

# Who Do You Think You Are?

Series: Becoming Who We Are

Brad Bailey - January 12, 2014

Introduction [1]

It's a **great big new year** so we're **going to start** with a **great big question**:

**Who do you think you are?** That is, **what is your ultimate identity?** **How would you finish the most basic statement: "I am \_\_\_\_\_?"**

As you ponder that little question, **I want to suggest** that...

Life is generally lived without ever answering that most fundamental question.

**Our lives become a long process in which we become attached to various ways of seeing ourselves that don't really answer who we really are.**

**It starts when you're little.** Were you the first-born? Were you the baby in the family? What were you like? Were you the funny kid? Were you the chubby kid? Were you the athletic kid? Were you the arty kid?

**What nicknames** did they give you? Did your parents have a nickname for you? Did your friends have a nickname for you? Was it a good nickname? Was it a bad nickname? **How did they see you,** and subsequently, **how did you see yourself?**

As we continue forward in life and we hit **the teen years**...the ones we **often blank out** because they were **so confusing**. You hit junior high or middle school, you have no idea who you are. All of a sudden, you're in a new school surrounded by people trying to find their place...and you discover that what you look like really matters... the clothes, hair, the height. We wonder: Am I one who is part of the crowd that I want to be a part of or always on the outside looking in? And we have **new authority figures** with **different ideas** about who we are ...or at least **who we should be.**

**You hit college** and all of a sudden you've got an **opportunity** to completely **reinvent yourself**. We think it's **finally time to define who we really are**...as we begin to make our own choices about moral lifestyle... and begin to take up a degree and career path.

And then perhaps, one day, you **get your career job**. Then it **consumes all of your identity**. "Now I know who I am, and if I can succeed and thrive in this vocational path, that will define who I am."

**And if we get married**...what we thought was going to help us become who we want to be...doesn't turn out to be so simple...because they **seem to have their own ideas.**

**If we become parents**...that often becomes a **mixture of taking away** some of the old identity while giving us a new one.

> **And we become identity givers who are still not sure who we really are.**

**We look at others** to define us...and ultimately we are reduced to some **complicated social exchange of needs.**

**We look down at the ground of our productivity** and we become **human doings** measured merely by our output.

**We look within...**and we become self absorbed and ultimately self-consumed.

**Today... we are going to look to God.** I believe that God...as our creator sees that apart from Him...we are **lost trying to define ourselves** by *temporal traits*. We are looking at the **fallen condition** and trying to define ourselves by **mere descriptions**.

**We're going to spend the next several weeks letting God answer this question as expounded upon in the Biblical Book of Ephesians.**

But first...take a quick look at **Genesis 1:26-28**

Genesis means "**beginnings**." It's the first book of the Bible because it's **the book of beginnings**. And there, we find the beginning of everything, except for God, of course, because he is the Creator of all things. And there we find the beginning of our identity.

Genesis 1:26-28 (NLT)

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.

And here's what the Bible says:

**"Then God said, 'Let us.'"** There's an **allusion there to the Trinity: one God, three persons**, us.

**"In our image, after our likeness."** I want you to see, that's identity language. Who are you? God says, "I've made you in my image and likeness."

> **That's your truest most original identity.** Human life was created as a bearer of God's image on earth.

**We are created as a reflection of God...meant to be mirrors of God in the created world.**

And what God says is that, **though he is spirit, he wants his attributes to be visible** on the earth. He wants creation to know something about him, and so he's made us as his mirrors. We are to reflect, to mirror, to show, to echo something of God's attributes to the world.

So many of our identity decisions are about, **"How will this make me look?"** That's the wrong question. **"How will this reflect God?"** That's the right question. "

That's **why Jesus is called the image of the invisible God**. That's why Jesus says, **"If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."**

**And we are clearly created distinct from God...and distinct from all other creatures.**

If we don't grasp this truth.. we float around with ideas that we are the ultimate...that we are god or gods...OR we think there is nothing special about our human nature.

We can come to accept that we're **nothing more than highly evolved animals**. We're just lucky animals with thumbs, that's all we are. Your identity is not reflected in your having a more evolved thumb.

### **In verse 28 -"Then God blessed them**

Adam and Eve **didn't do anything to obtain this identity**. God made them, God spoke to them, God defined them, and God blessed them. It's all God.

