

REMADE

Embracing Your Complete Identity
in Christ

PAUL TAUTGES


P U B L I S H I N G
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To founding pastor Armand Tiffe, my fellow elders, and my brothers and sisters in Christ at Cornerstone Community Church in Mayfield Heights, Ohio. It is a joy to grow in grace together with you.

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Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV's alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* ("brothers and sisters").

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INTRODUCTION



1. A Triple Lens

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Each one of my adult children has a three-lens camera built into their phone. The multiple lenses work simultaneously, enabling the photographer to zoom in on a baby’s adorable face, get a wide-angled view of an ocean sunset, capture better images in low-light conditions, and increase depth of field. The combined work of these lenses enhances photo quality and results in a sharper image.

In a similar way, focusing on our Christian identity through three lenses—those of saint, sinner, and sufferer—gives a clearer and more comprehensive picture of who we are and what God is up to as he works out his good purpose for us in Christ.

The Scripture above clarifies that God’s purpose for every believer (“we all”) is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ by *beholding* the One into whose image we are being transformed. This is key to our spiritual growth. As we focus on the Lord, we are progressively changed, “from one degree of glory to another,” into “the

same image”: the image of Christ. The Spirit is working to transform every believer in a process called *sanctification*, which is the clearly stated will of God (see Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). This inside-out work, accomplished by “the Lord who is the Spirit,” nonetheless requires our active participation. We must keep on beholding!

When we look at our identity through the lenses of saint, sinner, and sufferer, then our understanding of ourselves, our sin, and our circumstances will align with God’s view, which is revealed in Scripture. As a result, we will become more secure in our standing before God, strengthened in our battle against indwelling sin, and steadfast in our suffering.

This triple-lens perspective is superior to a single-lens view.

If you look at yourself *only* through the sinner lens, it’s likely you’ll feel defeated by your daily struggle against temptation. You may lose sight of the reality that, in Christ, you have been raised up with the One who already conquered sin, death, and the devil, and you may consequently forget that you can persevere in the Spirit and walk in newness of life (see Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1–10).

If you peer through *only* the lens of your exalted position as a saint, then you may begin to think you are stronger than you really are, even invincible! You may forget you are a fellow struggler on the road to holiness alongside those who are ensnared by sin, and you may fail to remember the warning “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

If you think of yourself *only* as a sufferer, then you may fall prey to the crippling power of victimhood. You may begin to see yourself as a passive pawn on the chessboard of life instead of as an active worshipper of your good and sovereign God, who is always working out his wise purposes for your good and his glory.

In this book, I aim to help you to look through all three lenses at your identity, to help you to take a biblical “selfie,” so that your heart soars in joyful worship of the Savior in whose image you are being remade.



TALK TO YOURSELF. Which of the three lenses do you tend to look at yourself through—perhaps almost exclusively? How might that distort how you understand your relationship to the Lord? (It's OK if you don't know how to answer this question yet.)

TALK TO GOD. Ask the Lord to use the Scriptures and counsel in this book to develop and round out your understanding of Christian identity, so that you may experience steady progress toward God's goal of remaking you in the image of Christ.

TALK TO OTHERS. If this threefold lens is a new perspective for you, consider going to a wise Christian and asking them to teach and mentor you in your faith.



SAINT

PRACTICING YOUR POSITION IN CHRIST

The purpose of this first part is to help you to begin to look at yourself through the *largest* of the three lenses: *your standing before God in Christ*. Your first and primary identity as a Christian is firmly rooted in your union with Christ. Every other part of your identity is secondary to this. Mike Emlet makes this point so well: “We are saints who suffer. We are saints who sin. But we are saints nonetheless at our core.”¹

In this part, you will learn what it means to be *in Christ* and how to begin to practice your new position—that is, to see what it might look like for you to apply the fact of your union with Christ to your everyday life.

1. Michael R. Emlet, *Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 26.

A NEW IDENTITY



2. You Are a Saint by Calling

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:2)

In the religious tradition I grew up in, a saint is a deceased person whose earthly life of sacrifice and devotion to God is officially recognized by the church and whose name is venerated. You might imagine how surprised I was when I learned that every Christian is already a saint. I'll be honest, it took a little while for this truth to sink in. Perhaps this is news to you as well. But this teaching is foundational to our understanding of our identity in Christ.

Today's Scripture highlights this truth: we are saints by calling. The word *saints* comes from the Greek word meaning "holy ones." To be a saint is to be set apart. Christians don't become saints through some super-sacred monastic lifestyle or by climbing the ladder of religious hierarchy. We are "called to be saints." It's our position before God from the moment of conversion onward. We have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus." *Sanctified* is also from the root word meaning "holy" or "set apart to God."

