

## How Should Christians Understand “Identity”?

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“I identify as trans” or “male” or “gay” or “African American” or “white” or “Christian” or . . . This “identity” phenomenon is everywhere today and sometimes confusing. The Christian understanding of identity must be theological, not political or cultural. The biblical approach will keep us faithful to God and His Word and guides us so we approach life realistically and with compassion. The biblical worldview distinguishes three senses of “identity”:

### 1. God-established identities—*true, inviolable.*

I rightly identify myself as, and all human beings as, those *made in the image of God in the broad sense*. Human beings alone have an immortal soul. They grasp, unlike other creatures, transcendent truth, justice, purpose, life, beauty, and goodness. They are designated to rule over creation even though they may abuse that rule. This image-of-God status makes all people of equal, intrinsic, and sacred value. And this value applies to *everyone* regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, nationality, heritage, economic status, intelligence, etc.

I rightly identify as, and all human beings as, either *male or female*. Furthermore, I identify two people as *married* only when that marriage consists of both male and female.

I rightly identify as, and all human beings as, those who *lost the image of God in the narrow sense* (true holiness and righteousness). Since the fall, *all* are equally and desperately sinful, regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle. . . .

I rightly identify as, and all human beings as, those who have been *objectively justified*. Jesus Christ purchased forgiveness and righteousness for everyone and therefore this identity applies to *all*, regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle. . . . Objective justification claims that every person is precious and of inestimable value to God, reinforcing the evangelism mandate.

I rightly identify as, and only some as, those who have been *subjectively justified* before God, namely, those who have been baptized and live in repentance and faith in Christ. The image of God in the narrow sense has been renewed in believers and they begin to display that image of God by producing the fruits of repentance. This identity is a reality *only for true Christians*, uniting them in one body regardless of sex, ethnicity, economic status. . . .

### 2. God-allowed identities.

I *may* identify myself and others on the basis of skin color, ethnicity, lifestyle, nationality, heritage, economic status, intelligence, age, vocation, etc., as long as these are based in some objective reality. But in and of themselves, they do not make one more (or less) sacred or intrinsically valuable than another.

However, when one or more of these God-allowed identities are believed to be *intrinsically valuable* or are thought to be *equal to or more important* than one of the true identities, then they take on a status never intended. This leads to denying or diminishing in others the image of God in the broad sense. This exalting of God-allowed identities and suppression of true identities results in disrespect, lovelessness, cruelty, and injustice. This is the essence of racism and many prejudices.

### 3. God-forbidden identities—*offensive to Him and to human nature as He created it.*

I *must not* identify myself with that which is contrary to the God-established identities or objective reality. To do so means to live in a lie.

Nor am I allowed to *affirm* the self-chosen identities in others that are contrary to the God-established ones or objective reality. To do so would encourage others to live in a lie, the very opposite of Christian love.

The **Woke Movement (Critical Theory)** dangerously and deceptively elevates God-allowed and God-forbidden identities above God-established identities.

So, *love for God* compels me to say “no” to forbidden identities and to rejoice and find security in His true identities. *Love for my neighbor* compels me to recognize my neighbor’s sacred value (equal to mine), his fallenness (equal to mine), and his redemption in Christ (equal to mine), with the hope he will receive Christ. It is not love to affirm false identities; rather—when called upon—I must speak *the truth in love*.

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