

Identity Gift

Heart to Heart, Part 1

1 John 2:28-3:1

Just about every month or so I'll see a news report or read an article about the ever increasing problem of identity theft.

According to the North Carolina General Statutes, chapter 14, an identity thief is a person who knowingly obtains, possesses, or uses identifying information of another person, living or dead, with the intent to fraudulently represent that . . . person . . . for the purposes of making financial or credit transactions in the other person's name, to obtain anything of value, benefit, or advantage . . .ⁱ

In other words, somebody uses your name – your personal information – your social security number or your credit card number – and they use it for their own benefit at your expense.

Identity theft is exploding – in fact, according to figures from the U.S. Department of Justice *identity theft* has grown at the rate of 50% in just the past few years.

Six years ago government officials estimated that there were 1 million computer programs designed to hack into and steal personal information – they now estimate, six years later, the number of those programs to have grown to somewhere around 130 million.

And it is expected that identity theft will surpass all other “traditional” forms of property theft in the near future.

As an example, one woman received surprising news from her accountant last month, according to this article I read recently – an identity thief had stolen her personal information and had filed a tax return in her name to claim her refund and had it sent to him.

As a result, her accountant couldn't file her tax return – it had already been filed with her Social Security number. That one instance, will take at least six months to sort – and in the meantime, she will have to wait to receive her \$2,700 tax refund.

I also read that identity theft is especially prevalent in Arizona, with around 150 victims for every 100,000 (1 out of every 650) fall prey. Other leading states with the highest incidents of identity theft are California, Florida, Texas and Nevada are the leading states for identity theft.ⁱⁱ

That's troubling news, isn't it?

There's no doubt, as Solomon wrote, that ungodly people truly do lie on their beds at night thinking up new ways to commit crimes. In fact, Solomon actually means that they can't get to sleep until they've come up with a new, devious plan (**Proverbs 4:16**).

Millions of people have been victimized by identity theft of one sort or another – and it's a global problem too, by the way.

In fact, our daughter, serving in Chile, was having a cup of coffee one morning in Starbucks – yes, there is a Starbucks in Santiago, Chile. While she was in there, someone stole out of her purse her debit card. She couldn't find it that afternoon. She called me and I told her that she needed to report it to the bank right away, but not to worry about it because that person would need to know her pin number in order to use it. By the end of the day, 100's of dollars had been charged to her card – which shows I'm no security expert – evidently, the person who took her card had more than likely watched her punch in her pin number at the counter.

As she thought back over those moments, our daughter came to the conclusion that it was more than likely one of the employees of Starbucks who'd stolen it. She couldn't prove it though . . . but she decided never to go back to Starbucks again – and she didn't for 2 whole days.

But she's more careful now.

Obviously we are dismayed and troubled and concerned about identity theft.

But has it ever occurred to you that Christians are, by definition, people who have someone else's identity. We're called Christians, having taken the identity of Christ as our own.ⁱⁱⁱ

We didn't steal it, but we weren't born into this world with it. But something happened to us, didn't it? We were born again, by faith in Christ alone, and inducted into the family of God – *for as many a received Him – Jesus – to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)*

The good news is, your new identity wasn't some kind of identity *theft* . . . it happens to be an identity *gift*.^{iv}

God gave you this gift of identity when He made you a member of His family. And He evidently gave you power of attorney privilege because you can actually sign for Him; represent Him, transact business for Him and speak for Him.

He even gave you His son's name – you're called, Christian, so named because you are kin to Christ – you are a co-regent with Christ in the coming kingdom.

I want to return your attention to chapter 2 of First John – where John is about to emphasize that our new identity not only affects our future responsibility, but our present activity.

In other words, John wants us to make the most of our identity gift from God – it influences everything.

Two words came to mind as I read these next few verses in I John chapter 2. Four words, actually, but we only have time for two.

We'll call them, two characteristics of our new identity:

1. **And the first characteristic is Preoccupation**

28. *And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.*

29. *[Since] you know that He is righteous, you*

know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Verse 28 begins with the words, “And now” – I would agree with others that this would be a great place to begin chapter 3.

As you may know, chapter and verse divisions were not inspired – they were not original to these letters – and John here was writing a letter.

Chapter and verse numberings were added much later as study aides – and they are wonderful study aides, aren't they?

The first time an English Bible included both chapter and verse numberings was the Geneva Bible, first published in 1560; they were later picked up and for the most part used in the King James translation, first published in 1611.

