

Genuine Identification

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Certain believers distance themselves from anyone found to have sinned. They don't want to be seen as being soft on sin or as a friend to one who is a failure, and yet they are missing the fundamental message of the glorious Gospel.

Jesus Christ made Himself of no reputation. In fact, He went out of His way to be a friend of sinners (John 4:3-26). He came to fulfill the law, given in Leviticus 19:18 and 34—a law that put a premium on loving our neighbors and even our enemies. The Lord told us to treat others as we would want to be treated (Matthew 5:38-48).

What does it mean to treat others as you would want to be treated? (See Matthew 7:12.) What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)? What does it mean to heal instead of wound? What does it mean to give grace instead of smiting?

This booklet tackles these questions and provides the answers from God's Word.

Chapter One

DRAWN TO A DEEPER FAITH

“I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

“I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.

“I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?

“My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.

“I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of

the lock.

“I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

“The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me” (Song of Solomon 5:1-7).

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

In Song of Solomon, we have a picture of the bridegroom coming to see his bride, who was still a maiden. Resting peacefully, she had turned in for the night; so when the bridegroom called for her, she hesitated and did not get up to greet him. But when she realized that her delayed response was a missed opportunity, she opened her door, only to find that her beloved had withdrawn himself. He was gone, and though she sought him, she could not find him.

The picture of the maiden resting typifies a believer who knows and understands the Finished Work of Jesus Christ but also one whom

God wants to draw into a deeper walk of faith. Spiritually, we see that this maiden, the bride-to-be, was being tested to go on to a deeper faith. Apparently, she knew the bridegroom's pattern of initiation. Therefore, because she had become familiar with a pattern, she did not respond immediately to that initiation. Yet, though she hesitated in her opportunity, she did recover and rebound and began to seek after him.

When the maiden called to the bridegroom, he gave no answer. This scene shows us that God wants to draw us out into a much deeper walk of faith than we have ever experienced. Those whom God calls into such situations are potential leaders in spiritual warfare.

Think of children. They ask for everything, "Mommy, can I have this? Daddy, I want that." Early on, the children get what they want. But as they grow, there are times when they must learn discipline. A child that is trained up properly does not mentally react. He trusts the love of his parents.

In the same way, God at times may not seem to answer us because He wants to teach something new about His character, to lead us into a deeper degree of faith. Remember that, according to Hebrews 11:6, it is our faith that pleases

God, and great faith pleases Him greatly (Matthew 8:10, 15:28; Acts 6:8; 1Timothy 3:13).

Progressive Degrees of Faith

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:35-36).

In His Word, God has given a promise for every circumstance, but sometimes He holds back His answers to keep our faith alive. Faith is the substantiation of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). When an answer is held back, it is designed to take us from faith to *patient* faith. We need patient faith to make *powerful* faith possible (2 Thessalonians 1:11). Romans 1:5 speaks of *obedient* faith; Romans 1:17 refers to *progressive* faith. God is teaching us degrees of progressive faith.

In effect, God is saying this: “You need to have faith in Me. If I were to make everything happen today just the way you have asked for it, then you would never develop godly character. You would begin to think of Me as something less than your faithful provider.”

In Song of Solomon, the bridegroom drew

the bride out of her passivity and her familiarity. As a result, he could be more pleased with her life, she would get to know him more intimately, and their relationship would become more fulfilling.

The sad part of this story concerns the watchmen who smote the bride and took away her veil. They were supposed to represent the authority of God, but those watchmen were like Christians who do not have God's heart of grace and forgiveness. Here was a woman who was doing all she could do to go after God. Yes, she made a mistake. But she immediately responded and made it right through the process of recovery and rebound. The watchmen should have been loving her and helping her; but instead, they wounded and uncovered her.

Not one of us can stand on our own righteousness. God has already declared it as "filthy rags." Like the Pharisees who sought to punish the woman caught in the act of a terrible sin, not one of us can qualify to cast a judgmental look, never mind a stone (John 8:7-9). Thank God for a Savior who always seeks to identify with our weakest condition, so He can strengthen us when we obey Him by faith.

Chapter Two

THE NEW MEANING OF THE LAW

Only God knows who repents completely by coming clean, forsaking his sin, and making things right. Certainly, there are those who make only a surface repentance. Their hearts never change. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will never fill someone who treats recovery and rebound lightly. However, the rest of us must recognize that whatever the sin was, it was nailed to the Cross.

