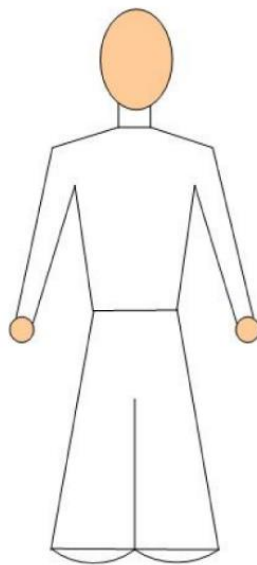


Who Am I? – # 1

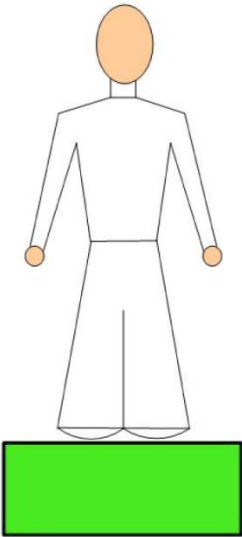
Perhaps it is one of the most important questions that people struggle with, “Who am I?” The thought comes in many forms with attached emotions and may last for moments or decades within the mind and heart of each of us. Just the simple question “Who am I?” may not be that clearly formed, but the result is the same as we seek to understand how we fit into this world, form our self-concepts, and learn to reflect upon the world around us from that unique perspective.

We never know when the critical pieces of this perspective will be formed exactly. They might come from any experience that holds such significance in our minds that it merits a role in forming our self-perspective. What may give impetus to that selection process is an interesting issue, but select we do, and those pieces are used to shape our answer to the question, “Who am I?”

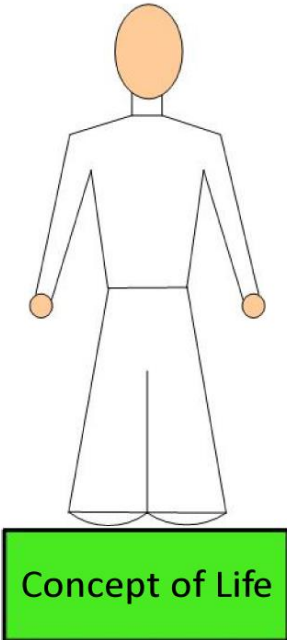
How does all this work? Is there a way to understand this and perhaps delve into this question of the centuries? My suggestion is “we can”, and what follows is at least one approach to answering this question.



We begin with an image of our physical self. Sight, smell, hearing, tasting, and touching all connect us to the fact that our body exists, and we are real. So, the most fundamental basis for answering this question is our awareness of our own physical existence.

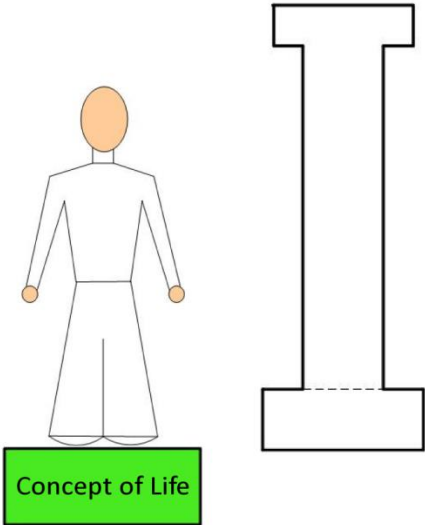


Now we see a block underneath our image. What is that? Well, let's allow that to represent our concept of life. We know that our concept of life goes far beyond our physical body, and this green rectangle represents the fundamental formation of our concept of life.



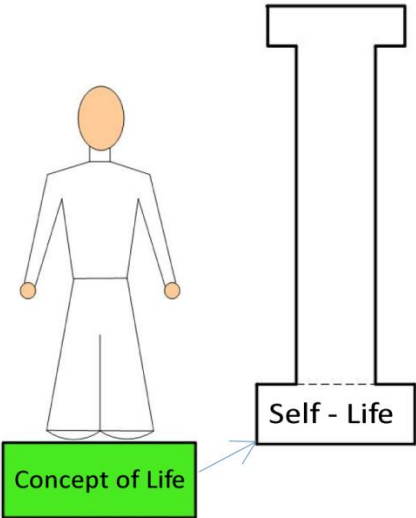
As we go beyond these basic two elements of physical existence and concept of life, we run smack dab into the big “I”.

Exploring What Makes Up Our Concept of “I”



This word is an old friend. It is the simplest form of self-expression that we know. I want this, I am going to do that, I should, I could, I might, I won't, and I do are just some of the ways we use this expression of self. It makes a big difference how we use that one letter word, because we are talking about our self. Perhaps one of the biggest moments in a man or woman's time on this earth is when they say "I do" during their wedding ceremony. We want to be careful how we use this one letter word, "I".

First Key Element – Self-Life....."What's that?"



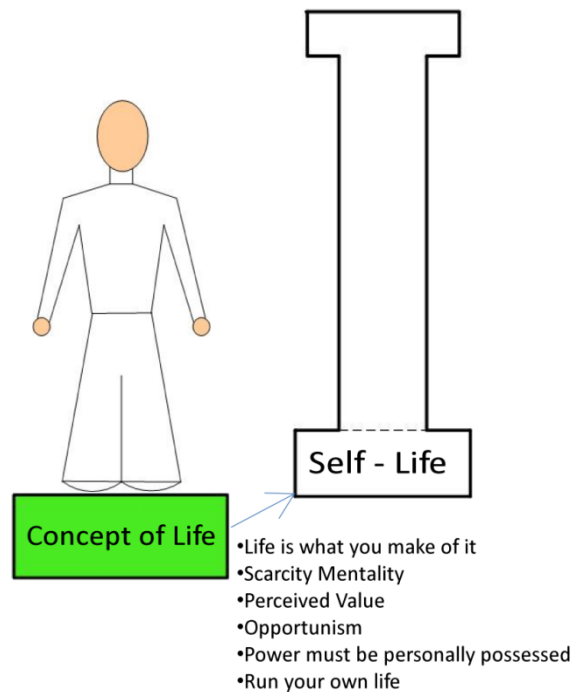
As we think about what is at the basis of the big “I” we see that our concept of life serves as that foundation, and that foundation for all people is “Self-Life”. Now what is “self-life”?

We often reference it. Have any of us ever heard the phrase, or something similar, “Life is what you make of it?” How about, “You are what you do”, “You are what you eat”, “You are the choices you make”, do any of these sound familiar? There are many forms of this thought that all support the fundamental assumption that our life really boils down to self-life.

It is considered the norm that, while others may help us, it is really up to us to make the right decisions in our life, and do the right things (or the “smart” things) to get ahead. Who our friends are makes a difference; the connections and relationships that we establish. How hard we work, how well we perform, and all the other measurements of success or failure point directly to us; to self, thus “self-life”.

Self-Life – Let’s Go Deeper

Now there are many other characteristics of self-life in this world, but we’ll consider just a few:



Life is what you make of it

“Life is what you make of it”, “Nothing in life is free”, and many other statements are like injections of “wisdom” into our thinking. These support the idea that it is up to us to “make” our self into something. There are suggested ways to accomplish this like, “Be all you can be. Join the Army”. The world is full of these sayings, like sound bites of wisdom floating in the air waiting to be captured by our mind and used

to determine our perspectives of life. At the core of this concept we may acknowledge that our “life” got a start from others, but what really counts about life is what we must create; what we make of it. Essentially, we determine the quality and value of our life by our perspectives and the actions we take to influence the circumstances of our existence.

The hole in this logic is the fact that we cannot control all the circumstances of our existence. How many times have we hoped for one thing and ended up with something less no matter how hard we tried? The other fact is that no matter how well we can control our circumstances, it is never enough. It is a repetitive trap of seeking to accomplish self-satisfaction. Usually this causes people to settle for less, and hope for some type of a “balance” in life. We struggle to ensure that the urgent issues of living do not sidetrack us too far from our desired reality. We hold on to the hope of a chosen set of goals that create the attraction for continuing on in the face of adversity. Unless or until we achieve the goals and create more or give them up for something less.

Scarcity Mentality

Most of us operate from the basic assumption that there is a limited amount of anything that we might want or need, and if other people are getting it first, their actions put our ability to get what we want at risk.

This concept is projected by attitudes and events all around us. Economic systems have this as a foundational truth. If we are in a business and the product that we once manufactured shifts from being “special” to being a “commodity” then its value will decline as a result. If there is a limited supply of something that people want or need then we can bet the price will reflect the scarcity of that item: gold, diamonds, water in Jordan, certain types of food in several parts of the world, oil, etc., etc.

There is no existing economic system that can set us free from the ruling grip of this perspective. Every system supports and propagates this concept. Thus, it remains a part of our reality and is retained in our minds as being “truth”. This is sustained in spite of the fact that gold and diamonds have limited intrinsic value, we have the capacity to feed the world and make sure that everyone has enough water. We continue to create our own crisis where oil and other extracted resources are concerned. There is one thing that stands in the way of us solving these problems and many others; us. Our concept of life, and sustained perspectives that are based upon sin hold us in a prison of poverty. It is a poverty of resources for some, a poverty of generosity for others, but at its core is sin that is too often lived out as greed.



Yes, that’s a picture of a sponge. How do we use sponges? Obviously, we mostly use them to soak up some liquid, or hold something like soap to be used for cleaning something. When a sponge is full of liquid it simply won’t hold anymore. Our brains are a bit like that on a temporary basis. They’ll absorb more information faster than we may be able to process fully. It may take time

to let things really soak in; create the necessary cognitive connections so new thoughts can be interconnected with others, and their meaning for us to be discovered. Because some of these thoughts may challenge our “conventional thinking” feel free to let them soak. Take some time and come back

and read them again. Please don't just accept them or reject them without the Holy Spirit's leading.

Perceived Value

Since the nature of humankind is to be the judge of what is good or evil, it is people who choose for themselves what is valuable and what is not. There are places in this world where killing someone means very little; "life is cheap". So it is with most things in this world. When cultures, societies, and governments hold common values, then we have a structure that supports the sustaining of the same. Within the United States one of the strongest values is "freedom" at a price. That price consists of obedience to a common set of laws, the willingness to be governed by a representative group of people, and too often the cost of the precious lives of our young people on foreign ground.

