

## Tea Tree Gully Community Church

# Our Corporate Identity Before God

**Luk 1:17** And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

**Tit 2:14** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

**1Pe 2:9-10** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### Preamble

A little over a year ago we looked at a message entitled *Who are You?* (15 Sep 2013) which was really looking at the issue of our identity in Christ.

**Quote:** Dean Sherman (of YWAM) says in *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian*, "If we are unsure of ourselves it is because we do not yet know who we are, or in whose authority we operate."

As new believers there are truths and principles for us to grasp such as: Being created in God's image; becoming a new creation, a child of God (King's Kid), a citizen of heaven, transferred from darkness to the Kingdom of Light, joint heirs with Christ, a vessel of the Holy Spirit and co-labourer with God entailing spiritual authority and power etc.

All these things are essential to grasp and of great importance. However this is not the full picture of our identity before God; the picture is incomplete. While there is an acknowledgement that we are part of the family of God, the emphasis is usually on individual identity of the person.

Today I want to unpack a topic that we don't understand well from a western mindset but as the people of God it is vitally important. It's a topic that can't be comprehensively covered or grasped in a single message but we need to come to terms with the significance of it. Indeed, largely speaking it's not understood well or is a work in progress in different corners of God's church. It's the aspect of corporate identity and the relationships connected with that.

## Introduction

**Read:** Above texts.

Here's an interesting thought:

**God does not just see us individually but also corporately, that is, we have individual identity and we have corporate identity.**

The two exist in tension and alongside each other.

'No man is an island' is true in God's eyes – and no man was ever intended to be an island.

**Quote:** We must emphasize the reality of corporate identity, which the Old Testament and the New Testament both bear witness to, because many ... today in western countries have so emphasized individual identity before God that they have forgotten that according to the witness of Scripture, God sees us not simply as individuals but also as families, cities, people groups, and nations, and He expects us to act accordingly. <sup>1 pg 12</sup>

**Quote:** Jesus addressed not only individuals but cities like Korazin, Bethsaida, and Jerusalem and churches (**Rev 2-3**) – corporate bodies of people who, like individuals, are addressed and held accountable for their actions, both good and evil. <sup>1 pg 43</sup>

**Quote:** The NT continues to assume and teach OT categories of corporate identity.... Corporate identity and responsibility is found alongside individual identity and responsibility. In the OT the individual (male) person may be viewed as extending beyond himself to include those who 'belong' to him. Thus, the husband (at the family level) and the king (at the national level) both have an individual and a corporate existence encompassing respectively, the household and the nation. For Jesus and the NT writers this perception of man as a corporate being is determinative for the proper understanding of Scripture. <sup>1 pg 42</sup>

## Areas of Corporate Identity

### **Families (parents, husbands, wives, children)**

Family is the smallest, and most fundamental form of corporate identity that we as an individual need to relate to. We bear a family name and how we behave reflects

upon the rest of the family. The behaviour of children reflects on parents and decisions that parents make affect children.

Husbands have responsibility to represent their household to God and God to their household as a priestly role ordained by God. They are ultimately responsible as spiritual gatekeepers of the home and for setting the spiritual tone in the home.

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. **Exo 12:3**  
(The Passover meal)

"Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army. One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you. **Num 1:2-4** (Clans, families, tribes are all mentioned here.)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." **Eph 6:1-3**

## Illustrations

1. The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household. **2 Sa 6:11**

It was not just Obed-Edom the individual who was blessed but all who fell under the banner of his household: wives, children, servants etc. His accommodating the presence of God had implications for his entire family.

2. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba) to be your own.' **2 Sa 12:10**

King David's behaviour and decision making impacted not just himself but it would impact upon his family also with tragic consequences.

3. The giving or withholding of the tithe by the family breadwinner is a good example of how a family will be positively or negatively affected.

## Cities

Jesus addressed cities:

"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. **Mat 11:21**

When Jesus sent out the twelve, looking for the man or home of peace (receptive to their message) and to heal the sick and cast out evil spirits, he said:

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. **Mat 10:14-15**

We should care about the city we live in and its responsiveness to the gospel:

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. **Jer 29:7**

Jeremiah was addressing those who were exiles in a city in a foreign land. We as believers, citizens of heaven are foreigners, in the world but not of it. We need to have a similar approach to our city.

