

IDENTITY CRISIS

Citizenship in our own country is an integral part of identity. We are Americans. As such, we are a part of history. We were born into, and shaped by, a culture of freedom. The history of this country and the future of it mean more to us than those of any other country on the face of the earth. We are unashamedly patriotic. An incredibly sad story was once written and entitled “A Man Without a Country”. It was about the sense of loss suffered by a man whose citizenship was stripped from him for crimes against his country. He was adrift in the world with no place to call home. We do not have that misfortune. We are Americans.

As a family, we have enjoyed a drama entitled, “Miss Rose White,” several times. It is the story of a young immigrant woman trying to live in two worlds that are vastly different. Trying to establish an independent identity in America, she still hangs onto the traditions and culture of her Jewish heritage. She has two sets of clothing, two groups of acquaintances, even two different names. No matter what situation she is in, she can not commit herself to it or enjoy it for fear of the alternate life becoming exposed. As a result, she is desperately unhappy, unsure of what she is doing, where her life is headed, or even who she is.

It can be difficult being a citizen of both heaven and earth. We have been given a new life in Christ. We have a new family, a new father, a new heritage, even a new name written in the book of Life. Yet, we work, and often live, in an alternate environment with those who would find our Life in the body of Christ alien and confusing. Some would even ridicule our new way of thinking. So we seek to hide that part of ourselves by keeping the two worlds separate. We develop two languages, two names, and two ways of walking, talking, and acting. Is it any surprise that we then find ourselves desperately unhappy and unfulfilled?

Sooner or later, if we are to claim any joy, we must decide which world and which identity we will embrace. Joshua told all of Israel that the time had come to choose, that day, which God they would serve. We can not occupy both sides of a fence at the same time. Even found out recently, in an airport, that both feet have to be on the same moving sidewalk. Although moving in the same direction, standing on two walks moving at different speeds is painful. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Dual citizenship only works if both countries have the same goals, laws, and never go to war with one another. This is why we were instructed to be in the world, but not of the world.

If we are ashamed of Christ, he will be ashamed of us. When we were growing up, we were taught that a good name was to be valued above all else. We were made aware that everything we did had an impact on the value of the family name. Sometimes an honorable name might be the only inheritance that parents had to pass onto their children. But if it was a name of honor, and kept pure, it had the power to open doors and win friendships. Jesus Christ was tempted in all ways, yet did not sin. We have received His name in baptism. Everything we do, we are told to do it in the name of Jesus. There is no dishonor associated with that name.

Deciding which world to cherish is a matter of deciding which is more real. Perception of this can be difficult. A favorite story is the tale of a young soldier traveling through France on a train with his commanding officer. At a stop, the train is boarded by a young lady and her grandmother, who take seats opposite the two men. As the journey progresses, the glances passing between the two young people make it obvious that there is mutual attraction. The train plunges into a tunnel through the mountains, and in the darkness, the sound of a kiss is followed by the sound of a slap.

As the train emerges back into the light, all four are sitting in the same position with no one saying a word. The grandmother is thinking, "I can not believe the nerve of that soldier! I am glad that my granddaughter slapped him!" The commanding officer is thinking, "I can not believe that soldier had the nerve to kiss that girl. But I wish that when she slapped him, she would have hit the right guy." The young lady was thinking how nice it had been to be kissed, but wished that her grandmother had not slapped the boy. The boy was just smiling. It was not very often that on the same day, one got the chance to kiss a pretty girl and slap a commanding officer. The situation, as perceived, differed according to the knowledge each one had.

Therefore, we seek a deeper understanding of which reality life truly consists. C.S. Lewis once wrote "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was created for a different world." One example of different levels of reality can be found in taking children to a play in which an actor is killed. A play is merely a brief interlude in life portraying an illusion of reality. It must be explained to children that the characters who "died" on stage still live on, have gone on home, and are now quite safe and happy with their families. The world, we tell them, is larger than the world of the play. Shakespeare wrote that all of life is a stage and we are merely actors upon it. He was theologically correct. We were created in the image of God as a spirit. We are clothed in mortal flesh, even as He later was, but we are still an immortal spirit. Those who have acted out their parts and have died, still live on, have gone on home, and are quite safe with their Father.

The deeper reality of that eternal world is available to experience. The more it is experienced, the more tangible it becomes, and the easier to embrace and hold. Through the Holy Ghost, it is possible to enter the world of a timeless God and walk in the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit can nourish and strengthen that part of us that does not die. Treasure can be stored there and storehouses of blessings tapped at will. Gold is worthless there, while dependence on the strength of God is valued. This world even has its own language, but while we are there, it is ours to use. The longer we are there, the less the physical world has to offer. It becomes easy to see that the eternal world is the one for which we were made. For it is the world of our Creator.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What would it be like to have no place that you could call home?
2. Have you ever felt that you were playing one role while at church and another while at school or work? Which role fits you best? Which role do you play at home?
3. What would happen if we dropped all role playing and proclaimed with joy to those around us that we were citizens of heaven and eternity and that our values and customs were different? Would we lose friends? Would we stand to gain any brothers or sisters in Christ?
4. What does "living for Jesus" really require? How differently must we live in order to have come out from among them and become separate? Must we look different? Talk different? Eat and drink differently?
5. Should our external differences simply be a consequence of the values we hold dear, or are the external differences additionally commanded by God? Why do you believe one way or the other?
6. Have you ever found yourself seeing two sides of one issue? Have you ever tried to make peace between two friends who were arguing? Any success?
7. Have you ever tried to please God at the same time you were trying not to offend friends who do not serve God and were doing something you felt was wrong? Do you feel you

succeeded in pleasing both? Would it be easier to just love both them and God, and let those two reconcile their own differences?

8. Does separation mean isolation from the world? If we do not care about them or love them, how can we be a witness to them of God's love?
9. Our dual citizenship can be compared with sitting with the fans of one team at a football game and cheering for the other team. Have you ever done that? Care to? By the way, Satan has the home team advantage.
10. How much do you value the good name of Jesus, all it stands for, and all it has stood for over the years? Does the reputation of that name that was given to you factor into your decisions as you make them?
11. One reason that the present world seems so much more real than that of the spirit is because of the five senses. They register and record this world while the Spirit within us registers the things that are spiritual. If you were given a choice between sensual pleasure and losing out on heaven or losing one of your five senses and making heaven, what choice would you make and which would you be willing to give up? By the way, this scenario is described in the scriptures.
12. Have you ever known people who search for every experience they can afford, every thrill they can experience, and still seem unhappy and unfulfilled? Do you ever compare their life to yours and think that if you had all they had or could do all they do, that you would be happier?
13. If you could catch a glimpse of the real eternity in which you will live, do you think you would mourn the passing of loved ones who die in the body of Christ or would you rejoice for them?
14. Have you ever experienced how much more tangible and touchable the world of the spirit seems, after spending time in the presence of God? Why do you think this happens?
15. Have you ever considered that there is a struggle for control that goes on inside of you between your spiritual side and your physical side? Did you know that whichever part of you that you feed and strengthen will eventually win? What are some examples of how you feed each part?