

Living Your True Identity in Christ

Learn the life changing way to live your Christian life according to the New Testament.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Is living the Christian life a constant struggle for you? Are you tired of continuously battling the flesh inside of you and wondering, is there more to the Christian life than this? Discover how you can be set free from this struggle and live your true identity in Christ. This study will walk you through the teachings of the New Testament to help you identify with and live out Christ's life in you as God intended for all of His children to live.

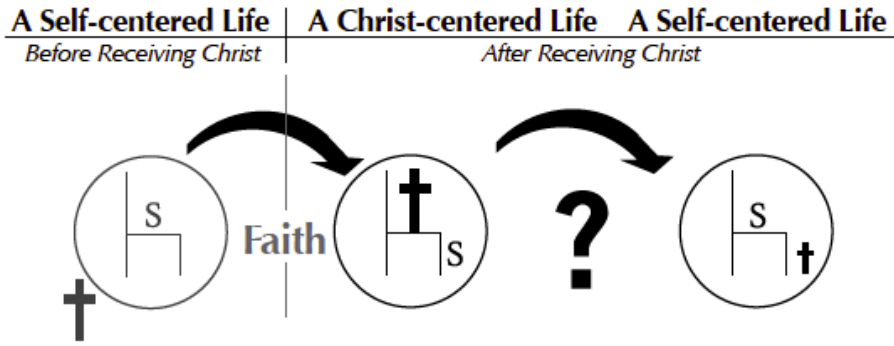
THE PROBLEM

The Christian life, as experience by many, is a constant struggle of trying to live up to the holiness of God while battling back the flesh, the carnal self. It is akin to the old Native American story of two wolves that constantly battle inside of us, a black one and a white one. The black wolf is filled with fear, anger, envy, jealousy, greed, and arrogance. While the white wolf is filled with peace, love, hope, courage, humility, compassion, and faith. The one that we feed the most wins. Because of this inner struggle, these feeling arises when we come to God:

1. Guilt: the feeling of not measuring up to the standard put forth by God. This guilty feeling can mask itself as fear, anxiety, shame, worthlessness, defeat.
2. Fear: living on pins and needles, constantly being afraid that you will slip up. Whenever something bad happened, you wonder if it was because you did something wrong.
3. Dis-satisfaction: You are never satisfied with yourself because you have not done enough, there are much more room for improvements.

Contributing to the problem: The wrong model of Christian living.

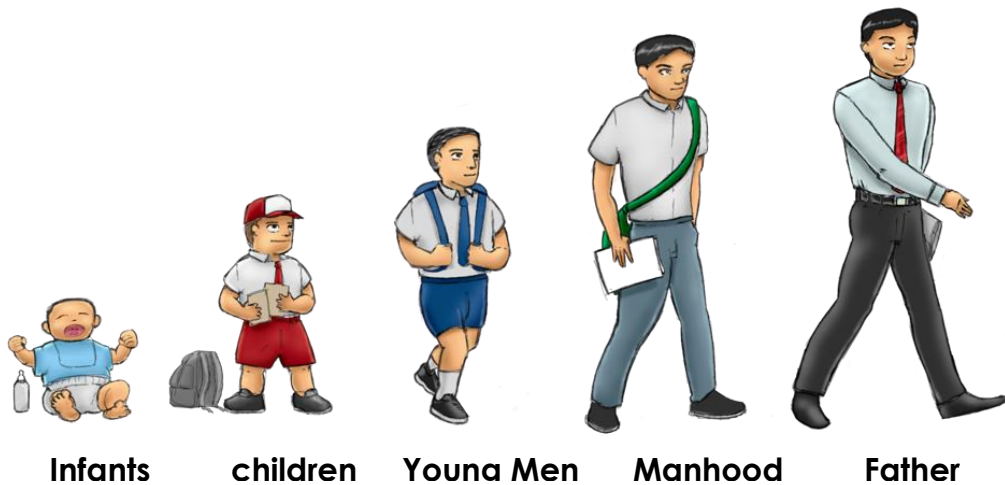
The church has been teaching a model for Christian living that contributes to the cause of the problem. The image below illustrates this model.



