

Who are you? Who am I? What is my identity?

I am the son of Martin and Margo, husband of Joy, father of Richard and Joanne, and Grandfather of four lovely grandchildren. Part of my identity is these relationships.

I am a minister in the Anglican Church on the staff at Waitara Anglican Church. I am an Australian citizen. Even though I was born in Hong Kong I was naturalised 1979. I am an Aussie! When I travel overseas, my backpack has an Aussie flag on it. I enjoy travelling to other countries but I don't belong there. I'm not home there. I belong to Australia.

Our sense of identity is what makes us tick. It shapes our life.

1. Who are we?

As Christians we have a unique identity as we see in 1 Peter.

a) We are citizens of heaven

This is much more important to our identity than citizens of Australia. Peter writes,

"To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces ..." (1:1)

He says, *"...live out your time as foreigners here."* (1:17)

In 2:11 calls them *"foreigners and exiles."*

This world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven. This world is just a bus stop on our way to heaven. You don't settle down at a bus stop. We have "*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.*" (1:4) That is where we belong. That is our true home.

We are citizens of heaven. "*Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.*" (1:13) This new identity should shape our lifestyle so he says to focus our thoughts on our future inheritance, to really take it to heart.

b) We are God's children

"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." (1:14) *"Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially..."* (1:17)

Prince Harry's identity is that Prince Charles is his father. It makes him a possible heir to the throne of England. When he comes to Australia he gets VIP treatment because of who his father is.

God is the most significant being in the universe. To be his children gives us a most significant identity, far more significant than the child of any king or president.

c) We are part of God's family

Having God as father makes me part of his family. *"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love [literally 'brotherly love'] for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart."* (1:22)

To be family, to be related, is a vital part of who we are. You are not an only child. You have brothers and sisters. All of us are parts of God's family.

d) We are God's people

One of the greatest statements of who we are is 1:9-10. *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

Today we live in a society where identity is defined by the self. It is the age of the 'selfie', photos with me as centre, my Facebook page. It is an age where self is centre to identity.

But God is centre to reality. His love eclipses everything else. To belong to him is far more significant than anything else, to be his people, his priests. In the Old

Testament only the priests could come before God to worship. Now every believer has that privilege. Never take it for granted. We have the privilege to be his priests.

But note: it not just me as an individual, it is us together, a “holy nation”. We are “God’s own people” - Not God’s own person.

Yes each one of us is a child of God individually, but we belong to him together. Our relationship to each other is a vital part of identity. Just as being Aussies means to belong to this nation we belong to each other. Other parts of Scripture call us the Body of Christ together.

Western society puts all its emphasis on the individual. We need to see our shared identity. Our identity is based on our relationship to God and to each other.

2. How did we get this identity?

It wasn’t based on our own achievements. It wasn’t something we had by right.

a) We were redeemed

¹⁸ *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,* ¹⁹ *but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1:18-19)*

To be redeemed is to be bought at a price. We think silver and gold are precious. Gold is worth \$1580 an oz. at present, but Christ's blood is far more precious. That the Son of God should die for us is beyond price. Yet God was prepared to pay this price so we could belong to him. We are not our own. We were bought at that price.

b) We were reborn

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." (1:23)

My Birth Certificate says where I was born, on what date and who my parents are. It is a key part of my identity. I need show this to get a driver's license.

That we have been reborn is even more significant. It is God who has given me this new life as his child through his word that makes me who I am. We are citizens of heaven, God's children, God's family, God's chosen people. We have been redeemed and born again.

3. How should we live?

This letter is all about how we should live as Christians. But this isn't just a matter of a list of do this and don't do that, an arbitrary moralism. It is about a lifestyle that is consistent with who we are. Given our new wonderful identity how should we live?

Peter says, “¹⁵ *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;* ¹⁶ *for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*

(1:15-16)

If we belong to God, we are his children, his people. We should therefore seek to become more like him, holy. But what does it mean to be holy?

a) Don't live like the world

“Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” (1:14) *“You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors.”* (1:18) We are not to copy the social patterns of our society. We need to question the individualism, the materialism, the self-centred lifestyle, the pleasure focus and other aspects of our society.

He says it is an *empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors*. It doesn't have the fulfilment our new life has. Don't blindly follow them.

b) Love each other

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” (1:22) Being part of God's family will mean we love like brothers and sisters.

We need to work on our relationships with each other. It does take work to get to know each other, and when there are conflicts to resolve them and re-establish love. It is not easy but it is very important. We need more than casual acquaintances. He calls us to *“love one another deeply, from the heart.”*

We need to get rid of negative attitudes and actions. *“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”* (2:1) These things are all destructive of relationships. The world around us accepts these things as normal but we need to reject them as against what God stands for.

If you were making a cake you would put good ingredients: sifted flour not full of lumps and plenty of sugar to make it sweet. You wouldn't put in bad eggs or rotten fish.

Relationships are far more important than cake! We need to put in the ingredients of love, patience, understanding, honesty, forgiveness and so on and to make sure there is no malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander. We need words that build up not tear down. We do this not only for each other but also to honour God.

c) We need to grow

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (2:2)

I guess you have all seen a baby who wants to be fed. They can yell the whole house down. You can't ignore them!! They crave milk. They demand it. They are not satisfied till they get what they want and need. Do we crave to have more of God's word like that?! Would you yell the house down if the preacher didn't give you a long enough sermon? Or if you didn't have time to read the Bible at home?

Crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. We need to grow in our faith.

d) We need to live for God

He talks about our new identity that we are: *“like living stones, being built into a spiritual house.” (2:5)* We are being made into a temple to honour God. He says that we are *a “holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.” (1:5)*

And finally he says, *“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (2:9)*

We are to honour God by our lives, to give him praise and to be witnesses for him in this world.

Shane Warne was a brilliant spin bowler. He was part of the Aussie cricket team representing Australia on many tours, but he didn't always act in a way that brought honour to his country. We look to our sporting stars to do well and also to act well, to bring honour to our country.

So we represent God in this world. We need to live to bring honour to his name. We are to “*declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” by our words and our actions, by our whole lifestyle. They are to be a witness to him.