**Your identity is not achieved, it's received**. It's not something you do, it's something God does. It's not what you earn, it's what he gives.

And equally clear, is that **you're not more valuable than anyone** else and you are **not less valuable than anyone** else. All people equally bear the image and likeness of God. Male and female, young and old, black and white, rich and poor...all are made in the image and likeness and God, all have dignity, value, and worth.

**Now Genesis goes on to describe how we lost that identity** and blessing. **The story of Adam and Eve** is a **description of choosing to declare our autonomy from God**...to and we are told how the whole of human life shares in that position.

> For we are all in essence "in Adam." We belong to Adam.

Only God as he source can provide a plan that offers restoration.

**This is in part what Paul the Apostle captures in his letter to those who lived in the city of Ephesus**. In this letter...**Paul describes God's plan. It is called Ephesians because it begins stating it was written to those in the city of Ephesus. That is a city in which Paul introduced the good news of Christ and served to care and guide the church community for a couple years. But this letter** doesn't focus on any particular issues among those gathered in Ephesus, and some manuscripts don't include hat name of the church, so it was likely **intended to be a circular letter**, not meant for one church in particular.

**Let's listen to how these words begin...**

### **Ephesians 1:1-14 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. <sup>3</sup> All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. <sup>4</sup> Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. <sup>5</sup> God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. <sup>6</sup> So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. <sup>7</sup> He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. <sup>8</sup> He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup> God has now revealed to us his mysterious

plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure.<sup>10</sup> And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ— everything in heaven and on earth.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.<sup>12</sup> God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God.<sup>13</sup> And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.<sup>14</sup> The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

I know this is such a **lofty flow of thought** that it can be hard to grasp the breadth of things being said.

**Verses 3–14**, in the Greek text that your Bible is originally written in, it's **one sentence**. One. **Our English translation created 15 sentences**... but it was one intense sentence. You **English majors** are trying to take that in... you may want to correct his grammar...but it reflects the magnitude of what he is trying to capture.

> Paul is capturing **the HUGE reality of God's plan**...the most cosmic of proportion.

**Ephesians is an invitation into seeing the Divine drama...the big plan of God...and living out of that reality.**(I want to **encourage you to read... reflect...and let this shape your thoughts and soul.**)

> **But Paul begins by focusing on the enormous blessings that this includes for us.**

**Ephesians 1:3 (NLT)**

**All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.**

Most translations use the more literal phrase -"*In Christ*."

**In Christ I am blessed with every spiritual blessing**

**He is passionate that we grasp who we really are... not in ourselves...but "in Christ."**

**The Bible refers to Adam...as the "first Adam"...and Christ as the second Adam** ...because if we belong to Him...we have his life. It says we all belong to one or the other.

One of the great myths, particularly in the West, is that each of us is exclusively an isolated individual. We tend to have an identity based upon things like: "I young...old....black.... white...rich... poor .... winner...loser...single...married... divorced.

**Really**, there are **only two categories of human beings** today, yesterday, and tomorrow: those who are **in Adam**, and those who are **in Christ**. Those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ, **that's how God sees all of humanity in human history**.

**God sees each of our lives as fundamentally bound with one or the other...and all the consequences associated.**

**Here's how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22.**

**1 Corinthians 15:22 (NLT)**

Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

**1 Corinthians 15:22 (NIV)**

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

**We may think** that being tall...cool...smart... rich... really identifies who we are...but what really **identifies who we are is in these two terms: "we belong to Adam" or "we belong to Christ."** The **Bible speaks** of identity as **being in Adam or in Christ**, so much so that the Bible speaks of believers being "**in Christ**"... **no less than 216 times**. [2]

**We're all born in Adam. We all inherit from him a nature that is not aligned with God... we're physically alive, but spiritually dead to God.**

But **at the cross of Jesus Christ, he traded places with us. He literally traded places with me.** All of the death, all of the shame, all of the condemnation that I deserve went to Jesus. All of the forgiveness, all of the love, all of the grace that Jesus rightly has as the sinless Son of God comes to me. What that does is that changes our identity.

