

Who Are You?

If you ask me who I am, I could simply give you my name. Would that be enough? Maybe, if you were just checking through a list of people. When I went to the clinic for my booster jab, that's almost all they wanted to know. They also asked for my date of birth, to make sure that they had the right person there. Perhaps they have two or more patients with the same name. Quite important to give the right injection to the right person! Often, people want my address as well, for much the same reason.

But does that really answer the question? We may not be bold (or cheeky) enough to ask people to their face "But who are you **really**?", but we usually want to know more about them so that we begin to feel that we know them. Perhaps we will chat with them a little and ask about their family, their work, their home and their friends. Maybe we will also talk with other people who know them and find out a bit more. If a friendship starts, it will probably be because we have found some areas of each other's lives that are similar and then, as the conversations deepen, we find out more about 'what makes them tick' and the friendship becomes closer.

Have you asked yourself the same question? About your own self? "Who am I, really?" "What is my real identity?" "How would I describe myself?" Or do those sorts of questions seem either worrying or pointless? Worrying, perhaps, because they come close to asking whether your life has any meaning or purpose and you may not have a very good answer to that. Or pointless because "What difference do the answers to these questions make to my normal everyday life?"

We can easily pass by questions like these and just live in the present moment, living life as it comes, with its pleasures and pains, without asking ourselves 'deep' questions, perhaps deliberately avoiding them. But usually, sooner or later, we find ourselves facing them. Maybe a crisis triggers it and we begin to seek answers. Perhaps many of the normally stable factors in our lives are suddenly upset and we find ourselves strangely isolated? We may question the purpose of life in general, suddenly feeling very small and insignificant in a confusing world.

Why am I going on about this? Just that I want to look at some of what the Bible says about who we are, and it is all too easy to put these 'religious bits' in a separate compartment of our lives which is reserved for Sundays and perhaps other occasions when we meet with other Christian believers. Some of these truths have become so familiar that we fail to see the real meaning of the words we use so often . . .

I Am A Child of God.

Just take a step back for a moment and try to understand what an awesome claim this is. Many people's idea of God is not necessarily the traditional Christian picture, and in fact our own understanding may have been limited by our familiarity with the words. Perhaps we know what it says in **John 1:11-13** : *"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*

For many who believe that there is a God, they don't see him as the benevolent father-figure that we may have grown up with, nor as the terrifying all-righteous Judge of all mankind. They may start with the idea of an almighty creative power, not necessarily personal but certainly all-powerful. If they begin to think that he just **might** be personal as well, then they are probably still thinking in terms of power and perhaps control of the whole of creation. A truly awesome being!

Now, take that understanding of an awesome, creative and all-powerful being who is over the whole of creation – and add the claim that we make of being his children. WOW ! How comfortable are we to try to explain this claim to our non-Christian friends? Have we thought it through?

Just for a moment, let's look at the words used in the New Testament. The word translated 'children' in **John 1** is the Greek word '*tekna*', which literally means 'born ones'. So we have been born to God as our Father. In case there could be any doubt about that, the word translated 'born' literally means 'begotten' or 'fathered'. You and I, individually fathered by God, the all-powerful creator! That's quite a claim!¹

¹ For more about spiritual rebirth, see '[Reborn](http://www.justonecandle.uk)' at www.justonecandle.uk

This is very different from the idea that all human beings are 'God's children'. Paul touches on that in Athens, in **Acts 17:28,29**, where the word translated 'children' is different, linked to our word 'generic' meaning 'of the same type'. It seems to be linked to the fact that **all** human beings are made 'in God's image', i.e. like him in many ways, especially perhaps in our personal individuality. (**Genesis 1:26,27**) Basically, here Paul is saying that we humans are made in God's likeness and that, simply from that fact alone, we should realise think that God himself can not be represented by something man-made, just a lump of wood, metal or stone.

There are many New Testament references to the fact that, through trust in the Lord Jesus, we have become children - 'born ones' - of God. ¹ Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of this is that we have also become . . .

Heirs with Christ.

What does this mean? An heir is someone who inherits, someone who receives property, wealth, title or power, usually from someone who has died. In **Romans 8:16-17**, Paul writes: "*The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, since we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*" For us to be 'fellow heirs with Christ', it means that Jesus must also be an heir – but an heir of what?

In **Hebrews 1:2**, it says that "*in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*" In **Colossians 1:18** it says ". . . so that he himself will come to have first place in everything." (Other translations say 'pre-eminence' or 'supremacy'). Read the whole stunning passage from **verses 13-20**!

A time is coming when the most amazing announcement will be made: "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he will reign for ever and ever.*" (**Revelation 11:15**). Perhaps we are aware of this but see it as something far off and somehow remote from us but, about 600 years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Daniel was given these insights into future events: "*And behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and he came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom . . . His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away . . . But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for all ages to come . . . The Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favour of the saints of the Highest One, and the time came when the saints took possession of the kingdom . . . The sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him.*" (**Daniel 7:13-14,18,22,27**) I certainly don't understand all the details in Daniel and Revelation, but I think I know who the 'son of man' is, who the 'Ancient of Days' is and who are 'the people of the saints of the Highest One' are! These passages show us a little of what is coming in our future as **heirs with Christ**. You may be a little surprised to see that all the events and the coming kingdom are '**under the whole heaven**', in other words, here on earth. Not some vague idea of 'going to heaven', but the establishment of the kingdom of God on this earth!