The economic systems of the world are all based upon perceived value. We have lost the ability, if it ever existed, to accurately measure the value of what we possess and produce. The amount of currency moving around the world that is real or counterfeit is not controllable. So, it's really a system of "agreement" based upon some measurable items that people decide to hold in common that we use as the basis of the economic systems. If anyone was able to really measure all of this, the systems that are currently in place may come crumbling down like a house-of-cards. Since no one can measure any of this better than what we hold in common the whole thing keeps working. It is, however, all based on perceived value. It is the same with any quality of life, any idea we desire to live out in this world, and anything we might seek to possess.

Have any of us ever entered into a pricing negotiation when we want to purchase something and had the other person ask, "Well, how much do you want to pay for it?" They are essentially trying to find out what we think it is worth. That's perceived value.

Our value as a person is viewed in the same way. "How much are you worth?" This generally means, what's the value of our combined wealth. It's not a question that is often asked out loud, but it is often the subject of consideration. How we dress, walk, talk, or look may be used to "size you up" and determine our perceived value. Perceived value takes on many forms as it is applied to each person: their value for productivity, advice, knowledge, skills, wisdom, love, making connections and profitability to name a few. We and other people choose the measuring points for the determination of our value. We usually get along better with people who choose the same points of measurement, and value us as much or more than we value our self.

The grades that we get while working our way through the educational labyrinth are often used to determine our "actual" or projected value. Measuring points that are held in common within a society tend to follow us around as we prove them to be "right" or "wrong", and there are plenty of examples of both.

If we are as smart as Einstein, can run in the Olympics, as beautiful as a fashion model, or as talented as a famous entertainer then our chances of being highly valued may be pretty good. There is risk involved, however, because the world has been known in the past to ignore or destroy its best and brightest,

especially when they provide too much of a challenge and contrast with commonly held values or perceived “truth”.

“I will love you if...” is a clear demonstration of perceived value and often dominates the relationships within families and society in general. This is implied more often than it is clearly stated, but we get the message loud and clear.

Racial prejudice and racism clearly demonstrate decreased perceived value based on difference, regardless of a person’s performance. Native Americans within the United States are a continuing example of negative perceived value, because fundamental differences exist between their culture and the dominate culture within the country. History is filled with examples of this that are too numerous and horrific to mention here.

Is a person who can put a basketball through a hoop, or a little white ball into a hole in the ground really doing something of greater value than the soldier who gives their life for the freedom of this nation, or the law enforcement officers who put their lives on the line every day, so we can sit in our home with a greater sense of safety and be entertained by the guy that does neat stuff with a basketball or golf ball? Sure, there’s economic “realities” that can be used to justify what people get paid, but that’s not the only way we express value. Isn’t there something really messed up with all this perceived value? My answer is a resounding “Yes”, and it’s because Sin is at its root.

It’s amazing how much perceived value serves as the foundation of destructive forces in this world.

Opportunism

This is taking advantage of the circumstances with little regard for principles or the consequences. What usually drives this is self-interest. We may know that it is wrong or questionable behavior, but we decide that the possible gain is worth the risks. This exists in societies to the degree that we can be considered foolish if we don’t act opportunistically. Scam “artists” make money by taking advantage of people’s opportunistic behavior, and they will continue to do so because this is not going away any time soon. People simply become more educated about how to act opportunistically with less risk involved to avoid the scams.

Power must be personally possessed

We are willing to let other people hold the power over systems and circumstances that impact us if we trust them. That is, however, a trade off decided by the fact that we cannot hold that power ourselves, or to do so would cost us too much in the quality of our life experience. Generally, we prefer to have control over that which significantly impacts our circumstances.

Wouldn’t it be great if we could control the weather? Of course it would look a little weird because we might have clear skies above us, the person next door might have a cloudy day, three houses down it might be raining, and on down the street people would be building a snowman. So, it’s probably good that we can’t control the weather. Think how hard it would be to come to agreement on what kind of

weather we would have every day. The solution, of course, is that “you” would be the one who gets to control the weather, right?

If it’s not the weather then it’s something else that we’d like to control that we can’t, and if the possibility really existed then our list of things that we’d like to control would grow longer rather than shorter. If we question this concept of wanting to control things and people around us just watch a child grow up in a home where he or she gets everything they want.

Control is a key foundational element of our concept of life in this world. It is a trap set by Satan. (Gen. 3)

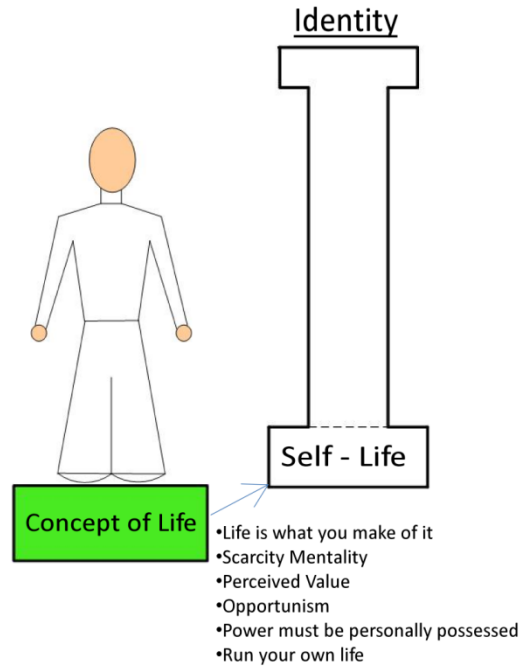
Run Your Own Life

Here, perhaps, is where we see the most direct correlation between the temptation of Eve and Adam by the serpent and our circumstances today. Everyone who has the capacity to do so desires to run their own life, make the important decisions, determine their own future. Even those that decide not to make the important decisions are making a critical decision by giving up their “self-determination” to someone else.

There are so many ways that we play the “control” game that the complexity of layers of direction and misdirection can be difficult to define or understand. We are artists at living Satan’s lie about self-life, and denying that we are doing so, while espousing some philosophy that seems to give credence to our chosen means of control.

In a way “running our own life” is a culmination of all the other items just addressed above. It is the ultimate means of insuring that the results of each of the above concepts fit what we think is best for us and those we care about.

All these characteristics and others form the foundation upon which we build the answer to “Who am I?” Which of the characteristics we accept as “truth” determines the formation of our answer. On this foundation stands or falls the formation of the next primary factor of who we are; identity.



The big “I” is all about “Identity”. This is where we get to the core information that for most people answers our question: “Who Am I”.

Let’s say two people meet and begin telling each other about themselves. They’d probably start with general information like their name, what they do, and where they are from. In some cultures we’d start with our name, where we are from, our community, our family, and at some point we might talk about what we do.

What if we get engaged in a comfortable conversation and the person says that they really want to know all about us. For instance, “What’s your first memory?” What would we each tell them? Take a moment and think about it, “What is our first memory”?

There’s probably a long list of things that we could tell the person after disclosing our first memory like:

Our parent’s names and what we remember about them as a child

Our sisters and brothers if we had any

The first food we remember

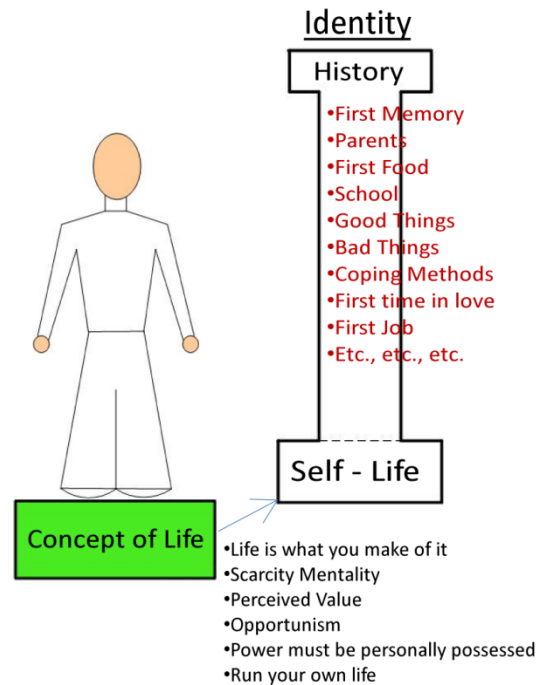
[etc., etc.]

Now let’s say the person is typing away as fast as we are talking and captures all that we share on a computer. They could save our entire life on a small portable device and say, “Here, now if anyone else asks who you are, just give them this and they’ll have it all.”

“Wait”, we might say, “that’s not ‘me’, I’m much more than just a bunch of information!” Ok, tell me; who are you?

Sure, it’s true we are much more than the experiences and thoughts that we’ve had while existing on this earth. The point is, however, that for the most part the way we think about our identity is based upon our “History”.

Our history really ends up being a bunch of information about who we are, and how we define ourselves.

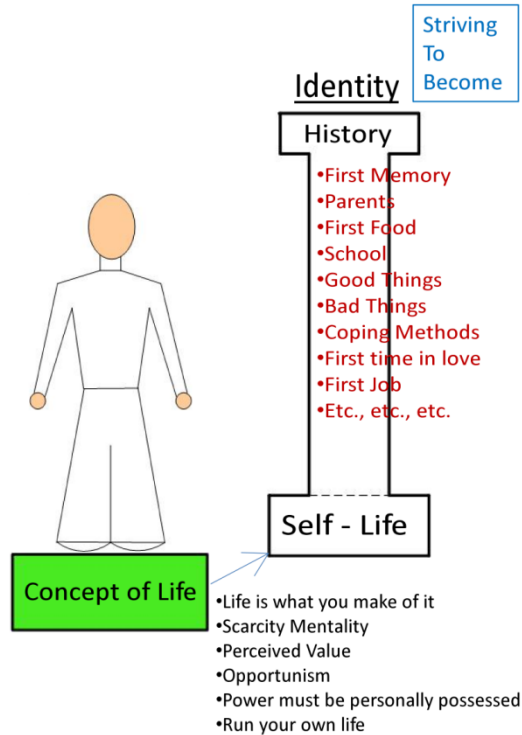


People sometimes feel as though they hit a brick wall when trying to answer the question “who am I”, because they consider this experience-based concept of self and feel as though something big is missing. Where is the “purpose”, where is the meaning that rises above all of the “stuff” that we describe as our life; our identity? Often, we move to comments about what we intend to accomplish; our hopes and dreams, the difference that we intend to make in the world; planned or unplanned future experiences.