We so easily identify with this model of the Christian life as well as the story of the two wolves because it seemed to mirror our experiences. It is logical base on our feeling and base on a form of Christianity that is "self" centric. After the salvation experience, "I" now need to put Christ on the throne, the driver seat, the center of my life. If "I" fail at this, "I" have not lived up to the standard that God wanted me to live: I am still on the throne of my life. According to this model, there is a constant battle for the throne of your life.

THE NEW TESTAMENT MODEL: STAGES OF MATURITY IN YOUR CHRIST IDENTITY

The New Testament teaches a different model of the Christian life. It begins with Christ's identity being given to us at the point of regeneration and addresses us according to our stages of maturity which can be seen as the stages of life.



Ephesians 4:13-14 (ESV)

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the

fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

To fully understand the New Testament model, we need to have a clear Biblical understanding of Salvation, Regeneration, and Sanctification.

Salvation: a love gift of God, based on the justification work of Jesus Christ, which we receive through faith and not by works.

Ephesians 2:8-9

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And **this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works**, so that no one may boast."

Romans 8:1-4

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. **By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Regeneration: a product of Salvation, where our old self has been rendered dead through the cross of Jesus Christ and a new, born again self, with Christ's identity, is given to us. Through this regenerated process, a person is born into the lineage of God and becomes a citizen of God's Kingdom. This process is not of us and therefore cannot be undone.

John 1:12-13

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

2 Cor. 5:17 (NKJV)

"Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* **a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**"

Romans 6:3-4

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

We Receive Christ's Identity When We Were Born Again

God asked me this thought-provoking question that began my meditation journey on this topic. He asked: "Of all the vocabularies in the Hebrew language (or human languages) why did Jesus chose the words 'born again' to express the greatest spiritual truth of Christianity?" I invite you to meditate on this same question and embark on this journey with me.

When it comes to the subject of "Born Again," we tend to gloss over its meaning. Or we substitute the meaning for something else. For example, we tend to define born again as "conversion." You may have heard someone asked, "Have you been born again?" What they meant was, "Have you had a conversion experience where you asked Jesus to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior?" Born again encompasses conversion, but it is more than conversion.

These two simple words transcend all languages. Every language on Earth has a word for "born" and a word for "again." Missionaries and Bible translators do not need to come up with new words to convey the meaning for birth or again. Furthermore, the concept of birth can be understood by an 8 years old to an 80 years old. Birth can be understood by the uneducated tribal people to the great philosophers of the world. The words born again transcend language, ethnicity, age, and education. Anyone, anywhere on Earth can understand God's path into the Kingdom of God. However, the irony is that we tend to substitute the simplicity of this understanding for something else that sounds more "holy." What are some simple lessons we can learn from the concept of born or birth?

First, birth convey the simple meaning of beginning. Can you tell me about the time before you were born? No, you cannot. Birth is the beginning of our lives. From the point of our birth onward, our total focus and energy is on living this life. We do not swing back and forth between the desire to live a past life and the desire of our current life. So why are we doing this in our spiritual life? The "traditional" church has been teaching us to battle our old selves. We were taught that our life consists of an old and new self, and we are being pulled on both sides. So, we must fight to resist the old in order to live the new life. Though that idea seems logical, it is contrary to New Testament teachings. Birth conveys a beginning, a time where before that, we didn't exist. We came into existence by birth. Hence, the first lesson we learn is: Birth is the beginning of life. There was no past life before birth.

I am an Asian by birth. That is my physical identity. The second lesson we learn from birth is that it's the origin of our identities. We were born into an identity. Likewise, we receive Christ's Identity when we were born again. This makes you a child of God. We inherited God's characters and attributes upon this new birth. Christ's likeness lives fully in us. God's DNA, His "seed," is in us because he gave birth to us.

