

Message Notes

The American Sovereign Self

Scripture Passages

(taken from the New International Version)

Introduction - "What's water?"

How do we engage with "the world" today?

Isolation

Fight

Simulate

Learn and Filter

Today's Message:

The Identity Narrative: The American Sovereign Self
You just need to be true to yourself. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

The Identity Narrative Clarified

In historical thinking

In contemporary culture

Filtering the Cultural Dogma: "The Sovereign Self"

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

What is Paul doing here?

What constitutes real "wisdom according to Paul?"

What is Biblical Identity?

The Creation of Human Identity

Genesis 1:26-28

The Confusion/Corruption of Human Identity

Genesis 3:1-8

The Reinstatement of Human Identity

John 3:1-18

The Restoration of Human Identity

Galatians 2:20-21

A little thought experiment:

What if God's thoughts were the ones that mattered to me most?

Gospel Application - *What do I need to filter through what God says to be true about my identity and worth?*

How about in how I view others?

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 3:4

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁴"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

John 3

¹Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

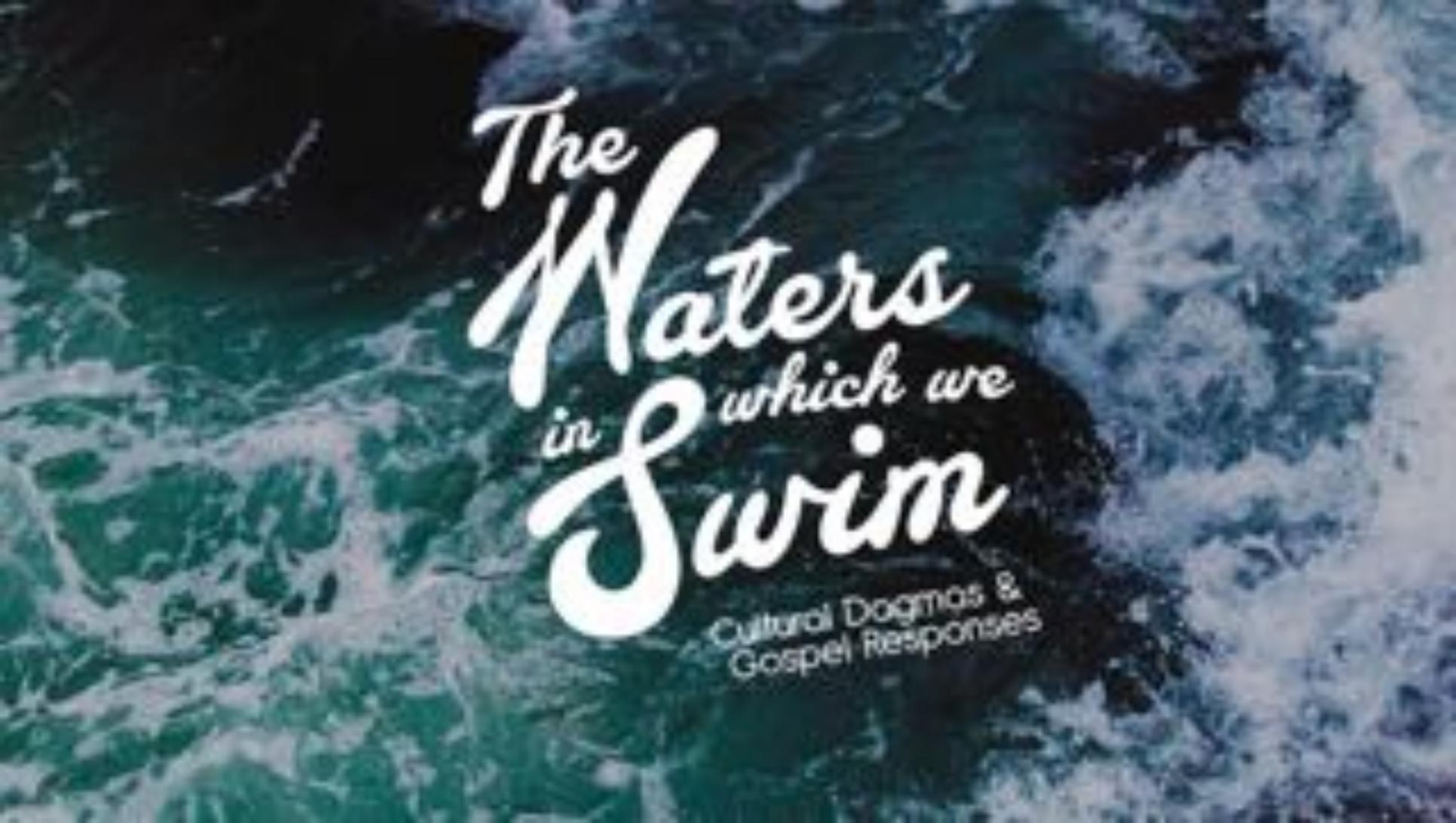
¹⁰"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Galatians 2:20-21

