

People of a certain age may be familiar with a 1985 movie called *The Breakfast Club*. The whole movie takes place in one day, specifically, March 24, 1984. That's when five students from Shermer High School have to report at 7:00 a.m.—hence the name *Breakfast Club*—on a Saturday for **all**-day detention. A voice-over at the beginning describes the five as “a brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal.” That's what makes the movie so good—that these five students are so **different**. If it weren't for detention, the quintet would **never** be in the same room, let alone **speak** to one another. What makes the movie so deep, so profound—profound enough to serve as a sermon illustration!—is that (after a bit of rough start) they not only **talk** but also **joke, argue, laugh and cry with one another, and** they **even** become great friends. So, here's a question: Why didn't that happen **before**?

Well, if you've been to high school, (and in one sense I'm not sure we ever truly get out), you know the answer. Because when your identity, your who-you-are, is a brain or an athlete or a basket case or a princess or a criminal, you hang out with the brains or the athletes or the basket cases or the princesses or the criminals—because if you **don't**, if you fail to live up to the **expectations** of those groups, those tribes, those cliques, then you risk getting the boot, having no identity at all, and eating your cafeteria Tater Tots all by yourself. So, what happened with the Breakfast Club? (Pause) They got a new **identity**, specifically one as detainees- high schoolers thrown into detention together. This gave them a new identity, a **common** identity that trumped all those others and **freed** them, in this case, to be **friends**.

Now, picture in your mind a pre-Damascus-road Paul as a student at “Shermer High School”. Please indulge me this morning as I use the Breakfast Club and their school as a metaphor for a world in which we're enslaved to one identity or another.

So, before he became a Christian, what was Paul's group? What was his tribe, his clique? A Jew? A Pharisee? Top of his class? Zealous enforcer? Yes, to all of the above! Paul had been quite proud of **all** of these identities which set him apart from and above others. In Philippians

chapter 3 he brags: I was “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil 3:4–6).

Before Jesus met him on the way to Damascus, these are what Saul just **was**. This was what **drove** his every action and interaction, and without which there **was** no Saul.

Now, please imagine yourself at “Shermer High School.” What is your group, your tribe, your clique? (Pause) If you’re not really sure, perhaps some diagnostic questions will help to identify the tribe from which you get your “who am I?”

-Whose approval do you need or crave?

-Whose *disapproval* would crush you?

-Whom would you most like to see fail (and there are some!)?

-If you’re exhausted right now, is it because you feel you can’t keep up? And, if so, with whom are you trying to keep up?

It is hard to see and admit (in reality, to confess!) how we get enslaved to the expectations of the brains, athletes, basket cases, princesses, criminals, and so on, —but we do!

Often those who most deny it are the ones who are most enslaved. Everyone has a desire to fit in somewhere, somehow, even if it’s fitting in with people who say that don’t want to fit in with others.

In our text, we see how Paul has overcome all of the previous identities he was so proud of and how he shattered all the previous expectations people had about **him**. In verse 19, Paul reasons that since he is, “free from all, **I have made myself a servant to all**, that I might win more of them” (v 19). (“Since” may be a better rendering than “though” in the ESV.)

So, what **happened** to Paul so that he could recognize his earlier life as Jew/top-notch-Pharisee/enforcer to be **slavery** to the group, the tribe, the clique, with all of those expectations?

Jesus! Jesus happened to him. Jesus **transformed** Saul! Jesus showed up and gave him a new identity!

Beginning at Paul's baptism, a few short days after his encounter on the road to Damascus, the risen Lord Jesus gave Paul a new identity, a **sure** identity, an identity surer than **death**! The gracious Jesus gave Paul an identity he didn't have to prove, or earn, or "virtue signal" again and again!

The forgiving Jesus gave Paul an identity that he can't mess up! He is a redeemed child of God. All of his sins have been washed away. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Priceless treasure Jesus gave Paul an identity that made all the other stuff pulling his strings and that he'd **thought** was so important- his heritage, his pedigree, his religious fervor; look like a pile of "rubbish" as Paul calls it in Philippians 3:8.

Just like you! All the same is true of you! Who are **you**? A brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, a criminal? No—at least not first, and definitely not **only**!

Your name tag reads **Baptized Child of God!** You are forever loved by Him! Fully forgiven by Him! You are God's treasured possession, His beloved child, Jesus' Little Lamb, friend of Christ, and the list goes on!

Let's go back and visit the Breakfast Club one more time. While in detention at Shermer High, each of the five was supposed to be writing a thousand-word essay answering the question: "Who do you think you are?"

While they don't get around to writing until the end— and actually "the brain" writes one essay on behalf of all five—the point is that by 4:00 p.m., March 24, the detainees were **not** who they thought they were at 7:00 a.m.

A question that goes left unanswered in the movie is what happened on Monday, March 26, when the brain, athlete, basket case, princess, and criminal went back to Shermer High. Did the common identity forged on March 24 **stand**, or do they go back to the "slavery" of the cliques? We never find out.

By the time Paul wrote his well-**over**-a-thousand-word essay to the Corinthians, he knew very well who **he** was and to what he **was** or **wasn't**

beholden. Paul doesn't have to live up to the Corinthians' expectations for him as one of the strong ones, that is someone who never fails.

The now-believing-in-Jesus Paul has a new identity. In Jesus, Paul is **free**. *Since* he is free from all the enslaving identities and expectations, he is free to, well, do what comes **naturally** to the new identity!

Gripped and captivated by the gracious call of Jesus, secure in an identity that cannot be taken away from him, Paul does what he cannot **help** but do: namely, preaching the Gospel by which enslaved sinners are set free. ***With no one left to impress, Paul is free to "become all things to all people"*** (v 22).

So now it's **your** March 26, 1984. You Are Free in Jesus. What are **you**— a beloved Child of God—now **free** to do?

Your calling is probably **different** from Paul's, but your **identity** is the same. Jesus has claimed you as one of His own. "God's Own Child I Gladly Say It, I Am Baptized into Christ", as the hymn beautifully puts it. Yes, you are a member of the Body of Christ. So, if you can stand the hokeyness... welcome to the **Jesus** Club! Because in much the same way as the five members of the Breakfast Club found a way to break free of their former identities, in Christ Jesus, we truly **are** set free! Each of us is a new creation with a new identity that no one can take from us as Paul wrote it in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all **one** in Christ Jesus." ***That's*** our club! ***That's*** our identity!

As a Child of God then, what are you now **free** to do? You are free to live your life for Christ and in service to others. You're free to let the fruit of the Spirit have its way in the way you live your life towards others with 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, against such things there is no law' (Galatians 5). You truly are free! Thanks be to God, forever free! (pause)

So... A brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, a criminal . . . butcher, baker, candlestick maker. ***Whoever*** you are, ***you've*** been transformed by Jesus. He's marked you as His own. There's no one to impress. Just people to love. Amen.