Verse 28 begins with an emphatic particle which introduces a new section of thought.^v

And now – or – you could translate that particle, **And since this is so, little children, abide in Him.**^{vi}

Simply put, have fellowship and communion with Him.^{vii}

Then, the command to **practice righteousness in verse 29** – another key precept of the Apostle John – but keep in mind, it isn't in order to gain your new identity in Christ, but to reveal it.

Practicing righteousness isn't something you do in hopes of producing a new birth; it's something you do as proof of your new birth.^{viii}

Think of it this way: your new identity is God's gift to you; practicing your new identity before the world is your gift to God.

Now, the Apostle John has already written about abiding in Christ, as well as practicing righteous living.

But in this new chapter of thought, John has this preoccupation in mind – a preoccupation for every believer's heart and mind – and it's this – the soon appearing of Jesus Christ.

Notice **verse 28 again** – **Now, little children, abide in Him – have fellowship with Him – so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.**

His coming is from a word John uses here – *parousia*, (παρουσια) - which literally refers to Christ's presence – literally being alongside.^{ix}

The *parousia* – the coming of Christ – is two-fold; it includes the appearing of Christ *in the clouds for His redeemed at the rapture (I Thessalonians 4:17)* and then following the Tribulation His coming

from the clouds to earth with the Redeemed as He sets up His kingdom (*Revelation 19*).

Since John is referring to the *believer* being personally ashamed at Christ's presence, the reference here would then be to the Bema seat. The Bema seat is that time of judgment where Christ will sit upon the Bema – the Judges bench – where athletes were rewarded during the Olympic Games and where judges heard cases brought before them, rendering their evaluation.

Upon that bench, so to speak, the Lord Christ will personally *come alongside* and review every believer's activity. It will not be a time of identifying sin, since sin has already been judged. However, everything of a believer's life that is worthy of reward will be graciously rewarded – and in so reviewing our profitable activities, our unprofitable and sinful activities will be visible. (1 Corinthians 3 & 2 Corinthians 5).

Obviously, when Christ comes alongside us individually and evaluates our lives, every one of us will have some sense of regret and some level of shame.

Who, in all of church history, will not wish they had remained more passionate for Christ, more diligent for Christ, more preoccupied with Christ.

Even the Apostle Paul lamented in his later years that he was the chief of sinners (*1 Timothy 1:15*).

That he would refuse to glory in anything other than the cross-work of Jesus Christ (*Galatians 6:14*).

I mean, if not Paul, who would ever be confident and unwavering when they stand before the holy gaze of our Chief Shepherd?

This verse has always troubled me, for who among us would not feel some shame or regret at not having been more faithful?

So what exactly is John talking about here that Christians can be confident – even bold – at His future evaluation of our lives?

The answer is found in the meaning of John's key words. And the word John uses here in *verse 28* – *parresia* (παρρησια) – translated *confidence* – is a word that in ancient times actually referred to candid speech.

It came out of the political world where a candidate would speak candidly – translated often “open speech”. By the time of the 1st century, the word came to refer more generally as – and I think it wonderfully clarifying to use that translation instead – *openness*^t.

The word refers to openness – transparency – no hidden agenda ethically or morally.

That when He comes, we may have openness and not shrink away from Him in shame.

What is it in our lives that cause us to shrink from transparency before God right now? What causes us to withdraw from an open communion with Christ?

Unconfessed sin.

Can you remember someone in the Bible sinning against God and then when God appeared he shrank away and hid?

It was Adam . . . and Eve.

Why? They were hiding sin. They shrank from Him in shame because of their unconfessed sin.

Frankly, I don't think any believer will ever reach a point where they will stand before the Lord with a kind of confidence – as if to say – “Okay, Lord, it's my turn and am I ever confident I'm going to be crowned.”

Yes, you'll be crowned alright.

I believe the idea John has in mind – and the encouragement to every believer – is to live with such ongoing confession of sin before the Lord that when He appears for us, we will actually receive His presence with *openness*.

We, the chief of sinners as well, have lived up to the moment of His coming, confessing openly – with *open speech* – not hiding anything, but openly confessing our sin to Him.

Now there are some who would say that John isn't referring to Christians at all here . . . that John is referring to Christians who will be confident in His appearing and those who aren't really Christians will shrink away from His coming.