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

An aerial photograph of a river with white-water rapids. A large, dark rock sits in the center of the river, creating a focal point. The water is a mix of deep blue and white foam. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The
Waters
in which we
Swim

Cultural Dogmas &
Gospel Responses

The New City Catechism

Devotional

Introduction by
Timothy Keller

God's Truth
for Our Hearts
& Minds



The New City Catechism

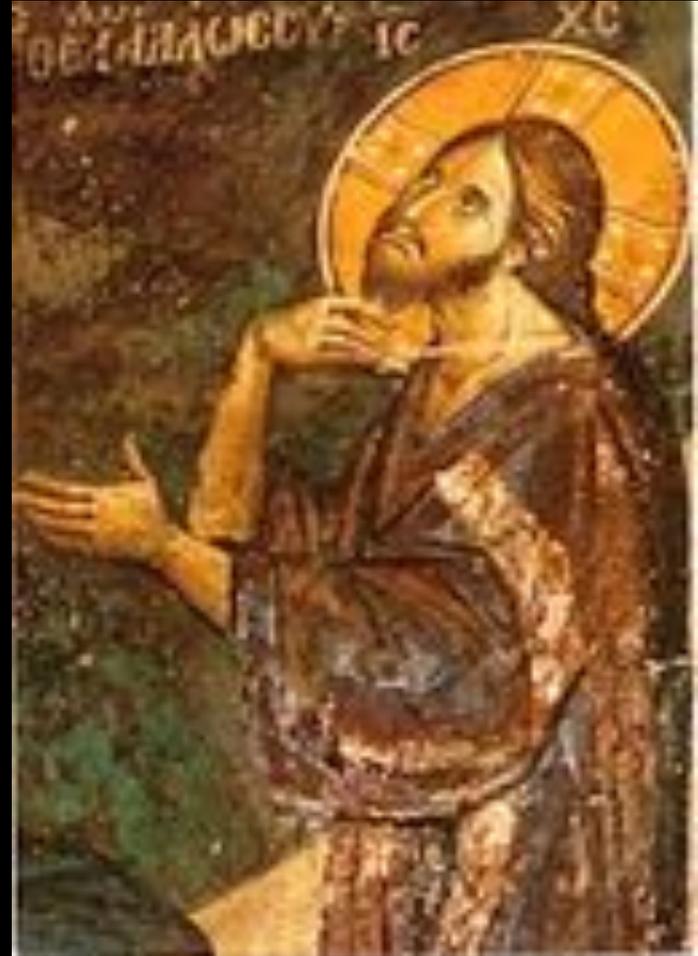
52 Questions
& Answers
for Our Hearts
& Minds

Introduction by
Kathy Keller



John 17

¹⁴I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.



How do we “interact” with culture (the world)?



1. Don't be OF the world

ISOLATION

How do we “interact”
with culture (the world)?

KILL OR BE EATEN

2. Attack the world

FIGHT



How do we “interact”
with culture (the world)?



3. We are IN the world

SIMULATE

How do we “interact”
with culture (the world)?

4. IN but not OF

LEARN AND FILTER



This week's message:

The Identity Narrative:

The American Sovereign Self

The Narrative:

You just be true to yourself.

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Understanding The Narrative:

The American Sovereign Self



Many argue that the most fundamental of the late-modern narratives is that of identity – that we must discover our deepest desires and longings and then do all we can to realize them, regardless of constraint or opposition. Sociologist Robert Bellah has called this narrative “expressive individualism”; I will call it the “sovereign self.”

We should start by recognizing the great good ushered in by the modern emphasis on the individual...



