

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Galatians 3:26-29 on January 14, 2018 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: New Year Revolution

Today's Focus: Identity

Treasure Your True Identity—It's the *New You!*

1. "I'm a child of God."
2. "I'm a saint."
3. "I'm an heir."

It's amazing what we accumulate over time, isn't it? How many of you have lived in the same place for less than a year? Less than 5 years? Less than 10? Less than 25? How many of you have lived in the same place more than 25 years? Have you accumulated a lot of stuff? We've lived in our Franklin home now just over 11 years and it's incredible how much stuff we've accumulated without even trying! But in a couple weeks we're going to be moving to Florida where they don't have basements to store all that extra stuff and where there are some things we're just not going to need anymore. Like parkas, turtlenecks, boots and snow pants! And so the last couple weeks I've been taking trips to area thrift stores a little bit at a time, discarding and donating old clothes that I'm not going to wear anymore. I'm giving them away!

Friends, you have anything you'd like to give away this year? I'm not talking now about all that odd stuff in your basement or the old clothes in your closet. I'm talking about all the other things you've accumulated over the years that you might still be wearing. I'm talking now about the identity labels that you've accumulated over the years. Because let's face it. The identity labels we wear impact us more deeply on the inside than the actual clothes we wear on the outside. You know what I mean? You probably wear a couple labels. Some labels you give yourself. "I'm a loser." Or, "I'm a hot mess." Other labels are given to you. "You're an insecure basket case." "You're a savage jerk." You're perhaps proud of some labels. But other labels trigger feelings of shame. What often happens is that these labels have a way then of becoming part of our core identity over time.

What would your life look like if you began to live the labels God gives you instead? What would your life look like if you could discard the unflattering, inappropriate and flat out false labels of the world and begin instead to treasure your true identity—the new you from God's point of view? Well you know what would happen? There'd be a new year revolution in your life!

That's what the Apostle Paul wanted to see happen in the lives of people he dearly loved—the Galatians. The Galatians were people from a couple different churches that Paul helped to start. He was the first person God used to share the good news about Christ's victory with them. And so now in this letter, he's writing to them because they were having a hard time discarding old labels that

didn't fit anymore or didn't actually fit in the first place. And so Paul is writing to them and passionately pleading with them to treasure their true identity in Christ. He's writing to them to help them take off some of the labels they had been wearing or begun to wear and instead to discard them like old clothes for something far better—being clothed with Christ.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Sounds pretty good, right? But first we need to understand that what the Galatians were doing...is the same thing we often do. It's the same problem. And it's what Satan is always trying to get people to do...wear the wrong identity labels. It's just that the labels he tries to get people to wear change depending on the culture and the place. He customizes his temptations accordingly. But Satan's tactics really haven't changed. People keep falling for the same identity traps.

Check it out. Now one label that the Galatians were tricked into wearing with a twisted sense of pride was being part of the "The circumcision group." Now I know that sounds like sort of a strange club to boast about being a part of, doesn't it? But for them it made a certain amount of cultural sense. You see many of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus took great pride in the fact that they were circumcised because that was the outward sign of the promise God had made long ago to their ancestor named Abraham. So over time many people of Jewish descent started to think, "We're the children of Abraham because look at how we try and live. And because of how we live that's why God loves us."

And so even those Jews who became Christians sometimes struggled to let go of this kind of thinking and lose these labels. What happened as they wore this label of "the circumcision group" is that not only did they start to think that this was the reason why God loved and approved of them, but that they had good reason to look down upon those who were different. And so what you had going on was that in the Galatian churches many of the members didn't have this Jewish background with circumcision and all that. They were unfamiliar with Jewish customs. They didn't know who Abraham was. They didn't grow up trying to follow the law of Moses. They were Gentiles: non-Jews. So now these Gentile Christians were being looked down upon as 2nd class citizens of the kingdom of God. They were being made to feel like they needed to follow Jewish customs and practices to boost their status in the sight of God. They were being told what Jesus did is great...that he got you off to a good start...but it's not enough just to believe in Jesus. You need to become just like us who keep the law! It was work righteousness to the core.

Yikes! Do you see how dangerous this label game can be? When the wrong label becomes a person's primary identity it can lead to a warped and sinful kind of pride. It can make us think we're part of the "in" crowd with God because of who we are or what we've done. Or it can lead to just the opposite—to despair. "I'll never be good enough because I don't know as much as they do." Or, "I'm never measure up because I'm not like so and so."

