

It's hard for me to remember clearly but my Dad was in the Navy and then in the Coast Guard and so we traveled around and moved around a bit. There didn't seem to be, in the circles we were in, a big deal made of sports. Little League had pretty much a season, but then when it was over everyone kind of moved on and played whatever the next sport was that was available in the city leagues. It wasn't like now when you can play soccer year-round and you can play baseball nearly year-round. It just didn't work like that back then. I didn't really get into athletics; I played a bit of baseball as a kid, but didn't really get into athletics until junior high. What we learned very quickly was that I could run really fast in a straight line, but if I tried to move to the left or to the right, tried to turn, tried to stop, tried to do something as I ran straight, then things would go bad for me. I would fall over, I would break an arm, I would trip over a hurdle or something like that. So, the doctors said it was a rare disorder called 'uncoordinated lankiness.' Basically what that means is that there is some sort of disconnect between the brain and fast-twitch muscle fibers in your body. So, running full speed I would go 'make a left' and my body would get confused as to whether I meant right or left and it would just freak out and fall over. That was pretty much my athletic background. I grew up in a predominantly black junior high and so I played football and basketball and played those sports but pretty much just huddled and wasn't very good at it. I'm being legit, I just wasn't very good. My style of play was deemed as "the honky hustle," and so I'd give it all I had but it usually just didn't go very well for me. And honestly, normally that's not a big deal, even now it isn't a big deal, except that starting around 4th-8th grade you begin to really try to figure out who you are by looking around at who everybody else is. You begin to form what is called your identity. You can see this play out, you can turn on any television program about teenagers, you can study your own teenagers, and you can look around and see it. They start going "Okay, am I an athlete? Am I a brain?" and "Which group am I with? Which group am I not with?" There are even these groups that are anti-groups that form. I'm thinking in my generation it was kind of the Goth kids, that all get together and are Goth together and not be any other group than the group they've now formed. They are individuals within a group of sixty Goth kids. You begin to start trying to figure out "Who am I and how do I fit into the world?" Usually what happens is there's this belief that this seeking of identity and a group to belong with kind of fades as you go off into college, then as you get out of college and into real life. I just simply don't think that's true. I think we continue to define ourselves via our race. I think we continue to define ourselves via our job and where our job falls on the socioeconomic scale. I think we continue to define ourselves by physically how we're made up, emotionally how we're made up. We continue to define ourselves in these really limited, finite ways.

Even here in the suburbs, you have people who define themselves by the job they have. They are their job. They define themselves by the house they live in. This house is what made them. Their entire worth is built around this house, this job, their children, their ability to dress or their fitness. Most fitness has everything to do with vanity and very little to do with actual health. That's why you get the guy doing bicep curls and bench press everyday in the gym. So it's not really about being in shape; it's about your identity. "I want to look this way, I want to be perceived this way, I want to be looked at and I even want others to be envious of this thing in me," whether that be your job, your car, your house or whatever. So this desire for identity never really goes away; it just changes. It's not "the jocks vs. the artsy kids vs. the brainy kids." It kind of elevates to "I'm this. I'm on this team. I'm on the upper-middle class, white, drive-a-BMW, have a five bedroom house with a playroom and an entertainment room." Then you've even got the blue collar, "I'm not some sissy, BMW-driving, caviar-eating, champagne-sipping, weenie. I am a genuine Miller Draft, \$2 hamburger, mac'n'cheese kind of guy." So you've got pride over this side too, about being blue collar. You'll even see this in commercials. The Miller Genuine Draft commercial, where this guy comes in and takes all the Miller Genuine Draft out of the restaurant because

they were charging 8 bucks for a hamburger. So you've got this weird kind of "This is who I am. These are the lenses through which I want you to see me."