Christianity has always seen the importance of the heart and its loves. Augustine's Confessions represented an innovation in the history of human thought: a thoroughgoing examination of inner motivations and desires. Unlike the thinkers of classical antiquity, Christians regarded emotions as something not to be ignored or simply suppressed but instead to be examined and redirected toward God. Much of the modern understanding of the feelings and the self has grown from these Christian roots.



“ The new late-modern narrative, however, goes beyond merely understanding and directing our own passions to enthroning them... [Now] identity is not realized, as in traditional societies, by sublimating our individual desires for the good of our family and people. Instead we become ourselves only by asserting our individual desires against society, by expressing our feelings and fulfilling our dreams regardless of what anyone says...



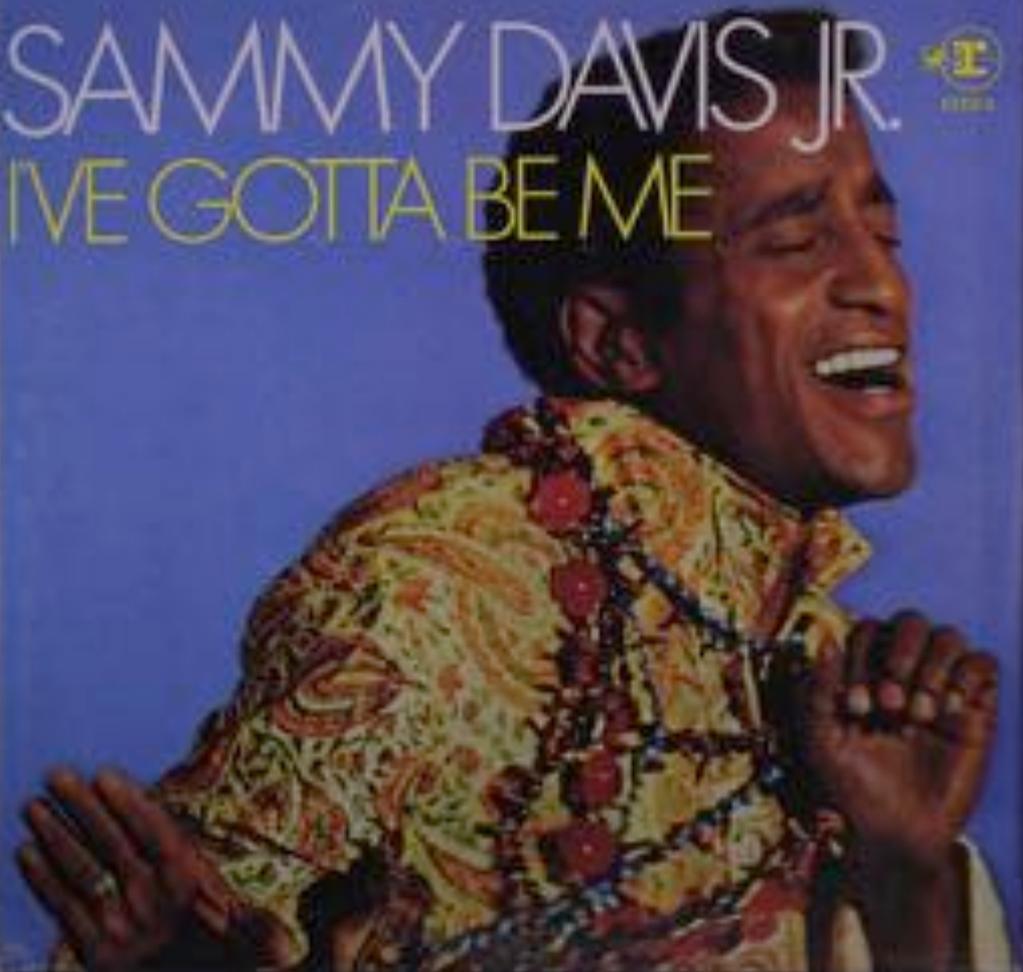
You cannot get significance through self-recognition; it must come in great measure from others. In the end, you can't name yourself or bless yourself. You can't ultimately say to yourself, I don't care that everyone I know thinks I'm a monster. I love myself and that is all that matters. That would not convince us of our worth, unless we were mentally unsound. We need someone from outside to say we are of great worth, and the greater the worth of the person telling us so, the more powerful that recognition is to our identity formation. So if we try to authenticate and validate ourselves, we place ourselves in an infinite loop of delusion that will lead to either narcissism or self-loathing.

