

SHARING LIFE AT FIRST ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2017 BY DR. BOB BENDER, PASTOR
“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?” FROM PHILIPPIANS 1:1
WE ARE, WE ARE FBC LIFE MESSAGE SERIES FROM PHILIPPIANS

This is Discover Day at the FBC. Today we are going to discover our identity, community, and capability through spending time together in worship and in Life Groups. We begin a new life message series from Paul’s letter to one of the churches he founded—the church that has the most in common with FBC: Philippians. The church in Philippi was the apple of Paul’s eye and the most impressive church in Asia Minor, along with Antioch. It was a united, healthy, growing, giving, missional, sharing, and loving church—just like FBC. “Who are, who are, who we? (We are, we are FBC).”

As we begin our journey to discovering who we are as a church body, we must first be reminded of who we are in Christ as individuals, for our church is made up of folks just like yourself—and that’s a good thing! So, today’s message is entitled, “Who Do You **Think** You Are?”

Okay class; it’s pop quiz time. Let’s take this little test so I can get an idea as to whom I am preaching to today. Please raise your hands with your answer—true or false.

1. A good definition of a Christian is “a sinner saved by grace.” _____
2. I did more sinful acts yesterday than I did righteous acts _____
3. My heart is wicked. _____
4. I can sin and not know it. _____
5. For me to become a saint, I need to get closer to God. _____
6. My heart condemns me. _____
7. When I sin, I need to beg God to forgive me. _____
8. I am more alive to sin and dead to God than I am alive to God and dead to sin. _____
9. I am incomplete as a Christian. _____
10. God frowns at me. _____¹

I will give you your grade later. But for now, today’s big idea is this: We become who we think we are. Our text is one word in Philippians 1:1—“To all the **saints** in Christ Jesus in Philippi.”

Peter Lord tells this story about turkeys and eagles (pic): Once upon a time there was a group of eagles living in a colony. Among this group of eagles were a male and female eagle that got married. They built a nest, laid two eggs, and had two baby eagles. When the two babies were born into the eagle kingdom, everyone got excited. All the eagles came in and bragged about how wonderful and marvelous it was for mama and daddy to have two young eagles. Now, this was a very religious colony of eagles. Daddy eagle was a charismatic and mama eagle was a Baptist. Mama eagle immediately did what every good Baptist does. She went out and built another nest and laid two more eggs to have two more babies as that is the Baptist standard of success: have them as fast as you can. Now daddy eagle had been confined during these months of incubation and being a charismatic, he loved to soar in the heavenlies. So, he went up into the heavens and soared around every day. Now, having little baby eagles is just the beginning. We have to help them grow up. But mama and daddy were gone; mama was busy having more eagles and daddy was busy soaring. He did not have the confinement of changing diapers, feeding meals, and that sort of stuff; he just wanted to soar. Now soaring is good, but when you ought to be feeding, you shouldn’t be soaring. After about three days, the young eagles saw that mama and daddy were not coming back, so they had a conference. They were about 60 feet up in a tree. They look down at the ground and said, “If we jump out, we might die but we might live; if we stay here, were going to die for sure.” So being sensible eaglets, they decided to take a chance and jump out. So, they did and fell to the ground. They had all the wind knocked out of them, but with the remaining strength in them, they struggled toward the woods to find something to eat. On the way, they ran into a bunch of turkeys. The head gobbler looked down at these two-pitiful looking little birds and since he was a compassionate turkey he said, “Hey guys, you look hungry. Come with us; will go gather acorns.” So, the eaglets followed the turkeys out to the oak tree, and filled their little craws up with acorns. Those acorns were not very tasty to these little eagles, but do you know something? There is a basic law of life that we need to understand. When someone is

really really hungry, he will eat anything that is fed to him—even if it is not natural for him to eat it. After they had eaten, the head turkey asked, “Where are you going to spend the night?” They answered, “We have never been in this part of the world before and we don’t have any home to go to.” So, the head turkey said to them, “How would you like to become part of our family?” Now, when you are a turkey, it is easy to be like a turkey, but when you are eaglets, it’s hard to be like a turkey. It is a constant struggle. You have to keep saying, “Now remember, don’t scream; cluck. Don’t ask for fish; eat acorns. Don’t soar; walk.” You never saw a turkey eat fish, did you? You have to say, “I like acorns; I have to like acorns; I must like acorns.” Other incidents happened in the lives of these eaglets who were trying to be turkeys. One day they were crossing from one set of woods to another. They were out in the open and the eaglets looked up in the sky and said to one another, “I sure would like to be up there soaring.” You can take an eaglet out of the sky but you cannot take the sky out of an eaglets. That is where he was meant to be—not in some dark woods hiding in fear all the time. The head turkey saw them doing that and said, “No, No, No. All those birds up there are vultures. You don’t want to fly with them.” He was trying to keep them in bondage to the system; trying to convince them that all who are free to fly are vultures.¹

Are you beginning to see yourself in this story? You see, **You cannot soar with eagles if you live with turkeys.** Is there a longing in your heart today to soar, to rein, to fly, to be victorious? Is there a discontentment within the confinements of your turkey life? Have you been turkeyized? Let’s find out by re-engaging our little pop quiz; this time with the correct answers from God’s Word.

