

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Show Me Your ID, No. 4*

Made to Grow

February 5, 2023

**1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (NIV)**

*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

----

We're in 1 Corinthians 13 today, if you'd care to turn there with me. First Corinthians, Chapter 13.

**Identity.**

Boy, talk about a polarizing, lightning-rod sort of topic.

Why talk about identity?

Because our world is confused about it and needs to hear what the One who created us thinks about identity. And if the *church* doesn't speak to that, no one will.

It's just our responsibility.

Our world thinks identity is all about awards, or politics and how we align ourselves, or where we've been, or the color of our skin, or our academic degrees, or whether we have a wedding ring. [Hold up, in turn: trophy, political campaign sign, passport, chart with skin colors, diploma, left hand.]

But it's about way, way more than these things.

We've defined identity, admittedly simply, as, "a person's sense of self and worth."

OK, fair enough. But *who* determines that? *Where* does that come from?

Our society says it comes from *within* us and that it's *ours to determine*: that we can be whoever and whatever we like to the point that many around us are on "journeys" to supposedly discover who and what they really are.

In fact, it's becoming more and more the norm for people in authority to *encourage* even very *young children* to begin *experimenting—investigating* who or what they would like to be.

They may not know how to read or tie their shoes yet, but they should be able to choose something as important as identity?

If that sounds dangerous to you, or even abusive, it should!

At the same time though, we can be relieved to know that there *is* another option.

The "God world" maintains that identity is not something we determine from within, but rather something that is given us by the God who made us.

He says quite a lot about that, in fact, in His Word to us, including six foundational truths from Genesis 1.

Now, I know I'm repeating these a lot, but grasping this list is very important to really knowing who we are.

Regarding all of us humans:

- 1) We are made by God in His own image.
- 2) We are of tremendous value.
- 3) We are ranked above the rest of creation.
- 4) We are made either male or female.
- 5) We are intended to grow and develop and even lead the rest of creation, and,
- 6) We are very good.

This is human identity: who God made us to be.

However, because, nearly from the beginning, when we exercised our God-given free will and did something that was contrary to God's best, we are all now also:

- 7) broken because of sin.

And the only cure for that brokenness was for God Himself to offer the life of Jesus, His own sinless Son, in exchange for our lives.

That's why Jesus died on a cross on Good Friday two thousand years ago: to pay a debt for us that we could not pay, so we might be redeemed and restored as we will follow Him.

That is the Gospel, the Good News, in a nutshell.

We were made good, in God's own image.

We are worth much—more than the rest of creation.

We are broken by sin, and yet redeemable, if we will live in Jesus.

That's who God says we are.

Now, it's that fifth of those seven that I'd like to talk a little more about today, the one that *says part of our identity is growing and developing*.

Two reasons I did so poorly, academically, in college had to do with the classes called "statics" and "dynamics." They're physics classes, and they're designed to measure and describe the behavior of things that are sitting still (that's *statics*) and things that are in motion (that's *dynamics*).

Now to me, if a thing is not moving, then it's sitting still. It is *static*. And, if a thing is *not* sitting still, then it is moving. It is *dynamic*.

That's pretty simple, right? I thought so, initially.

So, when I'd get a test question like, "How fast is an object that's this big and weighs this much moving through this sort of atmosphere?" My answer would be, "Well, pretty fast."

But, as you might guess, that wasn't good enough for my professors. They wanted answers that involved actual math, and that's where good grades and I parted company.

The point is, the difference exists. God made certain things to be *static* and certain things to be *dynamic*, and where rocks and dirt are in the *static* group, we the people are in the *dynamic* group.

God made us to develop in all sorts of ways.

***Growth and change are part of our identity.***

Now, that's not unique to humans, of course. Other living things do that, too: trees, flowers, birds, animals. If a thing is living, then it's somehow changing, moving and growing.

Now here is, to me, an intriguing metaphysical thought: before the fall—before sin entered our world, growth and change was all toward the positive. Before the fall, change always made us more and more alive.

But now, because our world bears this burden of sin, we do still grow and change and develop—and even positively for a time, but after a time, parts of us begin to change for the negative, don't they?

The body, the mind: for years those parts change and grow positively. We get bigger, taller, stronger, hopefully smarter.

But then, at some point, those parts take a turn and begin to diminish.

And yet our souls—the Spirit within us, at least for those in Jesus: the soul is the one part that keeps changing positively. Our trust in the Lord, our relationship with Him, our faith to see Him keeps moving forward.

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church, *“Though outwardly we are wasting away—inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*<sup>1</sup>

That was Paul's personal testimony, and any follower of Jesus can share in that. Though the body suffers, the spirit can still soar. That is one part of our person that can still grow as God made it to.

Because it's the part that most closely ties us with God and eternity.

