

Title: Apostle**[Slide 1]****Text: Galatians 1****ID****Identity issues:**

This past Tuesday CNN reported that as many as 18 million federal employee records had been hacked by a foreign power. For each of them – current and former employees, as well as people who may have simply applied for a federal position – life just got potentially a lot more complicated. Information crucial to their unique *identity* had been compromised and could now be used against them.

Just a week before, a civil rights activist was forced to resign from the leadership of a local NAACP chapter when it became clear that she had assumed and promoted a patently false identity. For years she had led the world to believe that she was of African-American descent, when actually she was the daughter of two white parents. Her defense: “I would definitely consider myself to be black.”

This same month saw the public debut of a whole new identity for the formerly Bruce, now Caitlin, Jenner. Jenner, a former Olympic gold medalist, will star in a reality series next month that documents her transition from Bruce to Caitlin.

Confused yet?

Identity Power:

Why such a fuss over *identity*? The reason is that *identity is power*. It is only when you know who you are that you can truly realize your unique potential to make your mark on the world. When someone steals your identity, they get to masquerade as you and use you to make their mark on the world. When someone assumes a fake identity, they enhance their ability to be important in places and ways where they never could have had influence

otherwise. When our identity doesn't seem to fit who we really see ourselves to be, we go to great lengths to adopt a new identity.

Our identity allows us to make our mark on the world. Take, for example, this cordless drill. All by itself, it is a powerful tool with the potential to be used in lots of ways. But it is useless until I put one final part into the chuck.

- A drill bit makes the cordless drill a tool for making a very precise hole.
- A screw driving bit makes the drill a high powered screwdriver.
- A sanding disk makes it a sander.

Three different "identities" for the same basic tool. The same is true for you and me. Like the cordless drill, each one of us has amazing potential. But it is only when we discover our true identity that we can do the things that God envisioned for us to do – and make our mark on the world.

Paul, an apostle:

In September 2010 there were 1,470,680 people in the United States with the first name of Paul. Every one derives his name from a Jewish rabbi who lived 2000 years ago at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Talk about leaving your mark on the world!

So who was that man named Paul who lived so long ago? And what kind of identity did he have that was powerful enough to leave his mark on the world to this day?

In what was perhaps his earliest known letter, Paul answered that question. Writing to churches that he and his partner Barnabas had recently established, Paul introduced himself in a way that nails down his core identity:

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Galatians 1:1 NIV

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

"Paul, an apostle..." The word "apostle" refers to a person who was sent on a specific mission and with a specific message. The literal meaning of the word "apostle" is "sent one." In Paul's time it was customary to send out a person or team of people to speak and act on behalf of the sender. Within Paul's

Jewish culture it was said that “a man’s delegate [apostle, sent one] is like himself.”

For Paul, that meant speaking and acting as a delegate from Jesus Messiah and the great Creator God.

Paul had been entrusted with a world-changing message. The same God who had conquered death by raising Jesus, was now announcing through Paul the Good News that the world’s true King was reclaiming His lost creation:

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Galatians 1:3-5 NIV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Apostle:

Revelation:

Paul wastes no time getting to the reason for writing this letter to the churches in Galatia. It turns out that there were others who wished to steal Paul’s identity as an apostle and hack his message. Paul writes:

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Galatians 1:6-7 NIV

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

In response, Paul explains where his identity and his message came from:

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Galatians 1:11-12 NIV

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Paul's identity and message did not come from Paul or anyone else. It came directly from Jesus the Messiah.

Old Identity:

How that happened is a story of an identity lost and a new identity found. Paul explains that as a young man he thought he knew exactly who he was and what he was put on earth to do.

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Galatians 1:13-14 NIV

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

He describes his former identity in a similar way to the Christians in Philippi:

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Philippians 3:4-6 NIV

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Look at the identifiers: circumcised, Israelite, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew, Pharisee, persecutor, faultless. Paul seemingly had it all together.

New Identity:

And so he thought, until one day Jesus broke into his life. And when that happened, everything changed. Paul was sent as an "apostle" to round up Christians and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. But on that road to Damascus Jesus broke into his world.

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Acts 9:3-6 NIV

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul [Paul's Jewish name], why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Jesus revealed Himself to Paul and gave him a new message and a new mission. From now on he was to be an apostle of Jesus Messiah; his message would forever be that God had come in Jesus to rescue and restore His world. As he writes to the Galatians:

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Galatians 1:15-16 NIV

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

Identity lost; identity found. The old Paul was gone forever. Now Paul served a higher King and preached a greater message: Jesus is the Lord of all.

Making Your Mark on the World

Recognition:

So what kind of mark did Paul make on his world with his new identity as an apostle of Jesus Messiah? He explains to the Christians in Galatia that he had very little contact with the original Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem. His authority and calling did not in any way derive from them. Nonetheless, they came to know him as a changed man with a new identity:

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Galatians 1:22-24 NIV

I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

Right Tool/Right Result:

A cordless drill with the wrong bit will do a world of harm. Paul was like that drill. He had a powerful personality, a brilliant mind, and boundless energy. But like a drill with the wrong bit, he left a trail of wreckage in his effort to forcibly bring to reality God's Kingdom.

What a difference when he abandoned that old, failed identity, and accepted his true identity in Jesus! Now, for the first time, he could do what God had created him to do. He could be the person God created him to be. Even the people he had persecuted in the past could see and appreciate the transformation. As Paul writes, "And they praised God because of me."

Right tool/right result.

Making Your Mark on the World:

Like Paul, you and I were created to make a mark on our world. And, like Paul, we will only discover our true identity when we allow God to reveal it to us. He is the one who created us and designed us for our unique mission in this world. He alone can show us who we are.

To discover that identity means to leave behind whatever other way we chose to see ourselves. It means to no longer be held hostage to how others see us. It means no more pretending to be something we aren't. It means abandoning the old identity so that we can be the person we were truly meant to be.

Paul said it just right when he wrote:

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2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!