

Gospel Blueprints: Identity, Colossians 3:1-4, 9/19/21

Everyone needs to be able to answer three primary questions to live life: **Who am I? Identity** **What is good? Morality, Why do I exist? Purpose.** Every culture and belief system attempts to give us ways to approach and respond to these questions- call this a worldview, or the image we are using of blueprints- the presuppositions, beliefs, values, practices that are foundational to our lives and society. You may consciously and thoughtfully aware of your worldview or subconscious unaware of you have one but all of us do, using one to cope with stress, manage your time and to make decisions every day. The course of your life and making sense of it has everything to do with your worldview. What we are doing with this series is trying to pull up the floor boards to expose the worldview of our modern secular culture, evaluate it and lay it side by side with Christian Worldview- Gospel Blueprints.

Now last week was foundational because we started with the question “What is Truth?” Talked about the shift from the **Cosmic Truth vs. Personal Truth** Narrative. Building on this foundational difference today as we talk about the question of Identity: “Who am I?”. David in **Psalm 8:4 What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?** Your identity is whatever you look to at your core to define you, what you look to for your **security, significance and validation.** The same shift from Cosmic Truth to Personal Truth also shaped the shift from traditional to modern identity. Charles Taylor- calls this shift from Authority to Authenticity.

Traditional Identity (Authority)- Your identity- your sense of self, worth and dignity was bestowed on you by an external validator- God, tribe, community, family. Your congruence with and ability to live out that identity through status in the community, duty and living a virtuous life determined your honor and status in that society. Outside in approach.

This was the dominant identity for the vast majority of history until the last hundred years, however, Modern Identity is not actually a modern discovery- it has deep roots in the Enlightenment, Romantics as early as 1600s- In **The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self**, Carl Trueman historically ties the foundations of modern identity to 5 Fathers- Atheist Revolutionary influencers- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friederich Nietzsche, Carl Marx, Charles Darwin, but it was Sigmund Freud who was the most influential on modern identity. Building on Darwin’s theory that human beings are animals who are the result not of design but accidental chance with no inherent meaning or dignity through the harsh process of natural selection, he believed that our animal instincts and desires should be freed, the greatest of which are sexual desires. The Social Structures of government authorities, family and especially religion repress these desires and it is repression of desires are the greatest cause of dysfunction and neuroses. Psychological health comes from expression of “true self” which is your desires. While there have been elements of this narrative throughout history, it is only in the last 30 years has the modern identity narrative come to decisively dominate and accelerate exponentially in the West.

Modern Identity (Authenticity)- inside out, Identity comes from your own sense of who you are based on your desires. getting in touch with the real you inside, what makes you happy. You

become your own validator not an outside authority like the community, your family or God. You will have a healthy identity to the extent to which you know yourself and live authentically to yourself.

The story of self-sacrifice for the duty of God, Country and Family shifts to stories of the heroism of living out the authentic self. Maybe the greatest example of breaking out of the traditional identity to embrace modern identity is **Disney's Frozen** in the song *Let it Go*. *Don't let them in, don't let them see, Be the good girl you always have to be, Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know...* this is the modern narrative of the repression of traditional, authority identity. She runs away to be by herself. And it is in her own self-reflection that she discovers her true self- *test the limits and break through, No right, no wrong, no rules for me I'm free, Let it go, let it go, I'm not holding back anymore*. And to really make sure we got the idea there is a costume change right before our eyes.

Now that's a quick overview of the two primary ways cultures have characteristically formed identity. Now I'm going to critique modern identity narrative, but that doesn't mean I think the traditional identity is the answer. I think in many ways the traditional narrative was suffocating and led to oppression, I'm not interested in going back there- it's not better just different. What I want to show you is that the Christian narrative is unique from both of these dominant views. So at each critique of the Modern Identity Narrative I want to show you how the Christian Identity has better solutions and a stronger foundation.

