



OUR IDENTITY AT KCPC IN THE CHRIST OF HEBREWS

PASTOR CHARLES R. BIGGS

Identity. How do we define ourselves (to others, or in our own minds)? How do we think of ourselves before God and other men? Our identity is most important to us all. And we define our identity in different ways.

We are fans of certain ball teams (this can be our identity, e.g. Redskins, Phillies, Falcons, Red Sox, Yankees, Terps, and Jets). We are from certain places on this great terrestrial ball or are part of a specific heritage of people (Asian, African, Anglo, American, etc- -this can be our identity). We make a certain amount of money (“My salary is above \$25,000 or above \$75,000 or above half a million dollars, etc- -this can be our identity).

We hold certain positions (plumbers, bankers, treasurers, professional athletes, pastors, home school moms, students, president of a certain company- -this can be our identity). We have a certain name and family (this can be our identity).

We are also defined by our confessional and denominational distinctions (you are an Orthodox Presbyterian and confessional congregation in Christ’s Church). These are all ways we define ourselves- -these are ways we can think of our identity.

But what should be our most important identity or way of understanding ourselves as a congregation in Christ’s Church? We should be reminded of our ultimate identity as a **covenantal corporate people in Christ.**

What should our identity be ultimately? We are those who are united to Jesus Christ by faith. We are those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. We are those who have been loved by God from before the foundation of the world. But you will be tempted to find your individual as well as corporate identity in something or someone other than Christ.

Thus the reason for this reminder: to teach us by God’s grace who we are by using someone else’s sermon. Now you might complain that I am borrowing from someone else’s sermon. Don’t be concerned- -I didn’t download this one from online; I am using an inspired sermon, or word of exhortation, or the ***letter to the Hebrews*** to encourage you tonight. I’m using the inspired sermon found in the **Book of Hebrews.**

The Christians that the sermon to the Hebrews addresses were also seeking to know their identity as *they were a congregation in transition.* These Christians were seeking to understand and to realize who they were in Christ especially in light of the accomplished and perfect work of Jesus Christ for them.

One reason the author of the Hebrews writes to the saints in his letter is to teach them ***how with the coming of Jesus Christ, everything changes- -especially one's identity.*** Especially during times of trouble and suffering you will especially need to remember your corporate identity as those in Christ Jesus.

Although we as members of Christ's Church are distinct and diverse on the outside (an observation by someone looking in), ***we are all one in union with Jesus Christ and this primary identity should serve to unify us.*** As the congregation of the Hebrews, we too will experience suffering, persecution and pain as a congregation and we must learn to stand firm, knowing our identity in Jesus as ***His Church.***

What should be KCPC's focus and self-aware identity as a congregation of Christ?

There is so much to say from the Book of Hebrews, but let's focus on 10 short points (that sounds like a good number- -now some might get mad at me and say there are literally 1000s of points that could be made- -and you are right, but we will focus on 10).

- 1) You are those redeemed and ruled by Jesus who sits at God's right hand. You are those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ (with his own precious blood). Jesus Christ is the one who has spoken in finality to His Church and given us the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who created the world and upholds the world by the word of His power and is the exact imprint of God's nature. Jesus is the same in essence with the Father, equal in power and glory. And you ***Ketocin Covenant*** have been redeemed by the blood of this one who died, rose again by the power of God, and sat down at God's right hand. ***That is who you are- -that is your identity.***

ESV Hebrews 1:1-4: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

- 2) You are those who are called as a people to watch and listen. You are those who must pay attention to the final Word of the Son found in the Holy Scriptures. As your pastor and elders make known the Word of Christ to you, in reliance upon God's grace, you are to believe and obey this word. ***Do not neglect the power of this Word and how by God's grace you will continue to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus.***

ESV Hebrews 2:1-3a: Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

We are all daily tempted to believe a lie- -to drift- -to be deceived- -but because Christ has spoken finally to His Church in His Word, we are to pay close attention and believe what we hear- -you are never to neglect such a great salvation revealed in Jesus! ***That is who you are- -that is your identity.***

- 3) You are those who have had the power of death and the devil destroyed for you by Jesus Christ. You are those whom Jesus Christ has come to deliver, who was like you in every way as a human, but also unlike you in that he was God in the flesh. Because of this, you are more than overcomers! You can live a life in Christ that is pleasing to God- -you can produce fruit that will last for the Kingdom.

