

How Are We Who We Are?

Marriage:

Before I begin, I'd like to thank all of you who have offered such warm wishes on our marriage.

Marriage as we know is the bringing of two separate lives together into one life. It entails a profound, real and wonderful change of identity. But it isn't just a change of status in the government registry records, or other legal records or the wearing of wedding rings or name changes. Marriage is a love relationship, a real change in orientation, motivation and direction for the two people involved.

Who are we?

This weekend we are talking about who is God, and who we are as a result. In other words our identity. What makes us and identifies us as God's people? And how are we to live out that identity?

Story

I'd like to tell you a long and sad story. But I will give you the short version and cut to the happy ending. It is your story, my story, our story. But most of all it is God's story.

Once upon a time God promised an ancient patriarch with a barren wife, that in his seed all mankind would be blessed. Later his descendants ended up as abject slaves to an oppressive empire. God heard their cries. He used Moses to rescue his people gave them a new life of freedom in their own land.

Old Covenant

He made a contract with them, that they would be his people and he would be there God. Because of their lack of faith in him, he gave them laws to keep them from again becoming slaves to the forces of the world around them again as well as the forces within themselves that led them into slavery and away from trusting God. They were given signs to identify and separate them as God's people, including circumcision, Sabbath and Holy Day observances, and other laws of *clean* and *unclean* that kept them distinct and separate from the peoples around them. They were to be a light to the Gentiles, to demonstrate what life with the true God looked like.

After many generations it all ended very badly. In spite of the laws and observances, the people's hearts were far from God. They didn't trust him to be the God he had proven himself to be by all his loving and gracious acts on their behalf. Tragically, they ended up physically where their hearts were, back in slavery to the world around them.

But God being the gracious, saving God he is, not too much time passed before he again rescued them, bringing a small number of the people back to their land. And, can you believe it, they ended up back in slavery once again, in their own land. But this time, in spite of great trials and tribulations, time kept their identity by doggedly and determinedly keeping the Sabbath and laws clean and unclean. But their focus and trust was in the laws and observances that they believed

identified them as God's people, *rather than trust in God himself*, and his gracious love and salvation. They even built a new temple. But as Isaiah had prophesied, "They honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me".¹

Jesus

Many years later a child named Jesus was born in a small village among the people captive in their own land. The stranger than fiction fact was that he was God, God become one of his lost, captive people. He wasn't just a messenger sent from God with a message of salvation, of grace, forgiveness and love. He was salvation. He was grace, forgiveness and love. He was, the way, the truth and the life for us all. He came to bring, not only Israel, but all people out of slavery to sin, self and society—and into relationship with our God.

But those he was sent to bring life and salvation, refused to believe who he really was, and under the ironic title, of "King of the Jews" had the Romans crucify him as a criminal insurgent.

The death of Jesus, the only true and faithful Israelite, the only human being to live in total dependence and faith in the Father through the Holy Spirit, died for both Jew and Gentile. He fulfilled and completed what the previous covenant could only picture, but not deliver.

God raised him in victory over all that mankind had done in our lives lived apart from God. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, ascended to God's right hand, where he still sits, still fully human and fully God. From there he sent the Holy Spirit to those who trusted in him, to fully and completely include them in his life and relationship with the Father. This was the beginning of the church, the body of Christ, the new and true people of God.

The Church

Initially the members were Jews. But in a dramatic vision of a sheet full of unclean foods, the Apostle Peter was told to eat what had previously been forbidden. After refusing, he was told, "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean. The same vision was repeated three times."²

He was told to take the good news of salvation in Christ to non-Jews. Peter explained to the Gentile Cornelius; "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean."³

With a great deal of resistance and protest, the (to that point Jewish) church accepted Gentiles into their midst. In fact, in time the church would become predominantly Gentile. This led to great tensions as some Jews started to become concerned that Paul and others were not insisting that the Gentile converts take on the identifying signs of Israel, including food laws, the Sabbath and circumcision etc. in order to be truly accepted as and live as full members of God's people. Even

¹ Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8, Mark 7:6

²NLT, Ac 10:15-16

³NLT Ac 10:28

Peter, who was used to first persuade the church in Jerusalem to accept the bona-fide conversion of the first Gentile members, became caught up in this identity crisis and battle. ⁴

Galatians 2:14b-16a "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?