We seek to shape our own identity by the experiences that we choose to have, or plan to accomplish. Our connections, relationships, acquired positions, recognition, and collective influence all factor into this attempt to form our identity. All of that along with all the other “stuff” that we collect or control along with our choices add to our identity, but no matter what we add to the list there never seems to be enough.

The moments where we think we have enough of “whatever it is we want” are usually when we have satisfied or overindulged our desires. Then we begin to realize the emptiness of having attained what we

thought would somehow fulfill our idea of a meaningful life. It is like being caught in a trap of seeking satisfaction that is never quite achieved; always something remains missing.



A hallmark of our identity might be described as “Striving to Become”. It might be striving to become as it relates to some type of job; striving to become at peace with something; striving to become debt free; striving to become successful at something, but there is always something more.

We may be thinking, “Absolutely, that’s the vibrancy of life. There’s always something more to do, to experience, to create, to achieve!” My hope is that we will see the trap in this as it relates to our sense of self, and our ability to experience true Life.

The underlying assumption for this concept of life is that we are never complete. There is always something more that we must do to add meaning to life; to essentially create life in the moment. That is the tradeoff that Satan proposed in the Garden of Eden; that we must create our own life rather than possess Life from God. In doing this we can be our own boss and replace God as our Life; be a god unto our self.

So rather than having life in completeness, as God intended, we are constantly seeking to make our life experiences be the type that we decide is “good”. For some people this is fundamental to their existence. For others it is layered with complexity, but it all adds up to the same thing; we are left to

discover and create our own life, and we never quite get to the point of completeness. Should we ever think we have arrived it may take only moments to discover that the chaos of the world will strip us of our sense of fulfillment.

Because the quality of our life is permanently connected to our immediate circumstances, we can be no more successful in creating a quality life than we can be in controlling all the circumstances that affect our well-being. We struggle to find order within chaos that matches our interests, and our need to control enough elements of our existence to maintain the “life” that we desire. This slips away from our grasp at some level because we can never completely control the chaos around us. It is impossible.

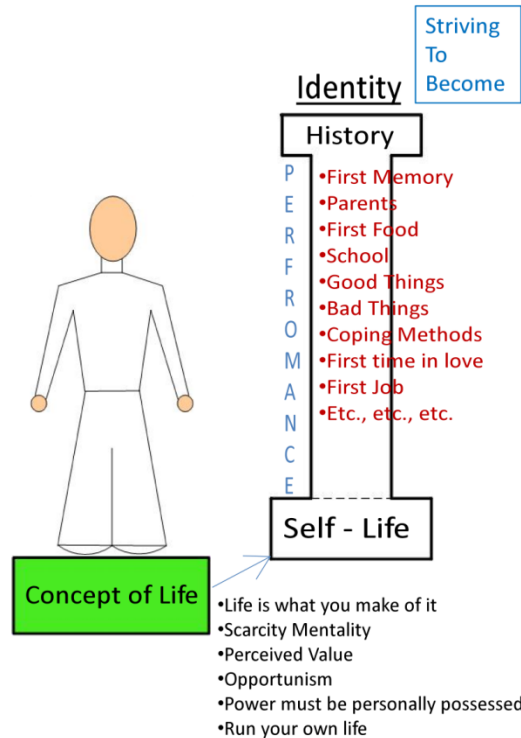
So, some say that we should grasp the chaos and go with it, but that is just another way to attempt to find a path to what we desire. If we can’t control what happens in order to create what we desire, then a solution is to change what we desire to be whatever happens. That may make sense, but most people become disillusioned because what chaos sends our way, sooner or later, will be so different from what we could ever desire that we will reject it, and seek to control our circumstances again.

The interesting thing is that this trap of always striving-to-become is based upon a lie about the essence of life. Because we believe the lie and try to live it out, we trap ourselves in its web of deceit. The resulting process of trying to create our desired quality of life leaves us with a sense of dissatisfaction; it’s never quite enough, it’s never quite “right”.

Because our identity is linked to this process we see ourselves, and understand ourselves from the perspective of the circumstances of our existence. “You are what you do.” “You are what you eat.” “You are (fill in the blanks).” Our points of identity and measurement, no matter how clear or unclear, set the base for our sense of self.

Often, we hope to create a different self-identity by creating a different history. Some people do this by changing what they do today, so in the tomorrows to come they will have a different history to talk about. Others just lie about the past to artificially create what they cannot have by experience. It is all a part of “Striving to Become”. This sets the basis for another characteristic of our identity.

How Are We Performing?



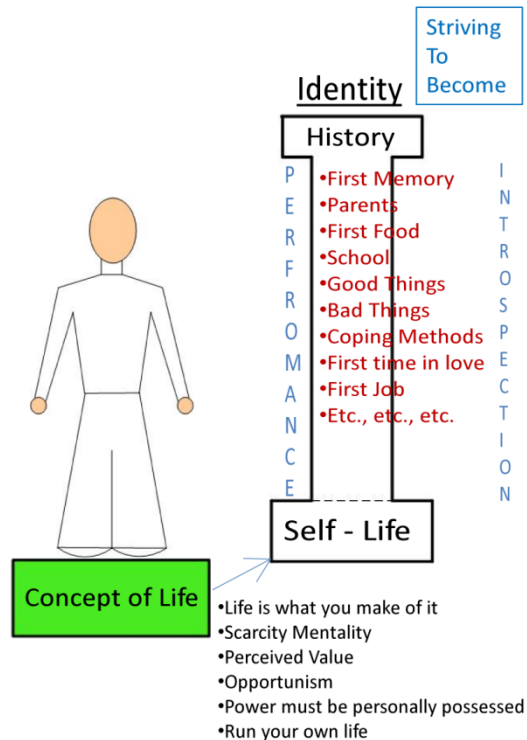
We learn that "Performance" is the basis for our acceptance. This characteristic surrounds us and chains us to our natural capacities or the lack thereof. In many ways we become the beneficiary or victim of our circumstances. Certainly, we all have the capacity to shape our circumstances, but as already suggested, we almost always face the fact that we cannot control all of our circumstances. That difference between what we can and cannot control often makes all the difference in what happens to us.

If those around us are "fair" in their judgment of us, then we will not be held accountable for what we cannot control. Most people are in alignment with that thinking when the circumstances are against their intended success. If, however, "good fortune" seems to be with us, then many people will claim the success as their own.

From the time we are children we learn about performance-based acceptance. Our achievements of learning to feed ourselves, crawl, walk, talk, and tie our own shoestrings all can become moments of celebration. This continues as we grow and attend school. If not before, then in school we learn that performance is clearly judged, scored, and labeled an "A", "B", "C", "D", or the dreaded "F".

If what we do is valued, then we feel valued. If not, or even worse if we become the example of failure then we usually feel less valuable as a person. There are so many ways that these things happen, and they can have a long-term impact on our identity. Now, let's consider another element of identity.

Looking Within:



Introspection is probably what we consider to be the norm. It's the process of us looking within ourselves and assessing our "state-of-being"; kind of like asking the question, "How am I doing right now?"

It may be that this happens most often due to some set of circumstances. For instance, when tension seems to exist between us and another person we may think, "Well I wonder what's her/his problem? Did I do something?" Introspection is the second step in the cycle of conflict that always starts with some recognized tension. Most of us do an introspective check-up to assess the circumstances and determine if we are the cause of the tension.

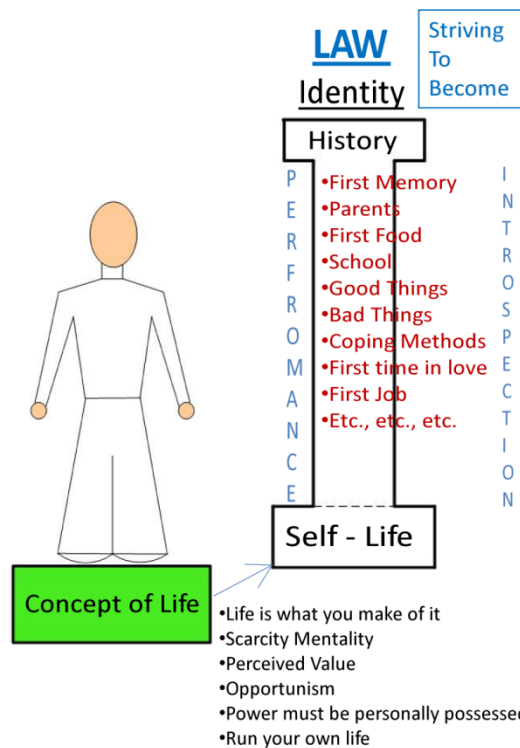
In order for the conflict to continue we must move on from introspection to gathering reasons why the tension is the other person's fault; it's their behavior that's causing the tension and not ours. Sure, we may be contributing to the tension, but we decide that our behavior is justified because of the other person's attitude and behavior. We watch for the circumstances to prove our point, and may even orchestrate the circumstances to gain the evidence to prove we are right. Our thoughts and actions are justified because we have introspectively absolved our self of being primarily responsible for the conflict.

Introspection can also lead us toward self-judgment, the decision that we are our own biggest problem. Some people decide that there's nothing that they can do about "things" and give up trying. When we want things to be different and we feel helpless to change the circumstances, our frustration can turn to anger, and our anger can foster aggressive behavior toward others or ourselves. That anger turned inward often becomes depression.

The flip-side is that our introspection can lead us to declare that all is excellent! "If I was any better, I couldn't stand it!" That is so positive that it must be good; right?

An essential point of introspection is that it is "self" who is doing the inspecting, analyzing, judging and coming up with our own conclusion about the truth concerning our state-of-being. We are the one making the final determination about how we are doing; we are the judge. Essentially, we replace God and decide for our self the meaning of our circumstances, feelings, state of mind, and physical condition. What do they all add up to: "good" or "bad"?

The greatest weakness about introspection is the person who is deciding the meaning of what is observed, us. By necessity, our opinion is based upon the circumstances at any given time, and so "truth" about our self becomes relative. Since our judgment of others is intrinsically linked to our self-perspective the truth about others is also relative; and we become our own god by deciding what is true and what is not; what is "good" and what is "evil".



The scriptures clearly tell us that apart from Christ people live under the law. (Romans chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8)

This has a very real impact on us in at least a couple of ways: 1) in our relationship with God; 2) in our relationship with each other. Let's briefly consider each of these.

