**SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH,**

**DRIVE OUT DEMONS, BAPTIZE, TEACH**

***(Identity as Sent Ones: Personally and in Community)***

Abraham McIlhenny, Andrew Christopher, Teddy Hembekides

**Objective**

To explore the imperative of having and maintaining our Christian identity as one of Christ’s sent ones, and the advantages thereof, as well as some of the dangers of neglecting such an imperative.

**Why Does Every Christian Need to Have a Clear Identity As Sent One?**

* Our identity as human beings is one of the most significant issues about our existence. After the fall, humanity has tried to answer two questions which still seem to be elusive to the majority, the first of which is: “Who am I?”; and the second is: “What am I doing here?” It seems as if neither science nor philosophy nor the humanities has come up with any satisfying answer to these two critical questions about life. However, in the very first chapter of Genesis, the Creator easily resolves these issues with the truth. We are God’s children, made in his image, and created to serve his purpose in our lives, in our families, in our communities and in the world.
* Our identity is closely tied up with our Creator God, and consequently with whether we have a relationship with him or not. History shows that when people stand on their identity as God’s people and servants, they not only worship him, but they also fulfill God’s holy purpose in their lives becoming a blessing on the whole world. But when they don’t clearly stand on their identity as God’s people and servants, they end up melting into the idolatrous cultures they live in and eventually forget their true identity and mission.
* After the fall, in human history those who have had a relationship with God through faith, never lost their sense of identity as God’s people (i.e. their status as a child of God in this world), nor their life direction (i.e. their mission as his servants in this world). They knew exactly where they came from, (from God) and exactly where they were going (back to God). Since human beings were created with a desire to worship God and to only be satisfied by God alone, they worshiped God. They were the ones whom God was also pleased to bless and to work in and who bear his blessings to the world.
* When God called his people (the Jews) out of slavery in Egypt to serve his mission as a light to the Gentiles he wanted them to have a clear identity as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). The mission field he was sending them to (the Promised Land Canaan) was overrun by idol worshiping cultures. When they compromised with these pagan cultures, they lost their identity as God’s holy people, as well as their God given mission. They forgot who they were and what they were sent by God to do. They were no longer a blessing to the people around them, nor were they useful to God any more. When the people of God lose their identity as God’s people, they become worse than the idol worshiping people of the world.
* Jesus called his disciples, and commissioned them to take the gospel message to all nations. Whoever they may have been before, they now had a singularly clear identity as Christ’s very own servants. In the book of Acts, there is much evidence that all who confessed Christ’s name also had the conviction about who they were as his servants. They had abandoned the idolatrous cultural ways from where they had come, and they now embraced their new identity as God’s children and Christ’s servants. In spite of the tremendous persecutions they faced and the severe temptations that challenged them, they kept their identity as Jesus’ servants. And so, God not only used them as a great influence in their own generation, but they were the flame that set the world afire with the Christian faith.
* To keep or not to keep a clear identity as Christ’s servants in this world can be the difference between being used by God as a blessing or not. In our generation, keeping our identity as one of Jesus’ sent ones is as difficult as it has always been throughout the generations. The lure of culture is very strong, and Christians are ever tempted to try fitting in at the high cost of compromising the gospel message as well as their own faith. But in the process, many end up losing their identity as God’s servants, and become cultural Christians. Consequently, they are no longer able to be a blessing on their families, communities and the very culture they are called to inspire and serve. In fact, they become a source of bad influence and misrepresent the name of Christ.