You are those who have a faithful high priest who serves at God's right hand to ever intercede for you and who has made once for all propitiation for the sins of those who believe. You can have a sure knowledge that when you are tempted to sin, Christ *Jesus is faithful* to help you.

ESV Hebrews 2:14-18: Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 4) You are God's House. KCPC, you are part of God's redemptive-historical construction project. You are a holy temple where God's Spirit dwells and the Son rules over as you are more and more built up by the Lord Jesus Christ who died for you.

The Almighty God dwells in you and therefore you, in reliance upon God's grace, must strive for holiness and for purity as a congregation in obedience to God's Word, because you are a holy place where the living God has made his home.

ESV Hebrews 3:5-6: Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Because you are God's house, part of His New Temple construction project, you are not complete yet, but you can be confident that God who began a good work in you will complete it, fully conforming you to Jesus Christ. Do not lose this corporate identity as a church in a time of great individualism- -do not seek merely your individual good, but seek the good of Christ's Church and help build his Kingdom here together by being faithful together to the gospel.

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 5) You are those who must encourage each other. You are called to exhort one another daily, knowing that you all will face temptations to unbelief even leading some to fall away from the living God (revealing that they never had their trust and faith and hope in Jesus Christ). Those who are united to Jesus Christ by faith must seek to be faithful by God's grace and to avoid being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

ESV Hebrews 3:12-14: Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Be on your guard against an evil, unbelieving heart; be on your guard of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Rather, as a family, as God's own house, seek to exhort each other according to the word each and every day.

God uses our instructions, our encouragements to one another, our urgings, our admonitions as means by which he helps us to hold to our confidence in Christ firm to the end. Be an encourager- -grateful for God's grace, confident in God's mercy- -avoid being self-centered and focused only on yourself.

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 6) You are those who have yet to enter into God's rest. Although you are in Christ and in him you experience peace and rest partially from your labors even now, you have yet to enter the glorious Promised Land of the New Heavens and the New Earth. You must understand the "*already-not yet-ness*" of your identity here. You have been united to Jesus Christ but you must suffer as in the wilderness until you reach your final destination. This present age of wilderness-like living can be full of persecution for your faith, temptation, and suffering of various kinds.

This ultimate destination must be reached by God's grace as you corporately as a congregation, seek to enter the rest when Jesus returns. Seek to take part in the means of grace, these are also the primary means by which God will get you there safely: Word, Sacrament and Prayer. What you experience each Lord's Day

when you are called together to worship is a foretaste of the glorious future of which you are already a part because of Jesus Christ's love for you.

^{ESV} Hebrews 4:9-12: So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 7) You are those who have a High Priest to represent you before the throne of God. Jesus, the Son of God is a High Priest similar to Aaron and the Levites, but much different (these were mere men, who were sinful and although they were called to be representatives for a season in God's Household, they were limited in that they were sinners, and they died).

Jesus the High Priest is called by God to be an ***Eternal High Priest***, who was tempted in every way as we are, *but without sin*. KCPC, Jesus is the one who lives to represent you before God. Jesus Christ is the one who can help you when you are tempted. *He lives to pray for you!*

KCPC, Jesus Christ is eternal and cannot die. There will never be a time when you do not have a faithful representative and High Priest before God's throne (you will never witness a "changing of the guards" as at Windsor Palace), for a permanent and eternal High Priest has taken the position. ***It is there with Jesus that you will find and receive mercy and grace to help you.***

^{ESV} Hebrews 4:14-16: Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus as your High Priest implies a lot of things, but you should be reminded that there is always mercy (*hesed, or covenant faithfulness*) with God to be found in Christ. This means that you are all sinners. As sinners, you will sin against God and one another. But what will make the difference is for you to always remember mercy and grace- -particularly the mercy and grace that has been shown to you in Jesus. Show this same mercy and grace to each other that your High Priest shows to you!