Now, the mind and body are tied to God and eternity, as well. Scripture says our bodies will be resurrected (recreated) just as Jesus' was. They're holy and eternal too, as they were made to be.

But it is the soul (the spirit) that most closely links us with the Lord, and this, it seems to me, is why the soul is able to keep moving forward, even when the rest of us begins to move backward.

The motion, the movement, the growth and change: we were made to do that, and the passage just read for us gives us a “for instance.”

One of the big problems in the church of Corinth had to do with the arrogance of some members with regard to spiritual gifts. Some believers there thought themselves superior because of the specific gift that they possessed.

The reality is, they actually took their identity in their gifts. They built their personhood and worth upon their gifts, which is bad enough, but then they used the

gifts and abilities God had given them to beat down the others, which is even worse.

Paul mentions the specific gifts of the offenders: prophecy, knowledge and tongues, which, honestly, have been common suspects for abuse by the Church through the ages.

But the greater point he makes here really applies to all spiritual gifts, and that is: the gifts of the spirit are transient.

Spiritual gifts, great as they are, only apply to *this present age*, and so their value is limited.

Yes, they're to be used here, but the day is coming when they'll be of *no use at all*.

They will not be in eternity, because they'll not be needed, you see? In eternity, Jesus and His Spirit will be with us in fullness, so we'll not need smaller, individual manifestations of His power.

And so, Paul is saying, “How senseless it is to take your identity in something that is passing away, and how reprehensible to use those things to diminish and abuse others. How much wiser to hold loosely to the things of earth—and even things so valuable as the gifts of God's spirit. Because even those are changing, you see? Even those come and go in our world. And we who wield them: we need to change our perspectives about their eternal value.”

To illustrate his point, Paul uses the image of a child growing up. He says in verse 11, *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”*

To become mature means to grow up in my understanding, my perspectives, my values, my treatment of others, my responsibilities.

We are expected to grow up. We were made to grow up.

Now, Paul doesn't say this to insult those who were in error there in Corinth. He points all this out to help them mature in their faith; to help them see the way God made them to see; to think about things (even spiritual gifts) the way God thinks about them, so that they could actually grow into the people God intends them to be.

God made us to grow, to develop, to change, to mature.

There is always room to advance, you see? Improvement is always possible, maybe not in our body, but certainly in our spirit and our soul.

How do we go about growing, improving, maturing?

Well, first we have to believe it's possible.

We can't just say, “Well this is just the way I am.”

That's arrogant nonsense. We are dynamic people. We were made to change and grow, and God is superintending that process in us. God is about making us holy. He will purify us, if we'll let Him.

How can we participate in that?

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16

Well, one way, Paul tells the Corinthians in his second letter, is for us to *“Concentrate—fix our attentions—not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary,”* Paul writes, *“but what is unseen is eternal.”*<sup>2</sup>

Don't worry so much about the things of earth. Don't let that which is immediately about you consume you.

Specifically here, don't be ruled by—don't take as your identity—even something as important as the gifts of God's Spirit. Because all of this—even God's gifting—is passing away.

Paul says, instead, let yourself be ruled by that which is eternal, and he spells it out here. He actually begins and ends this passage with it.

What is eternal? What never fails? Paul tells us in verse 8: *Love*.

Prophecies will cease. Tongues will be silenced. Knowledge will pass away. When completeness comes, all of that will disappear. What will remain? Paul says, *“faith, hope and love, but the greatest is love.”*

A life of love: that is where God is taking all who will go with Him, you see? God is love, and He's taking us to Himself.

We were made for so much more than we are today. We were made to *grow*.

To become complete and mature and whole—to become all God wants us to be, there are changes that have to happen within us. God will make them, but we can make the process so much easier if we'll work with Him, and not against Him.

We can welcome Him—His Spirit—to do whatever He needs to do to grow us up, to change our perspectives, to develop our character, to purify our motives.

To move us to love.

This is the very thing that God was using Paul to do for the Corinthians, and God is still doing this today, even here as we come to His table.

Don't resist the voice of God.

Don't think that when He says something hard, He's trying to punish you.

No, He's simply trying to grow in us all that which matters for eternity.

He's stripping us of the arrogance that earthly thinking promotes, and He's building into us that which lasts forever: faith and hope and, more than anything else, love.

Will you let Him do that? Will you invite Him to do that? To change you, however He'd like, into the very image of Jesus?

Prayer:

Father, we open ourselves to you to change us in whatever way you'd like, here and now. Help us to give ourselves to you—to give even our identities to you, so that You can make us what you intend for us to be. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Change My Heart, Oh God*

Benediction:

You and I: God made us all to grow and develop, to become mature in those things that matter for eternity. God has plans for us and He intends to build every one of us into something truly good for His glory.

Let God superintend that project, will you?

Let Him have you—all of you. Don't hold anything back, so that He can grow and change and make you all He wants you to be.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 4:18, paraphrase