

Series: Hard Conversations	Reference: <i>Galatians 2:20</i>	Title: Identity in Christ	Date: 01.26.2019
Website Writeup: Operating out of our identity in Christ allows us to live out of a biblical worldview even when it is unpopular & to be able to lead others without vitriol or division due to our possible faulty opinions.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This series is designed to help us to have discerning effective conversations in love with those who think differently from us. We're addressing 5 affirmations to learn how to have hard conversations in love, not compromising our beliefs, convictions & values as Bible-believing Christians, but communicating them well.

We've asked, are we reflecting, or overcoming division? Remembering Jesus prayed for our Unity, recognizing that **THOUGHT** is the defining factor of **UNITY** with Jesus, and His Body, the Church. Our first affirmation was, God has all truth, but we don't have a perfect understanding of it. We shouldn't be afraid of having strong convictions, beliefs & values, but must couple them with the humbling knowledge, we can be wrong in the murky waters of personal opinion, especially in the area of hot topics.

Secondly we said, being loving is as important as being right. We love truthfully & truthfully love. Love without truth lies, truth without love kills. Our third affirmation, the Spirit can create unity where it once seemed impossible.

And today we have our fourth affirmation - **we find our identity in Christ, not in clutter, culture & cause.** With that in mind, our memory verse for this series, Galatians 2:20, is our text for today... *²⁰I have been crucified with Christ & I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me.* This verse speaks of our identity in Christ.

Remember, we avoid intellectual laziness & our system of theological belief is paramount to healthy Christian life - our knowledge of who God is as derived from the Scriptures. This knowledge informs our beliefs, decisions & values in all these areas of clutter, culture & cause. God can't be compartmentalized out of these areas of life. As Lord, He's Lord of all life & our identity's put forth & outlined for us in the Bible as being in Christ - nothing else.

Therefore, primary issues such as the nature of Jesus, His death, resurrection, the nature of sin, our need of salvation, that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, His deity, the nature of marriage, etc., all inform our belief system & are clear, unchanging & solid foundations, because God is unchanging. There's quite a bit of solidity in the Christian life & of which the church has unity in, my list is truncated, time doesn't afford us extensive exploration.

Yet there are things in life which aren't necessarily outlined clearly in Scripture. The Bible doesn't tell me what to wear in the morning, what coffee to buy, necessarily for whom I should vote, or how much to tip my waitress. Scripture may inform these thoughts to some extent, but maybe not with full clarity. And the Holy Spirit is able to interject Himself into any of the more mundane issues of life as well. For instance, He may prompt me one day to tip my waitress more since she may need it that day. Or He may give clear direction in certain areas for His purposes & the sake of Christ's name, or for the blessing of others. That's a lifelong upward learning curve of practicing faith in all areas.

But there are areas left to our own choice, because God's loving & has gifted us with great freedom. Some things are grey, where disagreement can be had & it doesn't much rock the boat. But we must remember, the Christian life's lived in open relationship with the Holy Spirit, with direction from the Scriptures & in community with other bible-believing Christians in our local church.

Sometimes the **Clutter** of life tempts us to define our identity by them. Clutter being wealth, or belongings. George Carlin called it, 'Gettin more stuff!' The clutter of wealth can be a sticky-wicket for some Christians as they turn a crooked eye at the wealthy. Problem is, where does wealth begin? Who's wealthy? Did you realize that the Global Rich List would categorize you as the top 1.23% of richest people in the world if you make only \$30k/yr in the USA? You're all obscenely wealthy!

I was watching a show where a vampire woke up after hundreds of years of sleep, and found himself talking to a woman in her dilapidated trailer. He looked around & said, "You must be the wealthiest of the wealthy!" Since he'd never seen anything so opulent having been asleep for so long. Wealth can be relative. Put a poor man from Calcutta in a trailer park in Alabama, with an income of \$24k/year & he just won the lottery!

To be wealthy isn't sin, although some feel it is, and do their best to make others to feel that way. There are wealthy people in Scripture whom God made wealthy. There's no prohibition in Scripture on being wealthy, but there's direction for all of us concerning finances. God promised, we're blessed in order to be a blessing to all people groups - our wealth isn't only for us to enjoy, but to further his kingdom to the nations. We're called to give tithe regularly to our local church (10% being our goal), to be generous, to care for the poor, not to hoard, or put trust in wealth, etc. So, if I'm able to buy an expensive car, I'd want the Scriptures to inform that decision & I'd also want to seek the Holy Spirit so that I'm not buying it to bolster some false identity in myself.