Yes, we should hate sin and forsake it. Still, each of us must be encouraged to go on with Christ in the filling of the Spirit and the walk of grace. The watchmen represented God, yet they wounded someone who was trying to make a recovery. We cannot afford to do such a thing. Those who have been purchased by the Blood of Jesus Christ are precious to Him. Yet God's own people often wound other Christians who are

seeking Him after a time of failure.

Here is the maiden who failed, who missed an opportunity to follow the bridegroom. She missed the privilege to respond to his initiation. But as soon as she realized it, she got right up in the night and went seeking him in the city. Then, however, the watchmen found her and took away her covering. The disciples did just the same when they told the blind man not to talk to the Lord (see Mark 10:46-52). The same men (who were Jesus' disciples) tried to keep the children away from Him (Matthew 19:13-14). They also tried to keep the prostitute out of the Pharisee's house and away from the feet of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50).

We must be good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). That means we must honor a person's honest, pure desire to live for God after he has failed. True friends are born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17), and love covers a multitude of sins (Proverbs 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8). There are, however, those who separate very friends by repeating a matter and spreading evil reports. This is not about covering up sin; it is about honoring someone who has begun to recover and is seeking after God.

Jesus and His Reputation

“At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

“But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

“But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

“How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

“Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

“But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

“But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

“For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matthew 12:1-8).

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it

not robbery to be equal with God:

“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7).

The problem we face in Christianity is very clear to me. It has to do with identification in the Church today. There is a great misunderstanding of the relationship between the Law and God’s righteousness. Many use the Law to establish their own righteousness apart from God. But in fact, we can receive God’s righteousness because Christ fulfilled the Law!

Jesus Christ’s reputation was established in God the Father. On earth, He made Himself of no reputation. Average Christians think that they must be accepted by men. They try to protect and defend Jesus’ reputation when He didn’t even try to keep it Himself. His reputation was kept before God as His mind stayed focused on the truth and as He lived a sinless life.

Often, believers who try to keep Jesus’ reputation will do so by not identifying with sinners. They use or abuse the Law to keep their reputations, and they try to avoid any identification with those who might have failed.

“Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto

them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.

“Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them” (John 9:15-16).

The Pharisees declared that Jesus could not be of God because He violated their understanding of the Law. Jesus had fellowship with publicans and sinners, and He didn’t go along with the ceremonial washing mandated by religious rules. Therefore, His reputation with them was not good.

Jesus responded to their accusations by telling them how King David ate the shewbread reserved for the priests, which violated the Old Testament law. Along with this illustration, the Lord was introducing a higher law, also found in Hosea 6:6: “I will have mercy and not sacrifice” (Matthew 12:7)—a manifestation of the Royal Law of Love: Love your neighbor as yourself and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Jesus’ interpretation of the law was not a violation of it. Instead, He was taking the law to new heights.

Who Is Our Neighbor?

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:13-14).

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

When Jesus introduced the new meaning of the law, He was considered a blasphemer because of who He said He was and what He did against what they thought was *Moses’* law. Yet, because Jesus was the end of the Law (Romans 10:4) and the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17), He unveiled the summary of the Law as this: “Love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

And who is our neighbor but everyone in the world.

With this declaration, Jesus disregarded His reputation. The fact that He refused to live according to their interpretation of the Law made Him a blasphemer in men's eyes. He deliberately broke some of their wrong interpretations of the law, and thus He sacrificed being liked by men. He did it to identify with us sinners.

One of the greatest problems Christians face is a lack of understanding genuine, godly identification. Men attempt to preserve their reputations and personal testimonies instead of honoring Christ's testimony. The testimony of God means that we love not our own lives unto the death (Revelation 12:11). Jesus detests any attempt to maintain a reputation by ignoring identification with one another.

Paul was put in prison and no one visited him (2 Timothy 4:16-17). No one wanted to be identified with him. Believers prayed for Peter while he was in prison (Acts 12), but they wouldn't go visit him. Then, they were shocked when God answered their prayers and got him out of jail. Why were they so surprised? They lacked an understanding of genuine, godly identification.

Chapter Three

STAND WITH THE WEAK AND THE WICKED

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

“Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

“And the King shall answer and say unto

them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:34-40).

In this passage, Jesus was identifying with those who have nothing. He has always identified with the poor all over the world—whether they are poor regarding possessions or poor in spirit. The beautiful, glorious, and loving Christ demonstrated perfect identification with every man, woman, and child. Reputation meant nothing to Him. He didn't honor men's interpretation of *His* Law. He identified with perfect identification—without insecurity and without fear.

