

Weekly Reflection – Abiding in Our True Identity

Illustration from Greek Mythology: Two poems traditionally credited to Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain characters called Sirens. Sirens, who pretend to be beautiful women with amazing voices, try to entice and allure sailors, who pass their island. They convince them they just want to entertain them with beautiful melodies. What they really want, however, is to kill them.

One of their most famous stories is the Sirens' attempt to lure Odysseus and his crew as they passed on their home voyage to Ithaca following the Trojan War. Advised by Circe, Odysseus had a plan. He had himself tied to his ship's mast so that he could hear the Sirens' beautiful song and not be able to steer the ship to land while the rest of his crew were made immune by blocking their ears with wax and so they all safely sailed on out of harm's way.

Another hero the Sirens tried to capture was Jason as he and his Argonauts passed on their way to find the Golden Fleece. Jason, confident in the musical abilities of his talented crew member Orpheus, did not bother with wax but drowned out the Sirens' call with Orpheus' exceptional lute playing. Jason and his crew were so captivated by Orpheus' music that they were not enticed by the music of the Sirens and they sailed safely by.

Which story better depicts how you are trying to live the Christian life? Odysseus and Jason illustrate two ways that exist in the pursuit of victory in the lives of Christians. Some, like Odysseus, long to hear the Siren song of sin but are strapped to the mast of legalism to prevent them from yielding. Others have wax in their ears, in order to drown out the Siren song of sin. The sons and daughters of God are not meant to be prisoners chained against their will to the mast of the cross by dogma, doctrine and duty, longing for the deadly embrace of the Sirens. It becomes a life of do this and don't do that. What can I do and still be a Christian.

However, other Christians are like Jason and find the Siren song of sin no longer captivates them, for they have heard a sweeter song. They still say no to sin, they still resist sin, but it's because they have heard a better song.

The Better Song

What is the better song? What is the song that can so captivate our hearts that we are no longer enticed by the song of the world? One title for the song may be the song of grace and love. Within that song of grace and love is our true identity. You know how you can hear a song and then that song gets stuck in your head? That's my hope, that we would get the song of our true identity stuck in our hearts.

John 15:4-5 - Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. I think one of the most powerful and life changing truths in understanding the New Covenant is our identity in Christ. Our identity as Christians is we are "in (abiding) Jesus" and "Jesus in (abiding) us." The terms "In Him" and "In Christ" are found around 180 times in the New Testament and Paul uses them around 143 times in his Epistles. Then add the dozens of times "Christ in you" is used and the dozens more that talk about the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and it should wake us up to the vital importance of understanding our true identity and living in, or abiding in, that true identity. Paul understood the reason that any believer struggles with sin was primarily rooted in an "identity crisis." He knew that once they were "awakened" to their true identity in Christ, a better song, that knowledge alone would transform their desires and behavior.

Picture of the Abiding Life

Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Every true follower of Christ believes that Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. But many Christians basically stop there. They believe they will go to heaven, because they've been forgiven of their sin. But the problem is they're not really sure how to live the Christian life until they get there. As a result, many Christians live frustrated, empty or even defeated Christian lives. I'll tie myself to the mast to try to keep myself from sinning. If that's the case for you I want you to hear this truth that is crystal clear in Galatians 2:20 and throughout the Bible that so many Christians are missing out on.

Jesus died for you so He might live in you and through you.

The reason why so many Christians live frustrated, empty, even defeated Christian lives is because so few of us have grasped the mammoth reality that Jesus died for us so He might live in us and through us. You have an entirely new life now, not just in eternity. We're talking about now on earth, a new life now, today, tomorrow. ***And that new life is the very life of Jesus.*** Listen to what the Word of God says: ***It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."*** (Colossians 3:4 ESV) This means that between now and Heaven we are called to start living increasingly like who we really are. Our life is the life of Jesus. Our life is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not just religious talk, or just an idea or Christian principle; this is your real-true-exact-actual-valid-factual-literal-precise-genuine-concrete-undisputable-unembellished identity RIGHT NOW.

The Christian life is a totally exchanged life.

There's a total exchange that's happened there. The old me which wanted my ways over God's ways has been crucified, then in exchange, I've not gotten a refurbished, improved version of me; I have received something altogether different. I now have Jesus' life in me. This is so significant. Jesus did not die to make you better. Jesus died to make you new, totally new. ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*** (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV) The old me is gone; the new me is here. The new me is Christ in me. ***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*** (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV) For those who are followers of Christ, who have been crucified with Christ, just think about what this means. You have given Jesus your sin, your broken life, your death; Jesus has in exchange given you, His righteousness, His eternal life.

The Christian life is a supernaturally empowered life.

With this exchange comes supernatural power. ***Romans 8:10-11 - But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. [11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*** Just think about the wonder of these words: "Christ is in you." Who? Christ. Jesus. God in the flesh. The One Who spoke, and the world came into being. He said, "World" and world happened. He is the One living in you. The Holy Spirit is in you giving you life; the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

The Christian life is a completely secure life.

