

Living My Identity in Christ

by Annette Gullick, Copyright 10/1/2001

Lesson Five

Lesson Objective: That students commit to living in a way that reflects their true identity in Christ.

Bible Passage: Col. 3:1-17

Bible Truth: Having died to our sin we get rid of sin in ourselves and put on Christ like qualities.

Memory Verse: Colossians 3: 2, 3

Before You Begin (*prepare ahead of time*): notes of encouragement [see “closing” for directions] and extra blank notes for unexpected students; extra Bibles for students who don’t have one with them, pens, copies of handout “Living like a Child of God”.

Opening:

Have students put their chairs in a circle while one person, “it”, remains standing without a chair in the middle of the circle. Name four or five different types of fruit and assign every person one of those fruits. When the person who is “it” says the name of one of the fruits everyone who chose that fruit must get up and find a new seat while the person in middle tries to take a seat. The person left standing without a chair becomes “it.” If the person in the middle says “fruit basket” everyone has to change places.

When you decide to quit, explain that just like a fruit tree produces things that show what kind of tree they are like blossoms and then fruit, children of God produce fruit that shows who they are.

Interactive Learning

Read the creative reading (or have two students perform it as a skit) then ask:

- *Why do you think Rose had stopped playing the piano?*

- *Rose let the laziness; the pressures of daily life, and her feelings of inadequacy keep her from enjoying what she was made to do. What are some of the things that keep you from really living out who you are in Christ?*

Explain that just as Rose got back into playing the piano through the gentle encouragement of a friend who helped her regain her lost joy of playing, the group is going to come up with several concrete examples of how they can rediscover the joy in their relationship with God and overcome the barriers to their living out their identity in Christ mentioned in the second question. Guide the students to elaborate on any general answers (i.e. read the bible, pray) until they become specific (get up 10 minutes early every morning so I have time to read a section of the Bible. Not hit my little brother when he bugs me.)

Bible Application

Last week we saw that people who have been born into God's family become His children and are described by him as holy, righteous, pure, and dearly loved saints. The Bible says that our "new birth" is a gift from Him that we do not do anything to earn. As Paul wrote,

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2: 8)

We call that act of salvation "justification" and it determines who we are. If you have been justified by Christ's death, you are part of God's family. If you have not been justified and saved from your sins, you are spiritually dead and the Bible says that you are a slave to Satan.

The problem is that those of us who know we are part of God's family often find it hard to understand how we can be called holy and pure when we know that we sin every day. What we see when we look in the mirror is not what God says that He sees. Before we can go any farther in our study we have to decide who we are going to believe—God or ourselves? If our point of view differs from God's, somebody is right and somebody is wrong. Whenever our view differs from God's, there's something He understands that we don't.

From the very beginning of this series we have said that the world tells us that what we do determines who we are. That is why we keep thinking that if we sin it means we are still sinners and cannot be saints. But God says that who we are will determine what we do, that if he has given us a new life we will change from the inside out, we will start to become like Him and love what He loves and hate what He hates. We are going study what this life should look like, as Paul describes it in his letter to the Colossians.

Pass out the handout “Living like a Child of God” and make sure all students have a Bible and something to write with. Ask them to answer only the first eight questions based on the verses specified on the sheet. When they have finished ask them to share why we should fix our eyes on heavenly things [because we have died to our old lives and have been raised with Christ and our life is now hidden with Christ in God.] Have several students share some specific things that they should and shouldn’t focus on. Then ask what similarities they see between clothing and the actions and attitudes these verses mention. [The clothing we wear doesn’t change who we are but it changes how others see us. Clothing is something you choose to either put on or not put on.]

Just like we choose what we are going to wear every day, we also choose what we think about, what we say, and how we treat others. What we wear, and how we act, doesn’t change who we are; I am my parent’s child no matter what I have on. But most of us have experienced that people treat us differently depending on what we have on and sometimes our clothing or our haircut may even cause problems in our relationships with other people.

Our goal as children of God is to “dress ourselves” with the characteristics of Jesus so that we look like Him. It is important to notice that many of the qualities and attitudes listed here in Colossians that we are supposed to “put on” are called in Galatians 5 “the fruit of the Spirit”, which means that they come from God’s Spirit, not from our willpower. Let’s spend a few minutes looking at how God’s power and our efforts can work together as who we are determines how we live.

Commitment

Frequently we struggle to understand how God’s power and our efforts work together. To help us see how two things can work together at the same time, each one necessary but not independent from the other, God has given us examples in the world around us.

Ask someone to explain how a bird flies, allowing other students to add anything they might have missed. If there are still points to be made fill them in from the following ideas:

The point here is to show that birds fly as a result of the working together of their efforts and the air. A bird cannot fly in a vacuum without air; it needs the air going over its wings to give it lift. But even a hurricane cannot make a bird fly (tumble maybe but not fly) if the bird doesn’t stretch out its wings, take off, and catch the air. Flight requires both air and effort on the bird’s part. A bird can choose to sit on the ground, or even walk, but as soon as he lets the wind under his wings his small efforts are enhanced by the currents under him. In his flight he flaps, he glides, and he turns, but we know that the success or height of a bird’s flight is not only dependent on its efforts or strength. Instead all of his movement is a play between two forces—him and the wind.