¹⁵ "You and I are Jews by birth, not 'sinners' like the Gentiles. ¹⁶ Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law⁵

Paul argues in Galatians that any teaching that insists that Gentiles take on Jewish identifying signs, is no gospel at all. Why? Because it is focusing on the identifying signs given to Israel that excluded and differentiated the Jews from non-Jews. Those signs of identity are now superseded in Christ, who is both Jewish Messiah, and Gentile Lord. He is creator of all of us and God in the flesh. He is our only possible means of becoming at one with God. He alone makes us who we are. His presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit is the seal of God's approval and adoption of us into the family kingdom and very life of God.

Paul makes clear that any insistence on Old Covenant practices as a sign or condition of membership of God's people, equates to saying that Jesus is not enough and is thus a false gospel, not just a matter of differing opinions and practices.

Colossians 2:1-23

I'd like to move along in our story to around 60AD, and to a letter from an imprisoned Paul nearing the end of his life, to a small group of non-Israelite sheep farmers, slaves, humble women and children living in a remote area of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor, called Colossae.

In a similar, but different scenario to that of Galatians, the members of the house church in Colossae were being troubled by teachings that insisted that in order to experience the full spiritual life and be truly part of God's people, they needed more than Christ alone.

He starts by assuring that they are already secure in who they are as God's people because of their faith in God's plan, "which is Christ himself".

Colossians 2:1- 23 ¹ I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. ² I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. ³ In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. ⁵ For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

⁴ The questions naturally arose, do Gentiles need to become Israelite to be part of the people of God? When a resounding "no!" was proclaimed by the former Pharisee, and now apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, and confirmed by the rest of the church leadership, but many were disgruntled.

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ga 2:14-16). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁶ And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷ Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

⁸ Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers* of this world, rather than from Christ. ⁹ For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. * ¹⁰ So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

As Paul has made clear in chapter 1, Jesus Christ is the supreme creator and is superior to all earthly and heavenly powers. Everything is of him, and all things are held together by him. Nothing is lacking in him at any level. He is way and above all we need for our lives and our inclusion in God's family. We need to let our roots go down into him and have our lives built on him.

Based on who he has established Jesus to be in chapter 1, Paul goes on to make two things clear about the Colossians identity in Christ.

1. They *became* God's people through faith in Christ, through his death in particular, not through the Old Covenant initiatory rite and sign of circumcision.
2. As we read in vv. 6-7, and will see later, the *ongoing sign* of their being to be God's people, is their new life lived in Christ.

Colossians 2:11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.*

Religiously, spiritually, identity-wise, they are fully identified as God's people by their initial coming to Christ. They were not physically circumcised, which means they were not Jews. They hadn't taken on the initiating identification of the Old Testament people of God, but they were *spiritually* circumcised, marked and identified by Jesus' spiritual circumcision through being buried in his death and raised in his resurrection.

Paul now reminds them that baptism was their spiritual circumcision and initiatory sign of becoming God's people.

Colossians 2:12-13

¹² For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

* Or *the spiritual principles*; also in 2:20.

* Or *in him dwells all the completeness of the Godhead bodily*.

* Greek the cutting away of the body of the flesh.

¹³You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.

As Gentiles, as Paul makes clear in Romans, they were far away from God, they sinned without the law, they went against their consciences and lived for themselves. Both Jew and Gentile needed the same forgiveness, and both are given new life with God in Christ. Jesus, not physical circumcision, is the entry, the sign, the entrance into God's people, for both Jew and Gentile,.

¹⁴He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

¹⁵In this way, he disarmed [or *stripped off*]* the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

It is only through Jesus that guilt is cleansed, the past dealt with. All that stood against us, including the law is defeated and nailed to the cross. The curtain in the temple was rent. The old is done, the new has come; not this time in laws and observances but in God himself coming to be with us, and to die our death and share his life.

For those who feared that not keeping the signs of being the people of God would stand against them, Paul now makes that crystal clear as well.

Colossians 2:¹⁶So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. ¹⁷For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.

As much as some try to deny it, the expression, "holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths" undeniably refers to the Old Covenant observances. Additionally, the "so" as in "so don't let anyone condemn you" is based directly on the power of Jesus' death on the cross to bring to an end the law and its power to divide and condemn.

Tom Wright: "These rules of diet and ritual marked out the Jew from his pagan neighbour. Failure to observe them implied that one did not belong to God's people."⁶

Sound familiar? In the past we mistakenly made the same claim--that Sabbath keeping identified the true people of God, and marked them out from false Christians. But Paul is telling the Colossians not to be caught up in such false claims. He says diets, Sabbaths and Holy Days were shadows or images foreshadowing the realities to come. The reality has come! Jesus Christ is their fulfilment. Jesus is all you need! It is in him and only in him that we are God's people, Christ's body. He is our identity, our inclusion, our atonement, our place at God's right hand.