Jesus does not come and go based on your performance. All who have been crucified with Christ, who now live in Christ and Christ in them, are secure. And not just in the future, you are secure now in Christ.

- ***I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

Galatians 2:20 ESV

- ***"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit," Ephesians 1:13 ESV***
- ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 ESV***
- ***"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3 ESV***

Your identity is Christ in You, sealed by the Holy Spirit, You in Christ, and Christ in God. That's a complete picture of your life. So, I'm thinking that you're pretty secure. ***Romans 8:31-32, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*** When you are in Jesus, nothing can stand against you, nothing. Not even death itself.

Ian Thomas biography

Born in 1914 within the city of London, Ian Thomas dedicated his life to the service of the Lord as a child. At age 19, Ian became a windmill of activity, every moment of his day was packed tight with doing things: preaching, talking, and counseling with a passionate desire to win souls for Christ. But he found the more he did, the more energy he expended, the less happened.

He states: "I became deeply depressed, because I really loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart; I wanted to be made a blessing to my fellow men. But I discovered that forever doubling and redoubling my efforts in order to win souls, rushing here and dashing there, taking part in this campaign, taking part in that campaign, preaching in the morning, preaching in the evening, talking to the Bible class, witnessing to this one, counseling with another, did nothing, nothing, nothing to change the utter barrenness, the emptiness, the uselessness of my activity. I tried to make up with noise what I lacked in effectiveness and power."

In a state of spiritual exhaustion, one night about midnight, he got upon his knees and cried out God in despair. He continues the story: "I said, 'Oh God, I know that I am saved. I love Jesus Christ. I am perfectly convinced that I am converted. With all my heart I want to serve Thee. I have tried to my uttermost and I am a hopeless failure! So far as doing anything more, I am finished. It is useless for me to continue like this. I hate this double life!" That night things happened.

"I can honestly say that I had never once heard from the lips of men the message that came to me then. I never had read it in print; but God, that night, simply focused upon me the Bible message of Christ Who is our Life."

"It just came from every area of God's Word, and very kindly and very lovingly the Lord seemed to make it plain to me that night, through my tears of bitterness: 'You see, for seven years, with utmost sincerity, you have been trying to live for Me, on My behalf, the life that I have been waiting for seven years to live through you. I have been there the whole time. All the things you have been pleading for, all the things for which you have been asking, have been yours since the day seven years ago, at your request and invitation, I came into your heart at that Crusader boys' camp; but you see, although you have given mental consent to the truth that I have been in your heart, and have accepted it as a theory, you have lived totally ignoring the fact. You have been busy trying to do for Me all that only I can do through you. Now supposing I am your life, and you begin to accept it as a fact, then I am your strength! You have been pleading and begging for that for seven years. I am your victory in every area of your life, if you want it! I am the One to whom it is perfectly natural to go out and win souls; and I know precisely

where to go and find them. Why don't you begin to reckon upon Me and say, 'Thank you.' I simply said to the Lord Jesus Christ that night, 'Well, it is that or nothing! If this is true, then I am going to thank You for it in sheer cold-blooded faith.... I am going to thank You that if You are my life, and this is true, then You are my victory, You are my strength, You are my power, You are my future! You are the One Who is going to go out now, clothed with me to do all that I so hopelessly have been trying to do in the past seven years!'

"I got up the next morning to an entirely different Christian life, but I want to emphasize this: I had not received one iota more than I had already had for seven years! I had had the Lord Jesus, equal to all my need and in whom I had been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly things, for the whole of those seven years; but I stepped out on my way to the university that morning with a new song in my heart. I was saying, 'Lord Jesus, I thank You for the first time in my life, this is Your day! I no longer have the burden of running my own life.'

"At the end of five weeks God made it very plain to me He had something more to say. He had just begun to whet my appetite. He said, 'That is My life. You know perfectly well that it has nothing to do with you, because it happened overnight! It is not a new method. It is not a new technique that you have learned. It is simply My life; being what I am, doing the inevitable. This is now the thing you have got to realize: you cannot have My life for your program. You can only have My life for My program!'"

Such a life, Ian Thomas would often declare, is not a life of inactivity but of Christ-activity. It is not what you can do for God, but what He can do through you. "It is all in Christ, you see; and all of Christ is yours!" Would you be willing to surrender everything and pray, "I do not want any other program, any other kind of life, but the one that You Yourself are prepared to live in and through me!"?

What to do now: Learn what the Word of God says about you. Get that song in your heart!

1. If you picked up a "Who I am in Christ" bookmark read through it daily, as well as the corresponding Scriptures.
2. Read John chapter 14 through John chapter 17; maybe read one chapter a day and then repeat. This is what Jesus taught hours before He went to the cross to die for us. Jesus is teaching us how we are to live while we wait for His return. Read one chapter a day looking for truths that Jesus has said about who He is and about who you are. What has Jesus promised to give? What help did He promise us? Whose strength did He say we will need to live by? Whose wisdom? Whose joy? Whose peace? Whose love?