1 Peter 1:23

since you have been born again, **not of perishable seed but of imperishable**, through the living and abiding word of God;

1 John 3:9

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God

God's DNA is in us. Our job is to live it out. Learn to master that which you have inherited by birth.

The third lesson from the concept of birth is that we play no part in our birth or how we obtained our physical identity. You did nothing to cause your birth, and likewise, you did nothing to earn your salvation nor your identity. We play no part in how our identity turned out to be. I did not choose to have black hair and tan colored skin. I inherited them by birth. We like to think that we have a part to play in our sanctification, but that's not what the Bible teaches.

Sanctification: also a product of Salvation, where we are declared completely holy in Jesus Christ and are made holy through a renewal process of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 1:2

"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to **those sanctified in Christ Jesus**, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:"

Hebrews 13:12

"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to **sanctify the people through his own blood.**"

1 Cor. 12:2

"Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ephesians 4:23-24

"and to **be renewed in the spirit of your minds**, and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**"

Noticed that all of these are works of God through Jesus Christ. Sanctification is God's work in us. Sanctification does not require any effort from us. On the contrary, our part in sanctification is to enjoy it. Picture it this way. Sanctification

is a new suit that God had tailored and gifted you. Your part is not to do anymore sewing to the already finished work. Your part is to enjoy the new suit that God had put on you. I had no part in having black hair and tanned skin. My Asian looks, even my characters, were given to me. What I did was learn to enjoy my Asian likeness and characteristic.

Go back to the story of Nicodemus. This Pharisee represented everything that is the church today: the law, performance, spiritual growth, etc. The first thing that Jesus said to him was: no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. In other word, Jesus said to him: "Stop being the church. Stop teaching about human efforts, what you must do to enter the Kingdom of God, or what you have to do to retain your salvation. Stop it!" It has NOTHING to do with YOU.

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

We are children BORN into God's family. It all has to do with God. We must be born again. We must be born of God! It is not by our human effort, decision, nor our will. It has nothing to do with us! Stop adding to the finished work of God. Enjoy being God's children instead of trying to be God's children. Our sanctification is not dependent on our efforts. It is something we were already born with. Our task is to identify with Christ's identity and live out that identity daily.

KNOW YOUR CHRIST IDENTITY: CHRIST, WHO IS MY LIFE

The key to understanding and living the Christian life according to the New Testament model is understanding our identity in Jesus Christ. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defined identity as: "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual." I was born in Vietnam and have Vietnamese parents. When I fill out identification forms, I always declare on there that my race is Asian. This is my earthly identity that I inherited by birth. What are your distinguishing characters or personalities that you were born with?

As Christians, we were born with an earthly identity, and we were also spiritually born with a Christ identity. Let's look at what the New Testament teaches about this.

John 1:12-13

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

2 Cor. 5:17 (NKJV)

"Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* **a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** "

Romans 6:3-4

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

Ephesians 4:23-24

"and to **be renewed in the spirit of your minds**, and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**"

Galatians 2:20

"**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Philippians 1:20-21

"as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always **Christ will be honored in my body**, whether by life or by death. **For to me to live is Christ**, and to die is gain.

Colossians 3:3-4

"For you have died, and **your life is hidden with Christ** in God. **When Christ who is your life** appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Colossians 2:9-10

"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and **you have been filled in him**, who is the head of all rule and authority."

These verses of Scripture teaches that those who are born again are born of God, the old self is dead and buried. Now, ALL things have becomes new. This new self has been created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. This new life is now filled with Christ, it is Christ's life, Christ now lives in us and for us to live is Christ. When Jesus said, "you must be born again," this is what He was referring to. Birth, both physically and spiritually, gives us an identity that can never be changed or taken away from us. I was born into this world an Asian of Vietnamese descent. That is my identity. It doesn't matter how I dress or what accent I speak with; I will forever have black hair and a tannish skin pigmentation. I am an Asian. Likewise in the spiritual aspect, I was born again by

God into the Christ's family. I am a Christ-person. The fullness of Christ is in me. That is who I am!