Explain that in the same way, the “wind” of God’s spirit works with our efforts in the process of sanctification—our coming to act more and more like the children of God that we are. Have a student read out loud Phil. 2:12, 13 and ask them to explain what they understand the verses to be saying [that we work at looking more like Jesus, but that the desire and the power to do it come from God.] Ask someone else to read and explain 2 Cor. 3: 18. [You might have to explain that “with unveiled faces” simply means that we reflect God’s glory clearly. In this passage emphasize that even though we may not always feel it, God says that we are being transformed into his likeness.]

Then have the students refer back to their handout and look at the statements at the bottom. Explain that understanding the need for them to both make an effort and rely on God working in them, they should write down some specific things that they can do and some specific ways they can rely on God. Provide them with some examples to get them thinking [they can: stay away from people or situations that tempt them to sin; remind themselves that greed and coveting is basically worshipping an idol; ask a friend or someone they trust to ask them about how they are doing in an area of their life they struggle with. They allow God to “re-dress” them by: praying and asking for his help; reading the Bible every day to keep them in touch with God; surrounding themselves with Christian friends.]

Walk around the room encouraging anyone who isn’t writing anything. When you see that the students have finished close in prayer where each student asks for God’s help in one of the specific activities they have written down.

Closing

Before class write a note of encouragement to give to each group member. As much as possible focus on ways that each student reflects Christ, using the verses in Colossians 3:12-17 and Galatians 5:22, 23. For example: *“Mark, I want you to know that I appreciate the way you are patient and kind, especially with your little brother. You are fun to be around and have a good sense of humor and I especially appreciate the way you are loving and encouraging to the other students in our group. I thank God for who you are and what you are allowing Him to do in your life. Your sister in Christ, Annette”*

Note: Bring some extra paper to write on in case there are students you did not anticipate being there. Make sure that each student receives a note even if they are just visiting!]

Pass out the notes of encouragement and ask that the students wait until they are alone to open and read them.

Living Your Identity: Creative Reading

John could hardly stand his excitement the first day of school. Since he was very young he had loved music, especially the piano and had spent the past few years working his hardest with the best teachers his parents could afford. At last it had paid off and he had been awarded a scholarship to the school with the most acclaimed piano program in the country. He would finally be able to learn from the best teachers and have access to the best facilities. But there was another reason John couldn't wait to get to school: he had found out that Rose, the daughter of the world's best concert pianist, would be in his class. Once when John was very young his parents had taken him to a concerto and he had heard Rose play a duet with her father. He had been entranced listening to a girl his own age playing something so beautiful. From that time on John had been completely infatuated with learning to produce such beauty.

Once at school, John went first to the practice rooms to look at the pianos he would be able to use. A teacher showed him the chart of rehearsal times and he was surprised that he didn't see Rose's name on the list. Throughout the day he eagerly looked for her and finally saw her when a teacher called her name in class. Later when he saw her eating her lunch alone he sat down with her and the two became friends. A few weeks later when they knew each other better John ventured to ask what kind of piano she had at home and was surprised to hear that she didn't have a piano in the apartment she rented near the school. He had always assumed that she didn't practice at school because she had a better piano at home. He was even more surprised when she told him that she hadn't played for several years. He couldn't restrain himself any longer and burst out telling her about the concert where he had heard her play and how that had been his inspiration all of the years he had studied piano. When he finished she just sat and looked at him sadly.

Then he asked, "Why don't you play anymore."

She sighed. "I'm not quite sure. I used to love to play, especially with my Dad. I think that as I got older I realized that you have to practice a lot."

John replied, "Sure there are times when I'm not in the mood to practice, but there are other times when I play for hours and don't even notice the time."

"That's true," she said, "but also I realized that even though people told me I was good, when I listen to my dad I know *that's* good. *I'm* not that good."

"Nobody else is that good right now," answered John, "but maybe you could be that good someday. I would like to be, but even if I can't I still love playing and there are people who enjoy listening to me, even though I'm not perfect."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "I guess you're right."

The two sat in silence until finally John said, "Don't you miss it?"

She answered, "I don't really think about it, you know, with school and all."

Then he asked, "Are you busy tomorrow afternoon?"

"Um, not really. I just have some homework."

"Would you be willing to come to rehearsal with me then? One of my life long dreams is to play a duet with you. It doesn't have to be anything fancy."

She finally agreed and the next afternoon met him at his rehearsal room. At first Rose seemed almost scared to touch the piano keys but once they started playing they were having so much fun that they only stopped when the next student knocked insistently on the door.

“John, thank you so much.” She said. “I can’t believe it has been so long. Nothing makes me feel that good.”

“Of course not”, he smiled. “You’re a pianist. You are made to play.”

Living Like a Child of God

Look up Colossians 3

1. According to Col. 3:1-4 you should set your heart and mind on _____ and not _____. Why?
2. Give two specific examples of what you should set your mind on. (Look at 3:15-17 for hints)
3. Give two specific examples of what you shouldn't set your mind on.
4. According to Col. 3:5-10, list the "old clothing" that you should take off:
5. Of these list the "old clothing" you still wear. (This will not be shared with anyone)
6. According to Col. 3:12-15, list the "new clothing" you should put on.
7. Which "new clothing" is the hardest for you to put on?
8. Write down the name of one person you need to "bear with" or forgive (v. 13)?

What I can do to "re-dress" myself:

How I can let God "re-dress me":

**His divine power has given us everything
we need for life and godliness though
our knowledge of him who called us
by his own glory and goodness.**

2 Peter 1: 3