The trouble with that view is multiple:

- First, John is speaking to his children in the faith (v. 28).
- Secondly, John tells his children that the purpose for abiding with Christ includes not being ashamed at His appearance.
- Thirdly, John uses the middle voice for this shrinking away – a reference to the believer's own feelings of shame.
- Fourthly, John uses the first-person, plural subject of the verb – in other words, John isn't saying “They will shrink away”; he's saying here, “so that *we* – little children – *we* will not shrink away from Him in shame.”^{xi}

The picture John paints here is not of an unsaved individual but of a born-again believer who has allowed sin to abide in his life rather than the fellowship of Christ to abide in his life.

And that individual, standing before Christ one day at the Bema seat, will be just as ashamed as Adam and Eve were when God came to walk with them. They didn't run to meet Him, they hid from Him in shame.

I find it interesting that only John the Apostle will talk about, in his second epistle, the concept of forfeiting your full reward because of unrepentant sin. Forfeiting, not your salvation, but your full reward (**2 John 8**); which is an obvious reference to the Bema seat evaluation of the believer before Christ where He rewards us for faithful living.

I believe that's the concept here in **First John 2** – the idea of remaining totally open before the Lord – with daily confessing of our sin to Him so that we can enjoy abiding fellowship with Him now – and then, should He come at any moment, we will have openness before Him and not shame.

And by the way, the incentive here isn't just that we might hurt ourselves – as if to think, “Man, I might've gotten another sapphire for my crown!” No, not just hurting ourselves and our cache or rewards, but much deeper than that, not wanting to hurt Him . . . not wanting to grieve His Spirit . . . not wanting to rob from Him worship due His glorious name.

Warren Wiersbe writes about a group of teenagers who were enjoying a party, and someone suggested that they go over to a certain restaurant for a good time. One of the young women, Jan, said to her date, “I'd rather you took my on home . . . my parents don't approve of that place.” One of the girls sarcastically said to her, “Oh, you afraid your father will hurt you?” “No,” Jan replied, “I'm not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him.”^{xii}

John is effectively saying, Let there be a preoccupation with living for Him in light of His coming for you . . . so that there will be unbridled joy at his appearing – both ways – in your openness toward Him and His commendation toward you.

This coming day should stay on our minds – the preoccupation of those captivated by their new identity.

Preoccupation!

The second characteristic of our new identity is:

2. Exhilaration

3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

The opening words of John in verse 1 are literally, Look – Behold – or even, “Look at this!”^{xiii}

Look at this manner of love – this kind of love which the Father has bestowed on us.

The words “**this kind of love**” or “**how great a love**” or perhaps in your translation it reads, “**what manner of love**,” is a word that only shows up a few times in the New Testament.

A literal translation is, “from what country does this come?” It's foreign to us . . . what country did this come from?

It implies a reaction of astonishment and admiration.^{xiv}

The disciples used this word after Jesus stood up rebuked the wind and the waves and they immediately hushed and became perfectly calm.

The men said to each other, “**What manner of man is this?**” (**Matthew 8:27**)

What country is this Man really from . . . we would say, “What planet is He from?”

John writes, “**Look at the love of God** – what planet did this love come from – as if to say, we know nothing of the kind of love here on planet earth!”

“Can you believe this kind of love God has for us?!”

And look further at what John writes – **He bestowed it on us** – which means we didn't earn it, we didn't buy it, we don't deserve it – it's a gift granted to us.

And the verb translated **bestowed** is in the perfect tense which means **He permanently bestowed it on us** – in other words, it'll never be revoked or withdrawn.^{xv}

We can never ever be separated from the love of God which He bestowed on us. Paul wrote, **I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39)**

In other words:

*His love is so high, we can never get over it;
His love is so deep, we can never get to the bottom
of it;*

*His love is so wide, we can never get around it;
His love is so long, we'll never come to the end of
it!^{xvi}*

The hymn writer put it this way:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade*

*To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.^{xvii}*

The love of God for us – **John says here**,
“Would you look at that!”

There is this obvious sense of exhilaration over this new identity – notice exactly what John has in mind about this gift of love? Notice – **v. 1, that we should be called children of God, and such we are.**

The world doesn't think all that much of us – they didn't think much of Jesus either – which is what John means in that last phrase – **the world does not know us because it did not know Him.**

But that doesn't matter – look at what God thinks of us.