Though you have a physical identity and a spiritual identity, the Christian life is not a mixture of the old self and the new self.

The Christian life is not a mixture of old and new.

It feels as though that our Christian life is a mixture of the old and the new self. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

Luke 5: 36-39

He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But **new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.**"

John 3:3-7

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Nicodemus, in this passage, represents a religious person. He embodied everything that is religious in his society. Nicodemus was a religious scholar, a teacher of the law, and he was also a religious leader. He is our modern-day pastor of pastors, a bishop in some Christian circle. What do religious teachers teach? They teach that to please God, we must study God's law and try to live it out to the best of our ability. And if we have trouble living out God's law, then we need to be more devout. We need to try harder, go to more conferences, read more religious books, join a certain Bible study group, etc. What was Jesus' reaction to religious devotion? He didn't endorse Nicodemus. Instead, Jesus presented him a truth that sounded so strange to him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Through being born again we are given a new wineskin, a new life. The old has gone, the new has come. This new life is made to contain the new wine, the new truth. The solution is not a mixture of the old and the new. It is not battling the flesh so that your spirit will thrive. However, it is realizing that the old has passed away and the new life is here.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. **The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God...**

Here is where the confusion resides. We don't FEEL like a new creation and so it SEEMS as though we have an old self and a new self all wrapped up in one. However, the Bible teaches us that the old has passed away. It has died. We are now new creations. Paul's letter to the Galatians says this in a more vivid way.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 4:21-24

...assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to **put off your old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**

We have died and we no longer live. We still have a physical body, but it is Christ who lives in that body. We now live by faith in Christ. This is difficult to understand and therefore, does not seem logical. Jesus Christ living in this broken body of ours is a mystery unto our minds, but it is not unfamiliar to the Scripture. In Corinthians the Bible teaches that our "body is the temple of the Holy Spirit."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you**, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Romans 6:4-5

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we too might walk in newness of life.** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:11

So **you also must consider yourselves dead to sin** and **alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Our life is more than what we perceive through our physical senses and more than what our wisdom or knowledge tells us. Our senses and minds cannot understand that we have been buried with Christ and we no longer live. Yet this is the truth taught in the Bible. This is who we are.

The body is physical and it is subject to time and corruption just as all of creation. The Scripture teaches us that our mind is being renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind...**"

Eph. 4:22-23 "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to **be renewed in the spirit of your minds...**"

While our bodies are subject to corruption, it does take part in the regeneration.

Titus 3:4-6 " But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by **the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior..."

Romans 8:10-11 "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, **he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit** who dwells in you."

Philippians 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body**, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

The completion of this transformation comes when we are clothes with the imperishable, but in the meantime, it is being transformed as it is bearing the life of Christ. The physical body that we have lived in for decades have been imprinted by the old nature. The body's regeneration is not instantaneous like our spirit. Take jet lag as an example. Jet lag happened because our bodies' internal clock has not yet caught up with our present time zone. It will take time to adjust to the new time zone. It is the same with our bodies and our new Christ's identity. The body still retain the old way of life. It is still set in it's old ways. The body needs time to re-adjust to the Christ identity that is inside of us. We need to teach it to live Christ's identity, just as we need to teach it to live our