This is why I think one of the consistent themes in the book of Colossians is this idea of us as Christians being in Christ. As though our identity is not found in what we drive, what we wear, physically what we're made out of, our fortitude, but rather our identity is made up completely in who Christ is and what He has done. In Colossians 1:14 it says "In whom (that's Christ) we have redemption." In verse 16 it says "In him all things were created." Verse 19 says, "In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell." Verse 22 says, "We are reconciled in his body of flesh." In Colossians 2:3, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In verse 7, we've been charged to "walk in him." In verse 7, we are "rooted and built up in him." In verse 9, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." In verse 11, we have been "filled in Him." In verse 11, we are "circumcised in Him." In verse 12 we are "raised up in Him." In verse 15 we are "triumphing over them in him." In Colossians 3:20, we are pleasing to the Lord. In Colossians 4:17 you see that we are both the fellow servants of the Lord and that the ministry we have has been received in the Lord. You have this constant motion here where it's just completely repetitive in the book of Colossians. What he's saying to you and what he's trying to get across to us is who we are is not external, it's internal and Christ has done it so that my identity is completely built on Him and on nothing else. Where I go outside of Him to determine what my identity is, I am an idolater. There we get into another definition of idolatry: when you go "I will not be defined by God, I'm going to be defined by other things like my car, my house..." You start holding on to those things tightly so that when God wants them, you don't want to give up those things because you think they define who you are. You don't want to let go of some of your money or live a more simplistic lifestyle for the good of the kingdom because those things you've accumulated around you, they've created in you an identity. "This is who I am, I am this car, I am this house, I am these clothes. I am seven hours a week in the gym. I am these things." Paul's trying to communicate that that is an idolatrous way to live. So I want to show you why that is and how Christ is really exerting ownership over you, in regards to your identity and really, all of you.

We're going to pick it up in verse 9: "For in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. . ." Now I don't feel like I need to cover that with you because we did it in chapter 1 "And you have been filled, in Him. . ." There's the idea, you and I have been filled in Him ". . . who is the head of all rule and all authority." This is where we're going to start to break things down. "In him also, you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." I want to stop here and say that God historically had marked his people, had marked Israel, with circumcision. It was an external marking of belonging to God and one of the big debates in the first century was whether or not a man had to convert to Judaism, whether or not he had to become a Jew, before he could become a Christian. Paul is vehemently against this. In fact in Galatians, he at one point says "Why don't you go the whole way and emasculate yourselves? If you want to make this external thing such a big thing... like if you're holy because you do it, why not just cut the whole thing off and be the holiest of all of us?" So anytime get flack for being aggressive I point out to people "I've never said that to anybody. You should talk to Paul, man, I never told anyone to cut their business off." In the end, God is saying this: "I have circumcised your heart. I own you internally. What I have done is not an external marking, it's an internal transformation."

Now, let me tell you why this is so important for you to understand and know. The reality is, and I don't care what you've been taught historically: you did not decide to become a Christian. You are not able to do that, biblically. Your heart, your eyes and your mind are opened by the Holy Spirit of God, by the providence of God and not because you have some sort of intrinsic beauty that God is after. In fact, let me prove my point with God's original choosing. God chooses the nation of Israel. He chooses Israel, marks them with circumcision and then He leads them out of slavery – actually I've got that a little bit backwards. He leads them out of slavery, into the Promised Land, has circumcision as the marking, and then He says "Takeover Canaan. Conquer the Canaanites, drive them out and this land will be yours." Now listen to what He says to them as he tells them to do this. This is Deuteronomy 9:4-7. "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD

your God has thrust [the Canaanites] out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked [Me] to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been [nothing but] rebellious against the LORD. He's saying in this "This is Me. I am doing this. This is not because you possess some intrinsic righteousness that I'm giving you this Promised Land. It's because I'm good, not because of your righteousness. Now, I'm driving these fools out because they're wicked. Don't get confused as I drive them out because of their wickedness that I'm driving them out because of your righteousness. For you're not righteous. You are a stubborn, stiff-necked people who have done nothing but rebelled against me from the day I called you out of slavery."