We get another hint of this amazing future in **Romans 8:18-25**, especially **verses 19-22**. The whole of creation has been placed under the control of mankind and, as a result, is 'groaning', waiting and longing for the time when the children ('born ones') of God will be revealed in glory as his sons and heirs. ²

Don't miss this point: Paul reminds us that sharing Jesus' glory in the future means sharing in suffering with him now. But any suffering we undergo is nothing compared with that future glory! (**v.17**)

But that's all in the future, of course, what about NOW? Two things, each perhaps a little less spectacular than future glory, but in some ways even more miraculous . . .

We are Heirs Already, not Slaves!

¹ **John 1:12, John 11:52, Romans 8:16 & 17, Romans 8:21, Romans 9:8, Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1, 2 & 10**

² See also **Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1**

I make absolutely no apology for coming back to this again! One of the commonest traps for Christians to fall into is legalism. We may know that we are no longer under the Ten Commandments, no longer bound by rules and regulations, but we still slip so easily into trying to follow patterns of behaviour – set by the Bible, by Christian teachers, by our friends or by our own idea of what we ‘ought to do’. Consciously or not, we start thinking that God’s blessing in our lives is dependent on our performance. It isn’t. He always acts according to his grace, not by the measure of our achievement. We have been set free!

Do you remember the picture that Paul uses in **Galatians 3:23 - 4:7**? In those times, the son and heir of a rich man would be placed under the authority of a trusted slave, who kept the boy in line with his father’s wishes and trained him, making sure that he went to school and learned his lessons properly. Then, when the son had matured and was ready to take his place in the adult world, his father would set a date when he would declare his son as his heir. At that point, the boy (now recognised as an adult) would no longer be under the control of the slave and would start to act as the junior head of the household.

That, says Paul, is what has happened to us. We used to be under slavery but now we are heirs in our Father’s household.¹ **We are no longer under law. It has no more place in our relationship with God our Father.** Another way of saying the same thing is that we are dead to the law. (**Romans 7:6**)

There is a wonderful Old Testament promise about sonship. See **Hosea 2:23, 1:10**, quoted in **Romans 9:25,26, 1 Peter 2:9-10**

But here is another amazing fact: Right here, right now, we can begin to share our Father’s own divine nature! Who am I? I am someone who is . . .

. . . Gradually Becoming More Like Jesus

Wow! That’s quite a claim! Perhaps not one that we will want to share around too much, because we know that our lives don’t always match up! BUT it is still what the Lord tells us is really happening in our lives, so we need to take it on board for ourselves as we go on discovering who we really are. And **maybe** – hopefully, anyway – some of our closest friends, our spouses and close family will actually detect changes in our lives which confirm that it really is happening!

Looking first at the completion of the process gives us a strong hint as to how this works in our lives. In **1 John 3:2**, John looks at who we are now and then at who we shall be when we see Jesus. A simple statement: *“We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”* The transformation will be complete because the revelation will be complete.

Paul writes about this process in **Ephesians 1:15-19** (– and onwards!). He longs for the believers in Ephesus to have more and more real knowledge of the Lord Jesus – and then spends much of the rest of the letter expanding that revelation for them! And again, in **Ephesians 3:16-19**, he asks the Father to strengthen them *“with power through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . . that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”* He prays much the same for the believers in Colossae in **Colossians 1:9-12**.

But is this just to fill our heads with facts, or is it of some practical use? How can our increasing revelation and knowledge of Jesus – who he is and what he has done – make any real difference to who we are? *“Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, having been firmly rooted, being built up in him and established in your faith . . .”* (**Colossians 2:6-7**)

Yes, as believers in the Lord Jesus, our lives have been joined with his and we are **in him**. And all the promises of God are ‘yes’ **in him** (**2 Corinthians 1:20**), ready for us to take hold of them. Peter writes about the same process in **2 Peter 1:3&4**: *“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”*

So, how does this work? How can I take hold of God’s promises in such a way that my life will be changed?

¹ This ‘placing as a son’ is translated confusingly as ‘adoption’ in most Bibles. The ‘tutor’/‘guardian’/‘schoolmaster’ mentioned in **3:24 & 25** is actually the word used for that trusted slave.

'Revelation' and 'knowledge' of Jesus may sound super-spiritual, but this is how it works for me:–

Something 'lights up' for me, usually from what I have read in the Bible or from what someone has said or written. Sometimes I begin to better understand a Bible passage that I have known for years. It may or may not come with strong emotions, but it becomes firm and settled with me and I feel that I really know it. I have 'heard' something that God has spoken to me. A 'promise', if you like.

This 'hearing' produces faith. We don't need to try to manufacture faith ourselves! My reaction is sometimes 'Can this really be true?' But the more I 'listen', the more the conviction grows. Paul sums it up neatly: "*So faith out of hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.*" (**Romans 10:17** – literal translation). Paul also refers to 'the obedience of faith' and I think I know what he means. There are times when what I am 'hearing' is clear enough, but the implications on my life may not be what I expect or even want. Then it's a choice: do I go with what is becoming an increasing conviction, or do I disregard it and carry on as before? Will I take hold of this promise with its built-in spiritual growth, even if the results may be uncomfortable?

The process of being transformed may have its ultimate completion when Jesus returns, but it is certainly going on now. "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*" (**2 Corinthians 3:18**) For a wonderful blend of spiritual instruction and practical application, try reading the whole of Paul's letter to the **Colossians** !

So, who are you – who am I ?

A child of God, fathered by him.

A son and heir (yes, this applies to male and female alike) in the future and right now.

Someone who is being transformed to be like Jesus.

Why should all this be true for me? There is ultimately only one answer – the love of God. That he should care enough for us, for you, for me, that he would make all of this happen in our lives. We may have become accustomed to hearing about the love of God, but think about it again . . .

All of this for us when we were completely away from him!

I am someone who is loved by God!

Fear not, for I have redeemed you,

I have called you by name,

you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

God demonstrates his own love toward us,

in that while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

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