We too need to focus on our unity with God in Christ, and move on from old divisive practices which are not only not required, but which are by their very nature divisive. How can we have anything to do with such practices. Sabbath keeping is no longer a sign of being God's exclusive people. Insisting on keeping it is now a sign of division and exclusivity. Sabbath keeping now says, we are God's people, you aren't. Worse, it says, you need more than Christ to be included in God's people.

The Colossians were not to let anyone condemn or criticize them for not keeping these superseded, Jewish identifying signs and observances. In Greek the term *condemn* (vv. 16, 18) has a sporting

* Or he stripped off.

⁶ N.T. Wright, Colossians, p.119

origin. It referred to sporting umpires or referees calling a foul, or disqualifying a participant. It has the implication that the disqualification itself is illegal and false. So the Colossians are being unjustly told, “you don’t qualify as God’s people” because you are not observing the Old Covenant signs.

Wright; “This is not so much a matter of someone criticizing them, taking them to task or deciding for them. It is a matter of excluding them, or informing them that they are excluded, from the people of God, on the basis of the Law’s regulations which, according to verse 14. no longer stand in their way. (p.118)

The true test of whether or not one belongs to God’s people is neither the observance of dietary laws and Jewish festivals, nor the cultivation of super-spiritual experiences, but whether one belongs to Christ, alive with his life. (p.124)

It is also important to note that the “you” in verse 18, as is “don’t let anyone condemn you” is the plural you. This is the case throughout Colossians. He is addressing the whole Christian community, not individuals. ¹⁶ So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths.

So he is saying don’t let anyone pressure or manipulate you into keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days. He isn’t talking about individuals taking particular days to worship God as he addresses in Romans. This is a communal matter. To those Gentile Christians in Colossae who were not observing the Sabbath, keeping the Holy Days or observing the food laws, Paul made clear that they should take no notice of those who insisted they needed to. He assures them over and over again that Christ was all they needed. He is the centre of their community life and worship, not days and diet.

In spite of what some Sabbatarians may claim, the clear historical evidence is that the church very early on met on the first day of the week not on Saturday. The first day of the week was not an identification marker, or anything to do with being righteous or holy, but it was the time they chose as most appropriate for both Jewish and Gentile members to take time to focus on their Saviour and who is he was for them through his death and resurrection. This was a uniting and inclusive change. It brought both Jew and Gentile out of their past divided thinking and practices and united them in focus on their creator and Saviour.

Colossian 2:18 Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, * saying they have had visions about these things.

The false teachers were most likely local Jews, possibly neighbours and possibly friends or co-workers of the Colossian Christians. It seems they had adopted some of the practices of the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, including asceticism and had become involved with visions and angel worship.

Colossians 2:18b Their sinful minds have made them proud, ¹⁹ and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.

It all comes down to this for all of us, Jew or Gentile. Are we connected to Christ? He is our only connection with God, and him we are also connected to each other. Secondly, he is the only means

* Or or *worshiping with angels.*

by which we continue to belong to and grow as his body. Neither the old covenant observances, nor Gentile pagan ones do any of this.

In chapter 3, Paul continues to build on his point, about who we are in Christ, and how we are to live in Christ, both Jew and Gentile alike.

Colossians 3:10-17 ¹⁰ Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. ¹¹ In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile,* circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized,* slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Paul puts it all together in this verse. Salvation for the Jews is not found in the identifying signs and observances of the Old Covenant, and neither are these things required for Gentiles. Likewise, Gentile type religious practices are also useless in bringing about freedom from spiritual forces, or giving them a full spiritual life.

Salvation for both Jew and Gentile is found only in Christ, who is the Messiah of Israel and all people, and the Lord of the Gentiles and the Jews.

Paul spells this out in Ephesians as well;

Ephesians 2:14-6 ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.⁷

In Jesus Christ all dividing practices and attitudes are demolished, just like the Berlin wall went down, reuniting East and West Germans. Even more appropriately just like when the temple was destroyed, breaking down the old walls which excluded women and Gentiles. Jesus, the new Sabbath rest and temple invites everyone to sit with him as one at God's right hand.

- OC
 1. Sabbath, circumcision, etc. identified and separated the Israelites as God's people.
 2. Laws instructed them in how to live (but condemned them to death).
- NC
 1. Jesus identifies who we are and unites Jew & Gentile as God's people
 2. We live our new life "in Christ" through the Spirit

* Greek *a Greek*.

