

Who Are You? : Our Identity In Christ.

Colossians 1:1

INTRODUCTION

Ill – Taking Photos at pre-wedding (identity).

If someone asked you “Who are you?”, how would you answer? For many of us we don’t know how to answer that except to tell them what our profession is – and so I’m David Kabetu, a dentist; or Dr. Steve Omollo, working with the World Health Organization. Who are you? We don’t know how to answer that question except to tell you what our position or standing in life is.

Have you noticed that at funerals the eulogies, in trying to tell those who gather for the funeral who this person was, there is always a long list of what their supposed accomplishments in life were. Where they went to school, what degrees they achieved, what important positions of employment they had, and so forth.

Much of this is because we want to accord status and honor to our person – and because the job I hold and the company I serve will tell you how “honorable” I am and help you locate me in society, I drop a few important names.

Others who don’t have a multi-national employer name to drop try to do the same by dropping other sorts of names “. . . the other day we were having dinner with Moi when Biwott came in to serve me tea . . .”; still others drop names of places “. . . last year when I was in Washington on my way to London . . .” It’s all an attempt to give ourselves the respect we think we deserve.

You might remember that last year we wrote a petition to a Govt. Ministry protesting a corruption scandal they were involved in. Before we passed the letter with all your signatures on, we passed them onto someone in Govt. who returned them and advised us that we needed to letters as

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with all their titles otherwise they would not read them.

Well, Paul, in writing this letter to the Colossians, and in other letters to other churches, also throws his titles around. “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . .*” Infact, this was the standard address of a letter in New Testament times – Identify yourself, Identify your audience, and then a greeting of blessing

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

A standard greeting as in any other letter, but in Paul it also conveys important theological content, and this is the first striking thing that hit's you as you begin reading Colossians. You see, we try and throw titles of **honor**, like so much of the world we are trying to raise our esteem in the publics eye; because then they know how to treat us, and what we expect them to do for us, but when you study Paul’s titles, they do not count for much, in fact they **LOWER** his esteem, not raise it!

In his letters to the churches he titles himself as

Paul, an Apostle

Paul, a Servant and

Paul, a Prisoner

What then is he saying by his titles?

A. AN APOSTLE : The word “apostle” means “sent one”. It was not a title of honor, because it depicted a public official with

the authority to represent or act on behalf of the one who sent you. In other words, it clearly conveyed that you were not the boss, you were just serving the one who sent you . . . It would have been the same as us introducing ourselves today and saying **Oscar Muriu, K.Y.M.**

III – Meeting with Bishops, Apostles, etc

Amazingly today we have managed to take a title of servitude and make it a title of honor. This is not the way that Paul would have used it, for when you think of an apostle, you immediately recognize 2 things

a. If you are an APOSTLE, **you are not your own** – you are there to be sent around, not to be served and send others around, and indeed Paul shows as much when he speaks about his own life and says in I Cor 9¹⁶ *when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*¹⁷ *If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.*

b. Secondly the title Apostle shows that your life is **not to be lived inward focused on yourself**, but outward directed for you have a commission. If you are an apostle, you live to be sent out, that is your job description! And I dare say that we are apostles who call ourselves by the name of Christ. There are 2 ways you can define the term apostle, the narrower definition is according to Acts 1²¹ *Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*²² *beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."*

²³ *So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.*

This was to be someone who had seen the Lord Jesus with his own eyes, and had an intimate knowledge of him.

But there is a second definition, that of the actual meaning of the word in everyday use where anyone sent out was an apostle. Paul himself uses this of Titus in II Cor 8:23, and of Ephaphroditus in Phil 2: 25. Because of the great commission, we all are apostles, and the question is, when we put aside all our titles of honor and take a close look at our lives, is the fact of this title evident? Look at your life now, as an apostle, when was the last time you went out to preach, to tell, to witness, to share your faith? When was the last time you talked with a colleague or friend about the Lord?

B. SERVANT : The second title that Paul uses is servant, in his letter to the Romans, to Phillip and to Titus. Again, this is not a term of honor, for the title immediately reminds you of 2 things

a. **You must heed instructions**, for that is what a servant does. There is a painful truth that the centurion told about a servant in Mt 8:9 *I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."* A servant's job is to heed instructions, they exist to do what they are told to do.