### Illustration

1. Sodom and Gomorrah – Abraham sought to see the city saved from the judgement of God if he could find just a few righteous souls. He started with asking God to save the city on account of 50 righteous people and became more bold and desperate before God to the point of petitioning God to save the city on account of only 10 righteous people. God was willing to withhold judgement on a whole city because of a few righteous people and someone who interceded on its behalf. (see **Gen 18:20-32**)

## Nations

God also deals with human kind as nations. He is the ultimate authority not the United Nations which has no God given mandate or legitimacy as the ultimate global authority, or any other 'One Word' government.

He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them. **Job 12:23**

for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. **Psa 22:28**

He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations— let not the rebellious rise up against him. **Psa 66:7**

"The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. **Oba 1:15**

I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. **Joe 3:2**

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD... **Psa 33:12**

### Illustrations

1. King David counts the fighting men and incurs God's judgement, people suffer. (see **2 Sam 24**) The choices of 3 yrs of famine, 3 months of fleeing enemies or 3 days of plague (70K died over 3 days)
2. The Gibeonites avenged (see **2 Sam 21:1-9**). This is a very impacting account of the corporate nature of identity and sin. It was the grandchildren of Saul who were taken and sacrificed to make amends for the injustice done against the Gibeonites. We read that and think how unfair that sounds – that those living many years later are suddenly taken and killed for something they were not personally involved in. And there you have it – filtering this through the worldview or lens of the individual.

**Quote:** Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is addressing the second generation, whose parents had all perished in the wilderness and who were about to enter the Promised Land. And yet Moses includes them when he describes the sins of their parents in making the golden calf:

When I looked, I saw that YOU had sinned against the LORD your God; YOU had made for YOURSELVES an idol cast in the shape of a calf. YOU had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded YOU. **Deu 9:16**

**We have sinned, even as our fathers did;** (Heb. literally, we have sinned *together with* our fathers) **we have done wrong and acted wickedly.**  
**Psa 106:6**

**Aside:** This principle is important when it comes to generational iniquity, cutting bloodlines, and identificational repentance both horizontally across a generation and vertically down the generations.

3. God commanded Israel to deal decisively with 'sin in the camp'. Nine times in the book of Deuteronomy the phrase 'purge the evil from among you' (NIV translation) occurs.

#### 4. The Case of Nazi Germany

Hitler and his henchmen took down a nation. They were demonically inspired and there was widespread occultic involvement at the upper echelons of power also. One may ask what gave rise to Nazi Germany and a cluster of like minded people to occur at a given point in time. It was not coincidental.

Decades earlier the church in Germany that held to a position of higher criticism of the Bible and liberal theology rejected (actively denounced) as of the devil the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in that country which occurred around the same time as in Azusa Street USA and in England. The church had rejected God's spirit and the nation was doomed to suffer what seemed like unfettered evil that was allowed to wreck horror, fear and enormous destruction and human suffering. It was not until as late as the mid 1990's that the church in Germany formally came to publically repent of what had occurred around a century earlier. Now Germany is economically the most prosperous nation in Europe. While things are not perfect still, it is a very graphic example of 'as goes the church so goes the nation'.

#### How we treat Israel matters

God says 'Those who bless Israel I will bless'. This has individual and corporate relevance as expressed by prayer and support (financially and otherwise) both by the individual and by nations as public policy and international relations towards Israel.

**I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Gen 12:3**

It's important to understand here that the original Hebrew word for curse here includes not just actively an actively antagonistic or negative stance but also one of indifference i.e. an absence of support or blessing.

This is why we should care how our elected government of the day treats Israel as well as our own personal response.

## The Story of Achan's Sin

The principle of this story could also apply at the congregational or city level.

See (**Joshua 6 &7**)

**Summary:** The Israelites had defeated Jericho with the unusual and supernatural strategy given by God. The Lord had said that all of the devoted things (riches) were to be put into the treasury of the Lord's house. But Achan one of the Israelites took some items for himself and hid them amongst his personal belongings without anyone else's knowledge. When Israel set out to defeat the next, much smaller town of Ai they were overcome and defeated to their dismay. God had not empowered them to be victorious because of the sin that was present due to the disobedience.

But the Israelites (corporate) acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel. **Jos 7:1**

The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel (corporate) has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

**Jos 7:10-12**

**Quote:** When the spoils were given to God, they were 'consecrated' or set apart for God's house (tithe); but after a man took some for himself, it was actually cursing Israel's efforts to take the Promised Land. <sup>3 pg 36</sup>

## The Church / Congregations

While there are principles and values that apply 'globally' across the Kingdom of God, it is within the context of relationships locally, within a congregation and a city that these things are lived out and given expression in a meaningful way

We enter the Kingdom of God as a saved, redeemed individual but we are inserted into the Body of Christ (see **Acts 2:47**) - a people that God has bought for himself.