What we need to meditate on and think on; and what is the point of Him saying we have been circumcised in heart: is that God has called us, wooed us, to Himself, opened up our eyes to the glory of His name and given us affection for Him and a mind that longs for Him. This is a profound truth. We have been circumcised in heart. It is not an external identity anymore. So I am Matt Chandler: son of God. I am not Matt Chandler: preacher. I am not Matt Chandler: white guy. I am not Matt Chandler: upper middle class, white suburbanite pastor. I am not Matt Chandler: 2001 Impala, that we call the Gimpala. I am not defined by those external actions. I do not need to physically look a certain way – those aren't truths that define me anymore. I am defined by "I am His." I am His. So that way, if anything is taken from me, then I am still on solid ground. I am still on solid ground. It doesn't matter what is taken from me; my health and my strength and all those things that mark me that people say to define me. It wouldn't matter if any of that changed; the thing that would remain is that I am His. That's not because I am righteous but because He is merciful.

But that's not where the text stops. It says that and then moves on to the next section: Colossians 2:9-12 "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." My identity is made because I have been called, not because of my own righteousness but because of God's righteousness, and He has called me His own, marked me out. "Matt Chandler, you are one of my sons. You were adopted as one of my sons, not because of your righteousness but because of the blood of Christ." Then He begins to unpack how that works, which brings us back to what? The gospel. Over and over and over again, the gospel: that I have been buried with Christ. I've said this to you in this way historically, I'm going to continue to say it until God calls me home or my time here as pastor is up after our 40 years, or 33 years or whatever is left that I owe you. In the end here, you've got "Matt Chandler dies with Jesus Christ." He dies with Jesus Christ. All that Matt Chandler has been guilty of, all the wickedness he has done, every error in thought, every wicked action, every dark motivation, every bit of it goes on and dies with Jesus Christ. Then at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I am raised to walk in the newness of life. What do we do when we are baptized? We are "Buried with Christ into his death and raised to walk in the newness of life." This is the gospel. Since we talked last week about how teaching can delude, here's just a safe thing for you to hear and to understand: The gospel of Jesus Christ is not anything other than "we get God." That's the gospel. The good news that we've been reconciled to God and that God is going to be enough, regardless of circumstance. That's the good news. So if you start banking on anything else, you're going to be disappointed. If you think the gospel of Jesus Christ is that "if you follow Him, this is what you get..." then you're going to be disappointed. Here's the crazy part: more than likely you're going to blame God for not giving you something He never promised to give you. That becomes one of the real dark ironies of those who love the Lord, and then all of

a sudden don't love the Lord anymore, is they're angry they're not getting something that they were never actually promised to begin with. So, we are buried with Christ and raised with Him and that the power that worked in Christ in those two things is now in us by the Holy Spirit.

Look at chapter 2 verses 13-15. I want to talk at length about these: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." I want to talk about several things here. The weight of it is that you and I have been made alive. We talked about that God creates Adam and Eve in the garden and said "Don't touch this fruit..." – sorry, that was Eve's addition. He said "Don't eat this fruit, for if you eat it you will surely die." So the price of treason was death, and that's just and it's right and that's how most governments, even to this day in our enlightened era, operate. You try to overthrow the state; you die or go to prison forever. That's what God said, "Don't you eat of this fruit, that's treason, that's rebellion, you do it and I'm going to kill you." Then Adam and Eve do it and God does not kill them. It's the first act of mercy, occurring at the instance sin is introduced into the world, and that curse of death, remains over all of us. You're going to die, I'm going to die – we're all going to die. Death still reigns until we get to that moment where the fulfillment of all Christ died to bring us is made, the consummation of all things. That's where we can join with our brother Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and say "Where, oh death, is your sting? Where, oh death, is your victory?" We can say that now in hope, "Where oh death is your sting?" because my hope is that one day the dead in Christ shall rise. There will be a day when there is literally no sting, literally no fury in death. Death will be over.