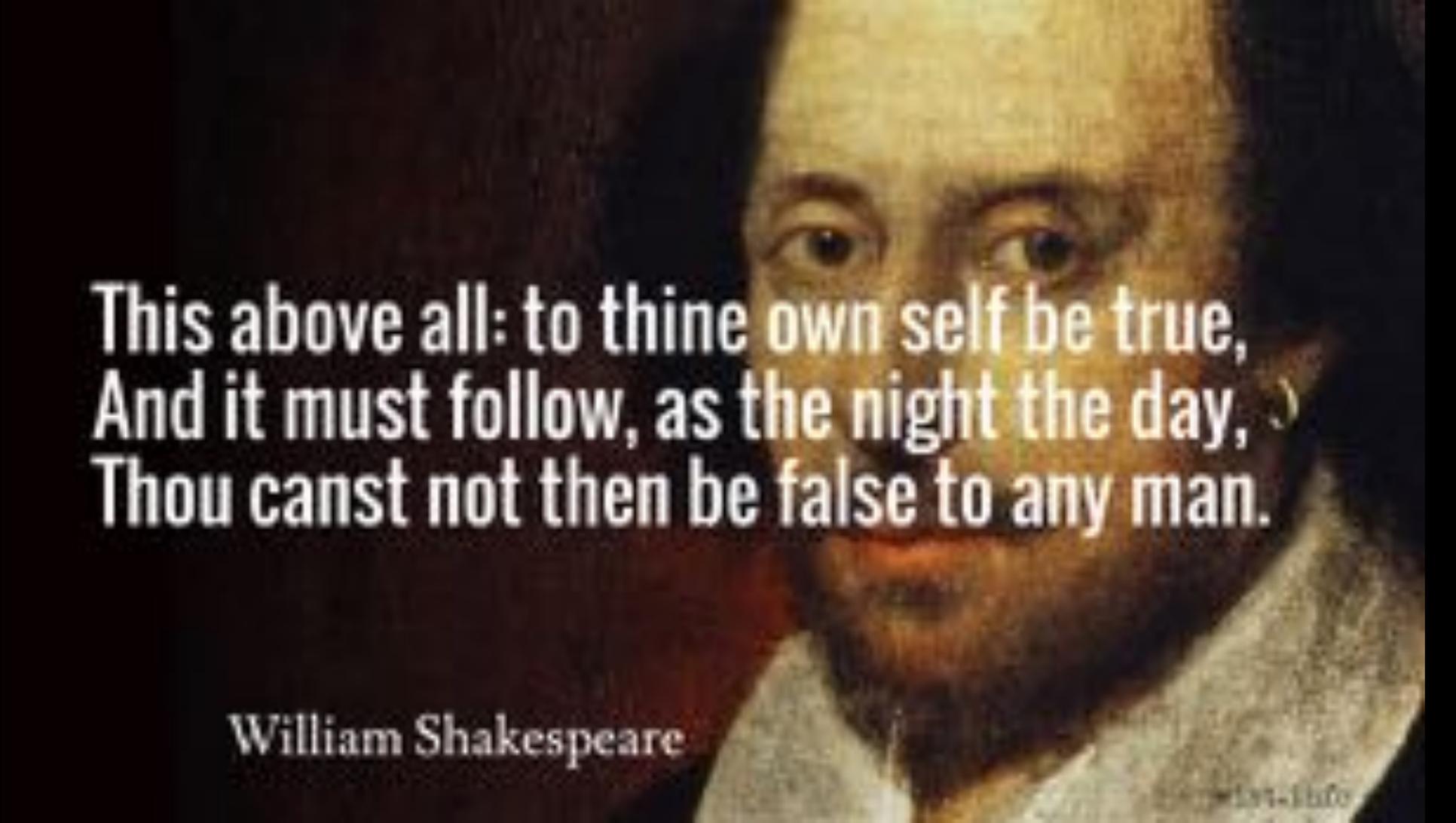
~Keller, Timothy. Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism (pp. 133-140). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



STEREO

SAMMY DAVIS JR.
I'VE GOTTA BE ME



A close-up portrait of William Shakespeare, showing his face and a white ruff collar. The background is dark and out of focus.