We are **called** children of God. The aorist passive tense of the verb means that it is actually God who is calling us “children”^{xviii}

God is introducing us as “His children!”

The world might call you a lot of things – God calls you His children.

A couple of Sunday nights ago after the Chapel Hour, a young mother came up to me with her adopted toddler and said, “The adoption papers are finalized and official and he now has our family name – so although you've seen us around, I wanted to come up here and formally introduce you to my son.”

He has a new identity . . . a new family and a new name.

John Phillips summarizes that there are three ways you can get into a family.

You can be born into the family in the usual way – and that's the life principle – whereby the life of the parent is passed on to the offspring.

Or you can be adopted into a family – that the law principle. Papers are drawn up and legally executed, and the new family member enters into all the rights and privileges enjoyed by a natural born child.

That's the New Testament concept of adoption, by the way – under Roman law, adoption was a legal contract where a man chose someone outside the family to become a member of his family and an heir to his estate. Often times, adoptions took place between grown adults.^{xix}

The third way you can enter into a family is by marriage – by means of the love principle, where both husband and wife are legally members of each other's family, even as they create their own.^{xx}

What a great summation.

Which leads to great exhilaration.

The exhilarating point of our own inclusion into the family of God is that we've become members by virtue of all three principles!

We're been born again into His family – as children born of the Spirit – that's the principle of life;

We've been adopted into the Family of God with all the rights and privileges as legal heirs of Divine royalty – through Christ we've fulfilled the requirements of the law.

And we've been chosen as the bride of Christ – chosen by our kinsman redeemer, our bridegroom – and made members of His Father's family by the principle of love.

So John can write, **as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God.**

What right do you have to be a child of God? How can you claim such an identity? You have the right through the principle of life, through the principle of the law; you have the right through the principle of love.

In his book, *Why Jesus?*, an author wrote of an orphanage in India, built by believers and where countless children with deformities from birth have received medical help and loving attention. One little boy was often passed over for adoption because of a particular brain disorder that doesn't always connect thoughts together. At about nine years of age he became somewhat despondent as he saw his housemates being selected by families and leaving. He began asking, “Why wasn't anyone choosing him?”

Through an incredible series of events, a couple from Texas, who had already adopted one child from the same orphanage, called to ask if this boy was still there. Through the love in these prospective parent's hearts, and the generosity of the couple who established the orphanage in agreeing to cover all the costs of this extra adoption, the day was set for this little boy to taken to his new home.

The day was set for this little boy to be taken to his new home. The special part of the thrill for him included the fact that he would be reunited with one of the little boys who had been his housemate at one time . . . they would now become brothers.

His actual name was difficult to pronounce, although it was a typical name in his native setting. His adoptive parents sent him a new name they had chosen for him and planned to give him at his adoption – Anson Josiah. The initials would be easy for him and everyone else to say and remember – AJ.

The orphanage staff created a special name tag for him and wrote on hit his initials. He began walking all around the campus as he waited for his new parents to come for him – he began telling everyone as he pointed to his name tag – “You can call me AJ . . . my name is AJ.”

There's one word to describe how that kid felt – exhilaration.

John wraps up verse 1 by reminding us that the world isn't gonna get our joy . . . John writes, *the world doesn't know you* . . . this is a phrase that speaks of depreciation . . . they look down on you . . . you're nobody.

John effectively adds, and they looked down on Jesus too . . . who's He? Who are you?!

You just walk around tapping your chest so to speak and saying, “My name is Christian . . . you can call me AJ . . . Adopted by Jesus.”

Beloved we have a new identity and with it a preoccupation as we wait for Christ; exhilaration because we belong to Christ.

If you can believe it – the Triune God has secured you for His family by every means possible:

- God the Father chose you by His love;
- Jesus Christ paid the adoption fees with His own life and blood;
- And the Holy Spirit has signed, sealed and secured you by His indwelling presence to make sure you get delivered to the right heavenly home address where you will live forever!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/5/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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ii Excerpts from USA Today, J. Craig Anderson, *Identity Theft Growing* (4/14/2013)

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iv Ibid

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vi James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John* (Baker, 1979), p. 77

vii Robert Lightner, *The Epistles of John & Jude* (AMG Publishers, 2003), p. 42

viii Adapted from Roy L. Laurin, *First John: Life at its Best* (Kregel, 1987), p. 102

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x Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 789

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xx Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of John (Kregel, 2003), p. 89