We have been made alive, we have been delivered from that curse in Jesus Christ. Really he unpacks it in two ways here. One, in the forgiveness of all trespasses, and he goes on to talk about the canceling of debt. I want to make sure that you understand what Jesus is doing for you in the cross. That you, and this is very unpopular, you are deserving of, right now, death. Physical, instantaneous death. If you're here, if you're alive, if you're breathing, even if you hate God, or even if you don't believe that there is one, and you're here and you're breathing – it is nothing but the unbelievable grace and mercy of God that you're alive today, because you are guilty of treason, you are guilty of trying to overthrow the King of the universe, you are guilty of a constant treading of His glory on His creation with what He has created, even in you. You are worthy of instantaneous death and instead you're here, and I'm here, and he's saying in this for those of us who believe that the record of debt has been cancelled. If we think about it, don't think like this – I'm trying to make this as clear as I can: it's not that you paid off the debt. It's not that "I did some bad things and now I've done some right things and these things don't matter because I'm right now." Or "I'll agree at one time I had some serious issues, but not anymore." This is classic mistaken evangelicalism that says, "I believed in Jesus back here when I was getting high and sleeping around and now I don't get high or sleep around so there's no issue." There is me doing right now and so what's wrong doesn't matter, like you pay it off. "Oh alright, I owe you a little bit for that, or I owe you a little bit for that, or I owe you a little bit for that." This is not what's happening in this text. You didn't pay off your mortgage early – you came home after your first week in the house and it was paid for. That all the debt that you owed was cancelled. The bank called you saying, "It's paid for, you don't need to make a payment. Don't worry. It's paid for, in full." He canceled the record of debt, so that for those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ we are righteous, once again this rolls back up to how we started this thing, not because I am intrinsically righteous but because there has been a righteousness given to me in Christ. It is not my righteousness that I stand in. I would not be able to stand in my own righteousness, no matter how pretty it was. Ezekiel 18, "If a man sins, he forfeits the right to life." I have sinned. My daughter learned in her school a song called "The Perfect Ten", so she's been singing it and we make her sing it before she goes to bed. She agrees to it, we just have to announce it before she does. We go "On loan from the London Symphony is Audrey Chandler here to sing "The Perfect Ten" and she comes out, bows and sings and we get to go through the Ten Commandments. Then she'll kind of say "I've done good at this," you know, "I've done well at this." Last week I asked her, "Have you ever been mean to

little girls?" She said "Sometimes they're mean to me and when they're mean to me I can get vicious." It was awesome because I didn't even know my daughter knew what vicious meant, and I also understand her. I also went "Man, I'm kind of the same. I tend to be fine and tend to be very peaceable until attacked, and then I can be vicious. I can use my wit and my quick mind to attack and to try to disintegrate an argument. I have to submit that to the Lord." So we had this moment of empathy together and took that to the Lord. She's 7 and I'm 35 and both of us deserve, in regards to justice, death, right now. Yet here I am preaching to you. Why? Because the record of debt has been canceled. Because God has been merciful to me, not common grace, not that kind of common grace that everyone who is living is experiencing, but really in a special kind of effectual, elective grace that says, "the debt is clean." Because for the common grace people, those of you who are alive in here and don't believe in Jesus Christ, there will be a day. In fact Jesus even taught it, nobody likes that Jesus taught this, nobody ever wants to address it. Jesus said that "even now the axe is being laid to the tree." Jesus is teaching "there's coming a day where this common grace, where my patience, runs out and then the streets will run red with blood." Nobody likes that. We want fairy Jesus. We want nice, loving fairy Jesus fluttering about, never gets frustrated, there's no judgment, no wrath, He's just this kind of all-encompassing, loving Jesus. I tell this to you all the time, but that is actually the teaching of Jesus himself. You and I are here because the record of debt has been cancelled.

