

“Six of One; Half Dozen of the Other”

Colossians 4:10-14

Sunday, August 27th, 2023

The British musical rock group, “The Who,” in the title of its 1978 hit record asked, “*Who are you?*” *Well, how about you? Who are you? How do you answer such a question anyway?* In the current culture you can “choose” to be whatever you want to be - not just in terms of employment or life calling, but in terms of your gender and sexuality. *Is that actually good, helpful, biblical?*

We all have esteem issues; you’re certainly not alone if you have them. The person with whom we are most familiar - self - is broken and fallen! The *entire* created order is flawed. Things are not the way they are supposed to be. *What happened?*

God created Adam and Eve to be our **federal heads** - what they chose to do would affect not only themselves, but also every other person descending from them as our first parents. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, who had said that they could eat of the fruit of any tree in the Garden of Eden with the exception of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they chose to eat from that tree, then they would be subject to death. *What happened?* Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of that tree God commanded that they stay away from. God created them for life, but they, by their own choice, were destined to hell upon the completion of their earthly lives.

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin of disobedience, every person born through the line of humanity they initiated was and is born into this life **in Adam**. If our lives come to an end in this present life, and we are **in Adam**, we will have no path of entry to heaven. Only hell awaits those who choose to follow their inclinations on the path to hell.

What can we do? Is there any way out of this mess? YES! There is, but there is just one way. *Do you know Who that Way is?* Jesus Christ, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (**John 1:29**) Our Savior Jesus, who said of Himself, “I am the Way the Truth, and the Life, no comes to the Father except through Me.” (**John 14:6**)

Trusting Christ for your eternal salvation removes you from being **in Adam** to being **in Christ**. He is what the Apostle Paul refers to as the second Adam in **Romans Chapter 5:12-21**. Just as we sinned **in Adam**, we are **redeemed in Christ**, the second Adam. The death sentence God pronounced over Adam and Eve will be carried out if you are merely **in Adam**; conversely, you will escape eternal death if you are **in Christ** by faith in His work on your behalf. You receive Christ by faith - a saving faith that embraces Jesus as the sinless Savior and Redeemer of God’s elect ones.

We’ve just about come to the end of our sermon series working through the New Testament Book of Colossians. After today, we’ll have one more sermon, which, Lord willing, will cover the last four verses next Sunday, verses **15-18 of Colossians Chapter 4**.

For today, however, we will be looking at verses **10-14 of Colossians Chapter 4**.

Colossians 4:10-14:

“**10** Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), **11** and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. **13** For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. **14** Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

In **verses 7-9 of Colossians Chapter 4**, which we covered last Sunday, Paul commended two men to the church in Colossae who would be coming to them - (Tychicus and Onesimus). With today's passage, Paul sends greetings to certain people who were part of the church there in Colossae.

In the present 5 verses, Paul lists 3 Jewish friends (Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus) and three Gentile friends (Epaphras, Luke, and Demas). Thus the title of this message; “Six of one, half dozen of another.” We'll talk about each of them briefly, then apply this to our own identities.

Aristarchus was a “fellow prisoner” and part of Paul's ministry over a period of many years, including the riot in Ephesus (**Acts Chapter 19**), the missionary journey to Europe (**Acts Chapter 20**), and the shipwreck en route to Rome (**Acts Chapter 27**). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and a successful “reclamation project” following a poor showing on his first missionary journey (**Acts 15:36–41**). We don't know the full story, but he had clearly regained Paul's trust by the time Paul wrote this letter. The third Jewish Christian Paul mentions in Jesus Justus; Scripture reveals nothing about him, other than his name.

Luke we know as a doctor and as the author of an account of the gospel in his name (Luke). He also wrote the New Testament book of Acts. Demas, unfortunately, later betrayed the gospel (**2 Tim. 4:10**). Epaphras was the founder and pastor of the church at Colossae and perhaps also the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Since he was the one who had likely brought Paul the information concerning the false teachers, Epaphras merited a longer description as we see in verse 12, “...always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Let's attempt to apply what is essentially a listing of names to ourselves.

Who are you? You have a **name**. You are that person. And, you have an **identity**. You are that person, too. I am Daren. I am a pastor and retired Senior Master Sergeant, husband to Jan, father to Zach and Molly, father-in-law to Clare and Noah, grandfather to Georgia and to her little brother or sister forming in the womb!

Those are many of my roles, which make up my identity.

I'm a sinner. I sin in thought, word, and deed.

I am often ungrateful. God gives us life, breath, food, and shelter and most people "thank" Him by either ignoring Him or wondering if He really exists.

My sin consists not just in doing bad things, but in making good things the ultimate priority. If we all are honest, God is not our first priority on most days.

I am a sinner not just because I've done wrong, but all the good I have left undone.

I continue to sin even though God has poured out His grace, love, and mercy upon me. I'm thick-headed when it comes to God and what He has done for us.

Though I am a sinner, I am a *redeemed* sinner! Though I was mired in sin and misery, Jesus came to me in my messes!

Why is it that countless American school-children memorize the Gettysburg Address each year? Is it a simple civics lesson? An opportunity to learn about the Civil War, which was a turning point in American history? Yes, it is each of those things, but also much more. The memorization of that short (two-minute) speech is also an act of identity formation. It is a chance for students to connect to both the ideals and the aspirations of the people who founded this country. This is how President Lincoln began his speech:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

The Gettysburg Address provides an opportunity for every American child who remembers its words to internalize the values and aspirations of their country. As they recite the address, it becomes a part of them.

When the church goes through its liturgy (or order of worship) each Sunday, its people are engaging in similar identity formation, through a reenactment of the life of Christ and His call to the church. When we engage in the sacraments, we also engage in identity formation, from Baptism to the Lord's Supper. We are reminded of our sin, God's sending His Son to earth from heaven, and the sacrifice that leads to our reconciliation with the Father. All of this done through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

I opened this message by asking if it was good, helpful, and right for people to choose their own gender.

Not long ago, most people dismissed questions like this one as absurd. But in recent years, rapid and alarming changes have taken place in American views on important ethical issues such as gender and sexuality. Ligonier Ministries' 2022 State of Theology survey reveals that nearly half of U.S. adults now believe that gender identity is a matter of personal choice.

With the steady rise of secularism in the United States, it's tragic yet unsurprising to see so many people embracing the false notion that we, rather than our Creator, have the authority to determine our gender and to alter this identity at will. More disturbing, however, is the finding

that 37% of *professing evangelicals* (believers in Christ) now also think that gender identity is a matter of choice. These represent an increase of 15% in only the last two years.

The rise of unbiblical views among American evangelicals on the subjects of gender and sexuality seems to expose the influence of a secular worldview that is making deeper inroads into the church. These survey results also indicate an urgent need for clear biblical teaching on ethical issues among Christians.

Who are you? You are the male or female God created you to be. It was - and is - His choice, not ours.