The clutter of life, our wealth & belongings, don't define our identity, Jesus does. And we must be careful, to not only to hold on lightly to these things due to their temptations in the area of identity, but also of our opinion of others as well.

Sometimes we're tempted to make **Culture** our identity. To define ourselves by what's popular, or the current vein of thought & worldview of our time. Our personal connection to Scripture, Spirit & Church, all become vastly important as we navigate the

currents of culture. The western individualistic worldview which deifies the 'Self', or drives us to vilify others & not call all people to repentance in Christ is often contrary to the Biblical Worldview which unifies us under Jesus & sets us in unity towards His glory & mission in the world. We won't spend a ton of time on this - it's a large subject & we've preached it often. Suffice it to say, we're responsible to take captive every thought to Christ, having Him define our worldview through Scripture, Spirit & Church (2 Co 10:5).

Which brings us to our last category, **Cause**...let's save ourselves the rehash of difficult topics & just ask ourselves a few questions. How does God's created order & the directives of Scripture define our views on human sexuality? How does the just character of God & His nature of grace define our views on poverty & justice? Can we align ourselves with those who preach Liberation Theology which teaches the Gospel comes to people when systematic sin is dealt with, but personal sin is never addressed by marginalized peoples? Can we align ourselves with movements which preach hate towards other groups, or which lead people farther away from Truth? Can we align ourselves with movements which take the lives of the innocent even before they're born? Can we as Christians ravage our planet without thought or care of God's Creation?

Those are big questions which take a lot of thought, but everything must be weighed against Scripture. The Gospel doesn't afford us the luxury of intellectual laziness. We're thinking Christians, aligning ourselves with a Christian Biblical Worldview, even when it's unpopular. The truth of the matter is, no matter how we vote, we're most likely prostituting our convictions to some degree, since we live in a tension of a world which isn't fully given over to Christ as of yet. We're stuck in imperfect systems, so we do our best, and exercise caution in how we estimate the actions & thoughts of others in that whole process.

The bottom line is, our identity isn't in Clutter, Culture or Cause. We live in tension, looking always to find our identity in Jesus & striving for unity of thought as we come into agreement with Him.

There are absolutes & clear convictions we must be in obedience to in our belief systems. To find our identity in Christ involves our belief systems concerning who He is as Scripture defines Him. But we all hold to various beliefs which may be right or wrong in certain areas, or may be grey areas, or which may even morph in different situations & changing times. We're all learning. So...*I have been crucified with Christ & I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me.*

What does that mean? It's almost as if we must resign ourselves to the loss of self. That I cease to become & Christ takes me over. Paul's sometimes clear, and at others, confusing & philosophic. You may have to sit & meditate on his words to gain understanding. If you took this verse by itself, it may seem that I cease to exist & Jesus takes over. But we have to read Scripture in light of Scripture.

Turn with me to Ephesians 2 on p799 in your church bibles. Verses 1 & 2 outline this for us, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions & sins ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world & of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* All of us were at one point disobedient by nature to God. All of humankind is, which levels the playing field.

But he continues to say in verse 4 & 5, *⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...* And then in verses 8 & 9, *⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

The point is, our position with Jesus is one of gratitude & we find our true self in Him. It's one of recognizing, the work of salvation in us is only due to Jesus love & work of atonement. We did nothing for it, and it's by grace & mercy we find ourselves saved.

Even our spiritual formation over time is a work of the Word & Spirit in our lives in the context of church community. Our sinful self has been crucified, and in that sense we no longer live. But we've been raised to life in Christ as well - He has promised to live within us, in our bodily life, as He does his life-changing work in us - forming & shaping our Biblical Worldview. Sometimes we find ourselves wrong, and have to readjust our thinking & actions to be in line with His - remember last week, some lost that argument in Acts 15 & had to augment their thinking & practice.

There's encouragement in this journey of faith found in Philippians 1:6 which says, *⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* Or as 2 Co 5:17 tells us, in Christ the old has gone, the new has come - we're being completed over time.

The problem is, we live life in community right in the center of all the clutter, culture & causes which vie for our attention bringing tension with others - we bump up against their belief systems, faulty or right. This is where humility we've spoken of in past sermons comes in, that we do our utmost to live out of proper Biblical conviction, beliefs & values as faithful followers of Jesus, understanding, we can be wrong in our opinions on certain issues, but yet we can still hold onto the solidity of Jesus as we know Him & come to know Him more intimately.