#1 Modern Identity offers no Basis for Human Rights

If we are essentially animals that have evolved through the harsh process of natural selection, if we have no inherent purpose, if happiness is individually defined by what is best for me, and if morality is a social construct...then on what basis do we declare that anyone has inherent equality, dignity and worth? When my existence, personal happiness and identity come in conflict with anyone else's who is to say who gets to have the right to life, dignity and happiness? Modern Secularism has no cogent answer which should be sobering to all of us because rights and the value of people become tenuous at best. There is no greater expression of this modern conflict than the issue of abortion. There was a time that abortion advocates attempted to rely on biology to say prenatal life isn't human life. Now we knew that was a baseless argument even before advancement of technology but now we can observe in the very early stages, just weeks the development of a baby who feels pain, who can think, responds to stimulation and experiences emotion. And so the argument shifted to (modern identity narrative) women's right to choose by which we mean the personal feelings of happiness and psychological health in which case her dignity and identity is more valuable than the life of the baby.

Christian Identity: Human Rights Bestowed by our Creator

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

In stark contrast to modern identity, to know thyself we must begin with knowing God as we are made in his very image. Psalmist David answered the question of identity- *Psalm 8:5 You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor.* Os Guinness- “They [secularists] always try to understand human beings in relation to nature or to themselves, and they always end in reducing humanity to the level of nature or an animal or a machine. The Bible in contrast understand humanity upward, not downward.”¹

Not surprisingly then Christianity ends up with the highest view of human rights- championing inherent human worth and dignity for all, equally and uniquely above all other creation made in the image of God. For the sanctity of human life from womb to tomb. We can love ourselves and see the beauty, worth and capacity for glory within ourselves regardless of our position in society because we are God’s image bearers. And we are also compelled to see God’s image in every other human. When Jesus said in Matthew 25, “What you have done for the least of these you have done to me” it was a declaration of the dignity of all persons, even those the world discards. It is why Christianity must be unquestionably pro-life from womb to tomb. From the beginning the early church was characterized this way- adopting babies who were discarded, caring for elderly widows and the poor, during the plagues risking their lives to care for the sick.

“The man who wishes to exempt himself from providing for his neighbors should face himself and declare that he no longer wishes to be a man, for as long as we are human creatures we must contemplate as in a mirror our face in those who are poor, despised, exhausted, who groan under their burdens.” –John Calvin

This is why historically and currently Christians and Christian institutions are the greatest financial, material and personal contributors to humanitarian aid across the world. Building hospitals, clinics, disaster relief, schools, clean water efforts, fighting the human sex-trafficking and slave trade. Does that mean Christians have always treated everyone with dignity and never were oppressors no- Christian slave owners, treatment of minorities, LGBT persons. But these examples are not a demonstration of true Christianity but rather of corruption of Christianity.

#2 Modern Identity is Incoherent and Confusing

Be true to yourself, go into your feelings and find the real you and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise- OK, which one? All of us have families of selves in us.² If my feelings and desires are my true self, well I have all kinds of feelings and desires, many of which are in conflict with each other. Some of which if I lived out would might be harmful to me and others. John Mayer- “Half of my heart is a shotgun wedding to a bride with a paper ring and half of my heart is the part of a man that hasn’t truly loved anything.” So which should I live out and which should I suppress and self-restrain? None? All? We have a saying in our house, never shop hungry...I want to be

¹ Os Guinness, *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, 49.

² John Mark Comer’s phrase

healthy and so part of me desires to go down the fruits and vegetables aisle but another part of me wants to indulge and to go the pastry aisle...both are authentic desires which one is the real me? But there are far more warring desires in me and in you than food...I want to be faithful to my wife, kids and church...and I want to move to a beach in the Caribbean and live on a sailboat singing Margaritaville. I want to treat women with honor and stand up for equality- and I also want to objectify them. I want to be more like Christ and I want to be more like Brad Pitt. Modern Identity has no basis for determining which desires are the real you and which you should suppress.