The point that we are born in Sin and Death has been made several times already. Earlier it was stated that we all confirm this by committing sins; we choose to do what is wrong with full knowledge that it is

wrong. The list of possibilities is long and unnecessary to repeat since we all know that we have intentionally lied, cheated, stolen, or something that is clearly wrong.

Under the Law such behavior results in our self-condemnation; we are guilty of sins and we are accountable for those sins before God's eternal Perfection. In essence this proves the death grip of Sin upon us, and justifies God's separation from us forever.

Since God is Perfect, no one with unforgiven sins can be united with Him, and our sins clearly prove the dominant presence of the power Sin within us. Essentially, we belong to Sin so we cannot belong to God. If God's Life was within us then we would belong to Him, but we are condemned to Death's eternal grip and our behavior proves that we are Dead already.

If we think about this it may become apparent that God does not have to separate Himself from us. We do that ourselves. Again, God is absolutely Perfect. Even if we were not born into Sin and Death, the moment we do something wrong we can no longer be a part of Him. To do so would require God to become imperfect.

Instead, our imperfection causes our separation from God. We may discover this separation is not about God rejecting us, as much as it is our choices and actions force our ejection from God's Perfection.

Under the Law this can never change. There is nothing that we can do to change our state-of-being Dead. This is correct because of our separation from God, caused by the power of Sin in us, and demonstrated by our sinful behavior. There is no way to set ourselves free. We cannot get God's Life for our self; it cannot be earned. His Life must be given freely.

In the Old Testament God gave His Law to His people. If they were faithful to that Law then after their physical death on this earth God would release them from the power of Sin. In reality, however, even the greatest leaders like Abraham and Moses sinned. So, their obedience could not earn them freedom from Sin, because no one was able to remain completely faithful to God all of the time.

God set up processes by which people could have their sins forgiven. In the Old Testament, as considered in a previous chapter, it was the sacrificial system. Sin always results in Death, and the sacrificial system clearly demonstrated that fact. The animals that were sacrificed served as a gruesome reminder of the price of sins as they provided a type of replacement for the people who offered the sacrifice. Instead of people dying, animals died in their place.

Judgment was a real experience for people in the Old Testament. There is one story after another of judgment coming upon people and nations because of their sins. The sacrificial process taught a vivid lesson. To watch while an animal is slaughtered in front of us, cut up and burned on an altar would leave a lasting impression concerning the effects of our sins. The animal either came from those owned by the making the sacrifice or they had to pay for it, so the cost was real though far less than the alternative.

It was the obedient offering of these sacrifices, given from a trusting repentant heart that God honored as faith on the part of the believer. It was because of their faith in God that He would forgive them, and that's what made the difference. Their faith was the basis for offering the sacrifice that God counted as

sufficient, otherwise sacrificing the life of an animal would result in nothing. The animal represented the price that must be paid to satisfy justice, a very real and necessary act, but it was the faith of the believer that caused the “price” to be sufficient for their forgiveness.

The Law always holds a sharp edge that separates Truth from a lie. From the perspective of the Law a person is either guilty or not guilty; there is nothing in between. Once guilt has been established a price must be paid to satisfy justice. That is our reality within the Law.

Since we are under the Law, we view others in the same way that we are viewed. This substantiates our perspective of performance-based acceptance that was addressed earlier. The Law is all about performance. Our performance either determines our guilt or innocence; if guilty then we are rejected; if innocent then we are accepted. It is not surprising that this reality is emulated in our relationship with others to varying degrees, and in many different ways within social structures.

The harsh reality of the Law exposes our sins. This in turn makes the results of the power of Sin within us apparent. Through the Law we become aware of our need to be set free from Sin’s dominance. For most people this equates to a desire to be set free from the burden of guilt for the sins that they have committed. They know that they’ve messed up and they want to get things right somehow.

When they come to understand that there is a way to be set free from their sins, to be accepted by God, to experience the love of God, then they may listen with hopeful hearts. They might begin to see the way to freedom when they learn that God has eternally paid the price necessary to satisfy justice as required by the Law, through His Son Jesus Christ. That freedom comes through faith in Jesus; faith that He is the Son of God, He died on the cross for our sins, was buried and arose on the third day; that if we repent of our sins and believe in Him our sins will be forgiven, we will be set free from the power of Sin, and we will be saved from condemnation and eternal Death.

“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” 1 Corinthians 1:21

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast.” Ephesians 2:1-9

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

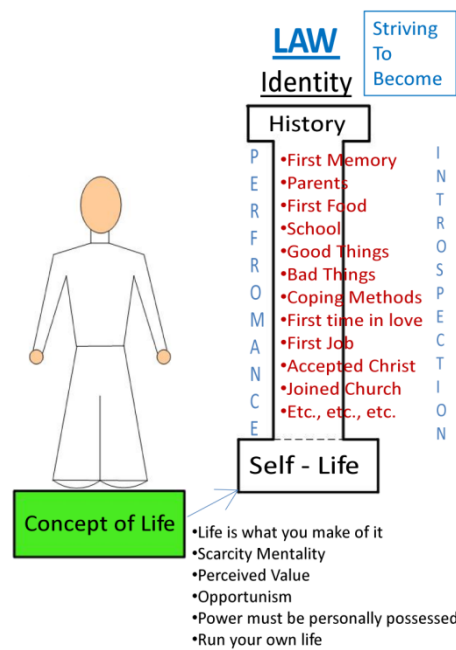
“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;” 1 Peter 3:18

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” John 5:24

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John 3:16-18

Some people make the decision to receive this gift of eternal life and believing in Jesus; they commit their life to Him; they receive salvation in Jesus Christ. So a part of their history is this salvation event.



Here we can now see it as a part of our history. It may be seen as the pinnacle event in our “life” on this earth, but it is still usually seen as another of the long list of things that has happened to us that is a part of our identity. Along with everything else we see ourselves as a “Christian”; a follower of Christ, a child of God born again by the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus. For some of us accepting Christ holds the most prominent point of our identity, while for others of us its place of prominence varies greatly.

My guess is, the majority of people who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord see themselves as a person who must continue to cope with the circumstances of “life”, except now they have God to show them the way. In spite of the fact that they’re still in the mess of this world God has forgiven them, and will

continue to forgive them if they ask Him to, so with His help they will find a way to a more meaningful “life”.

Our identity has changed but we really don’t understand the depth of the fundamental change that has occurred within us. Most people understand that they are now different, but they do not know how far that difference reaches into their core; the very nature of their being.

As we go on in “life”, we are once again inundated with the circumstances of our existence, and eventually our focus is on what is happening around us. The new events and experiences add to our identity, and the moment of our salvation in Christ becomes entwined within the continued complexity of what happens in our “life”, and how we initiate or react to those events.

Essentially our identity stays intact with the addition that we know we have accepted Christ; forgiven, set free from sin; a child of God. This influences our perspectives to the degree that we are willing to learn about our relationship with God and apply that knowledge to our everyday circumstances.

Our continued existence on this earth ensures that our history evolves, ever changing with the circumstances that pass through the ticking clock of our “lifetime” on this earth. The moment of our salvation begins to move away from us, getting more distant unless we work diligently to keep it fresh. Prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians serve as the means of keeping our act of faith close to our current reality.

The more we learn about God and the more we include Him in our daily living, the closer we sense His presence. Still there are all the competing issues, demands, conflicts, opportunities, experiences; the living of “life” that calls us back to what we know. We are constantly encouraged to take charge of our “life” and make something of it, and the lineage of our history grows with the passing of each moment.

It is easy for God to become less the focus of our attention as the challenges of living confront us daily. Many of us struggle with a self-image shaped by a history that diminishes our sense of self-worth. Others of us know our strengths and find a stronger sense of self confidence because we now have a relationship with God.

Often, we are continuously reshaping our understanding of our identity, so it aligns with our personal perspective of daily events. This becomes intertwined with the eternal Truth of our relationship with God.

From that new perspective of a combined identity we face each day in the best way that we can. For most people, that new perspective means they are a sinner who is saved. They have a relationship with God, but they have to struggle each day with their circumstances in an attempt to do what is right.

Our successes and failures continue to shape our identity, which rests on our understanding of what we believe to be “right” or “wrong” according to what we understand at any given point of our existence. Others continue to judge our performance, and our acceptance continues to be linked to their opinions. We are still in the game of “life” trying to figure out who we are, and what it means to be connected with God while living in the chaos around us.

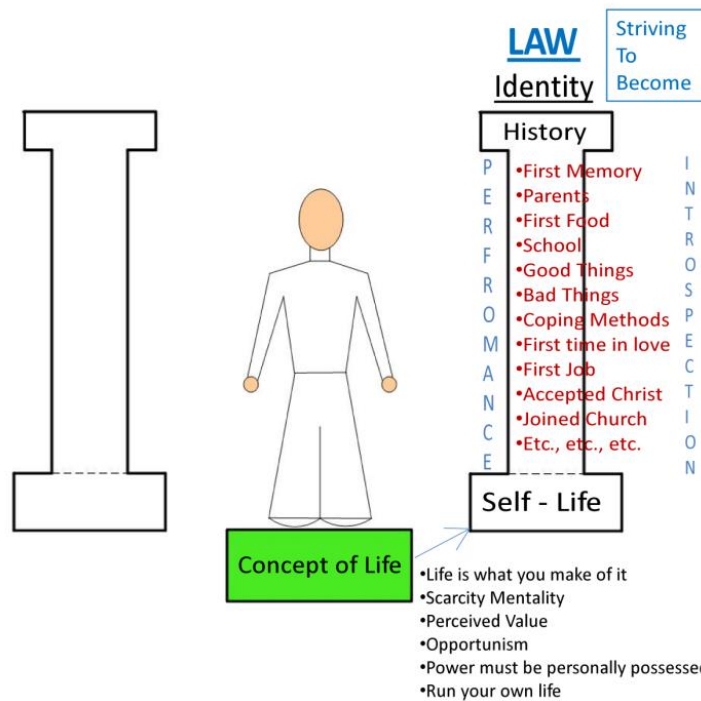
Some of us spend all our time trying to control the chaos by building a structure of defined behavior that complies with our idea of “right”. We seek to establish “good” in the middle of complexity and trust God to assist us as we seek to carry out His work.

This difference in perspectives and ideas are expressed in many ways, individually and within religious organizations. In nearly every case the focus remains on us and our ability to have enough faith, or perform in some way that will meet the satisfaction of God and those around us. It sometimes seems as though “who we are” and “who we should be” are both moving targets that sit outside of our mental and emotional grasp, and clearly outside of our ability to achieve success.