1. A good definition of a Christian is “a sinner saved by grace.” _____ (False). A good definition of a Christian is a saint—Ph. 1:1. Like when Jesus changed Simon’s name from Simon—a pebble, to Peter—a rock, so He has changed ours. As a reminder in heaven, at least three times in Revelation, it is mentioned that His name will be on our foreheads reminding **each other** of Whose we are.
2. I did more sinful acts yesterday than I did righteous acts. _____ (False) Jn. 15:2-3. The first act of righteousness I did yesterday was to get out of bed in a timely manner. My second was that I kissed Beverly and said “Good morning.” The third was my quiet time (etc.)
3. My heart is wicked. _____ (False). God has given you a new, holy heart—Ezek. 36:26. While left to itself, our hearts obviously tend toward evil, but His holy heart trumps our natural tendency.
4. I can sin and not know it. _____ (False). Eph. 4:30. Now to be sure, some believers with seared consciences can, but as a general rule, you tell me that you can grieve the Holy Spirit Who is within you and not know it? To have this kind of thinking and at the end of the day asking God to forgive us for all the sins we didn’t know about—assuming we did them—keeps us under condemnation.
5. For me to become a saint, I need to get closer to God. _____ (False). You are already a saint if you are saved; you don’t have to DO anything to become one—1 Cor. 1:30.
6. My heart condemns me. _____. (False). Rom. 8:1, 1 Jn. 3:20-21.
7. When I sin, I need to beg God to forgive me. _____ (False). Col. 2:13; 1 Jn. 1:9.
8. I am more alive to sin and dead to God than I am alive to God and dead to sin. _____ (False). Rom. 6:2, 13.
9. I am incomplete as a Christian. _____ (False). Col. 2:10.
10. God frowns at me. _____ (False). 1 Jn. 3:1; Jn. 17:23. Do you frown at your children?

We become who we think we are. David wrote in Psalm 40:7, “In the volume of the book it is written of me.” David rejoiced when he discovered what God had to say about him. Let’s look at what God has to say about you in His Owner’s Manual. Your discoveries will change your life.

The Bible says that you are to “reign in life through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). How? By discovering who we are in Christ. Some of these are review, but the Bible says that you are a saint—made holy in Christ Jesus (Phil 1:1). You are a king and a priest (Rev. 1:6). You are a child of God (1 John 3:9). We have His very nature (Greek—sperma) in our veins. You have a new heart (Ezek. 36:26). You are complete in Christ (Col. 2:9-10). You are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). All your sins are already forgiven (Col. 2:13). You are more than a conqueror in Christ (Rom. 8:37). You are dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:11). The Bible says that you are an eagle, not a turkey; a saint, not a sinner; a king, not a pauper; a child of God, not a

child of this world; the head, not the tail, and reigning over life, not life ruling over you. We become who we think we are.

I heard of this church, perhaps you have heard about it too. Its reputation wasn't the greatest. One of their church members was living with his stepmom. They got drunk at the Lord's Supper table. They were suing each other in court. They were divided into three camps. Some of the church members' reputation was worse than some lost people's in the community. And every business meeting was a knock-down, drag-out affair. Now if I had heard about this church, I would have written them a nasty letter telling them to get right or get left. My first sermon to them would be, "Repent you dirty rotten sinners!" Well, a pastor did find out everything about how poorly his church was doing—because he was the founding pastor. So, he wrote them a letter. The church is the church at Corinth. Notice how Paul begins his letter to this sorry group of believers, "To **the church of God** which is at Corinth, to those **who have been sanctified** in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling** with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and **our (Lord)**" (1 Cor. 1:1). Do I need to connect the dots for you? Paul is backhandedly reminding them at the very outset, "Who do you think you are?" So, by the time he writes Second Corinthians, they had put aside all of these worldly activities due in part because they recognized that they were saintly eagles and not dirty rotten sinning turkeys.

If you, like the Corinthians, see yourself as a dirty rotten sinner, guess what dirty rotten sinners do—even those saved by grace? We sin dirty rotten sins! Why? Because we become who we think we are. It's a matter of identity. The devil, the ultimate identity thief, has stolen our identity—the very essence of who we are in Christ. If we then see ourselves as eagles, we too will fly, screech, and enjoy life. We will rule over life; not be ruled by life.

Now to today's text from Philippians 1:1, where Paul writes a similar opening salutation to them, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi..." The Bible says, "For as a person thinks in his heart, so is he" (Pr. 23:7). How we think about ourselves; how we feel about ourselves; how we perceive ourselves to be impacts our every thought, word, action, and direction in life—indeed it determines our identity. We become who we think we are. Are you an eagle or turkey? "This is my Bible. I am what it says I am" in and of itself is a truism worth repeating.