The Lord also identifies Himself with the sick—those in wheelchairs, those battling terminal illnesses. The elderly person in a nursing home—Jesus identifies with him. When we go to his room and minister, we are visiting Jesus. "I identify with this one. Visit him and you visit Me," the Lord declares. That is perfect identification.

The world is so wicked, cold, heartless, thoughtless, and careless. Instead of identifying with others, many people just wound and smite and uncover the needy.

Identification! It is what this world is lacking. I hate immorality, but I love the man or woman who lives in it. I hate robbery, but I love the thief.

Jesus, the One who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. We all have turned to our own ways. But God laid upon Christ the iniquity of us all.

That is genuine identification.

Removing the Sin Barrier

We must ask ourselves, "Am I identifying with others in perfect identification?" I am not talking about compromising with sin. I am talking about treating your neighbor exactly as you would like to be treated. Christ removed the sin barrier, and He brought in the love barrier.

Yes, repentance is always needed when sin comes in. There should be an absolute change in the mind, the emotions, the will, the attitude, and the heart. But throughout Christianity, we have men cleaving to their rules, cleaving to their understanding of righteousness. They refuse to identify in meekness. They neglect godly identification and substitute it with self-righteous rules that are private interpretations of

holiness and human goodness.

Are we any better than Christ? Of course not. He did not try to keep His own reputation. His reputation was already established with the Father. In His humanity on earth, He could not have kept His reputation even if He had tried—and He doesn't expect us to keep our reputation either. The servant is never greater than his master (John 15:20).

God wants to teach us the principle of redemptive, loving identification. Instead of wounding a person in the midst of his failure or in the process of his recovery, instead of smiting him or uncovering him, we are to identify with him.

Loving Those Who Use You

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Genuine identification can be taken even further. Jesus instructed us to love our enemies; therefore, we can identify with the wicked. Remember, Jesus was separate from sinners, but He was still a friend of sinners (Hebrews 7:26; Luke 7:34). He never compromised with sin, but

on the Cross He identified with every kind of sin that the human race committed. In His love, Jesus might have said, “What is it like to be an atheist?” Then, He went to the Cross, where—because He became sin for us—He was separated from the Father for three hours. For those hours, Jesus had to identify with what the atheist feels like when he doesn’t know God and cannot get through to heaven. During that time on Calvary, Christ bore every sin in His body. Therefore, He had to identify with the homosexual, the adulterer, the one who gossips, and the murderer when He bore all of those sins and became sin for us (1 Peter 2:24).

Too many Christians refuse to identify because they are afraid of being found on the wrong side. When Watchman Nee was imprisoned by the communists in China, only one pastor stayed in fellowship with him, even after all of Nee’s years of ministry. No one wanted to identify with this godly man for fear of losing their own lives. Sadly, there is such self-righteousness in people, and they maintain it in order to keep their reputations.

The watchmen in Song of Solomon were trying to do for God what only God can do for Himself. They wounded the bride, and they un-

veiled her. The watchmen didn't recognize what God would do for her. Jesus Christ planned to die for her while she was His enemy. He purposed to shed His Blood for her while she was still in her sin.

What a contrast of natures!

What a contrast of attitudes!

What a contrast of hearts!

Christ died for the guilty. And, as Christians, we must love those who are seeking God. We cannot afford to wound them. The Spirit of the living God isn't in churches that wound people with legalism. Those who place "justice" and reputation ahead of identification and reclamation dishonor the Finished Work of Christ. They try to manipulate the sovereignty of God by using the law to keep their testimonies. They want to be seen as acceptable and respectable while they water down Bible doctrine.

Many people are hurting, not because of their sins, but because they do not identify with God's people. God is more than able to build His own house. He needs us to recognize what it means to identify with the weak and, yes, even with the wicked. He died for them all and the Lord wants us to pick them up when they fall.

CONCLUSION

The Savior must be released through our lives. This can only happen as death works in us and life then comes through us. Christ can only be released in our lives as we take up our daily cross and as we lay down our lives for the brethren. He is only released as we edify others and minister grace to the hearers. He is only released when we love as He loves. He is only released when we forgive as He forgives. Let us learn to be kind one to another.

Let's help others to get up and heal their wounds. As believers, we ought to be recognized for the love that we have, one for another. The guilty need someone to stand by their sides and see them through.

This is perfect identification.

Surely, it takes the patience and power of faith. And yes, we need to receive unconditional love and the motivation of the Spirit. But with that and the living Word of God in our hearts,

God's love should be pouring out of us to a world that is waiting to see believers practice redemptive, genuine, and godly identification.