

Finding Our Identity

1 John 3:1-3

Introduction

People know that to understand who you are, you must know where you come from. Since they don't like who they are, they try to rewrite history by denying certain things happened. But it's important that we know who we are. It's important to know where we come from. It's important, because as author Terry Pratchett said, *"If you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong."* So, especially on **ALL SAINTS' DAY**, we look to the past, to our ancestors in the faith to see where we come from, so we can know who we are and where we are going.

Looking to the Past

Let me first make clear our relationship with the saints who have gone on before.

Worship

We do not worship the saints. (Read **Revelation 4:9-11**). Throughout the book of **Revelation**, all those around the throne are worshipping God. He is the **only** One worthy of our worship. No matter how godly a person's life has been, they are not our **Creator** or **Redeemer**. A godly life doesn't make a person God.

Praying to

We do not pray **to** the saints. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to pray to God. Nowhere are we told to pray to other people or even angels. *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)*. Since the temple veil was torn in two at Christ's death, we have direct access to God through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. We don't need to go through a secondary mediator to get to Christ. That shows a lack of understanding of our relationship with Jesus.

Praying for

We don't pray **for** the saints because they are beyond the need of our prayers. They have already left this world of sorrow and suffering and are in the arms of Jesus. They have no needs. All is peace and joy.

Honor

What we do is **honor** the saints. And we honor them in three ways.

Thanksgiving

First, we **give thanks** for them. *We should thank God because He has shown examples of mercy, because He wishes to save people, and because He has given teachers and other gifts (Apology XXI: The Invocation of the Saints)*. We have all been blessed by the saints in many ways. Let us thank God for all the saints and all the benefits we have received from them.

Strengthening Our Faith

We look to their example to have our **faith strengthened**. When we see things like Peter's denial forgiven, it serves to strengthen our faith, knowing that we can be forgiven, no matter how bad our sin is. When Paul talks about the thorn in his flesh and how God's strength is made perfect in weakness, it encourages us in **our** weakness.

Imitation

The third way we honor the saints is by **imitation**. We imitate their faith and virtue. *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).*

Looking to Jesus

When we honor the saints by thanking God for them, drawing strength from their examples, and imitating their faith and virtues, we realize that they are pointing us to look to Jesus, the *Founder and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2)*. He is the Founder of our faith because He is the Sacrifice for our sins. So, we are named for Him. The word "Christian" means "of Christ."

Looking to the Future

Our identity is that of followers of Christ. John says we are His children. We don't know what we will be like in the future, but we do know this. We will *be like Jesus, for we will see Him as He is* (v. 2). We will have the same type of glorified body that Jesus had when He was raised from the dead.

Means of Grace

We have been finding our identity in the **WORD**. We also find it in the **SACRAMENTS**. When we are **BAPTIZED**, we put on Christ and His name. When we receive the body and blood of Jesus, we are reminded that He died for us and we are His. This sets us apart from all the people who don't know Him. We also recognize in the **SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR** a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, when we will see Him as He is and be reunited with all the saints we celebrate and honor today. We have found our **IDENTITY**—**children of God, washed in the blood** of Jesus, **purchased for God** by His **broken body**. This is who we are, how we got here, and where we're going.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