Thomas Merton wrote, "To be a saint means to be my true self. Therefore, the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I truly am and of discovering my true self, my essence or core." (*New Seeds of Contemplation*)

The Time cover story of March 3, 1980 featured an interview with Peter Sellers. Appearing on the Muppet show two years earlier, he was told by Kermit the frog that it was all right to "just relax and be yourself," to which Sellers replied, "I could never be myself. You see, there is no me. I do not exist." Acknowledging that it was a good joke, *Time* magazine saw a deeper significance: "The real Peter Sellers at 54 is virtually a nobody." A longtime friend said, "Peter is the accumulation of all the roles he's played and all the people he's met. He's directing traffic inside all that." Sellers died less than six months later. I don't know if he ever found himself or if he even searched for his true identity.² Spiritually, many of us are like Peter Sellers, bouncing around like a bowling ball in a boxcar relating to our identity. We jump from our past to what we want others to think of us to trying to be someone we are not. Something inside of us yearns for real self-discovery. My prayer is that each of us would discover our true identity in Christ as saints—at least before we die. We become who we think we are.

We are all aware of the negative influence of parents always harping on their children. If we call them lazy, irresponsible, a griper, messy, or other negative traits we notice, many times they become these things. The same is true spiritually; that is why God calls us saints. Our identity is in Him. Most of us have been taught how to let Jesus in, but not how to let Him out. We let Him out by becoming who we are created to be—saints. Our identity is wrapped up in who God says we are—saints.

Paul includes all the Philippian saints in Christ Jesus in his address. Every single church member was included in the letter. I am sure some members were more saintly than others, but all were included in the

blessing as well in an implicit opportunity. If I was called a saint, no matter how I was living, I would understand that I have an opportunity to live consistent with my calling.

Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon who conquered Philippi—after whom the city was named—was one of the greatest generals who ever lived. He conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. Legend has it one night during a campaign that he couldn't sleep, so he walked around the campgrounds. He later came across a soldier asleep on guard duty—a serious offense met in some cases with instant death. The soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him. Recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life. “Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?” Alexander the Great asked the soldier. “Yes, sir,” the soldier responded in a quivering voice. “Soldier, what's your name?” demanded Alexander the Great. “Alexander, sir.” Alexander the Great then looked the soldier straight in the eye and said. “Soldier, either change your name or change your conduct, for no man can bear the name of Alexander, my name, and do the things that you have done.”³ I have an idea he changed his conduct. Isn't it time you changed your conduct to match your name, saint? We become who we think we are.

Peter Lord goes on to tell us what happened to those two eaglets. Early one morning, the head turkey was leading them to a new oak tree being all excited as thousands of acorns were everywhere. He headed to the new tree with the eaglets dragging behind as no true eagle can get excited about acorns. They were also tired of struggling with turkey laws and failing. It's hard to be a turkey when you're an eagle. They looked like most Christians I know like they had been run over—dragging behind the crowd. As they stopped under the tree, one eagle's head was down; his wings were drooped and he was saying, “Oh Lord, not another day.” There was an owl sitting up in the tree and looked down from his limb and saw those bedraggled looking eaglets down there—defeated and discouraged. The owl asked, “Who-o-o-o are you? And what's wrong?” One answered, “I'm a turkey that's failing. I've tried so hard but I can't make it. I don't even want to finish another day.” The wise owl said, “Your problem is you don't know who-o-o-o you are. You're an eagle. Eagles are meant to be up there in the sky. You will never be happy down there on the ground in these dark woods. Fly eagles fly!” So, the eagles stretched their wings and flew. Each was soaring rather than walking; fearsome rather than fearful; and screeching rather than clucking; and eating fish rather than acorns. Each had rediscovered himself and in so doing enjoyed the life God had mapped out for him again.¹ Aren't you tired of being turkeyized? Soar with me this week as an eagle! We become who we think we are.

When you get accused and abused by the accuser of the brethren—Satan himself—or when you get told something contrary to what you know is true about yourself in Christ, just respond softly with these words, “I am an eagle and not a turkey; a saint and not a sinner!” Because we become who we think we are. Who do you think you are? “As a person thinks in his heart, so is he.” Allow God to make that determination about you this week; not yourself, not others; and not the devil. When you are confronted with internal thoughts or external words, remind yourself of this life-changing truth: We become who we think we are—eagles and saints. Turn to the person beside you and say, “I am who God says I am—an eagle; not a turkey and a saint; not a sinner.”

¹ *Turkeys & Eagles*, *Fulness*, November-December, 1981, pp. 8-11.

² *Time* Cover Story, March 3, 1980, Vol. 115, Number 9.

³ <http://www.covenant-harvest.org/blog/2015/06/11/either-change-your-name-or-change-your-conduct/>

Central Idea of Text (CIT): Paul calls his Philippian readers “saints.”

Big Idea of Message (BIM): We become who we think we are.

Major Objective (MO): Supportive

Specific Objective (SO): I desire my hearers to believe what God says about their identity.

Primarily Addressed Need (PAN): Who am I, really?