>II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man is <i>in Christ</i>, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.</p>	<p>New identity</p>

<p>Galatians 2:20 <i>"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.</i></p>	<p>Death to the old person</p>
<p>Galatians 3:28 <i>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.</i></p>	<p>Basis for social, racial, and sexual equality</p>
<p>Ephesians 1:3 <i>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,</i></p>	<p>Every blessing, note the past tense</p>
<p>Philippians 3:9 <i>[that I] may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,</i></p>	<p>Righteousness imparted to us</p>
<p>Philippians 4:7 <i>And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.</i></p>	<p>Inner peace of mind</p>
<p>Colossians 3:3,4 <i>For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.</i></p>	<p>Future inheritance and eternal life</p>
<p>I John 5:20 <i>And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is</i></p>	<p>Truth and understanding</p>

true, and we are <i>in Him</i> who is true, <i>in His Son Jesus Christ</i>. This is the true God and eternal life.	
II Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God <i>in Him</i>.	The righteousness of God
I Corinthians 1:5 In everything you were enriched <i>in Him</i>, in all speech and all knowledge,	Spiritual gifts

Table 0.1 Things we receive based on our identification with Christ

When we analyze the promises in these and other passages, we find the over-arching theme is that what is true of Christ has become true of us who are in Christ. Christ is victorious; therefore we are led in his victory. Christ is at the right hand of God; therefore we are also. According to Romans 6, death and resurrection are two of the most important things true of us if we are in Christ.

God's Viewpoint

Whatever this teaching means, it must be very important, considering the promises attached directly to it. It may help to consider the problem from God's viewpoint.

As already stated, God's verdict on the Adam nature is final. We will never experience freedom from our fallen nature until we die and are resurrected in a new body. What is God to do in the meantime? One solution might be to strike dead all who receive Christ immediately and take them to heaven right there and then. This solution has some obvious drawbacks. If everyone who believed in Christ immediately fell dead, Christian evangelism might become harder than it already is! Besides, who would do the witnessing?

Whether for these reasons or others, this is not the direction God has decided to go. Instead of striking all believers dead, he has judicially ***declared*** them dead by identifying them with Christ. This means God elects to view us as though we were in Christ. That is, he views us the same way he views his son. This is certainly good news. Our standing before God couldn't be higher! But is it real? Or is this just double talk? How can it be true that I have died and am seated in heaven, when I am clearly sitting right here, seemingly the same as ever?

There are a few points which should help clarify this concept for us.

First, who views us as being "the righteousness of God?" I know I find it very hard to view myself that way. My wife finds it even harder! No, it is God who, in the first place, views me this way. But we should not take this to mean our identification with Christ is just some dream in the mind of God. Actually, our status is quite real. Consider the fact that one day our fallen existence will end, either when we die or when the Lord returns. However, our standing in Christ will never end. When we think of it this way, our standing in Christ is even more "real" than our life in Adam.

Second, the fact that we have been identified with Christ is an item of faith for Christians. I Corinthians 1:30 says, "by God's doing you are in Christ." That is a plain proposition which we might not fully understand, but which we need to accept as a direct declaration by God. We don't need to be able to confirm this statement with some kind of experience or feeling. It is a fact of Scripture, which deserves willing belief from those of us who view Scripture as our ultimate standard of truth. The truest thing about us is what God says about us.

Remember, we did not sense or feel anything of Adam's fall, yet we received a fallen nature because he was our federal head. There certainly could be other explanations for why we have a selfish nature. The reason we, as Christians, believe our problems came from Adam is not that our experience tells us so, but because God has declared this to us in his Word.

God also declares that those of us who have trusted Christ have died and risen with him, though we cannot feel this truth either. Therefore, we have the same reason for believing in our identification with Christ as in our identification with Adam--God tells us so.

Finally, when we consider our sense of identity, we realize that how God looks at us is not an unimportant abstraction. This idea is so important, and it comes up so often in the study to follow, we will devote a whole chapter to understanding it.