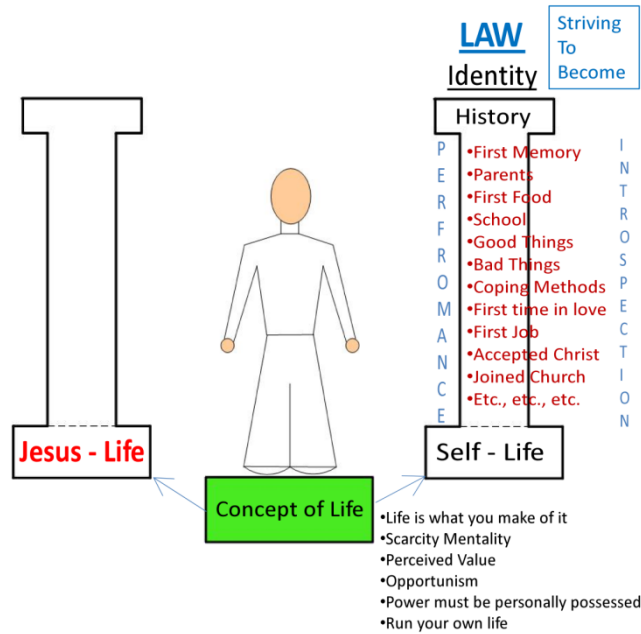
How can we ever hope to get a grip on something so real, something so stable that we are sure about the answer to the question, “Who am I?”

The answer: “You first have to know who you really are, and here’s the answer the that question!”

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord what follows is your True Identity.



Since we’re talking about a new identity notice that we’ve added a new big “I” on the left of the diagram above. Let’s use that to explain our new identity. We will start with the foundation of who we are; the foundation of our true identity.



Just as our old identity had our concept of life as its foundation, our new identity also has a foundation of life. The difference is our old identity had a concept as its foundation, and our new identity has something that is eternally real; the actual Life of Jesus, or Jesus-Life.

It is absolutely critical that we understand this and not just know about it, so please pay close attention because this is the most powerful thing a human being can experience! When we accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord, His actual Life was placed inside of our body, united with our spirit by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God.

No, it does not matter whether we felt it or not, or whether we saw it, or anything else. It happened. Not because we earned it. Not because we were good enough. Not because we said the right words. It happened because God gave His Son, Jesus, Who obediently died on the cross for all sins, and arose from the Dead proving that He had broken the power of Sin forever, and that His Life was eternal.

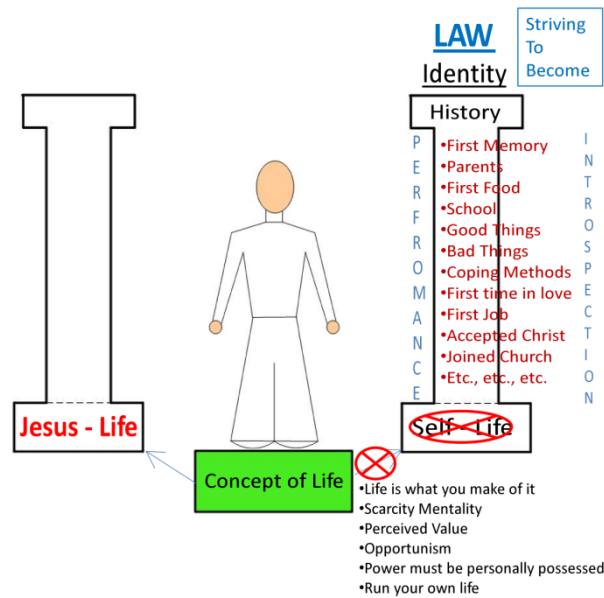
Because He did that, we were able to exercise our will and make the decision to repent of our sins, and believing that Jesus is the Son of God we asked Him to save us. God loves us, and because Jesus-Life is eternal Life that has conquered the power of Sin and Death, God is able to give it to us, even though we were Dead in our trespasses and sins.

Before that we existed, interacted with everyone and everything around us by choice or necessity, but we were Dead because we did not have God's Life within us. Now that we have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, His Life is our Life. God took a Dead person and brought them to Life for the first time, and that person was you. That, my friend, is the greatest miracle a person can ever experience on this earth.

Now that we know that Jesus' Life has become our true Life there is something else we need to know. If God is Life, and Jesus' Life is God's gift of true Life, then our concept of life as being "self-life" is false. In other words, both cannot be true at the same time.

Elsewhere in this book we have seen the difference between God as Life, and the lie that Satan proposed to Eve and Adam in the Garden through the serpent. We won't review that here, but it might help to recall or review the earlier chapters of this book so we clearly understand the difference, and recognize the way that deception is used to shape our identity.

Only then can we clearly see the contrast between the foundation of each form of our identity that is diagramed above. Based on the eternal truth that Jesus is "...the way, and the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6) the foundation of our old identity is proven to be a lie. Thus, in God's eternal reality our old identity is unable to support anything.



If we take away the foundation of our old identity, then what happens to the rest of the big "I" that is left? It crumbles and falls because it has no support; it has nothing to stand on. Why? Because its foundation was a lie.

That doesn't mean that all of the events within our history never happened or are false. It means the concept that those events constitute our "life" is a lie. Since the meaning of those events was formed by us based on the premise of "self-life", our entire concept of self, and life must be reshaped by the revelation of the true Life of Christ.

So, did those things happen to us? "Yes." Is that our life? "No." It is our history, but the meaning of that history changes greatly when it is seen only as a series of events, and not as our "life" that defines our identity.

The New Testament has some interesting things to say about this subject that has been referred to as co-crucifixion. This means that when Jesus was crucified, we were crucified with Him. "What? "How can that be?" Good question, but let's first look at some scriptures.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

“...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him...” (Romans 6:6)

“You have died with Christ...” (Colossians 2:20)

Along with these scriptures we are encouraged to die to self by Jesus. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.” (Matthew 16:24-25)

This is all somewhat of a brain twister. First, we have said that we were Dead before accepting Jesus when we received His eternal Life as our eternal Life. Now we seem to be saying that after receiving Jesus’ Life we have to realize that we have died. How can this make sense?

Let’s take it one step at a time:

When we were physically born into this world, we did not have God’s Life within us. So, we were actually Dead even though we possessed physical existence; we were physically alive.

When we accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, we received His life within us for the first time, so for the first time we were truly Alive; we were born again. Now even though our body ceases to function; we will never die. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26)

The Life that we received is Jesus-Life. That is the Life that we now possess. Jesus’ Life was already crucified, passed through Death, and was resurrected breaking the Death grip of Sin forever. Sin and Death cannot touch the Life of Jesus again, ever.

The Life that is in us, because it is Jesus’ Life, has already died when He was crucified. Since that is now our Life, and the only true Life that we possess, then it is accurate to say that our Life was crucified in Christ.

When we accept this truth and apply it to ourselves then we can say boldly with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ...”

1. Since our original concept of life has been proven to be false by our own experience, our concept of self as it existed must come to an end. The big “I” that existed no longer exists because it has no foundation of truth. In this way it is accurate to say that we have ceased to exist as we once did, or with Paul we can say, “...it is no longer I who live...”

Our new identity is based upon our new Life; the Life of Christ within us, so we can accurately say “Christ lives in me.”

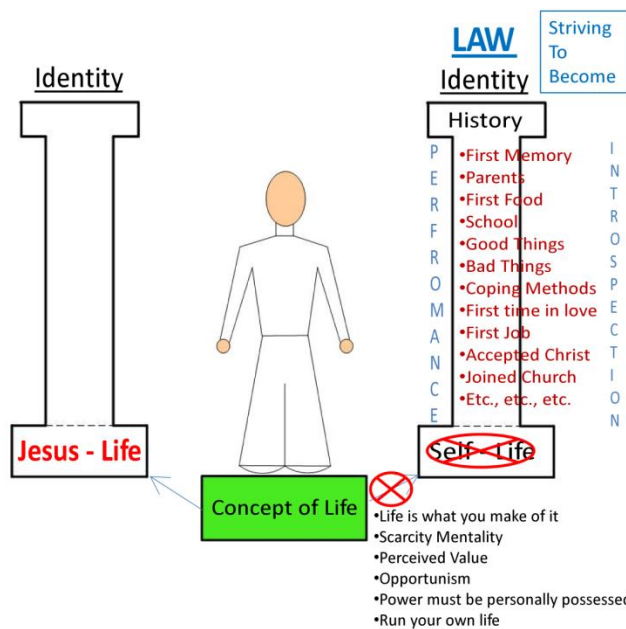
So, there are two ways that we have died in Christ. The first is by the fact that we have ceased to exist as we did before we accepted Christ. Our old self can no longer “live” because it was never truly alive to begin with, and the foundation of our old created identity is destroyed by being proven to be a lie.

As stated earlier, if the foundation of our self-perspective is our physical existence, and everything else we understand is based upon that assumed reality, then we will minimize this concept of being Dead in Sin. The result is we will also minimize the death of our old-self; the death of our old identity.

If we accept God’s view concerning Life; that He and He alone is Life, then our physical existence and its meaning is based upon our spiritual reality. Thus, if we do not have God’s Life we are Dead, even though we exist physically in this world. On the other hand, if we do have God’s Life we will be truly Alive no matter what happens to us physically.

A self-perspective based on God’s view means we acknowledge that we were Dead in Sin before we received Life from God through Jesus Christ. It also means that our old concept of self is no longer valid because Jesus-Life within us has fundamentally changed the essence of our being.

What we once knew as our identity, based upon the circumstances of our physical existence, is no longer valid. We now know that the basis of Life is Jesus, and our new birth in Christ, our new existence in Christ has become our True identity.



