



Strength of youth

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Who am I?

“...God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”

Acts 27:23b.

“Who am I?” This is the second most important question to ask and answer. Now and throughout all of life, every morning when you awake, every night before you go to sleep, and before every decision you make between waking and sleeping, you should be answering this question of self-identity.¹ But before asking ourselves this, we must be aware of the *first* most important question, which is “*Who is God?*” Catechism students studying the “Essentials of Reformed Doctrine” will recognize this if they remember the six loci of Reformed doctrine, the *first* being Theology, which answers this

question. Let us be sure to start here. Begin with this question every day, for if you do not first know who God is, you will “mess up” the knowledge of who you are. Only in keeping that crucial knowledge of God’s identity in mind will one rightly answer the *second* most important question—number two of the six loci (Anthropology)—“*Who am I?*”

Even secular, modern psychology today recognizes the critical necessity of self-awareness. The world and its professional (and unprofessional) counselors say things such as, “He’s just trying to figure out who he is”; or “Give her a break. She’s still searching for what her identity is”; or “Be yourself. Don’t try to be someone else.” There is some truth to these claims. Major social and emotional problems arise when young people grow physically but lag in their knowledge of who they are. Self-identity affects your direction in life, your pursuits of higher education and occupation, major decisions

¹ The idea for this article came from a chapter in David Murray’s book *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 106.

about whom to date and marry, your confidence level, happiness, friendships, and overall behavior.

While the world and today's psychologists realize the need to answer this crucial question, most have erroneous methods of finding an answer. To the question "Who am I?" the answer is often determined this way: "Whatever my feelings tell me." The result is confusion. One extreme example of this is the LGBTQ movement. "Who am I? Man, Woman, or something else?" And the answer given is essentially, "You are what you feel." Feeling autonomous, man foolishly imagines that he determines his own gender by his feelings.

But what about you? Do you use the method of feelings to answer the second most important question also? As a senior colleague of mine puts it, "Feelings are real, but they are not the source of truth."

High school and college cultures are breeding grounds for many wrong methods of finding an answer to this question. "Who am I?" The answer, though often unspoken, is, "I am what others think of me." What folly it is to have your identity sway with the fickle opinions and judgments of the masses! While there might be some truth in what others think, lies abound. Do skewed standards of beauty get to determine whether you are beautiful? Do opinions shaped by gossip get to determine if you have good character? If people think your identity should be a cool drunk or conceited flirt, is that who you are? Is that how you should behave? Absolutely not! We may not and must not be defined by what others think of us.

There are many wrong ways to determine who you are. Your own feelings and the feelings of others are unreliable. Basing it on your appearance in the mirror is also a faulty manner. Acne, hair-styles, scars, tanning, piercings, sickness, pregnancy, make-up, aging, and any change of your appearance does not change who you are! Your perceived status as you work quietly to beat others in this over-competitive culture does not determine who you are. The troubling memory of past sins repented of is not your identity.

Men often define themselves by what they *do*. "Who am I?" The male mind generally answers: "Student-athlete." "Ford pickup driver." "Hard worker." Approach an adult man at church and ask him to introduce himself. Most likely, after giving his name, he will give his job description. However, while one's deeds do demonstrate his identity, they do not determine who he is! A student-athlete does not become someone else when he graduates from school and stops playing sports. A Ford pickup driver does not become someone else because he totals his truck and gets a Toyota. A hard-working man

does not become someone else if he gets fired and is forced to change occupations.

While this is often true of men, women generally define themselves by their *earthly relationships*. Ask a woman to describe who she is, and she will probably (after giving her name) explain who her husband is and who her children, parents, and friends are. However, while these relationships do affect one's identity, they should not be of primary consideration. What if friends betray you? What if you move out of town and find new friends? What happens when your relationships end with death? Does your identity change?

Beware. Satan is in the business of a kind of identity theft. He does not hack and phish to steal our driver's license and Social Security numbers, date of birth, and other personal information to ruin our finances and reputation. But instead he engages in the identity theft of stealing from our consciousness the true knowledge of who we are. Through pride, busyness, opinions of others, worldly ideas, disappointments, and sins, he is working to distract us from the true and significant answers to this vital question.²

To find the correct answers to this second most important question, we must consider not what we think of ourselves but what God thinks of us. We are not what we have made ourselves to be, but what God has made us to be.

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! (Ps. 139:14-17).

A better way to phrase this question is, "Who am I in God's eyes?" Consider four of the most important answers.

I am chosen by God in love. Election is not just a doctrine. It is not meant to be a mere intellectual answer. It is the deepest truth of who I am! Out of the billions of sinful specks of mankind, He chose me by name—not because I was better than the rest but because in His mysterious good pleasure, He loves me. Will that ever change? No! Even if no one chooses to marry me, even if I am not chosen for a specific team or job, even if all choose to forsake me, I must always remind myself that I am chosen by God in His love.

² Murray, *Reset*, 105.

I am righteous in Christ alone. Justification is not for elite theologians. It is the most simple-minded elect's identity! I am the chief sinner, a blaming, excuse-making, stubborn sinner—but I am forgiven. God judges me as one who has already finished suffering for all my sins—past, present, future. He judges me as one who has kept all His commandments perfectly through my life. Why? Only because Jesus did it in my place. Others may judge me harshly, hold a grudge against me, and condemn me. My conscience and Satan's accusations may bring sinful doubts again and again to my mind, but my unchanging identity is that I am righteous in Christ alone.

I am a saint by the Spirit's sanctifying work. Not sinless—not yet—but I am progressing in holiness. Holiness is not for the older, more mature leader in the church, but it is every forgiven sinner's identity, including my own! I am able to say “No!” to increasing pressures of worldliness. I am able to fight addiction and flee temptation. I am able to improve in thankful obedience, in sincere worship, and in disciplined devotions. I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, possessed by God Himself, to be holy as He is holy.

To be child of God is a comfort to every saint. The infinite God, whom neither space nor time can contain and whose power has no limit, is my Father! He has adopted me into His family and kingdom! I am royalty, a prince or princess of the King of heaven. Because I am a precious child whom He holds in His everlasting arms, He allows nothing to touch me against His good will, allows me never to be plucked out of His hands, conforms me more and more into His image.

I am a child belonging to the Most High God. To be a little child is not a shameful idea for my younger sibling to think about. To be child of God is a comfort to every saint. The infinite God, whom neither space nor time can contain and whose power has no limit, is my Father! He has adopted me into His family and kingdom! I am royalty, a prince or princess of the King of heaven. Because I am a precious child whom He holds in His everlasting arms, He allows nothing to touch me against His good will, allows me never to be plucked out of His hands, conforms me more and more into His image.

Search the Scriptures and you will find more wondrous answers to this second most important question. Who am I? I am a pilgrim and stranger on this earth, citizen of the kingdom of heaven, member of the bride of Christ, child of the light, friend of God, slave of Christ, and more. Yes, there are other true answers like these regarding physical beauty, athletic prowess, funny personality, musical talent, and earthly ability. But though significant, these are of lesser significance than the answers of Scripture. Beloved, chosen, righteous, holy child of God, knowing who you are, now *be* who you are.