**By Whom Are Jesus’ Sent Ones Sent, And For What Purpose Are They Sent?**

1. **By whom are Jesus’ Sent ones sent?**
   * There is no doubt that it was Risen and Ascended King and Sovereign Lord of heaven Jesus Christ himself, who commissions his redeemed followers to become his “sent ones” and sends them out to serve his purpose in a fallen world. And it is also clear that he does so for his own name’s sake to bring all people back to obedience to God and to his gospel through faith (Mt 28:19-20; Ro 1:5).
   * When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he called some disciples by name to follow him (Jn 1), but in time, the fellowship of those who were considered Jesus’ “disciples” swelled to more than 70 disciples (Lk 10:1) including some women (Lk 8:1-2). After having been with Jesus and learning from him the “gospel of the kingdom” (Mt 24:14) he so eagerly preached everywhere he went, Jesus began to give his disciples some field work training in the mission field they would inherit upon his departure. The first wave of disciples to become his “sent ones” were his original twelve disciples (Lk 9:1-2), followed by the second wave of 72 disciples (Lk 10:1). At the time Jesus commissioned them to be sent out, he also endowed them with authority to do everything he himself was doing as Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And when according to his command, his disciples went out as his very own “sent ones,” they experienced the authority and power of Christ Jesus the King (Lk 10:17). They had no doubt that they were sent out by the Sovereign Lord himself. After his ascension, Jesus again extended this commission to all disciples of all time, sending them all out by his own heavenly authority.
   * It is often through God’s appointed servants that people learn of Christ and of his gospel. But it is through the Spirit of God that they are born again and are called to a life in Christ and for Christ. And it is the Sovereign Lord Christ himself in heavenly glory––and not human beings––who commissions them to become his “sent ones” to carry on his work in this world. Jesus made it abundantly clear that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him, and that in that authority those whom he commissions are sent (Mt 28:18). It is imperative for a redeemed believer to have the conviction that, “I have become one of Christ’s sent ones not by the effort of other humans or by the authority of a church, but by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and through his Holy Spirit.” If one does not have that clear conviction in their heart, then there’s always the danger that he or she may be serving their own purposes or those of an organization rather than Christ’s purpose.
2. **And for what purpose are they sent?**
   * It is crucial for sent ones to know that it is the Sovereign Lord Christ who sent them. It is equally as essential for them to know the purpose or mission for which they have become the Lord’s “sent ones.” We need not get into the details and extent of a servant of Christ’s obligations as a sent one. But it is of vital significance for “sent ones” to know that they are not sent by the Lord to accomplish their own purpose or mission, nor to follow their own schemes and programs. They are sent by the Lord with a clear purpose and mission to serve the Lord’s very own purpose and mission. We can say with confidence that every redeemed Christian should serve the Lord’s purpose in their life, to glorify God, and to declare the praises of Christ who, when we were nameless servants of the darkness, saved our souls and called us to be the King’s children, and servants of the Light (1Pe 2:9-10).
   * “For what purpose are sent ones sent” is very much related to the critical issue of identity. It is one thing to have an identity as a sent one, and to know that it is the Lord of heaven who has called me and set me aside as one of his sent ones. But what good is having a clear identity but not knowing how to put it to good use as the Lord in his wisdom has seen fit for me to do in this world? We have a problem if we are not sure for what purpose the Lord called us and set us apart as one of his “sent ones.” Young, immature and still growing Christians often have such recurring problems regarding purpose and mission. They know who they are in the Lord, that they belong to the Lord who rescued them. They also know that they have to do something for the Lord. But they don’t know what. Often they fall prey to their emotions, human desires and thought world, when they have no clear Biblical truth regarding the purpose and mission of sent ones. So they stray towards whatever they feel they are called to do, which may not serve God’s purpose and mission for sent ones at all. That is why it is imperative that sent ones build a solid foundation on the basic truth that a sent one must strive (often through learning, and discipline) to differentiate God’s mission and purpose from human mission and purpose (Mt 16:23). We must be very careful as a sent one that we recognize what is God’s purpose and pursue it with our whole being.
3. **Who are we, personally and in Community?**
   * Those who are called by the Lord Jesus to be his disciples and redeemed through his death and resurrection should know and keep our new identity as the Lord’s servants and sent ones. We also come to have a clear conviction of the eternal and glorious identity of the Christ who calls us to be his sent ones, and in whose authority we are sent. But as important as it is that the “sent ones” know our own identity as well as the identity of the one who sends us to serve his purpose and mission in the world, it is also as important for us to know who we are 1) in relation to our God and Christ; 2) in relation to God’s family (that is, the church of our Lord, our brothers and sisters in Christ); and 3) in relation to the world we live in and are called to serve as Christ’s “sent ones” and gospel ministers.