human identity to which we were physically born into. Picture in your mind an image of an infant. That's who you are in Christ. When a baby is born, he doesn't know to do anything except cry. He cries when he wakes up, when he is cold, when he is hungry, when his bottom is wet. But as he grows into his human identity, he begins to understand that crying is not always the best solution. As a parent you teach him to ask to be held, to be fed, etc., instead of crying. As a new Christ-person, we don't know any better, so we will follow our old, imprinted ways, which is sin. We sin because we don't know any better, just like an infant cry because he doesn't know any better. But as we grow into our new Christ's identity, we began to see that sin doesn't bring us the satisfaction that we desire. We began to walk according to the Spirit and then gradually, we began to cry less, and less. As we grow into the Christ's identity, we began to not gratify the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." My friend and colleague, Larry Smith, in his book "Christ Our Life" said it best when he said, "Only divine life can live the Christian life." God did not intend for us to live this life on our own, so stop trying. Stop fighting the flesh. It is pointless because it's dead. Stop thinking that we need to put Christ on the throne of our lives. He is already there. Who has the power to bring Him off His throne? Do we really have that power? That model of the Christian life that we have been taught is not what the New Testament teaches. Embrace your Christ's identity. See yourself as an infant in Christ. Explore this new identity. Grow in it.

Grow in Your Christ Identity: Walk by Faith

Life is most meaningful when we become an adult. As an adult, we have the opportunity to live out our full potential that God has given us. Spiritual adulthood is the same. Our job is to grow up so that we can live the full Christ's identity that is in us, the full potential that God has given us in Christ. The fullness of Christ is in us.

Colossians 2:9-10 "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and **you have been filled in him**, who is the head of all rule and authority."

The fullness of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is in us.

Galatians 5:22-24 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

How do we grow in our Christ identity? Picture the infant in your mind again. How does he grow? He grows physically by eating, mentally by learning. He develops motor skills by practicing and exerting effort. That spiritual infant is you. We grow physically by feeding on the Word of God, mentally by learning from

teachers in the faith and ultimately the greatest Teacher of all, the Holy Spirit. We take what we learn mentally and put it into practice to develop our faith skills.

Hebrews 5:11-14 "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

Philippians 3:12-15 "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Stop living life base on our feelings. Act like the Christ-person that we are. The fullness of Christ is in us. The full fruit of the Holy Spirit is in us. Start living life base on faith and our Christ's identity.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. **And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**"

2 Corinthians 5:7 "for we **walk by faith, not by sight.**

"I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith." What does it mean to live by faith? Faith is not a feeling. You don't feel faith. Faith is believing the Word of God for what it says and put it into practice. Do we believe that the full fruit of the Holy Spirit is in us? Well, by faith live it. Let's take love as an example. We are conditioned to believe that love is an emotion and to love a dear brother or sister in Christ, we need to feel that emotion in us. But that's not what a Christ-person is taught by the Word of God. This is not how the Christ's identity operates. The Christ-person says, "By faith I will love you dear sister." "By faith I will serve you dear sister, even if I don't feel like loving and serving you." Living by faith is believing that I am dead. It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me. By faith, I live this Christ's identity. By faith, I see myself as a Christ-person even though I don't feel so. When temptation comes my way, by faith, I say to myself, "That's not me anymore, that

person is dead." By faith I identify with my Christ's identity. By faith, I live the Christ identity that I am. This is how we train our body, which has been imprinted by decades of living according to the desire of the flesh. Put this into practice little by little. Remember we are infants. We need to grow little by little, but we will grow. What happens if we failed, and sin? Remember that we are infants, mere children. If we stumble and sinned, admit it to ourself and to God that we have sinned because we are children and we are learning and growing. That's how God sees us: children learning and growing. When we fall, our heavenly Father doesn't condemn us. He runs over and embrace us in His arm to comfort us. "Now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)..." That verse reflects how God sees us and who we are in God. We are children loved by God. There is no condemnation because there is no performance required. Our Father will pick us up, dust us off, and embrace us in love. Let this concept sink in. Meditate on this in your time with God. We inherited all of this by birth. Our Christ's identities were given to us when we were born again. Now that we have seen how to grow in our Christ's identity, let's learn to rest in His awesome love.

