

What Then Am I?

Selected Passages

Attribution

German Psychologist Erich Fromm said

“If I am what I have and I lose what I have, who then am I?”

Fromm, like many, many Psychologist and so-called “thinkers” were and are vastly confused about where someone gets their identity from. They believe it comes from some perception of self that originates with whatever they can think of or call a part of them. This could refer to anything from talents and abilities, to material things, to achievements their place in the social world around them. They draw their self image and identity, sadly from outside of themselves and especially, from outside of the reasons and cause that we were created and placed in the world to begin with.

Think about it for a moment. God created man, and even went so far as to create Adam and Eve in such a fashion as they were clearly interdependent and had to lean on each other to make it in the world around them and into which God had placed them. It is sadly true that sin entered the world due to Adam’s deliberate and rebellious sin and passed to all men as a part of the resulting curse of God. Eve was deceived by Satan/the serpent and partook of the “forbidden fruit”, but Adam’s sin was very much a function that he KNEW was forbidden by God.

This is extremely important for us to know and understand. Adam and Eve did not cease to each other’s partners/spouses. They lost and suffered greatly because of their failing, but it did not result in eternal damnation for them. They died physically, but they did not endure spiritual or eternal death. God still allowed/caused our Lord Jesus to descend from them (Luke 1). The significance here is that Adam and Eve never ceased to be the ones from whom the Lord would descend despite the fact that they lost all that they had because of the sin in which they partook and the curse that resulted from it.

We might argue then that they never ceased to “BE” the progenitors of the coming Savior of all. What is significant as well is to remember that they were never that progenitor because of what they did or accomplished. They were such because of the creative work of God and because of His gracious ministry to them after that fall in using them and draw from their loins the ones who would start man of they way to producing the Savior/Messiah. They were NEVER what they were because of what they had. In the time immediately after the fall they lost what they “had” in the form of the garden, the wonderful capacity to walk with God, etc. In fact, as we have alluded to, they actually, in many ways, gained in what they possessed, and yet, remained essential the same – they were the ones whom God used to begin the long trek to the coming Messiah/Savior.

We might say this same essential thing about many of the family of God who are recorded in God's Word. We could speak about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, the great OT Prophets, the NT Apostles especially including Paul. I'd like particularly to draw attention to what Paul had to say to the Colossian church in that Book.

“ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” (Col. 1:3-8)

We have some insight here as to how and where the believer ought to draw their sense of self. Unlike so much of those who give “tips” and instruction for this idea in our world today, we need to draw our sense of who we are from God's Authoritative Word and use what it has to say to help us define just who it that God sees us to be and thus parallel our own sense of self as well. I can't tell you how often and sin what a quantity I have heard and read, even seen instruction on defining self that has much more to do with the world's wisdom than it does with what God has to tell us. This is not to say that we cannot hold as valuable what we do or have “at all”. There are many believers who do excellent and valuable things as parts of our living and being in this world. But whatever those things are, our identity MUST come from what we are and what we will inherit in Christ. Paul says this identity includes a number of definite and specific items:

1. First, we need to recognize that having faith is NOT just something we did at some time in our past, but rather it was such a thing and from that time on, in the lives of genuine believers, colored our lives, helping to define them and so giving us at least a portion of our present identity.
2. Likewise, because love for others, in particular, of the other saints with which we associate and have fellowship, that love serves as another aspect of our “self” as well. It is not, as #1 did not, serve as a single or occasional thing that we have done. It is now a part of who we are.
3. We also identify ourselves as people of “hope” The hope we have is not “hope” in the worldly sense of the gambler hoping for a good fall of the dice or deal of the cards. Rather, it is the hope of one who trusts his job or savings to provide for his needs. It is the hope of one who has confidence in the love of a spouse and therefore does not “keep and eye on them”. Our hope rests on the word of our Lord, His promises concerning what our eternal destiny will be. To make it a bit steadier in application, those who

have their hope in Christ and the inheritance He has given to us, are not those who search around for religions that work, or doctrines that fulfill or give them pleasure.

4. Likewise, our self is tied and our “identity” is tied and strengthened by what we own or what we can accomplish, but rather it is fed by the preaching, teaching and reading we do of God’s Word and what it tells us and how it strengthens and defines.
5. The one thing that we might see that is a part of what we “do” is, as Paul says to the Colossians here, the fruit that we bear in Christ and for His glory. It is interesting too, that Paul specifically mentions that this “fruit” came and has persisted “*since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth...*”. The idea here is they must think of their fruit as having come and stayed and that it is thus a part of what we call their “identity”.
6. A sixth thing here is that they learned all of this from Epaphras, whom Paul calls “our dear fellow servant”, and Paul then goes on and speaks of him as one “ who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” They were those who thought of themselves as ones who heard and put into action the truth of God’s Word.
7. Lastly, it is clear that they identified themselves as ones who Loved God and they lived that love in a sufficient fashion so as that it was a part of them and was seen and identified by those around them.

The final point for what we have discussed here is that our “personal identity” is not wrapped up in worldly and/or human things. Rather it is a function and/or a demonstration of our walk and relationship with our God. That is not a silly and dependent excuse as some in the world say religion is these days. Because what we are is tied up, rather, in what we have in the Lord Jesus and in what we have become as He has used and done work in and through us. That is where our “self” must be understood to spring from. It may take some work, but this is where our efforts must be aimed.