Then here's one that we don't talk about a lot, but also in that making us alive: He cancels and then it says that "He has disarmed the rulers and authorities of this age." I want to explain here because He's not talking about Rome in this text, He's talking about spiritual realities and spiritual forces. Those things that C.S. Lewis says the two big mistakes people make when it comes to the demonic. One is that there are people that think everything is demonic. Everything that ever goes bad, it's a demon. It's not a nail that you ran over, it's not the fact that you left your keys inside the car before you locked it and shut the door. That was a demon that did that to you because they wanted to keep you from getting to bible study where you would learn about God. Probably not. Probably, you're a moron and locked your keys in your car. That's probably what happened. You were forgetful, carrying a screaming baby, dragging a bag behind you and locked yourself out of the car. I don't know that that was demonic. Then, in the same domain, Lewis says that the other mistake people make is to pretend that it doesn't exist. To never give it any attention, to never give it any thought, to not try to learn and contemplate that those things are reality and that they are out to kill, steal and to destroy. That they do prowl around like a roaring lion waiting for someone to devour. The Scriptures are saying that Jesus has given authority over those things, or has triumphed over them and presented them open to shame. Here's what we can find out just from the Scriptures about the demonic. There are things that we can do that invite their hooks into us. Habitual sin, grievous sin. If you are just addicted and have some sort of habitual sin then you have invited what is wicked into your home. If you have a grievous sin, so maybe it's not habitual but maybe you murdered someone, maybe you're guilty of infidelity, then maybe you have invited dark spirits into your own heart, into your own mind. This is 1st Corinthians 10 – if you have ever worshiped any other God: if you have a background as a Muslim, you have a background as a Jehovah's witness, you have a background as a Jew, if you have a background in the occult, then you have invited them in at some level and they could be causing quite a bit of issue in your life. First Corinthians clearly says, on that section on food sacrificed to idols, that behind each one of those idols is a demon. That you are worshiping and exalting and putting your allegiance toward what is demonic. So when you say "You have my allegiance," and then you come over here and go "No no, Christ, You have my allegiance." Then what is demonic says "No, I have your allegiance," and they pester. There's not a lot of crushing power anymore, they just kind of pester and we find these things to be true. Particularly out of the Old Testament, there tends to be – so that would be active, you inviting something in - and then there are some passive ways that the demonic can work us over. Anything from a generational curse to someone levying a curse against you. Once again, we're Westerners, I know this is way outside of our comfort zone, but there are. You can talk to missionaries on the field or even pastors in areas where there is a lot of occult activities. There have often been times when sacrifices have been made and there are curses put on pastors and missionaries in areas ... well it's everything from just horrible nightmares in your house, to wayward children to just curses placed on men and women around the world. This is an

inactive, which means that you didn't do anything to invite it in but rather, whether either a generational spirit or a curse put on you by some witches in your neighborhood. I mean, I don't know where you live, I don't know if there are witches in your neighborhood but maybe. I'm just saying. You might want to know your neighbors. Come in there and they've got some cats' tails and some toads and stuff. "Get out! Move your family!"

The other thing is that there are just demonic attacks and they don't have anything to do with invitation. They're just straight up demonic attacks that we need to be aware of. Jesus – all authority has been given to Jesus – we are in Him, He is in us and so that authority at some level has been imparted to us. Now not all authority has been imparted to us, but some of that authority has been imparted to us. So some of the ways we combat some of this is we want to – and one of the things they used to do in baptism that we don't do anymore is before you were baptized you would say, "I renounce the works of the evil one" – you are renouncing any allegiance you have historically given to what is dark and then you would profess your belief in Christ and your allegiance to Christ as if somehow saying, "This is over. This is where I'm walking; this is where my allegiance, this is my authority now." Some of the things we do just in our home is we want to pray prayers of blessing out-loud over our children, over our home, over our house. We want make our house a house of worship and that looks all sorts of different ways. I mean it's not me on the guitar leading in worship. No one in my house wants that. I mean, top down, not even my youngest daughter. She's not even a year old, would just start crying if I started singing. Worship could be opening up the Scriptures, reading the Scriptures out loud to one another, talking about that and then Audrey singing The Perfect Ten. That's a night of worship and it's in our home and it's out loud. It's praying a blessing over my children before they go to sleep at night, out loud. Now, just so you're not mishearing me. I don't think you should go into your children's room and lay hands on them and pray, "Jesus I just pray you would protect Johnny from the demons that are trying to kill his soul." I strongly recommend that you don't absolutely terrify your child, alright? This is simply a prayer of blessing and protection, over Reid, over Audrey. I pray for their hearts, for their minds, that their room would be a place where the Holy Spirit speaks to them and reveals to them who God is and that the thoughts would occur in their mind and the emotions that would be stirred up in their souls would be towards the infinite worth of God. That's just a simple praying that this room is Christ's, this bed is Christ's, this house is Christ's. He has given the house to us as stewards for His name and He will reign and rule in this place. A simple prayer of blessing and understanding that there are times that you might need to - if one of my kids has a nightmare, one of the first things we want to do is hug her or him and then go sit in their room and pray out loud and - pray out loud in the name of Jesus. Once again, I'm not flinging oil all around the room, I don't have a giant cross that I bring in there with me. Or if you've seen Constantine with Keanu Reeves, I don't have like a gun that shoots anti-demon bullets or anything, so it's not Hollywood. It's me holding me son and asking for the protection of Christ over his mind, over his heart and then saying out loud, even in the room, that Christ reigns and rules over this room and if there's anything in the room that's wishing to deceive or disturb we say out loud that this is the domain of the authority of Christ. This is how we're made alive. What was meant to destroy us, we're freed from and what was meant to condemn us we're freed from.