DISCOVER REST IN YOUR CHRIST IDENTITY: ENJOY THE FATHER

One of the most beloved story in the Gospel is the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. This story has so many layers of meaning. Recently the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to understand it like this. The two sons described my Christian experience in the old model before I came to the knowledge of my Christ's identity. The son that came home ashamed was me whenever I failed to crucify my flesh and stumbled in sin. I would come to God full of sadness and shame and often felt not worthy to be His son. Then there would be time when I have done well in my faith and I would come to God focused on my accomplishments, what I have done right. However, I never had any satisfaction because I don't know when I would mess up and fail again. I lived in fear of God's judgment. When bad things happened, my thought would lead me to wonder if I have done something wrong. Of course I would remind myself that God is not like that at all, but there is something wrong when you have to keep reminding yourself of this. My life would oscillates back and forth between the characteristics of the two sons, misunderstanding who my Father God is, never experiencing His rest. When God began to teach me about my identity in Christ, I still debated with Him that I need to crucify my flesh daily. I leaned on Luke 9:23 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." I need to take up my cross daily, which means I need to crucify my flesh every day. But then, God directed me back to the text. Jesus said that whoever follows Him must take up "his cross daily." God wants me to take up "my cross," not Jesus' cross. There is only one cross of death, and that is Jesus' cross, not ours. In Hebrews the Scripture said that Jesus died once for all. The cross of death was Jesus' cross not ours. Furthermore, Jesus died once, not every day. What then is my cross? What is it that God wants me take up daily?

He directed me to Matt. 11:28-30 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." God want me to take up His yoke. He said take up my yoke daily all who are hard at your labor and carries a heavy burden, and I will give you rest...learn from me...and you will find rest for your souls! The word "rest" resonated in my soul. God new I needed rest, so He directed me over to Hebrews 4 where the Scriptures speaks about a rest for His people. The promise of entering God's rest still stands because those whom the promise was given to did not have faith to enter it. "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from **his works** as God did from his. (v. 9-10)." Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from HIS WORKS! That's me! I need to rest because I am caught up with working, with doing, performing for God. I am just like that older son who, though have been living in the same house with my Father God, did not really knew and understood my Father. That son said to his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends (Luke 15:29)." I have been toiling to serve God being careful to never disobey His commands. I did not let myself celebrate nor let myself enjoy who I am. I was caught up with performing for God. The words of the father ranged in my heart, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." God said to me, "All I have is yours, you are always with Me, rest, enjoy Me, enjoy all that I have for you." He reminded me of the Westminster Catechism. The first question in it reads, "What is the chief end of man?" and the answer is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to **enjoy him forever.**" The chief end to living the Christ identity is to enjoy God forever! Stop living the old model, see ourselves as little children in Christ, rest, let God embrace us and enjoy Him.

Embracing the Christ identity and seeing myself as a little child in the arms of God has changed me completely. It has changed my relationship with God, my view of Him. It has changed my prayers. "Lord you are good, and your mercy endures forever" has been my praise to Him whenever I think about Him. God you are so good! My heart has been released and it feels good! I'm on a spiritual vacation, I have entered rest. I no longer come to God with a guilty conscience because I am His little child. My morning prayer is "thank you God for this day, thank you for this new life and that it is Christ who lives in me, I will rejoice and be glad in it." I now live each day thinking "how can I enjoy God today." I now enjoy my intimate relationship with God throughout the day. Why was it that the disciples of Jesus, who have witnessed every aspects of Jesus' ministry, from His powerful teaching to His healing of the sick, performing supernatural miracles, casting out demons, being a masterful apologetic, only asked Jesus to teach them one thing? In the Christian word today I see people clamoring to Jesus saying Lord teach me to heal the sick, teach me to do

miracles and cast out demons. Lord teach me to be a powerful teacher; show me how to master debates. The only thing the disciple have ever ask Jesus to teach them was: "Lord, teach us to pray." Why was that? Was Jesus' prayer so eloquent that they were captivated by it? How many chapters of His prayers did his disciple wrote down and collected? It wasn't the prayer that the disciple was asking Jesus to teach them. It was Jesus intimate relationship with the Father that the disciple was so captivated by. In teaching them how to have this intimate relationship He began with: "Our Father." O Father, you are good and your love endures forever!

