

THE MEANING OF “IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST”

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“*Identification with Christ*” refers to a complex of factors within the reality of personal relationship, which we are calling interpersonalism. Interpersonalism is a worldview that considers persons in relationship as the highest frame of reference. That reality includes aspects like the following.

Faith in Christ as the object of identification in place of all others. We not only understand and believe intellectually, but trust actively that Christ is an “extension of,” and the human “manifestation of,” the other side of the divine-human relationship. We believe that identification with him leads to identification with the Father because that is the Father’s condition for identification with himself. We believe what Christ believes; we accept what he teaches about all things whereof he speaks. We put our trust in him.

Commitment by the whole person to Christ. Identification not only deals with overt behavior (outer action) but with feelings, thoughts, aspirations, motives, and attitudes (inner action). It gives a sense of identity, who we are, nearness, friendship, worth, thinking about, desire to spend time with, receiving and giving help, enjoying each other’s company, and the like—the same things that are true between human friends. They deal with more than dealing with sin; they deal with what we have together when sin does not get in the way or ruin things.

A sense of oneness with Christ to the exclusion of all others (EXCLUSIVE). We are Christians and wear his name; in so doing, we embody to other people a living **confession** of who we are.

Commitment to Christ’s lordship. That personal relationship is not between equals. So, identification means commitment to his values, which implies **repentance** from previous values and acts done in keeping with those other frames of reference. The commitment deals with moral behavior. Commitment to his lordship likewise means commitment to his purposes, which implies repentance from previous purposes and other purposes. It includes participation in his work, which deals with service.

Commitment to the degree (TOTAL) and length (PERMANENT) of Christ’s obedience to the Father. His was obedient to death and until death. With Job we say, in effect, “*Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him*” (Job 13:15).

Continued involvement with him. People we identify with we want to be around and do things with, for, and like. So it is when we identify with Christ. We want to be part of him and “take part” with him.

Doing our goodness toward Christ. **First**, Christian goodness means more than conforming behaviors to a standard of morality and duty. It means directing our actions toward a Person in love and service. These values and purposes are personalized in that they lie in him as a person, not in ideas period, in a standard of behavior, in words or in a book. Christian goodness is not just goodness, but goodness that honors him—being good with him in mind. **Second**, it means doing toward him rather than someone else. **Third**, it means doing our goodness as to Christ even when our actions are not done directly to him, that is, when the actions are other than acts of worship and service. It embodies the reality Jesus describes in Matthew 25:31-46: “*Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these brothers of mine, you have done it to me*” (cp. Hebrews 6:10; Proverbs 19:7; contrast 14:31). Identification means doing our goodness in the name of Christ (Matthew

10:40-42; cp. Mark 9:41). It means doing our acts to him more than to human persons (Colossians 3:23-24; Ephesians 6:5-6; 5:22?).

Identity with Christ means interpersonal relationship with Christ and acknowledges his lordship over us. Identification involves our sense of identity that corresponds to appropriate knowledge, actions, feelings, and motives, that is, with who we are, what we believe, how we feel, what we do, and why we do it. It incorporates the change from alternatives implied by these things. Identification summarizes faith, repentance, and confession, and extends to their formal expression in **baptism** and **communion**, which correspond respectively with initial and continued identity with Christ (unto identity with God).

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