

## Introduction:

What is identity theft? There is much talk these days about identity theft. There are those who steal other peoples' identities and seek to use the stolen identity to purchase goods and services illegally.

Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personally identifying information, like your name, Social Security number, or credit card number, without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes.

The FTC estimates that as many as 9 million Americans have their identities stolen each year. In fact, you or someone you know may have experienced some form of identity theft.

The crime takes many forms. Identity thieves may rent an apartment, obtain a credit card, or establish a telephone account in your name. You may not find out about the theft until you review your credit report or a credit card statement and notice charges you didn't make—or until you're contacted by a debt collector.

Identity theft is serious. While some identity theft victims can resolve their problems quickly, others spend hundreds of dollars and many days repairing damage to their good name and credit record. Some consumers victimized by identity theft may lose out on job opportunities, or be denied loans for education, housing or cars because of negative information on their credit reports. In rare cases, they may even be arrested for crimes they did not commit.

How do thieves steal an identity?

Identity theft starts with the misuse of your personally identifying information such as your name and Social Security number, credit card numbers, or other financial account information. For identity thieves, this information is as good as gold. Skilled identity thieves may use a variety of methods to get hold of your information, including:

1. Dumpster Diving. They rummage through trash looking for bills or other paper with your personal information on it.

2. Skimming. They steal credit/debit card numbers by using a special storage device when processing your card.

3. Phishing. They pretend to be financial institutions or companies and send spam or pop-up messages to get you to reveal your personal information.

4. Changing Your Address. They divert your billing statements to another location by completing a change of address form.

5. Old-Fashioned Stealing. They steal wallets and purses; mail, including bank and credit card statements; pre-approved credit offers; and new checks or tax information. They steal personnel records, or bribe employees who have access.

6. Pretexting. They use false pretenses to obtain your personal information from financial institutions, telephone companies, and other sources.

We certainly do have an identity that is defined by our social security number, driver's license, credit cards, and by a long string of certificates and documents that have reaffirmed who we are in school, work, and in the community. What about our spiritual identity? Is there such a thing as spiritual identity theft? ABSOLUTELY!

Lesson:

Today I want to address Spiritual Identity Theft. Identity theft can easily be defined as pretending to be somebody you are not, this is usually done for the purpose of obtaining benefits that are not due to you or getting them at the cost of someone else.

Spiritual Identity Theft then is pretending to be a christian when you are not. Acting like a christian when you are not truly behaving like a christian. Speaking with the authority of Christ when you do not yield to His authority yourself. Spiritual Identity theft is the stealing of Christ's identity.

Who was Jesus? What was His identity?

Beginning with Jesus' Baptism, he was given an identity that came from God. God called him his Son, whom He Loved. Matthew 3:16-17-16, ***As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*** and in Matthew 4:1-11, ***1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*** 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so

*that you will not strike your foot against a stone." 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

We see how the identity of Jesus empowered Him as He was tempted by the devil...

*Jesus asked the question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" in Matthew 16:13-16, 13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus and His disciples warned us about this every time they talked about false prophets, identity theft is nothing new. Here is just one example, II Corinthians 11:12-15, 12 And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

It is important to know who we are.

It creates balance, direction, and focus in our lives.

Our teen years and early adulthood are often so turbulent because we are trying to figure out who we are...

When we know who we are, or what we are, then we know how to behave and what to do, or at least what to work towards, I Corinthians 13:11, ***11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.***

Think about what Proverbs 22:6 tells us about helping our children figure out who they are... ***6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*** (creasing the demo car...) We are vulnerable to Satan when we don't know who we are and we can fall victim to false prophets at those times...

Sometimes people do not know that they are victims of identity theft... There is an interesting, certainly terrifying, twist to spiritual identity theft that we need to note. Some people fall victim to spiritual identity theft by being led into what they believe is Christianity, they have put their trust in someone other than Christ and they believe they have found Christ when in fact they have been lied to and have fallen victim to a liar... Matthew 7:21-23, ***21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***

*22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*

We are guilty of identity theft when:

We claim to be acting as Christ when indeed we are not

Would the things people see us do truly represent Christ? Are we the good Samaritan or the Pharisee?

Do our actions model the gospel of Christ?  
II Corinthians 3:18, *18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

We claim to be speaking as Christ when indeed we are not

Do the words that come out of our mouth encourage or discourage? Ephesians 4:29, *29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

Do our words teach the gospel of Christ?

Conclusion:

Matthew 7:13-14, *13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14*

***But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*** (vs. Matthew 7:21b, "but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.")

Who are you? Are you a Christian? Are you faking it? How do you know, did you follow the will of the Father who is in heaven?

You have to ask the right question to get the right diagnosis...

(relay example... until a mechanic asked the right question I had NO idea what the problem was and continued to spend hundreds of dollars and never got close to addressing the REAL problem...

You can't fix a problem you are unaware of or don't know what the real problem is. As most people try to figure out what's wrong in their life they rarely consider their relationship with God as the problem...