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 8) You are those who are privileged to be part of a better covenant (better than the old covenant saints were under). You are recipients of the New Covenant revelation of Jesus' cross, resurrection and ascension-enthronement to God's right hand- -and so you should inform your identity daily with this great reality.

All of the gallons and gallons of blood that was shed and spilled under the Old Covenant administration (in the sacrifices before God), ***these could never permanently take away your sins.***

Only the blood of Jesus could take away your sins. Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, because his blood is a final shedding of blood that is substitutionary and can truly cleanse and purify your consciences. Jesus offered himself once and for all for sinners—Jesus offered himself for those who believe at KCPC!

Hebrews 9:26b-28: But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

ESV Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

ESV Hebrews 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

ESV Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers,¹ since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Have confidence to come boldly into God's presence with your worship and thanksgiving- -continue to hold fast your confession knowing that you have received forgiveness and cleansing by Jesus' precious blood. Stir one another up to love and good works as you bask in the grace that Jesus has shown to you- -encourage one another this way- -and seek to be present as much as possible at every worship and fellowship.

Don't slip into thinking that you are not a vital and needed part of the congregation just because you do not preach or teach God's Word- -the Bible teaches that we can't get there without you- -avoid individualism in your identity!

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 9) You are those who are to live by faith until the full revelation of God's Kingdom when Jesus Christ the glorious Son returns. As part of the Household of God, and as a member of God's special redemptive household, you are to live by faith in God's promises that has been given in Christ Jesus.

You are to keep your eyes on Jesus, the one who has already finished the course ahead of you, and has promised that he would also help you to persevere and overcome till the end. No matter how difficult circumstances may seem in your life- -no matter how dire the times seem to be- -God is sovereign and you can have faith in God, an assurance of his goodness, a conviction of things not seen!

ESV Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

ESV Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Like Abraham and the other Old Covenant saints, you are looking for an eternal city, an inheritance not found in this world of sin and misery that is passing away, but you are looking for a New Heavens and New Earth.

ESV Hebrews 11:13-16: These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

ESV Hebrews 12:1-4: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

- 10) You are to live and worship as those who will receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. When you worship, let your corporate and covenantal identity be that you, Ketocin Covenant, are worshipping a God who still speaks to you through His Word, and calls you **not** to Mt. Sinai, but **to the Heavenly Jerusalem.**

Remember that when you are called to worship by your pastors and elders not to forsake the gathering together as you are called to hear Jesus Christ speak to you

and who serves as your Mediator in worship. Remember that when you come to worship, you are not a passive spectator, but an *active participant* in a foretaste of heavenly worship.

ESV Hebrews 12:18-29: For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly¹ of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."²⁷ This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken- that is, things that have been made- in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Ketocin Covenant Presbyterian Church (KCPC): Your identity is in Jesus Christ and you are to mediate upon this daily as God's people. Finally, you are to remember to show brotherly love and hospitality to one another, and seek to help the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned (Heb. 13:1-3).

Remember your leaders and consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith (13:7). Obey your leaders that God has given to you and submit to them humbly as they teach the Word of God to you. Remember that they are watching over your souls as those who must give an account (13:17).

You might not like this at times, but your identity is not individualistic, but part of a corporate body of believers who are shepherded by those God has called to teach you, to exhort you, to rebuke and admonish you with love.

Remember that obeying your leaders joyfully will bring great advantages to you as a Christian (13:17b). Remember that as citizen of heaven, the very Eternal Kingdom of God that cannot be shaken, you seek a city that is to come!

ESV Hebrews 13:14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Finally, remember that you are those who are heirs to the covenant promises of God found in and realized in Jesus Christ. In reliance upon God's grace, this is your ultimately identity in Christ- -you will be tempted to replace it, forget it,

exchange it, supplement it, etc- **but do not!** Your hope and identity is found in Jesus Christ!

That is who you are- -that is your identity.

So, I leave you with this great benediction:

^{ESV} Hebrews 13:20-21: Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us¹ that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

In Christ's love,

Pastor Charles