

Our Hidden Life in Christ

By Linda Rex

July 31, 2022, PROPER 13—I was making some updates on my blog site this morning when I realized that my profile and the site welcome page were outdated. As I was making the appropriate adjustment to what I had written there, it came to my mind how easy it is for us to find our identity in the everyday things of life such as what we do for a living, who we are related to, and how we spend our time, rather than simply finding it in Jesus Christ.

How do you answer when someone asks you to tell them about yourself? I did not realize how often I use the phrase “I am...” when telling someone about myself. For example, “I am a pastor.” Well, yes, for a time I have done the work of a pastor. Or, “I am a wife and a mother.” Now, yes, I do have a husband so in that sense I am a wife—Ray’s wife. And yes, I do have two adult children, so in that sense, I am a mother. But are these things my sole identity? Why are these often the first thing out of my mouth, rather than something about who I am in Christ?

What I realized in reading the New Testament passage for today, Colossians 3:1-11, was that we often find our identity everywhere but where it has its true source—in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that our life is hidden with Christ in God. Our true life, our true self, is found in Christ, in his beloved sonship in relationship with the Father. We are dead to anything that does not fit within the realm of Christ and his oneness with the Father in the Spirit. We can, because of Christ, say, “I am the beloved son or daughter of the Father.”

In that simple statement there is so much life! Think of it. The simple use of “I am” means that we participate in God’s life—in his personhood, in the sense that he has included us in his life as the “I Am” through Christ in the Spirit. To say we are beloved is to say we participate in Christ’s own relationship of other-centered love and affection between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. And to say we are a son or a daughter of the Father is to say we participate in Christ’s own sonship, thereby sharing in his rights and privileges as adopted children of the Father in the Spirit. As I begin to ponder these things, I zone off into oblivion—it is too much to get my mind and heart around all at once.

And thinking of where we find our true life, the apostle Paul tells us that we are dead to the rest—those things that no longer define us: anger, wrath, slander, immorality, impurity, evil desire, greed, abusive speech, and dishonesty. I’m sure there are many other things we think, say and do that are not a part of what God created us to think, say and do. There are many things we think, say and do which are not a healthy and genuine participation in Christ’s life of oneness with the Father in the Spirit. But they all died in Jesus’ death and are no longer a part of who we really are.

Our identity now is in the crucified and risen Christ. In Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension we find ourselves restored to God’s initial creative genius—bound through Christ in the Spirit to the Father in an eternal embrace of love which will never be broken. Nothing can or will separate us from God’s love in Christ. Praise God!

The kicker is—do we believe this? It’s true, whether we see it or know it or not. Our experience of it is enhanced as we begin to believe in the truth of it and begin to live it out. This is why the apostle Paul tells us to “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” We prefer to focus on what we can see and touch, not believing in the invisible, intangible things of our existent such as the spiritual realities. But those spiritual realities are where we find our true life and our real identity.

Think of the gospel reading for today in Luke 12:13–21. A man rushed up to Jesus, interrupting his teaching session, to insist that he intercede in a family dispute over an inheritance. Jesus' penetrating answer moved the discussion straight to the real issue: greed. Telling a story to demonstrate his point, he described a wealthy farmer who had just reaped an over abundant crop. This farmer decided he would build himself bigger barns to store the crop and sit back, and enjoy the good life. Jesus then asked a poignant question: "What if the rich man died that night? Who would get all that he had worked so hard to collect?" Then Jesus made his point, "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." We find our true wealth solely in our relationship with God.

There is so much more to this life than what we feel, see, hear, taste, or touch. All of our inner thought life and our senses find their true existence now within Christ's life with the Father in the Spirit. That means that we are dead to anything that is not found within that life and so, as Paul wrote, we leave all that behind. We are dead to greed, so we no longer live in greedy ways. We are not defined by our money, by how much we earn, or how we earn it, or how we use it, other than in what way it is a reflection of Christ's own way of being with regards to money. We are not defined by our wrath, slander, or impurity, but by Christ's own way of self-control and chastity. What we keep our focus on is so important. Because Jesus *is* the centre of our life, we want to *keep* Jesus as the centre of our life, for he is the One who defines our true humanity.

We so easily get focused on the earthly realities that we often forget there is a life beyond this life that is grounded in the very person of Jesus Christ. He is the king of God's kingdom and in his self-offering, has brought every one of us up into an objective union with God in which we find our genuine life hidden within his own life in relationship with the Father in the Spirit. It is by faith in Christ that we experience subjectively that relationship in tangible ways. We participate in Christ's own death and resurrection, in his life with the Father by faith. And we live and walk now and forever by faith in gratitude and devotion as Abba's beloved adopted children through Jesus in the Spirit.

Thank you, Abba, for making us your very own beloved children, for including us in your life now and forever. Grant us the grace to live in the truth of who we really are, in the hidden life that is already ours, through Jesus in the Spirit. Amen.

"Someone in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' But He said to him, 'Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?' Then He said to them, 'Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.' And He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' " But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.' " Luke 12:13–21 NASB