* Greek *Barbarian, Scythian*.

⁷Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Eph 2:14-16). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

We do not need days or dietary laws to be identified as God's people, or to live a Godly life. Jesus is our identity, it is in Christ that we are at one with God and are to live as one people. And he shows us and enables us through his Spirit, through the power of the resurrection, to live the life of God.

Christ is now all that matters.

God's original purpose and the promises to Abraham are being fulfilled in him. Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in Christ, and thus at one with God.

Tom Wright,

Private visions isolate individuals; dietary laws isolated the Jewish nation from the rest of the world; but in God's plan all belong together in mutual interdependence.^{8 9}

God in his very nature is one. He is Father, Son and Spirit undivided. All are in perfect agreement, and work together to rescue and reconcile all mankind, and all creation. That isn't just what they do, it is *who* they are. And it is to be *our identity* as well. We are to be "clothing ourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." We are to be part of the reconciliation of all things; firstly man to God, and then man to man. After all, these are at the heart of the two great commandments.

In Christ then, we are initially given our new identity and nature. And in our ongoing lives as his people, we are renewed as we learn to know him and become more like him. He is our guide. And unlike the law, he lives in us, in all of us, Jew and Gentile (v.11). He empowers us through his Spirit to not only know who he is, and what he has done, but to grow continually to be more and more like him. This is not a legalistic, do this, don't do that regime or life. It is Christ actually living his life in us, his people.

This is what the rest of Colossians goes on to emphasise. As we read in the following verses;

Colossians 3:12-15 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.¹⁰

Paul is saying that we are to live out who we are on a daily basis. In Christ, as God's chosen holy people who he loves, we are to put on and wear Jesus Christ. Through the Spirit we are to put on the mind and heart of God that is full of tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and

⁸ Wright, p.124

⁹ James Dunn adds, " ...the abolition of the boundaries between the two, with their limitation of Jewish Messiah and promise to those within the boundary marked by circumcision, had been a central feature of Paul's gospel from the beginning... ...the message here is the same as when Paul confronts the more aggressive proselytizing in Galatia: the distinction between Jew and Greek, as marked out by circumcision, has been removed by Christ; the privileges of the Jewish people which have kept them separate from the other nations have been opened up to the Gentiles by the Jewish Messiah (cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15) (Colossians, p.225)

¹⁰ NLT Col 3:10-17

patience and peace. This is who God is, this is who Jesus is, this is who we are to be growing to be in him, living in peace and unity with one another.

It struck me while studying Colossians particularly, but also Ephesians, that, that which formerly identified and separated Israel from all other people, became for us an instrument of separation between our church and other Christians. By claiming the necessity of Sabbath and Holy Days and clean and unclean food laws, we “disqualified others from being God’s true church” and became exclusive and judgmental. And that exclusivity was in direct contradiction of what Jesus accomplished at the cross, at great cost, and contrary to the very nature of our God, who is Father, Son and Spirit.

How does any division today over such matters fit with who God is and who we are to be growing to be in Christ?

How much more uniting and Christ focused is it when we sacrifice that which after all was never for us to keep anyway, and when we sacrifice that which was and still has a divisive impact even in our own denomination in Australia, and join with our fellow Christians of all races and cultures, down through time in celebrating the days, times and seasons that focus totally on who Jesus is, and who we are as God’s beloved people in Christ?

We are not taking on a new legalism in requesting this. These celebrations are not signs of identity, they aren’t laws, they aren’t commanded. But they do focus on who we are in Christ, and our new life as his people.

We can argue back and forth on technicalities and on personal preferences about days. But we also need to remember, Christianity is not just about what we think or prefer as individuals. It is about unity in the body. The whole nature of God—who God is—teaches us that the new life in Christ is about sacrificial love, laying down our lives, our preferences, our ways for others, for the good of the whole, for unity.¹¹

Our salvation in Christ is at the heart of our faith and teaching. In that light, the issue of days is a topic that has been raised by Joe Tkach, by John McLean, and regularly a topic of concern at National Pastoral Team meetings and Pastoral Conferences.