* **The Identity of sent ones in relation to God, to Christ and to the Holy Spirit**
  + Scripture teaches that those who receive Christ as Lord and Savior are born of God, born of the Spirit of God and not of the flesh, making them the children of God (Jn 1:12-13; 3:5-6). The Risen Lord confirmed that they are indeed God’s children and of the same family as the Lord Jesus himself (Jn 20:17). They are the ones who are also sent by Jesus into the world in the same way Jesus was sent by the Father (Jn 20:21). Although Jesus’ “sent ones” are still in the flesh until his return, they are in every way of his royal family, and of an intimate relationship with God as their doting Father. God the Father considers them his chosen people, his royal priesthood, his holy nation, those who belong to God himself and are called to glorify him by declaring his praises to a dark and sinful world (1Pe 2:9). As God’s own family members, he has privileged them to serve along his side as his fellow workers in the mission field of the world (2Co 6:1). More than that, as the sons and daughters of the King of glory, they are ready and willing to sacrifice their lives as soldiers of Christ sent by him to accomplish his purpose in the world (2Ti 2:3). As one of his “sent ones” we can sacrifice our lives as soldiers of Christ Jesus in his mission field only when we are firmly rooted in our relationship with our God and Christ!
* **The identity of sent ones in relation to God’s family, the church**
  + If “sent ones” are all children of one God and Father, they are unequivocally of one family and are brothers and sisters in the Lord. The Risen Lord himself confirms this when he no longer refers to his disciples as disciples, but refers to them as “my brothers” (Jn 20:17). Paul as well frequently addresses the believing church members he writes to as “brothers and sisters.” The church, which is the body of the Lord Jesus Christ is a spiritual family born through and bonded together by Christ our Elder Brother. Christ also described his own relationship towards those who belonged to him as a friendship, one that is sealed through his sacrificial love for them (Jn 15:13). And he invited them into a friendship relationship with him based on loving one another (Jn 15:12-14). It was in brotherhood and friendship that the church was nurtured until it was born on Pentecost through the coming of the Holy Spirit. Paul, unique among Jesus’ “sent ones” and one of the greatest Christians of all time in the Spirit of Christ Jesus, also referred to fellow believers as his friends (Ro 16:5,8,9) and called for all of them to “serve one another humbly in love” (Ga 5:13). Therefore, as one of his “sent ones” we can humbly serve all those who belong to the church and body of Christ only as we acknowledge that they belong to Christ as our brothers and sisters.
* **The Identity of sent ones in relation to the world**
  + Sent ones have a very close and personal relationship with God as well as with each other in the Lord Jesus Christ. But that knowledge can also easily alienate them from the world into which they are sent. The world is a hostile place for God’s children (Lk 21:17). Jesus himself describes his sending them out like lambs among wolves (Lk 10:3). So, amidst the hatred for God’s children and the ensuing persecution that is ever bound to take place, servants of Christ may be reluctant to have anything to do with a world that is out to get them. Yet, Christ has clearly defined our relationship with the world around us himself. Although we do not belong to the world any longer (Jn 15:19), he sends us into the world to serve his purpose (Jn 20:21; Lk 17:10). Christ’s sent ones are his very own royal ambassadors (2Co 5:20), his heralds and messengers to the world tasked to represent him and to bring his gospel message to those who would receive it by faith (Ro 1:5). Our Lord warned us that suffering and persecution are often rewarded to his “sent ones” who keep their identity as his sent ones and who faithfully fulfill their purpose. But none of this should discourage us, nor turn us away from our holy purpose. Unless our relationship with the world around us remains as the ambassadors and messengers of the King of glory, there’s a danger that we would either disassociate ourselves from the world or worse yet, slowly settle back into wallowing in the same mud the Lord so graciously once took us out of.

1. **The Benefits of a Clear Identity as a sent one; and the dangers of losing that identity**
   * There is no doubt that having a clear identity as Jesus’ “sent ones” and serving his holy purpose brings about many benefits to those who struggle to absolutely keep that identity in a world hostile to God and to his people. But as they strive to fulfill their holy purpose, they come to experience the difficulties and hardships, as well as the joys and blessings of one who serves the name of Christ. And so they are privileged to mature in a Christ-like character becoming more like him. They come to know him in his suffering, death and resurrection. (Php 3:10-11). It’s impossible to measure the full benefits when “sent ones” absolutely keep their identity in the Lord. As Scriptures tells us, when “Christ lives in me,” (Ga 2:20) consequently, God fulfills his great and glorious purpose in and through us, ultimately, “we are more than conquerors” (Ro 8:37) which is worth more than anything we lose or suffer here in this world when we keep our identity (1Co 2:9).
   * However, there are always pitfalls and dangers regarding their identity that “sent ones” would be wise to guard against and avoid. It isn’t uncommon for devoted Christians to eventually become zealous for church and tradition, and lose their focus on Christ, their identity in him and their mission. The Jews, in their zeal for their temple and religious tradition, unwittingly abandoned both God and his word, and lost their identity in the process (Mt 15:3-7). Of course, the church or organization we belong to and serve are important. It is a fellowship of believers we study God’s word and worship the Lord together with. But as important as it is for us to identify with a church community, we must remember that it is Christ himself we belong to and serve, as does the church. I must not, in some misdirected zeal, find myself more faithful to church and church tradition than to Christ and his word. I must fervently guard against that! Christ and his word must always remain my priority above all else (Jn 12:8). It is my privilege and obligation to maintain my identity as the Lord’s “sent one” at all costs.
2. **How can I maintain my identity in this world as one of Christ’s sent ones?**
   * Maintaining my identity as a servant of Christ Jesus is essential to my spiritual life and health as a Christian, as well as to my mission as one of his “sent ones.” If a disciple of Christ loses that identity, the results are usually very troubling. When Peter held on to his own pride and self confidence in his relationship with Christ rather than on faith in Christ and humble submission to his words, he ended up losing his identity for a while as one of Christ’s most trusted friends and servants even going as far as to deny that he knew Jesus! (Mt 26:31-35; 69-75). But when Peter very personally experienced Jesus’ unconditional love and forgiving grace through the Savior’s death and resurrection and held on to this grace. The Holy Spirit worked in his heart to maintain his identity till the end, even at the cost of his life. Like everyone else, Jesus’ “sent ones” are weak and susceptible to all the temptations and struggles of this world. But when the heart remains obedient to God’s will and word, (1Jn 2:15-17), often considering God’s grace and what the Lord has done in his great mercy for us, (Eph 2:1-12) the Holy Spirit gives his servants the necessary strength to maintain their identity. Paul said to Timothy: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1).