In the midst of all this clutter, culture & causes, we need direction, since they bring about hard conversations. Several years ago, researchers from Harvard University did some investigations into the nature of difficult conversations & how they can be done well. They concluded that in the most difficult conversations, there are two potential dead ends.

The first dead end is to get stuck on the question, "What happened?" It turns out that people simply can't agree on the answer to this question, particularly when

emotions are high. Often two sides of an issue are so dead set on what the facts are that trying to resolve this basic question itself can end up being fruitless.

Most often, there are underlying fears, or other feelings which drive our interactions which have little to do with the 'facts' at hand. Someone may feel they're not being heard, or respected, or your words, demeanor, or the issue at hand may be digging up a past negative experience from which they're reacting & they may not even realize.

The second dead end is to try to convince the other party of *our* good intentions while simultaneously distrusting *their* intentions. It turns out that intentions are difficult to talk about. If someone is offended by what I've said, it doesn't do much good to convince them that I didn't mean offense. If someone felt my words to be cold & unfeeling, it doesn't much help to try to convince them that I didn't intend for that to happen. Perception is reality. And it's often helpful to remember many times people do have good intention, even if faulty in their reasoning.

The conclusions of the research bear remarkable similarity to key tenets of the New Testament. **The key to moving forward in difficult conversations is to find my identity in Christ, independent of what the other side says or does.** What that does for us is to eradicate fear, or the need to prove myself, or even to guard my rights. It also gives me love for them beyond the issue as one of God's creatures loved by Him.

Even if I feel accused, attacked, or misunderstood, the other person's opinion of me doesn't shape my identity, Christ does. And if I believe this other person's deeply misguided & deceived, I still believe they're made in the image of God & loved by Christ.

Starting from this foundation, many of the most difficult conversations can move forward in unexpected ways. We can speak on issues when heat's dissipated. When we can say we don't have to win the argument & the Holy Spirit convicts hearts through the Scriptures. Mostly, we argue from our position instead of trying to lead out of God's Word & a posture of prayer. We forget, it's promised in Scripture, if we lack wisdom, we can pray for it & the Spirit will provide in the moment.

But even with all that...we often still say, "This IS personal. These conversations are not hypothetical. I am feeling attacked & misheard. I'm anxious about where this leads!"

First, we all need to know our limits. We all have a capacity for how much difficult conversation we can handle. There are times when it's healthy simply to do our best to walk away from a situation. It doesn't mean the other side wins, and it doesn't mean we're weak. It simply means we recognize we have limits.

Some good practices in difficult conversations are, simply acknowledge, we are speaking about heart issues, not necessarily logic. Convictions are deeply held in the world view levels of the soul. If we can say to the other person, "I know you hold your belief strongly & I respect that...", it might go a long way. Ask more questions, make less statements to understand where a heart is positioned.

Convictions, whether faulty or correct, aren't usually surface things. Their interwoven in our psyche, belief systems, soul & worldview. They're often a result of years of cultural conditioning, negative or positive experiences & possibly errant ideas we've learned along the way. They're difficult to change from simple discussion or argument. We must rely on prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to both of us as we explore a difficult issue together.

At times we need to know our limit of communication on an issue & simply say, "Can we take this up at a later time? I'm feeling this isn't productive right now, and want to do this well with you." Knowing God's working in them as He is in us. Often times someone may see Truth, but not be willing to admit it to you, they may need someone else, and some new circumstance to soften their position to bring about personal confession of it. And that may happen years down the road in a persons life.

Second, we need people who can lovingly support us. This doesn't mean we should only surround ourselves with people who agree with us & tell us the other side is wrong (as good as that feels). It means finding people who will pray for our hurts, empathize with our anxiety, and pray for us in faith & love.

Third, we can identify with Christ's humanity. He was often misunderstood & persecuted. He found Himself in emotions ranging from anger to sadness to exhaustion. We won't walk through this life without feeling the full range of human emotion. It's normal & part of what it means to be human follower of Christ.

Our identity's in Christ even in light of all the clutter, culture & causes which press for attention. And as we're spiritually formed in Jesus through Scripture, Spirit & Church, we must willingly submit ourselves in process. Adjusting our thinking to find unity with other believers in Christ, because thought is the defining factor of unity & identity in Jesus.

So, let's end by repeating our memory verse together again... *²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ & I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me.*