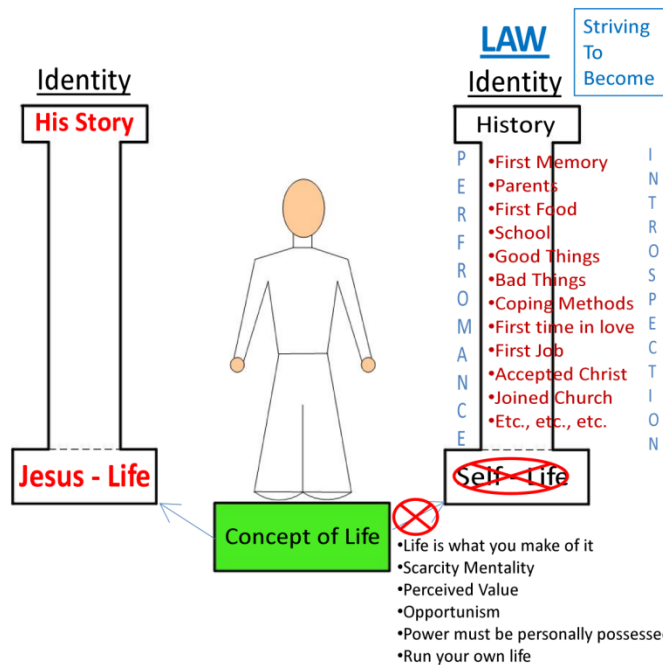
This new reality, based upon God’s eternal truth, supplants any pre-existent concept of self. Thus the old identity, the old-self is really dead even though we still exist in the same physical body. By letting go of the old identity and living based on our new identity, we validate the death of our old-self by living out the Life of Christ within us; by living out our new Life with Jesus under His Lordship.

The second way we have died in Christ is by the fact the true Life that we do possess, Jesus-Life, passed through crucifixion and Death with Jesus. So when He died, the Life we now possess died with Him. Since His Life is the foundation of the new “you”, it is true that we were crucified with Him.

This means the Death grip of Sin has been defeated in Christ in two different ways, and at two different times. The first time was when Jesus was crucified, Died, and arose. The second was when we accepted Jesus, received His Life, and ceased to exist as we had before because God made us a brand new creation. “....the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Who is this new you? What does our new identity look like?

Well, after the eternal change of the foundation of our identity, Jesus-Life, is the basis for the “creation” of our new identity. Remember, before our identity was created by our actions and based upon our perspective of our “history”. Now it is created by Jesus and based upon “His Story”!



Since Jesus is our Life, it is what He has done that creates our identity instead of what we have done, or might do in the future. As we live out the Life of Christ within us, it will result in the manifestation of what Christ has already created within us. This is very different from us creating our own “life” and shaping our own identity.

To understand our new identity, we have only to look to Scripture and find out what it says about who we are in Christ. While we won’t review all that apply the following is a good example and thorough enough to clearly make the point.

Rom 3:24 – Justified

Rom 6:6 – Old “self” was crucified

Rom 8:1 – Not condemned

Rom 15:7 – Accepted

1 Cor 1:2 – Sanctified - holy, set apart

1 Cor 1:30 – Have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption

1 Cor 15:22 – Alive

2 Cor 3:14 – Hardened mind removed

2 Cor 5:17 – A new creature

2 Cor 5:21 – Righteousness of God

Gal 3:28 – All are one

Gal 4:7 – A son [or daughter] and an heir [of God]

Eph 1:3 – Blessed with every spiritual blessing in Heaven

Eph 1:4 – Chosen, holy, and blameless before God

Eph 1:7 – Redeemed, forgiven

Eph 1:10-11 – Have obtained an inheritance

Eph 1:13 – Sealed in the Spirit

Eph 2:6 – Seated in Heaven

Eph 2:10 – Created for good works

Eph 2:13 – Brought near [to God]

Eph 3:6 – Partaker of the promise

Eph 3:12 – Bold and confident access to God

Eph 5:30 – A member of His body

Phil 3:15 – Living in perfection

Phil 4:7 – Peace of God guards my heart and mind

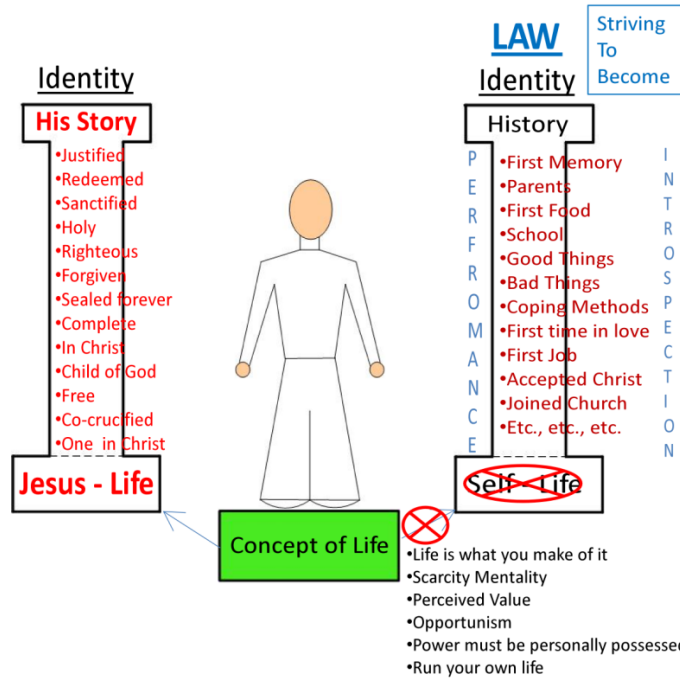
Phil 4:19 – Have all needs supplied

Col 1:22 – holy and blameless

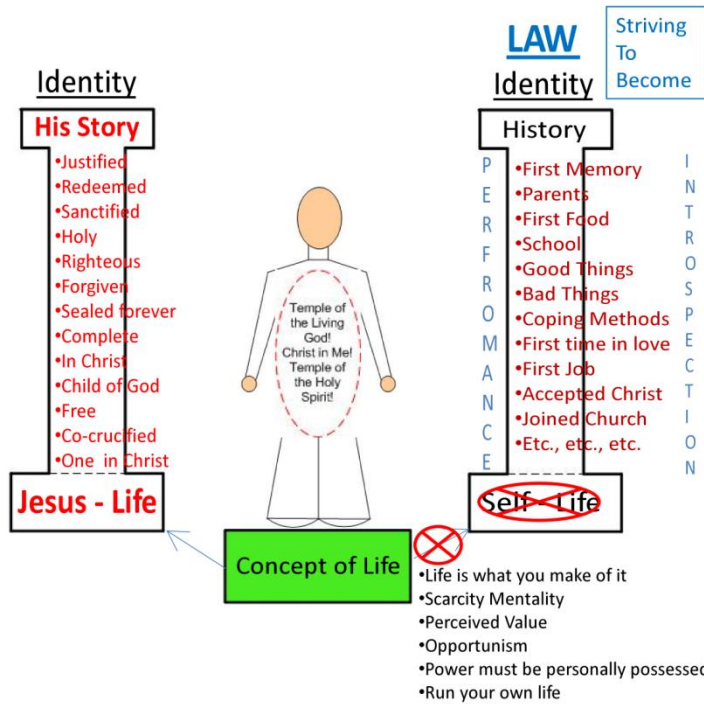
Col 2:10 – Complete

Col 3:1 – Raised up with Him

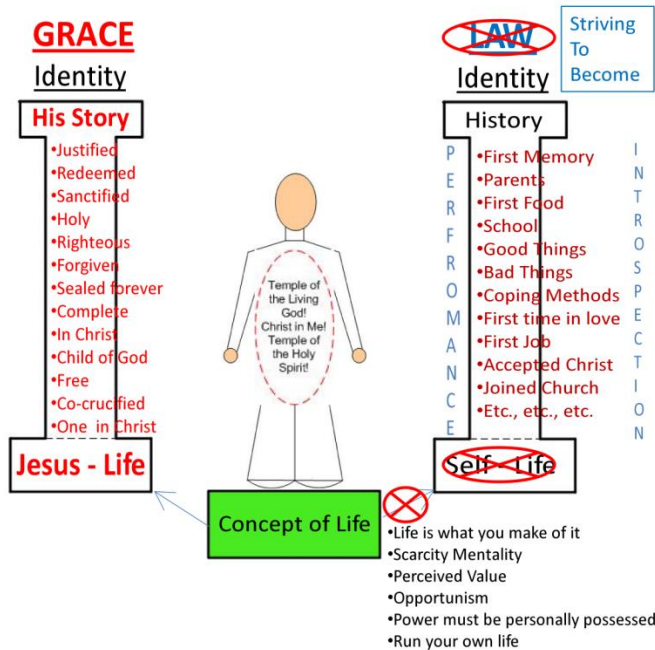
Col 3:3 – My life is hidden in Christ



One of the things that we read is that we are the temple of the Living God; the temple of the Holy Spirit. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16) “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19) So let’s add that to our diagram.



Another piece of great news is that we live under the grace of God and not under the law.



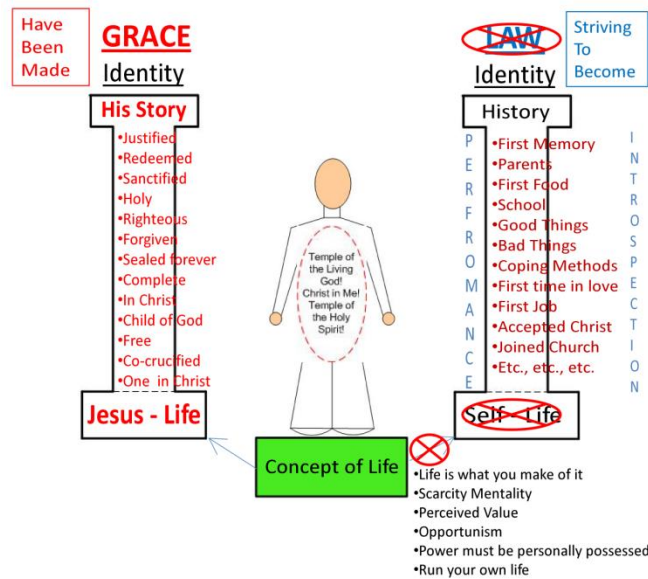
Grace is the unmerited favor of God manifested within us. That means that God provides His best for us even though we did nothing to earn it. This is God/Love. "Being justified as a gift of His grace through

the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24) “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

God’s grace extends right through judgment and into eternity with Him. This means that though we do not deserve it, God has made us righteous, justified, forgiven, and redeemed just as the scriptures stated above. In Christ we are made perfect. His grace is so wonderful that it is beyond our words. The only reason we think that we understand it is because we have only been allowed to see a small part of what it’s really like. Plus, we mistakenly think if we know information about something then we understand it.