Like the believers at Corinth, however, we don't always behave like saints. Sadly, at times we think and act more like the world around us than like the God who saved us. Therefore, the challenge that lies before us as Christians is to put into practice our position in Christ—to become who we already are in our standing before God.

You are a saint. God has set you apart for his particular use. He has called you to live as one of his holy ones while remaining in a world that is not always friendly toward those who follow Christ. By living this way, you reflect his holiness.

Be encouraged to know that Jesus prayed about this. “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:15–17). Jesus prayed for your sanctification then, and he prays for you now (see Heb. 7:25).

Your sanctification is threefold. First, it is *positional*: God is calling you to himself (see Gal. 1:6). Second, it is *progressive*: the Holy Spirit works continually to empower your daily battle against indwelling sin as he conforms you to the image of Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Third, your sanctification is *ultimate*: one day, you will be completely sanctified, or glorified (see 1 John 3:2). According to Scripture, God saved you to impart his holiness to you: “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). You now walk on Sanctification Road.

Jesus called you out of the world to live in the world but without being of the world (see John 17:11, 14–15). The Spirit performs this sanctifying work through the Word, which Jesus says “is truth” (John 17:17). And take heart—today's verse also reassures you that you are not alone in this calling. You are part of a community of saints, the church. You are a saint “together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We, the church, are called out of the world but left in the world as a light and testimony to the sanctifying power of Christ.



TALK TO YOURSELF. The primary instrument that the Spirit uses to sanctify you is the Word of God. What place does Scripture currently occupy in your daily and weekly schedule?

TALK TO GOD. Take a few minutes to thank God for calling you to himself through the gospel and for providing you with his Scriptures in your own language.

TALK TO OTHERS. Discuss threefold sanctification with another believer. Ask them to share key lessons they've learned on Sanctification Road.



3. You Are a Work in Progress

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
(Phil. 1:6)*

“I reviewed the results of your brain scan. There’s evidence that you had a very small stroke.” I stopped. I read the opening sentences of my doctor’s email several times . . . and then read on. “It took place in the part of your brain that controls balance and coordination, and is what we call a ‘silent stroke,’ which means you never knew you had it.” I learned it was impossible to know when the stroke had occurred because I had not had a test done previously to use for comparison.

After months of appointments related to chronic migraines, this news was both comforting and troubling. I had had a *very small* stroke, nothing more; that was a relief. And it was *not* in the part of the brain that affects thinking and communication, both of which affect relationships and are necessary for me to fulfill my life's calling as a pastor and teacher. Still, it was unsettling. I'd had a *stroke*, and I didn't even know it! Could it happen again? If so, could the next one be worse?

When difficulties enter our lives and questions fill our minds, anxiety may seize control and lead us down less-than-helpful paths. Therefore, we need to take every stray thought captive and bring it in line with Scripture (see 2 Cor. 10:5). Today's verse is a powerful reminder that the God who "began a good work" in us—the work of redeeming us from our sin and conforming us to the image of his Son—is the same God who will continue that work. The apostle wrote these words to build up believers by assuring them of God's commitment to the process. Here we see our threefold identity.

First, Paul addresses his readers as "saints in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:1). This doesn't mean they've achieved some sort of spiritual plateau, that they've "arrived." The Bible refers to all believers as *saints*, meaning that if you are a believer, you are *in Christ*. You have been joined to Christ by faith, and God sees you in union with his Son. You have been set apart by God, for God, and to God. Your new standing before God is all by God's doing; it's all of grace. And it is a present reality, not something for the distant future. God sees you as a saint—now!

Second, though believers are set apart as saints, we continue to battle indwelling sin. Positionally, before God, you are a saint. Experientially, however, you are still a *sinner* in the process of being sanctified as you struggle to live righteously. Therefore, you must lay aside your pride to "count others more significant" than yourself (Phil. 2:3), and you must discipline yourself toward Christlikeness (see 3:12–14). Ultimately, you will make ongoing progress because

“it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:13).

Third, you are a *sufferer*. It is “for the sake of Christ” that you “not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29). Suffering is expected. He who began a good work in you will surely finish it “at the day of Jesus Christ”—the day of his return. Until then, God wants to accomplish a lot of growth in your life. Suffering is one of the instruments he uses to develop Christlike character and strengthen your faith in him.

No matter what we experience in our earthly journey as Christians, we may be confident that God will use it all to nurture a deeper trust in our relationship with him.



TALK TO YOURSELF. Do you sometimes get discouraged that you are not further along in your growth as a Christian? Think briefly about what your life was like before you met Jesus.

TALK TO GOD. In a journal or notebook, write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his promise to finish the good work he started in you when you first came to believe in Jesus. Even though you may not be as far along as you would like to be, express thanks that you are not still what you used to be.

TALK TO OTHERS. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4–9. Write a note or send a text to a fellow believer that points out one way you see Christ reflected in them.