Jesus also gave a painful lesson on servanthood in Lk 17⁷ *"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'?⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'?⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

Why do you struggle when the Lord does not seem to recognize what you have done in his name, and how you have served so sacrificially? When he seems to have forgotten you and your work looks insignificant and feels like drudgery? What were you expecting? Cheers? Affirmation about how sacrificial you are? If he does give you that, expect it only as the exception, not the norm, otherwise you will become discouraged, and feel he has let you down. *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'*"

Are you a servant? How often in the day do you stop and listen for the masters instructions? Did you even pause today in the morning to hear him out, to attend quietly at his feet and take your days instructions, or did you rush out today and start your day presuming on your master, or even unable to heed his instructions because you are so busy with your plans?

Hudson Taylor said "When God wants to do his great works he trains someone to be quiet enough and little enough, then he uses that person" Too many times however we are too busy and too big for God to use.

b. The second obvious truth about being a servant is that **SUCCESS is defined NOT by how much I accumulate** for myself, how much luxury and comfort I can surround my life with depending on my position in life, instead success is a matter of whether I OBEY or not. It troubles me that more and more Christian success is being defined by material wealth, as though wealth is a sign that God has smiled on you because you are so successful in your faith; and we forget that wealth is a double edged sword that VERY FEW in this world know how to wield; and that it has destroyed more lives and homes than it has ever blessed. As someone said "No-one should curse their children with a wealthy inheritance" it will destroy them!

Premanand, a highborn Indian who became an Indian tells in his autobiography of a Priest, Father E. F. Brown, of the Oxford Mission in Calcutta who was every man's friend, but he was especially the friend of the menial laborers and the hundreds of street boys on the streets of Calcutta. He could truly be said to be "a friend of the poor without patronage, and a friend of the rich without subservience."

But what about us are we too concerned about how we look in the eyes of other, about our dignity and social standing? Do we have a correct understanding of success? Does this remind you of the Lord in his own humble service

Phil 2 ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!*

C. PRISONER

The third title Paul uses on himself is found in Philemon Vs. 1 – "Paul, a prisoner . . ."

III – Kibera cells.

2 things struck me about being a prisoner.

a. The first is the sense of confinement. **I was not free** to walk out, I was restrained! And this is the fact of being a prisoner. Can you see the prisoner Jesus Christ in the garden of

Gethsemene, saying “not my will Lord but yours be done”, or of Paul in Rom 6:15

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

In other words I have been set free so that I can be a slave to righteousness, so that I can now obey God. I am a prisoner to the love that leads to righteousness.

b. The 2nd truth that my brief jail-house experience brought home was the fact that ***a prisoners life is one of humiliation and even suffering***. There is no dignity in the cell or in prison. This too was Paul's experience as he narrates in II Cor 11:23 when trying to answer those who were snobbing him in Corinth. “. . . *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, . . .*”

He did not seek to raise his esteem up in the eyes of his hearers but instead went on to say in 12:5 “ . . . *but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.*”

CONCLUSION : Who are you? Has it been necessary to defend your dignity in recent days? Have you felt slighted when others did

not recognize and treat you for the important person that you are? Did you smart and seethe underneath because of it? Did your boss forget to honor your service, did he overlook it purposely? Were you humiliated by a colleague? What Paul teaches us does not excuse their behavior, but our reaction is a good indication of where we are and how important we see ourselves to be. Our quick response to defend our honor and to put others in their place shows our longing for recognition and for title.

III – Kenyan Embassy – Pretoria.

I was very quick to smart and under my breath wished I could get him sacked under the pretentious anger of defending our nations PR in South Africa, but all it showed is how difficult I find it to be treated by a servant. It revealed my heart and the hard-core pride that is still there even after 18 years of salvation. It revealed that I still count status and honor important to my standing, especially seeing how educated I am, and what important friends I associate with. It showed that I am still proud and wicked at heart, and not worth to participate in the titles that Paul used An Apostle, a Servant, a Prisoner!