Appendix I: The Flesh is Dead

The flesh and the battle that we have been so busy fighting came from a self-centric, misinterpretation of the Bible. I started out by saying that the model of the Christian life that we have been taught in our churches is a contributing factor to our problem. We so easily identify with this model and the story of the two wolves because it seemed to mirror our experiences. The Bible clearly teaches us that our old self has been crucified, it is dead and have passed away. You may argue: "But I feel the old self still here in me." It doesn't matter what you feel. For we live by faith, by Scripture, not by how we feel! So let us now look at what Romans 6, 7, and 8 really teaches about the flesh.

Chapter five of Romans concluded with a resounding declaration that just as death reign through Adam, life reign much more in those who have received grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (v.17). We now have a new life. The logical question that comes next and many of you are asking is: "Can I continue to live in sin?" Paul answered this question in 6:2 *"By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"* Why? Because 6:6 *"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."* And 6:14 *"For sin will have no dominion over you..."* The flesh is dead because of our baptism into Christ's death and the obligation of the flesh, sin, has been nullified. From verses 15 to the end of the chapter Paul uses slavery to illustration this point. He goes on with a second illustration from civil law, in chapter 7:1-6 to further make the case. 7:1 *"Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?"* We can say it this way: "The flesh is binding on a person only as long as he is alive." 7:6 *"But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."* We now come to the part of chapter 7 that is most often taken out of context and gets misinterpreted. In verse 7 Paul begins to defend the Law (I have capitalized it to show that it is God's law). 7:1 *"What then shall we say? That the Law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the Law, I would not have known sin."* The Law of God in the Old Testament had a holy purpose. It was given to show us that we are sinners in need of a holy God. 7:12 *"So the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."* The Law was good and holy, it did not produce death. Sin produces death and the Law exposed sin. 7:13 *"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."* We now come to the part that is most misunderstood: 7:14-24 *"For we know that the law is spiritual, **but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.** For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... but I see in my members another law waging war against the law*

of my mind and **making me captive to the law of sin** that dwells in my members. **Wretched man that I am!** Who will deliver me from this body of death?" I want you to look at those phrases in bold. Paul started out defending the Law, the Old Testament. He is now describing a life of a person under the Law. This person is a WRETCHED person, sold under sin, captive to the law of sin. In other word, a slave to sin. This is not you! He just spent chapter 6 telling you that you are not a slave to sin because you are now dead. Who will deliver us out of this wretched state of living? "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" That is why chapter 8 started with "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**" Jesus came and fulfilled all of the Old Testament Law for us, 8:4 "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. From verses 4 down Paul is speaking about 2 different people.

Verse	Those who walk according to the Spirit	Those who walk according to the flesh
4	the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, <u>who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.</u>	
5	set their minds on the things of the Spirit.	set their minds on the things of the flesh
6	set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.	set the mind on the flesh is death
7		the mind that is set on the flesh is <u>hostile to God</u> , for it <u>does not submit to God's law</u> ; indeed, <u>it cannot.</u>
8		Those who are in the flesh <u>cannot please God.</u>
9	<u>You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit</u>	Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
10	But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.	
11	If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to	

	your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.	
12	So then, brothers, we are debtors, <u>not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.</u>	
13	but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.	For if you live according to the flesh you will die
14	For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.	
15	<u>For you did not receive the spirit of slavery</u> to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"	
16	The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,	
17	and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.	

As you can see clearly, Paul is referring to two, completely different, states of being: those who are living in the Spirit (those who are born again), and those who are living in the flesh (those who are not saved). He is not describing a bipolar, multi-personalities Christian who is wrestling with the flesh inside of him, which is how we have been taught historically. Paul is consistent in his treatment of the flesh among the teachings in his letters.

