

We all have identities; something that defines us. Foundationally we are male or female, as God created us. After birth, we are given a name and our identity is the family name to which we are connected. Throughout life, there are other identities that we try to claim for ourselves, such as being a person of integrity or kindness or honesty. Other identities are given to us by the world, whether we like it or not. *That person is a loser. She is a princess.* What cannot be argued is that we are defined by any numbers of identities; ones chosen and given to us. These identities all dictate how we live and how we engage with this world. Nobody is without an identity.

In 1997, I worked as a program director at a Bible camp in northern Minnesota. One particular week, we had three boys who got into trouble from the moment they arrived on Sunday. They became a thorn in the side, not just for the counselor assigned to them, but for the whole staff. On Monday night, the staff lamented to me about how these boys were making life difficult for them. I admit, I was getting frustrated with the boys as well, and it had only been 24 hours. We were constantly pulling them out of activities and putting them in “time out”. On Tuesday, once again, the boys got into trouble, but this time I intervened. I took the boys over to a picnic table, away from everyone else. I sat them all on one side and I sat on the other. I glared at them and said, “*Why do you insist on getting in trouble all the time?*” There was an awkward silence until one of the boys replied, “*Because everyone expects us to.*” I sat stunned; punched in the gut with the truth. You see, they were right. We had identified them as trouble makers and they were just living up to our expectations. They were getting the attention they wanted by accepting the identity we had unknowingly given them. I shared my insights with the staff that night and we changed their identity. Instead of trouble maker, we expected greater things from them and we looked for that. The rest of the week went great as those boys accepted the new identity we gave them.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are given the identity, Child of God, redeemed one, loved one, accepted by God, and the list goes on. Through the Holy Spirit our identity is changed from sinner to saint. You are still a sinner, but no longer defined by that. Instead, we live into the new identity given to us by God. We do this by glorifying him with our very life; worshiping Him with every breath; treating others with love; proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Instead of expecting sin from you, God expects good works. You will still sin, but being identified with Jesus, you are forgiven.

Through Jesus, you have a new identity. Claim and accept this, knowing that this identity is forever. Praise be to God! Amen!