That's why just like the Galatians we need a new year revolution in our lives, don't we? We need God's Word to reveal what labels we shouldn't be wearing so that we can see what God has given us to wear instead. And that's exactly what God gives us through the Apostle Paul in these verses today: **²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Friends, did you catch that last phrase? It explains how we get our true identity. It's "*according to the promise*." In other words it's based on God's promise of our Savior and not on our performance. Huge difference! You see as we start to talk about our true identity we need to start here—that if our identity were based on our performance then the truth is we'd all be in big time trouble. Because instead of worrying about what other people think and how we measure up to their standards we'd find that the only standard that would really matter is God's. And you know what his standard is? Spotless, flawless, sinless perfection. And not just in terms of outward actions like whether we've always treated others the way we'd want to be treated but also in terms of our inner motives, thoughts, and attitudes which means the reality is none of us would measure up. We'd all fall far short. And so if our core identity were based on our performance we'd be damned as the rightful penalty for those who fall short of God's standard of perfection. Except... for that little phrase which is the theme of the entire Bible...***according to the promise!***

And so God's Word tells us in these verses that there are old clothes that no longer fit us. Our sins, our shortcomings, our performance failures as well as our successes and achievements plus all the labels that the world has slapped on us...these things no longer define us. We don't need to wear them. We are free to discard them. Why? **⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

In other words, through the washing with water of God's Word that is your baptism you have exchanged the filthy old rags of your sins and all the missfitting labels that you wear for the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ your Savior. Treasure your true identity—it's the new you...the real you that's clothed with Christ so that you too can say, "I'm a child of God!"

Earlier in the service we heard about Jesus' baptism. Remember when Jesus was baptized, what did God the Father say about him? **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"** (Mark 1:11). Well, being baptized into Christ means he now says the same thing about you! At your baptism God placed his name on you, brought you to faith in the Savior who died in your place, washed away your sins, and adopted you into his family. Who are you? You can say, "I'm a child of God!"

And if you've been clothed with Christ that means you can also say, "I'm a saint!" Now I realize you may not think of yourself as a saint. Or perhaps the person sitting next to you just chuckled or gave you one of those looks out of the corner of their eye like, "Yeah...right." But this is the difference between an identity based on your performance and one that's based on God's promise. You see as baptized children of God who've been clothed with Christ—we have been given the gift of Christ's perfect performance record. Because who is Jesus? He's our promised Savior...the one who as our substitute fulfilled all of God's laws in our place. He's the one who never sinned, who overcame every temptation, who resisted every custom designed identity trap of the devil, and whose perfect obedience to all of God's commandments is credited to you and me by faith. His perfect holiness is like our set of clothes given us to wear so that when God sees you and me he doesn't see any longer our imperfections and our sins. He sees Christ. And so the most commonly used word for a believer in Jesus in the New Testament is actually the word "saint." A saint is a person who God sees as holy because of Jesus!

Did you see the lines at the car washes earlier this week? Snaking out into the road! People wanted to get the grime and salt off their cars. Their cars needed to be washed. They wanted to be able to see through the windows clearly. Well these are exactly the blessings God gives us through baptism. If you want to see clearly ahead of you and be able to look back and see that it's all been washed clean...remember your baptism. You've been washed. God has forgiven all your sins, even the grimmest, dirtiest parts of your heart and life. You are clean in God's sight. That means you are a saint in the sight of God! And if you're not baptized yet....good news! You don't need to sit there trying to figure out how much to pay like I did at the car wash—whether the basic package or the platinum wash...because this is God's work...God's gift...it's the Gospel! It's free! Just let Pastor Bill or I know and we'd love to give you this amazing gift of baptism from God. Because finally what does it mean?

²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. It means not only can you can say, "I'm a child." "I'm a saint." But also, "I'm an heir." An heir who will receive an eternal inheritance in heaven. An heir, like every believer in Jesus Christ, *according to the promise*. Because the trap that's been set for us is that like the Galatians we would play these spiritual games where we try and rank our status in the sight of God based on our own measurements and comparisons, right?

For example, maybe you heard...this week Jeff Bezos has become the richest person ever—sort of. The Amazon founder's wealth rocketed to \$105.1 billion. That amazing. But if you account for inflation, Bezos has competition. Augustus Caesar of the Roman Empire...his fortune, for example, could be worth a cool \$5 trillion today. Yet no matter how you measure it, “The richest person ever” — that label has a nice sounding ring doesn't it? Wouldn't you like that?

But how much is that label worth if you're not also an heir of heaven?! Now I don't know if Jeff Bezos is a Christian or not. That's not my point. My point is that to believe in Jesus Christ means even if you are the least successful or poorest person on this planet, you're wealthier than your wildest dreams as an heir of heaven! And whether you live in a little apartment or in a spare bedroom in your parent's place...the truth is you have a mansion in the Heavenly Jerusalem where the river of life flows pure and clear and nothing prevents you from being in the shining presence of God's glory forever!

Friends, whose approval have been seeking more than God's? What identity labels have you been wearing that maybe you shouldn't be wearing? Go ahead and put them on the discard pile. It's time for a new year revolution! It's time to treasure your true identity—it's the new you! Because of Jesus you can say, “Who am I? I'm a child of God. I'm a saint. I'm an heir! And Satan...whatever you have to say about all that...the truth is I don't really care...because I belong to Christ. If you've got a problem with that...take it up with him!” Amen.