Galatians 2:17-20 "But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. **I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Here Paul is saying, if we who have been justified in Christ (are one with Christ) were found to have sin in our lives, is Christ (or we who have Christ in us) a servant (a slave) to sin? Absolutely not! Why not? Because I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. I am dead. I now live a new identity, the identity of Christ, who is not a slave to sin. He goes on to say: "Let me

ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh (Gal. 3:2-3)?" If you were saved by faith and not by works, why then do you need to work to perfect your salvation? Why do you need to perform for God? God does not require performance, and He will never requires it. Paul goes back to using the law as an illustration in chapter 3:15-29.

Galatians 3:23-27 "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

If you were baptized into Christ, you have taken on Christ identity, you are now children of God. You are a Christ-person. Chapter 4, Paul again uses the slave illustration. Verses 6-7 "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So **you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**" The end of this chapter he invoked the image of two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, to show two states of being and concluded with: "So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman." You are children of the free woman. You are free from the flesh, from sin. We now come to Chapter 5 with the declaration: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Verse 16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Now that you have been set free, walk in freedom, walk in the Spirit, the Christ identity, and you will not live in sin. Now the next verse has been traditionally misunderstood. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (v. 17)." Does this verse sound familiar? It summarized in one sentence what Paul took a whole paragraph to say in Romans 7. However, don't stop here and take this verse out of context. The next verse starts with BUT! "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (v. 18)." But if you are led by the Spirit, you don't have the two opposing personalities inside of you. How can we distinguish those walking in the Spirit from those walking in the flesh? "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 19-21)." The clarifier at the end tells us that these people are not us. They are non-kingdom people. They are non-believer (see Eph. 4:17-20 for a similar list). We who are believers are this: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ

Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (v. 22-24).” Again, the clarifier at the end tells us that those who belong to Christ, HAVE CRUCIFIED their flesh along with its passions and desires. The flesh has been crucified and it is dead. Let’s look at Peter’s teaching.

2 Peter 1: 3-11 “3 **His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them **you may become partakers of the divine nature**, having **escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire**. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, **having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins**. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, **for if you practice these qualities you will never fall**. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As you can see, Peter’s teaching parallels that of Paul. “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*” God has given us all the power to live a life of godliness because we have partaken of His divine nature. Partake means to “join in”. We join in, share, the divine nature of God, *having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*. Notice Peter used the word “escaped.” The antonym to escape is imprison. We have escaped from the prison of being bounded to “sinful desire” that corrupts this world. Peter echoed Paul in saying that we are not captives of the law of sin and death. Therefore, we need to make every effort to live out our Christ identity in virtues, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, and love. Ultimately, Peter says that “if you practice these qualities you will never fall.” You will never fall from faith because these are the fruits of your life in Christ, your Christ identity. The New Testament does not teach that we need to continually crucify our flesh. On the contrary, it teaches that we are to live our new Christ identity. Whenever the New Testament mention the flesh, the old self, it mentioned it in passing, referring to the past, and then redirect us to who we are now in Christ and admonished us to live it. **It does not instruct us to go battle our flesh.**

Romans 6:19 "I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to

impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."
8:5 "those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

Galatians 5:13 "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

5:16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

5:25 "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Ephesians 5:1-2 "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..."

5:8 "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light."

Colossians 2:6 "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,"

3:1-2 "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

God did not intend for you to live this life on your own, so stop trying. The Scripture does not teach us to fight the flesh. It is pointless because it's dead. Stop thinking that you need to put Christ on the throne of your life. He is already there. Who has the power to bring Him off His throne? Do you really have that power? That model of the Christian life that we have been taught is not what the New Testament teaches. Embrace your Christ identity. See yourself as an infant in Christ. Explore this new identity. Live it.