Under our old identity we were stuck with always having to become something more. Our very concept of life required us to continually “create” meaning for our own existence. That meant we must constantly strive to become something more than what we are by virtue of our experiences; our ability to do what we want or possess what we desire.

In Christ we have been made complete; we have been made holy; we have been made what God wants us to be by the perfect work of Jesus Christ. It is not about striving to become. It is about living out honestly who we really are in Christ.



Let’s take a look at a young man that wants to be a professional basketball player. He starts out when he is young practicing. Every day he practices working to hone his skills to a professional level. As he practices, he dreams about the day when he will belong to a team, wear a professional uniform, play in a great stadium, and get paid a big salary.

Well, what God does is like taking that young man and “bam!” He makes him a professional basketball player. Forget the years of striving to become; immediately he has made it! Suddenly he is a member of a great professional team, wearing a professional uniform, playing in a big stadium, and making a lot of money.

So, the key question that remains is whether or not he's going to act like a professional. The question of "becoming" no longer exists. What is left is a question of whether or not he is going to live like a professional.

Now, if he doesn't exercise, eats unhealthy food, and parties all night, is he acting like a professional? If he's worried about problems at home, bills that need to be paid and other issues so his "head is not in the game", is he acting like a professional? If he gets mad at his teammate and refuses to throw him the ball so his performance looks bad, is he acting like a professional?

You are correct; the questions are all rhetorical, because the obvious answer to each is a big "NO". He is a professional but in each instance he is not acting like one.

That's how it is with many followers of Jesus. We have been given a new nature, a new character; we are truly alive. We are righteous, free, holy, and all the wonderful things described in the scriptures above. We don't have to become any of those things. God already changed our reality and made us entirely new people. The only question that remains is, "Are we going to Live that way?"

We won't Live that way if we don't change the way we think about ourselves. While writing this it's almost like my mind can hear people saying, "Yes, we are made new in Christ, but I still have all my old ways of thinking so the 'new me' is really on a spiritual level. I still have to deal with the same old stuff every day. That's what's real."

Did your bills go away because we were saved? Are our troubles with other people gone? Is there much difference about the circumstances of our existence after we are saved? Probably not, though these things do vary from one person to another.

It wasn't our circumstances that changed; it was each of us that changed. Because we have changed our whole perspective on life, how we Live it will change if we understand the truth and Live it out by faith.

"Well my body feels the same with all of the same problems. I still think about the things I know are wrong. So, what's so different?"

When we accepted Christ, God did not give us a new body. If we didn't take care of it before, then we'll still have to deal with the consequences. If we fed garbage into our minds, or created patterns of thinking that were against the will of God before we were saved, then we face the hard work of letting God "rewire" the way our brain thinks about those things. God did not wipe our mind clean of all that garbage when we accepted Christ.

"Ok. You're making my point for me now. So what's new?"

Here it is in a nutshell: We were Dead. Now we are Alive. For the first time in our existence we really have Life. For the first time in our existence we have unity with God Who is Life. For the first time in our existence we can begin to know, experience, and Live the truth instead of a lie. For the first time we can do something that pleases God. We can really Live, and Live abundantly. For the first time we get to Live with Jesus every day!

The bills, problems, our body and thinking were all the result of the existence of a Dead person trying to create life out of their circumstances. Now for the first time, we can let the true Life within us make our circumstances meaningful.

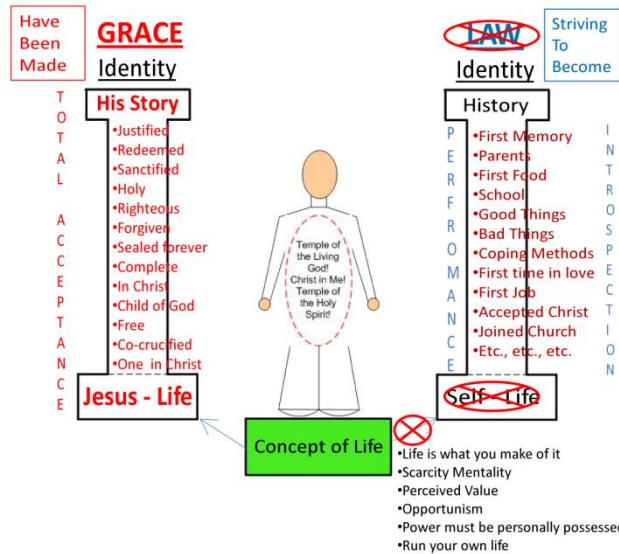
It's important to note the difference in the previous statement. Instead of us determining the meaning of our existence in an effort to define our life, Jesus, Who is now our Life, defines the meaning of all of our experiences through the work of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us. (You may need to read that sentence over again to absorb it and understand it. Please let it soak in by the Holy Spirit.)

Now we can begin to discover eternal Truth, God's Truth, and let it fill us with more meaning and purpose than we can contain. The Life of Jesus within us is so abundant that it can overflow from our being, reshaping how we think and what we do, and touching others deeply with the Love of God.

There is only one thing that can stop that abundant Life of Christ from filling us to overflowing, and that is each of us individually. That's right. If we try to take control; if we refuse to do what God shows us is best, then our Life of Christ cannot break free and flow from within us, into the world around us.

It's our choice. Each of us can be a person that is fully Alive who lives like they are Dead. Or we can be a person who is fully Alive and Lives that Life out in abundance. Because we accepted Christ we have the abundant Life of Jesus within us. His Life is now our Life. Are we each going to live that way?

This leads us to the next change:



Remember "Performance Based Acceptance"? Well this is the opposite. In Christ we are totally accepted. God Loves us completely. Not because of anything that we have done or will do. He just Loves us completely.

He has accepted us into His family and given us a oneness with Him that is eternal through His Son Jesus Christ. He will never reject us.

Now if we do things that are wrong does He stop loving us? No! He does not love the things we do that are wrong, but He loves us and will continue to work within us to encourage us to do what is best for us; His will for our life.

If we do something that is wrong then tell God about it, and turn away from that behavior. Don't worry. If we just keep trying, sincerely seeking to let God have His way with us, eventually our behavior will align with God's will. Over time God's truth will replace the lies we have accepted in the past as being true. This change is natural if we Live each day with Jesus.

It makes a big difference if we start each day recalling that God Loves us and totally accepts us as His own beloved children. Then if we will accept the work and leadership of the Spirit of God during the day, He will remind us of God's Love, and we will experience the abundant life of Christ freely flow from our soul as we Live each moment with Jesus.

This is a process that requires time and effort. Paul refers to it when he writes, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13)

We will not do this, however, if we fail to realize the marvelous miracle that God has performed within us. Instead we will continue to see ourselves as people who are struggling through life's experiences, trying to get God to help us when the circumstances seem beyond our capacity to accomplish what we think is best.

Our reality has changed. We are now children of God who can rely upon God for guidance in everything. It is not what we think is best that matters. Now we have God's best and we can not only know His best, but we can Live it; we can not only know God, we can experience His Life within us in the midst of our circumstances.

The reason we don't realize this is that we still think we must operate under our old identity. In other words, we are acting like our old identity is based upon truth instead of a lie; we are acting like the concept of our old self defines life when it really is Death. That means we end up living out a lie, rather than Living out the Truth.

How does that happen? It happens whenever we act like we know what is best by making decisions for ourselves. Then we take action based on our decisions rather than what we determine to be God's will for us. It is so easy to simply approach "life" the same way we did before we accepted Christ, because that is what we know how to do. It's easier to do what we know rather than learn to think about "life" differently. It's hard for us to remember to act based on an entirely different reality.

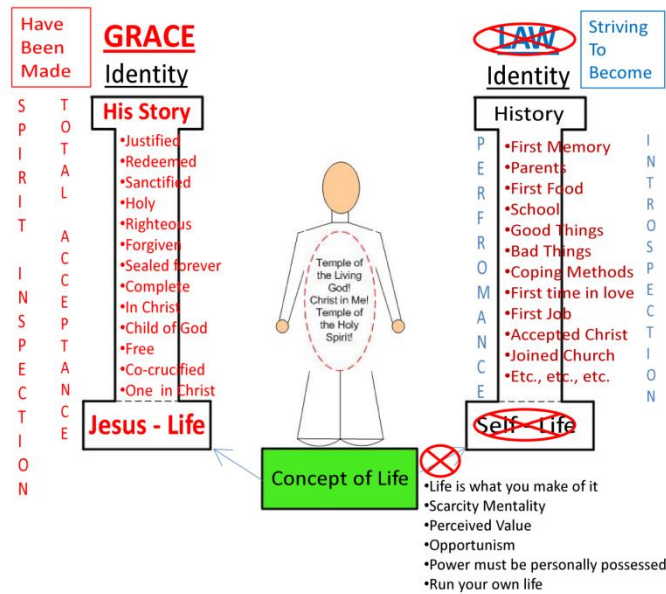
Our brain has to have time to learn new patterns of thought about what this new reality consists of, and how it works. We have to discover God's Truth, and allow God to replace the lies we have accepted in the past with His eternal Truth.

A part of this truth is we have been renewed spiritually, and we can continue to be renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit. As our Teacher, He will renew our mind. He will reshape the way we think. God’s Truth will replace the lies that we have accepted as truth. His Truth will change the perspectives that we hold, and the way we experience the circumstances around us by defining the meaning of our experiences.

“For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10)

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

In order for this to happen we have to give up our practice of introspection and let it be replaced with “Spirit Inspection”. Here again we come up against the question of authority; who’s leading the way, who determines what the truth really is concerning our identity and the way we live out our Life?



Introspection is self-directed reflective thinking focused on one’s self. If we determine our need for personal reflective thinking, define what needs to be reflected upon, and decide the meaning of what we discover then we are in control. We are acting like a god unto our self; acting as though we hold the ability to determine what is best for our self, thereby taking God’s rightful place. The alternative is for us to make the choice to open ourselves up for the Holy Spirit to inspect our every thought, intention, word and action.

Now it’s important to realize that the Holy Spirit knows our every thought, intention, word and action already. It isn’t like we’re going to expose something to the scrutiny of God that would otherwise be hidden from Him. The thing that stands in the way is our desire to be in control.

If we said to a person, “Ok, I’m going to tell you everything about myself and let you be the judge of what is good or bad, right or wrong and then I’ll do what you tell me to”, we would clearly be submitting

ourselves to that person, giving them full authority over us. That's essentially what we need to do with the Holy Spirit, only it's a bit different.