That's the great good news. You can really watch a man walk in victory when you watch the Apostle Paul talk about how dark he used to be and he's not ashamed of it. If anything, he's saying, "these things were shameful, but look how beautiful Christ is that he could rescue such a wretch like me." These things become more of a "how amazing is God!" I've told you this before but when people talk about the hypocrisy of Christians I always want to bring up the point that, "It's true, and that how amazing is God that He would be so patient with hypocrites. Now let's get back to you. So you're not a hypocrite, you're just outright wicked and so somehow the hypocrisy you've seen in certain evangelicals somehow has rendered you to feel safe in your treason against God? It's a silly line of thinking." We've been made alive in Christ, canceled debt, been set free from the powers of this world. You'd find this unpacked further in Ephesians 6. Then I want to read the rest of the text to you because it's going to address, I think, some more of those identity issues you need to be careful of: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." There are two pieces here where Christian folk try to get an identity. The first is in religious observances. It's the error that religious observance saves you. I'll say this very bluntly: some of you think you're Christians because you're here and you're wrong. Some of you think you're Christians because you come to church on the weekends and that does not make you a believer, religious observance does not make you a believer. If you've got this external list of things that you do that you think are saving you, I'm telling you that you're in error because we've already seen from above that it's a circumcision of the heart and not an external circumcision that saves. It's a transformation of the inward man, not a transformation of the outward man that brings about conversion. Then the other thing that I want to warn is... so there are those that get their identity, even within the Church, not that "I'm His", but "I do all these things for Him." One of those has a lot of life in it and the other doesn't have a lot of life in it. If you've ever come across some real dusty, mean church folk, probably what's happened is their identity is, "Look at what I do for Him." If you ever find anybody that's really angry with God, a lot of times they'll have this: "This is what I've done for Him and this is how he repays me for what I've done for Him." Which is just a complete misunderstanding of what grace is, what they were actually guilty of to begin with and how good God has been to them in everything, regardless of circumstance, their whole existence. They've got this, "my identity is found in religious observance." The second one is this, and this isn't new, but you see it in different ways in our culture. It's this kind of mysticism. You've got those that say there are like a varsity level of gifts and that if you walk in that varsity level of gifts, especially the spiritual ones, especially the more charismatic the gifts – which is redundant if you know the word charismatic means gifts, 'the gifts gifts' – and so if they speak in tongues, somehow they've had this experience with God that is the varsity experience and if you just had what they had then you would love God like they love God. This is just a continuation of the same arrogance that would say, "It's about me, and it has its root is in me, and if you would just do what I do then you would love God like I love God." Which is usually a surefire picture of someone who doesn't love God; they love themselves and are using God to make much of them. These are two errors in identity that occur in the church. One is, "I do all these things for God and so that's my identity." and then there is the identity of "I've had this experience with God," or "you should come do this weekend retreat that I go to" or "you should come to this thing I do" or "you should read this book." It's just this mystical "here's this thing that's going to save you." That's pulling what's happening here into the modern context.