No man is an island, as the saying goes.

Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. **Act 15:14**

It has always been God desire and intention to have a people for himself who love Him expressed even back with Old Testament Israel.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. **Deu 7:6**

As Gentiles we have been grafted in to God's plan (see **Romans 11**). The following verse sums it up well when Paul says:

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, **Rom 10:12**

As Peter says in **1 Peter 2:10**, "once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" infers common linkage and relationship in Christ through the Holy Spirit. There are many verses that speak of relationship in the community of believers such as:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. **Gal 6:10 (NIV)**

household of faith. **(ESV)**, our family in the faith. **(GNB)**

Not only are we not our own but bought at a price – the blood of Christ, we are also members one of another. We are our brothers keeper (and carer).

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **Eph 2:19**

With our individualistic mindset, we can still at the core view the term 'fellow citizens' as other individuals who are also fellow citizens which makes for a disconnect even though it does actually speak of a level of relationship. However, we should all be able to grasp that being part of God's household infers meaningful relationship that means how we live impacts upon our fellow brother or sister in Christ.

**Illustration:** Daily Nudge, Olive Tree Media, 5 Nov 2014.

## Shared Space Traffic System

Hans Monderman, a traffic planner, has built a new traffic system called Shared Space. Residents of the northern Dutch town of Drachten have been used as guinea-pigs in an experiment which has seen nearly all the traffic lights removed from their streets.

The idea is to take away most of the signs and traffic lights so that people become much more responsible for their own actions and aware of the people around them. The main junction in Drachten handles about 22,000 cars a day. Where once there were traffic lights, there is now a roundabout, an extended cycle path and a pedestrian area.

For those who think that this would be a total disaster, the results are very positive with a reduction in accidents and improvements in driving standards.

Monderman is suggesting that when you make people responsible for each other in the shared space, they actually take responsibility for their actions and show concern for others. It's a Biblical idea – we are our brother's keeper.

Decisions we make and lifestyles and values we adopt, impact upon families, cities, nations, congregations and therefore the Church.

The challenge for us is to adjust our thinking to see beyond the individual, beyond ourselves. We must also seek the grace of the Holy Spirit to do a work in our lives.

**Read:** If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit (individualistic thinking), but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (corporate thinking). **Php 2:1-4**

The apostle Paul said:

make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. **Rom 14:13**

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. **1Co 8:9**

This is very different to the rights of the individual being the ultimate, which says, “I should be allowed to do what I want, it’s my choice”, regardless of what impact it may have on others – and here we are not talking about intrinsically immoral issues. The motivator here is real love for one another.

## **Conclusion**

So, we have personal identity before God which is also kept in tension with these other spheres of relationships of corporate identity through which God also sees us.

This has implications in areas of, judgement, curse, confession and repentance of sin and blessing (peace, prosperity, power, oneness (unity)).

As far as a congregation and the church broadly in any given location is concerned, God wants to pour out blessing where there is true oneness of heart and mind

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. **Act 4:32**

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity (Hebrew - yachad) ! For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. **Psa 133:1-3**

Gill’s commentary describes "to dwell together in unity": even as one man, as if one soul actuated them all.

The “one in heart and mind” (oneness) that brings the power and blessing of God must be sought by us and the grace (empowerment, enablement) given by the Holy Spirit to see it made a reality.

**Quote:** When the Spirit of God came on the early church in Jerusalem...the central, primary anointing was this anointing for community, and all the other gifts, graces and anointings were attached to it.

For years we have made the mistake of preaching Pentecost (Baptism in the Holy Spirit) as an individual experience. Our thinking was that each believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit, can speak in tongues, can heal the sick, and win souls. “One man with Christ is a majority, so go out in the power of the Spirit, and conquer the world for Jesus!” is the kind of thing commonly enough thought, and preached. In thinking like this...we totally miss the main message of the New Testament – that we were meant to be of one heart and mind with all the believers – and together speak with one voice. <sup>2 pg 90-92</sup>

True Christianity is based on relationships, with believers being built together and sharing a common life. ...no church...no Christian is spiritually mature unless they are relationally mature. <sup>2 pg 97-98</sup>

The purpose of the Gift of the Spirit was to take people who believe in Jesus and join them....in ‘apostolic companies’...in powerful union of Christ-like communities. One of the reasons is that Christ is bringing the church to maturity before the great day of the coming of our Lord – and this requires the bride to be made spotless by love. <sup>2 pg 98</sup>

A proper functioning church will impact upon families, cities and nations for the glory of God.

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