With the Holy Spirit we need to choose to say, "OK, You already know everything about me. Please search my every thought, lead and guide me in all things that I might remain obedient with the Lord and glorify God." Of course there's about a thousand ways of "saying"/"thinking"/praying this, but surely we get the point; it's absolute surrender of our self to the Holy Spirit.

It's not a matter of just thinking in the right way. It requires our heartfelt desire, encompassing our willful choice to give God full authority over every aspect of our being. This is not legalistic obedience where we comply because we think we have no other reasonable choice. Submitting ourselves to Spirit Inspection is a choice based upon an eternal Truth, interlaced with our longing to please God. It is a choice filled with our willingness to trust Him explicitly and to act upon that trust.

Think of it as a conversation with someone that loves us more than we can understand. There is nothing we can hide, and nothing that will be held against us. So, we are free to talk about anything, anytime. Recognizing that God is smarter than any other being in existence, it makes sense that we would ask His advice. Because our relationship with Him is so important we want to make sure everything is alright between us. Because of His Wisdom and Love for us it is natural that we'd ask Him about how we can grow and develop in the best way possible. In fact, does it make sense to not ask Him about everything?

It's like having the closest friend that loves us absolutely, and every moment we share our thoughts and feelings with Him leaves us with a sense of completeness that can be gained in no other way. The best thing we can do is to ask His opinion about everything; just open ourselves up and let Him share with us all that He desires about how to Live Life abundantly.

God will respond to our expression of faith in Him so long as it comes from an honest desire to please Him. One person may do so with a deep sense of love and a profound passion to obey God. Another person may just be trying to take a first step in Living out their faith and not be sure what they "feel" or "experience". Each is an honest expression of their relationship with God and their desire to be faithful to Him. That's all that matters.

So, once we take this step what should we expect? The Holy Spirit will provide whatever it is we really need from the Lord to assist us in knowing Him better, loving Him more, and Living out our unified Life with Jesus. In truth, this may not be what we think we need. Often it seems to be a gentle prodding, concerning things in our mind and behaviors that are contrary to God's will. A quiet plea for us to do whatever He has been challenging us to do, or a subtle sense of what we should do next.

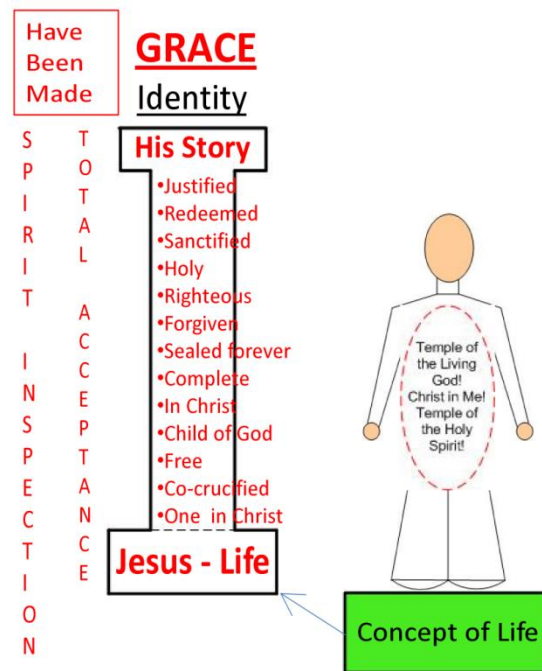
Rarely, if ever, does God come in with a sledgehammer and start breaking down walls of resistance. He always respects our ability to choose as He repeatedly brings us back to the same point until we surrender and obey Him. He is a Kind and Loving Father, and to think of Him otherwise is foolish.

God's patient Love goes beyond the bounds of our understanding. He will not force us. Instead He will allow us to learn from our poor choices as we discover that the best choice we can always make is to

obey Him by Living each moment with Jesus. How easy or hard this is for us, and how fast or slowly this happens is directly impacted by our willingness to surrender to the inspection of the Holy Spirit, and our willingness to do with Jesus what He reveals.

It's simple really. Just open up and share all we can with God, seeking His guidance, and do what He shows us because we know that's what's always best. Be ready to "listen" to the thoughts and impressions that He brings to mind, and learn from Him as He reveals His Truth in Love.

Spirit inspection can be such a wonderful experience that we never want it to stop. Guess what! It doesn't have to, because the Holy Spirit is always working within us to align our thoughts, and actions with the Perfection of God's Life within us. In fact, it is something that we can learn to enjoy without ceasing as we bring everything to the Lord seeking His wisdom.



With the realization of these great Truths we can see that we really do have a new identity. When the Scriptures tell us that we are a "new creation" it is real, and not something that has yet to occur. Sure, it will only become more complete when God gives us a new body to Live in so there's more "new" to come. What has happened already, however, clearly fulfills the meaning of "new creation".

One of the things to realize is that the concept of "I" has changed entirely. Now we can see, each of us is no longer a separate individual. We are now a people who are united with God. Because of the miraculous work of Jesus, we are now a part of the One Life simultaneously shared by multiple beings.

If it was just each of us and God it would be two beings sharing one Life, and one Life being shared by four persons. We have to remember that God is One being, and yet Three Persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's another mind twister, but perhaps worth another quick look to help with understanding.

The first step, perhaps, is to change our perspective. Generally, we see ourselves as distinct persons who are separated from every other person. So, the concept of our “being” and our “personhood” are singular concepts. Everything in our experience tells us this. Our assumption is that this is true for every being that exists. So, our mind struggles with the idea that a person can exist differently than as a separate and distinct individual.

Learning about God changes that reality, and it requires a shift of perspective. We need to realize that we in fact exist in a world where it is possible for more than one person to constitute a single living being. This is not three persons who are joined in some weird way that makes them connected while remaining three people. God is three distinct Persons that constitute one Being.

It might be helpful just to think about God as being Three distinct Persons that share the same Life source, characteristics, awareness, and capacity to such a degree that there is no distinction between them. The only distinction that can be understood is in the way the Three Persons reveal themselves.

Without that revelation, if we could have looked at God during the Old Testament period we might never have known we were seeing Three Persons. Everything about the experience of seeing would indicate that God is One Being and that’s it.

Even today each person of the Trinity shares the same “Being”; the same state of Perfection, the same Presence, Knowledge, Power and every other attribute so as to make Them One Being. God is one God.

In Jesus Christ, God clearly changed the way He would manifest Himself forever. The Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us as Jesus, the Son of God. That change in appearance ultimately did not change God’s absolute Unity of Being; it only changed the way we see God. It also changes our ability to relate to God, and the way we are in relationship with Him.

When Christ comes into us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are brought into the oneness of God. We are not, however, brought into the oneness of being God. So, we remain a distinct person who is one with God, but does not become God or a god. That change in us does not change our appearance, but it does change our state-of-being. We are now in Christ, one with God; a new creation. Not only are we one with God, we are also united by His Life with one another.

This requires a further shift in our perspective because while we might better understand the logic of the Trinity with a change of perspective, our unity with God in Christ is even more complex. As recorded in John 17:21, Jesus prays, “that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.”

So, we see, all who are alive in Christ are also one in Christ. This means that we share unity with God and each other simultaneously. Not only are we united with God, we are united with one another.

Our oneness is as strong as that shared between God the Father and Jesus His Son. Again, while we share His Perfection through redemption and reconciliation in Christ we do not become God. What God makes us to become is all that is necessary for us to exist with and in Him. We looked at the change in our nature earlier.

While we take on the nature of God we do not take on His power, His complete knowledge about everything, or His ability to be everywhere at once. So, the unity with God is clearly different than being God.

God's Life within us endows us with His nature. As we have seen His Holiness makes us holy, His Perfection makes us perfect, and His Righteousness makes us righteous. The list goes on, and it is because of what He has done; not what we do, which makes this an eternal fact.

My favorite cookie is a chocolate chip cookie. They are actually fairly simple. First we make some yummy cookie dough and then we mix in the chocolate chips. If we baked the dough without the chocolate chips, we'd still have a good tasting cookie. In fact, my wife intentionally makes some of them without the chips because she likes them that way.



If, however, we baked the chocolate chips without any dough we'd just have a blob of chocolate. It wouldn't be a cookie at all. Add the chocolate chips into the dough and bake them together and we get something that is very hard for me to pass up.

When we eat these cookies, if we break them apart, we'll note that the chocolate chips and the dough appear to be joined, and yet they are also clearly distinct from one another. The chocolate chips are held by the dough and brought into the oneness of the cookie without losing the distinction of being chocolate chips.

We can't eat all of the chocolate chips without eating the dough, and we can't eat the dough without eating the chocolate chips. Isn't it great! Now let's apply this to our unity in Christ.

A practical way of thinking about this is to change our perspective concerning our self. From the time we receive Jesus' Life there is no longer an "I" in each of us, there is only "We". We are no longer a separate person. We are united in Christ so there's two beings united dwelling inside of our physical body: God and each of us. Add the fact that God is Three Persons and we see four of us share our body. So there can be no "I", only "Us".

Try thinking about each of ourselves like that, but it's probably not a good idea to speak that way. If we sit down at the table and say, "Would you please pass us the salt" people are going to think we've lost it.

This is not a process of disassociation; in some weird way trying to separate our self from our perspective of our self or the circumstances. It is accepting the Truth about our new identity in Christ,

thinking about ourselves as being one with God in Christ Jesus, and then Living out our unified Life within the circumstances with Jesus.

When we add the rest of the believers in Christ then the complexity grows by leaps and bounds because we are all one in Christ. So, the reality is that we are all unified in Christ and the “We” is much bigger than just each of us and God.

Each moment we have on this earth is an opportunity to fully Live in Christ. Do we want to experience the excitement and peace, amazement and assurance, the hope and freedom of Living in and with Jesus? Then accept our new identity in Christ, seek His will, trust and obey Him by Living with Jesus each moment. While it may seem a bit unsophisticated, there really is no other way to be fulfilled in Christ.

The bottom line where living in Christ is concerned is this. We should share each moment, each event, each circumstance, and each thought very carefully with Christ, obediently following His lead as we Live with Him. Not because we should since it is the “right” thing to do, but because we get to since that is who we are! To Live fully the abundant Life we possess in and with Christ means being true to who He has made us to be right now, in this moment and forever. With Jesus we get to stop denying that reality and truly Live abundantly! Right now is our moment of opportunity, and every moment that follows!! Praise God!!!

“Father may it be so for each person who reads this. In Jesus name, Amen.”