Now let's finish this back, because this goes into how you apply this as you walk: If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used) according to human precepts and teachings?" Colossians 2:20-23 Here he's starting to talk, all of a sudden, "You're listening to rules that have a human origin not an origin in God. You're listening to things that you should be dead to." Let's finish reading it out. "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom..." Is that not what we talked about in regards to plausible arguments? That people make plausible arguments, and now he's going, "These things, these teachings, these identity-makers, they have an appearance of wisdom." But in the end look what it says here: "...an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."

What ends up happening when you manage your own behavior rather than press into Christ and let the holiness of God expose you to the need of a savior, is that if you gain success – so say your issue is lust, say your issue is a lack of discipline - and you are able to manage growth in that area, then that area of sin is simply replaced with a new area of sin, one of pride and arrogance that is far more difficult to penetrate than the actual issue. Lust was there to show your need for a savior. When you conquered lust by your own behavioral modifications you've now replaced that by making yourself God, "I don't need a savior I saved myself," which gets us back in to Genesis 3 which is treason against the King of the Universe, which is damnable. This continues as a really horrible cycle until, if God is merciful to you, He

absolutely blows you up to expose you to you so that you might cry out for forgiveness and salvation. My hope is you would find your identity in Him, that you would pay attention to yourself today. Some of you, your entire identity is built up in your physical body. You live at the gym, you measure your food and I'm not saying that health is wrong, you have a responsibility to be healthy; but I'm saying that some of you have taken it to this obsessive level, where your identity is built out in how you look physically. You just need to be careful. Be responsible, be a good steward with what He has given you and your body, but if your worth is how you are looked at by other people - you're an idolater. Some of you, your identity is in your home, it's in your job, it's in your kids' athletic careers, it's in those things. You're an idolater. Those things are going to betray you. They don't define you but because you think they define you, you fearfully cling to them as if you were clinging to life because you don't know who you would be outside of those things. The Scriptures say, "You're in Christ. That's your identity. Your identity is that you are Him." Once you get that, can grasp that and can understand that He has transformed your heart, that He owns you, that the authority given to Him has been given to you, that He's canceled your record of debt, that in Him you live, move and have your being - once you start grasping those things then you can be freed up from those other things that try to define you, that begin to feel very heavy. Especially if you're living in a house you can't afford. Especially if you're driving a car you can't afford. Especially when your body begins to give out on you - it happens to everybody. Then all of a sudden you're having to reconstruct who you are. I mean it's like you're literally leaving junior high again and go off to high school again and having to find a new identity, and nothing honestly, God help us, is sadder than the guy who changes his identity every couple of years. "So this isn't cool anymore so let me be this now," and "This isn't cool anymore so I can't do this anymore, so let me be this now." You just continue to change who you are depending on the audience. May God save us from such silliness.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women and an opportunity to have the Scriptures. I want to pray for understanding and I want to pray for a dialing in to where our identity is wrapped up, how we identify ourselves, what is it that defines us? What is it that we think that if we lost it or if we didn't have it we wouldn't know who we are anymore? For some of us that's our job, for some of us that's our marriage, for some of us that's our children. Some of us have gotten so used to being this title, 'Mrs. this' or 'Mr. That.' Some of us have been so used to being 'The Vice President of This' or 'The Manager of That' so that we hold these things so tightly that they choke the life out of us. May we be content in being Yours. May we have life in being Yours. May we praise You that You have circumcised our hearts, that the transformation has been from within and not because we're awesome, but because You're awesome. It's not because we're great and worthy, but because You're great and worthy. Might there always be an understanding that what has been done in salvation in us has been done not because we were worthy of it but because You are good and gracious and merciful. Thank You for our time together today. I pray that some of the things that were said and spoken would haunt us. I pray that we would take seriously that we battle not against flesh and blood and that we would understand the authority given to us. I pray that we would be men and women who pray blessing over our homes, over our children, over our lives, over our spouses. God, I pray that we would reign and rule and walk with You faithfully. Help us. It's through Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."