It isn’t an easy journey out of practices that have been seen as mandatory and part of our identity as God’s people. But think about the future results and benefits for our denomination. Many congregations have made this seemingly daunting and fraught transition in Australia and around the world. It is possible, it can be done. It isn’t easy. We can’t do it on our own. It takes prayer, study. It involves intent and leadership, clear and deliberate teaching--a continued focus on who we are as God’s beloved people in Christ. It includes continual and sensitive dialogue with those who are fearful and unsure. Understanding their concerns and fears, but also continuing the task we have

► ¹¹ Tom Wright widens the discussion; “Wright; Wherever one looks, ones sees Christ. “...differences of background, nationality, colour, language, social standing and so forth must be regarded as irrelevant to the question of the love, honour and respect that are to be shown to individuals and groups.” “...When an elderly person is ignored, Christ is ignored; where a lively teenager is snubbed, he is snubbed; where a poor or coloured person (or, a rich or white one) is treated with contempt, the reproach falls on him. There must therefore be mutual welcome and respect with the people of God. Nobody must allow prejudices from their pre-Christian days to distort the new humanity which God has created in and through the New Man.” (Colossians, p.140-141).

been diligently involved with over the years, of explaining who we are in Christ, and also explaining the errors of past teachings that still hover in people's minds regarding Sunday worship, Easter, Christmas etc.

This requires the love of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit. It also calls for humility and dare we use the word, "repentance", the surrender of deeply held ideas and habits.

But those congregations that have made the journey have found it is a journey well worth making, as it brings us closer in teaching and practice to other Christians, and removes unnecessary barriers for new people attending with us as well.

We are so thankful to God for the wonderful progress we have made, not least right here in Victoria. All the teaching and learning we have been engaged in over the last few years lays the foundation for such change and unity. Our emphasis on always starting with Who God is and who Jesus is, encourages us all to see more clearly who we are in Christ. That he is our identity. In him we are God's people fully and completely. And us such we are being a wonderful light to the community around us.

Let's continue to grow and be who we are in Christ more fully and freely. We have no need to cling to the old signs and observances. In fact continual practice of the old actually serves to reinforce the old thinking that Paul so clearly opposed. He put so much effort into helping the church to become free of the old practices and be totally focused on Christ. That was the work of Christ he participated in with his whole being. We are involved with the same work today and need to continually check our bearings with the living and written Word.

Conclusion:

God is all about reconciliation and unity, new life in Christ through the Spirit. Days and diets separate, but Jesus unites. He is all that matters. As Joe Tkach wrote recently, "Today, our focus is on the four major "Christ events"—the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus."¹² And Gary Deddo adds; "The church gathered around Christ looks back to his finished work and forward to the completion of his continuing work. Those are the proper objects of its focus."¹³

Jeff McSwain; Unconditional Gathering;

Christ's earthly life points to the eternal truth that he and gathering are inherently connected. We invite people to gather with us in fellowship and at church because they are already gathered with us in the Unconditional Gatherer, the One "in whom all things exist and hold together" (Colossians 1:17), the "temple" destroyed and raised three days later (John 2:21). In GCI we invite all people to belong, because, by creation and redemption, they do!¹⁴

¹² Joseph Tkach; GCI Weekly Update; October 2nd

¹³ Gary Deddo, The Kingdom of God, GCI, <http://update.gci.org/2014/02/the-kingdom-of-god-part-1/>

¹⁴ Jeff McSwain; Unconditional Gathering, article in *Equipper*, November 2014
Volume 9 , Issue 11; www.gci.org/equiper

Communion:

Today we have been focusing on who God is, and thus who we are.

1. How do we know who God is?
2. How do we know who we are supposed to be?
3. How do we become who we are supposed to be?

The bread and wine here before us this afternoon contain the simple but profound answer.

1. How do we know who God is?

Paul's letter to the Colossians tells us that

Colossians 2: ⁹ For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. [NLT note; *Or in him dwells all the completeness of the Godhead bodily.*]

2. How do we know who we are supposed to be?

¹⁰ So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

We are to be whole, complete human beings through union with Christ.

We were created in the beginning to be at one with God.

3. How do we become who we are supposed to be?

Having lived for ourselves as individuals, God through Jesus Christ has come down into our world, and taken on our lives, and all our sins and suffering, all our division and separation from God and one another. He has made us whole, at one, complete through our union with Christ.

¹¹ When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.* ¹² For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.¹⁵

The bread and wine remind us that we are identified as God's people, not through the Old Covenant initiating rite of circumcision, but through the loving sacrifice of Christ, in whom the fullness of God dwelled in a human body.

The bread reminds us that we are united and sustained in our new life with God, through Jesus living in us. It also reminds us that we are to be at one with each other, and to share the love of God by sharing the life of Christ with those around us.

That because of who Jesus is, we are God's people. And so we are to live in Christ as God's people, as God lives, in peace, in his love that binds us all together in his unity.

* Greek *the cutting away of the body of the flesh*.

¹⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Col 2:8-12). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.