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

William Shakespeare



LET IT GO

It's funny how some distance makes
everything seem small
And the fears that once controlled me
can't get to me at all
It's time to see what I can do
To test the limits and break through
No right, no wrong, no rules for me
I'm free
Let it go, let it go
I am one with the wind and sky
Let it go, let it go
You'll never see me cry
Here I stand and here I stay
Let the storm rage on



**Filtering the Cultural Dogma of
"The Sovereign Self"**



1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

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What is Biblical Human Identity?



The Creation of Human Identity

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

The Confusion/Corruption of Human Identity

Genesis 3:1-8

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”

The Confusion/Corruption of Human Identity

Genesis 3:1-8

⁴You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The Confusion/Corruption of Human Identity

Genesis 3:1-8

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

The Reinstatement of Human Identity

John 3:1-18

¹Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

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The Restoration of Human Identity

Galatians 2:20-21

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!



The question of identity is not
“who am I?” but “whose am I?”



~ Keller, Timothy. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (pp. 133-140).
Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Imagine an Anglo-Saxon warrior in Britain in AD 800. He has two very strong inner impulses and feelings. One is aggression. He loves to smash and kill people when they show him disrespect. Living in a shame-and-honor culture with its warrior ethic, he will identify with that feeling. He will say to himself, That's me! That's who I am! I will express that. The other feeling he senses is same-sex attraction. To that he will say, That's not me. I will control and suppress that impulse.



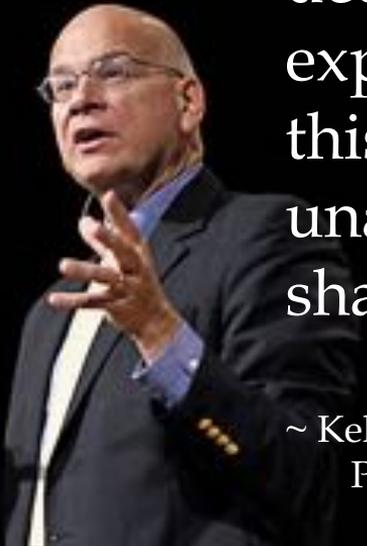


Now imagine a young man walking around Manhattan today. He has the same two inward impulses, both equally strong, both difficult to control. What will he say? He will look at the aggression and think, This is not who I want to be, and will seek deliverance in therapy and anger-management programs. He will look at his sexual desire, however, and conclude, That is who I am.



“ What does this thought experiment show us? Primarily it reveals that we do not get our identity simply from within. Rather, we receive some interpretive moral grid, lay it down over our various feelings and impulses, and sift them through it. This grid helps us decide which feelings are “me” and should be expressed — and which are not and should not be. So this grid of interpretive beliefs — not an innate, unadulterated expression of our feelings — is what shapes our identity.

~ Keller, Timothy. Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism (pp. 133-140). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