Christian Identity is Coherent, Honest and Lifegiving

Modern Identity has no coherent origin story or moral basis for desire. But Christianity does. Genesis 3- The Fall, man rebels, sin enters our world. Where there once was peace and harmony in our desires for God, for one another and for creation, these desires became disordered. We began putting our own desires (self-protection, self-fulfillment, self-validation) above that of God and one another. St. Augustine, building on Jesus and the Apostle Paul said that at our core we are designed to be lovers. Sin he said is essentially disordered love- loving things out of order. Freud: human beings are animals, run by instinctual desires for pleasure, and when we repress our desires we suffer. Augustine: Human beings are image bearers, created in love and to love God and each other, but when we disorder our loves and let them run amok, we suffer.³

Christianity is honest about the complexity of the heart. Follow your heart may be the worst advice you could take. Not all desires are good and not all desires are bad and it is God not us that gets to decide. We are a glorious mess of both good and evil, dysfunctional desires which run down the center of every human heart.⁴ Some desires should be restrained and disciplined and others we should cultivate and developed with the help of the Spirit working in us, not based on cultural conditions but on God's moral design for us (talk about that next week). Christianity teaches us that our strongest desires aren't necessarily our deepest desires. In the moments of temptation that feels the strongest- to gossip, to be frivolous with my money, to watch something I shouldn't, to lash out in anger, to act out sexually in a certain way- My identity is not reduced down to any of these desires. That is not who I am. Colossians 3:1-2 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

My deepest desires as Christians are formed in setting our hearts on who we are in Christ, where Christ is. My deepest desire, not always my strongest desire is to honor God with my mind, emotions, will, and body.

#3 Modern Identity is Brittle

Modern Identity tells us that we are own originators and validators of who we are. The problem is that's impossible. We are relational, insecure, half-hearted creatures. We cannot live up to

³ John Mark Comer comparison

⁴ Tim Keller's phrase

our own dreams and our own standards. And so we can't validate ourselves because we know ourselves too well. This is why Charles Taylor said, "The modern identity is the most fragile in history." Our culture thinks it is freeing people through self-actualization and identity creation, but what it is actually doing is crushing them with an unbearable burden. Never before in a society has there been a pressure to define yourself like this. Might this contribute to such enormous confusion, anxiety, depression and other mental/emotional health challenges among young people? We need people outside of ourselves to validate us, to confirm our identity. This makes perfect sense of why people feel such a need to identify themselves at their core by their racial profile, political party, sexual preference or gender preference. The real issue is one of recognition, of recognizing the legitimacy and validating who the person thinks he or she actually is. This results also in social brittleness and fragmenting- if others don't validate who I am politically, socially, sexually they become my enemy. They don't just disagree with my view, they don't accept who I am.

Christian Identity is Secure

Every human being desperately needs assurance and validation that they are received, loved, accepted, regardless of the ups and downs of your performance. Every other culture, religion is based on your performance. When you do good you feel proud, when you bad you feel like dirt. "Only Christianity says your identity is **Received not Achieved.**"⁵ The good has to be achieved...but you can't do it. If you try, you will always be radically insecure. **2 Corinthians 5:21** *God made Him who knew no sin to become sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.* Jesus didn't become sinful (not bad)...treated as if he was a sinner like everything we've done. So that we might become the righteousness of God. Exchanged identity. **Colossians 3:3-4** *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

When Jesus Christ becomes your deepest identity, God treats you as if you have done everything Jesus has done. No other culture, religion has that. That is the most secure identity possible. Those who have their identity hidden in Christ, it completely changes you to not need the validation on social media, from spouse, from children, from a lover, from social group, from grades...not in a way that makes you a sociopath- but a servant like Jesus. OK if you disagree, still can love you. I don't need you to validate me because the eyes of my creator look lovingly upon me.

Quick Challenge- Some of us have a Christian Identity in our heads, but are living a modern identity in our hearts. We say we believe Jesus is our identity and we know God loves us but then we live as if we desperately need something or someone else to define us. Do you see that inconsistency? Or we say we believe that Jesus is our identity and we want his desires to be lived out in our lives, but then spent no time cultivating his desires and just live as if our own desires are the "real you". Do you see that inconsistency? Colossians 3.

⁵ Tim Keller, Identity Conference, 2017