

Column

I am thinking today of what constitutes a person's identity. Is it one's socio-economic standing? His family? The schools he attended? His football team? Line of work or profession? Country of origin? Ethnic and racial make up?

No doubt, all of these are factors. Yet, which is ultimate?

Recently, it was Gideon Sunday in North Georgia, that is, a representative of Gideon International (the group that places Bibles in hotels) visited virtually every church in the area. The purpose of these visits was to report on the work of the organization and to appeal for prayer and financial support.

Our Gideon for the day was Earl Bankhead from Woodstock, Ga. Between our two morning services, over coffee, Mr. Bankhead share an experience which set me to thinking about what constitutes a person's identity.

The story he told was very moving. He said that his father was American and his mother Korean. During his early years, the family lived in Korea, where his father was stationed in the Service.

He went on to say that he was picked on in school because he looked different from the Korean kids in his class. When he discovered the family was moving to America, he naively thought his troubles would be over. He would be like everyone else; however, it was not to be. Some of his American classmates were not very kind either.

So, this question of identity continued to plague him: Was he Korean, American or what?

He got his answer after a kind neighbour invited the family to a local church. There the whole family found not only God but godly friends.

Eventually, he said, it dawned on him that these people were his family. They and he were members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. That was the only identity that mattered.

A person does not have to have a mixed ethnic background to come to this same realization. In the words of the hymn writer John Oxenham:

“In Christ there is no east or west, / in Him no south or north, / but one
great fellowship of love /
Thro’out the whole wide earth.

“Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, / whate'er your race may be! /
Who serves my Father as a son / is surely kin to me.”

In whom or what do you find your identity? Who’s on first, second and
third?

*O GOD, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on
the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to
them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere
may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy
Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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