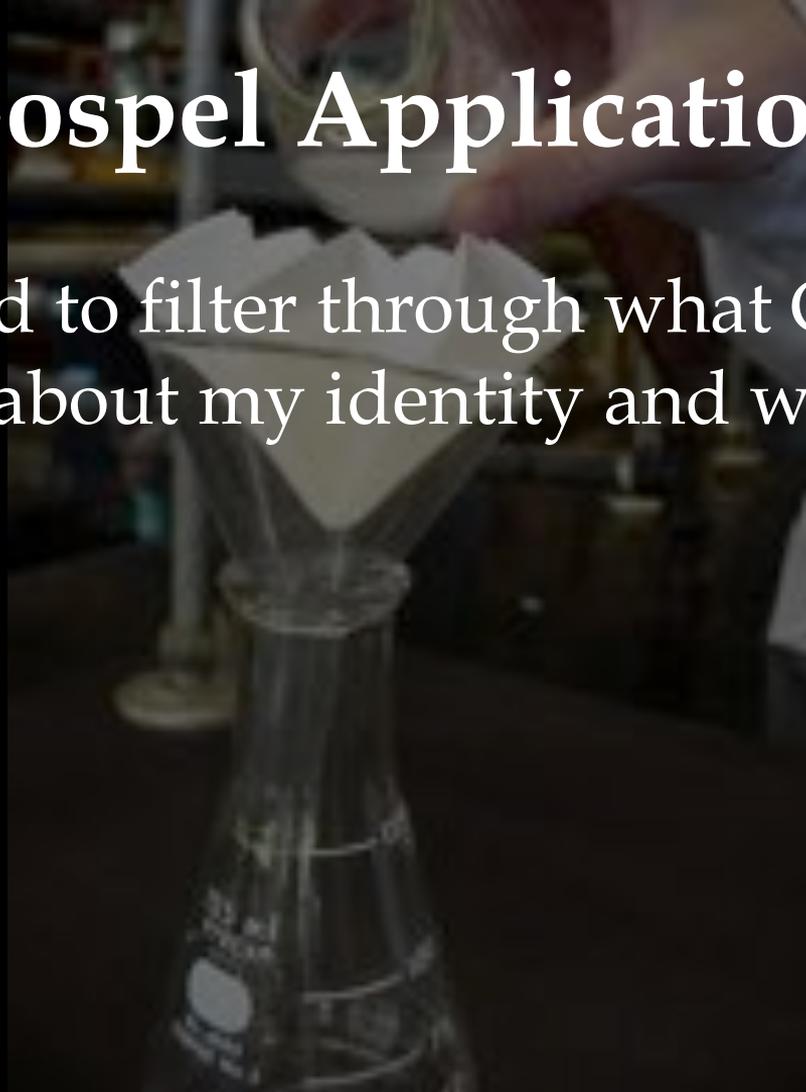


Gospel Application:

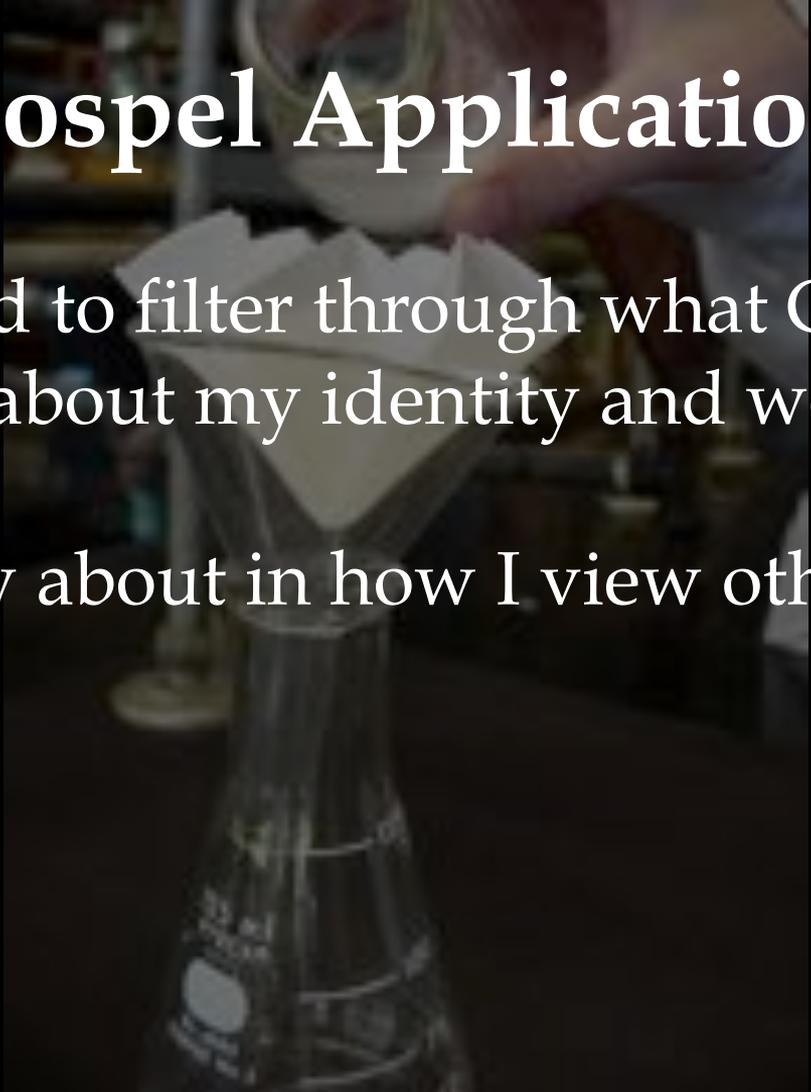


Gospel Application:

What do I need to filter through what God says to be true about my identity and worth?



Gospel Application:

A background image showing a glass funnel placed inside a glass beaker. The funnel is white and has a scalloped edge. The beaker is clear glass and has some faint markings on it. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a laboratory or kitchen setting.

What do I need to filter through what God says to be true about my identity and worth?

How about in how I view others?