I want you to see this: **if you are in Christ, you are in Christ's position** and Christ took your position. He suffers and dies so that you might be blessed and live. Do you believe that God the Father loves the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that he is kind toward him, and gracious toward him, that his ear is attuned toward him, that his affection is devoted to him? If you are in Christ, you stand in the position of Christ. You are loved as Christ is loved, you are blessed as Christ is blessed, you are embraced and adored as Christ is embraced and adored.

**In Adam we are cursed, but in Christ we are blessed.**

> And what are these blessings?

**1. In Christ I am chosen**

Ephesians 1:4 (NLT)

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

When you consider that your life can be blessed through Christ....there's no more powerful point to start with than that of you having been CHOSEN by God. Start with the fact that God has CHOSEN you.

Maybe you were the kid who never got chosen for the team...always feel last and left out. Maybe you feel like you're never favored, you're never graced that way. In Christ, you're chosen.

By his WILL It means not by his obligation... but his will...he WANTED you.

I remember telling Leah at one point that while I need her...at least with a small "n"... what was more significant to me...was that I was choosing her.

Many of us may hope God needs us. There is something more powerful. He chose you.

You might think that means he doesn't really know you...that he made a mistake...because you feel unworthy..

You are unworthy... but in Christ he made you blameless...to redeem you in the goodness of his son...himself. In Christ you're holy. His perfection is your perfection.

## **2. In Christ I am adopted**

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT)

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus

**Some of us** may feel the **loss and limits** of really **belonging to a family**.

Forty percent of kids tonight go to bed without a father. And some of you had a dad, but he wasn't there or wasn't being what a father really is.

**God certainly designed the human experience of family** to provide an experience in belonging.

> But Jesus always knew that **family on earth is NOT the source of ultimate belonging**.

**He knew he belonged to His Father in heaven** more than an earthly family.

He said that **in the eternal realm we won't be given in marriage any longer...** we will belong together with God as our Father.

We will belong in spirit not blood...and it starts now...with our adoption.

[MD] -Some of you've **wrongly been told**, because of spirituality, that God is a force. He's not impersonal, he's personal.

**God's not a force, God's a Father.** God adopts us into his family.

But perhaps you think you're the bad child...well look at what Paul says next.

## **3. In Christ I am forgiven and free**

Ephesians 1:7-8 (NLT)

He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. <sup>8</sup> He has showered his kindness on us

So many of us naturally think God sees how poor tempered and selfish we are... how we may feel pretty **deprived or dirty**. We **naturally fear God's punishment**.

## > **God never punishes those who are in Christ... because he's already punished Christ.**

The wrath of God was poured out on the Son of God, not the children of God. Now, it is true we reap what sow. Sometimes we do something wrong and there's consequences for that, and that's God's way of helping us learn and grow.

## **4. In Christ I can know the will of God**

Ephesians 1:8-9 (NLT)

He has showered on us...all wisdom and understanding. God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ

Now you may not think you know what God's will is thorough out various decisions. We tend to think that our earthly choices for marriage and work and where we live...are what reflect God showing us His will.

It's a misguided way of thinking about life. A good father who blesses his children with his goodness...not by telling them who to marry and what job they must get...and where to live...but by sharing what life is really about...the big picture. It's about sharing what the real purpose of life is...the big plan.

> He is referring to the big will at work in life...because that is the one that defines and directs so much else.

He will explain more as we go through ...but it is to unite all things under Christ..

## **5. In Christ I have an inheritance [3]**

Ephesians 1:11 (NLT)

because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God

Imagine if you opened the mail one day and discovered that you have been given a huge inheritance from a relative.

Now imagine...you just got notice of an inheritance from the eternal realm ...it declares that you will be receiving what the eternal father and family holds...all that is lasting and good.

It states some of what is included...

- physically - freedom from all suffering and pain
- emotionally - no more sorrow and rooted in joy that lasts forever
- spiritually / relationally - in perfect peace with God

Sound like a good inheritance?

We get **some of it in this life**, the rest is awaiting us **in the life to come**.

This life may seem long...but the Bible refers to this "as **a little while**" ...because from an eternal perspective...it's a short time.

In Christ there is eternal life...and with it an inheritance of all that is eternal and good.

Is there anything to help secure this inheritance...like a deposit? that is the last thing Paul notes...

## **6. In Christ I have the Holy Spirit who secures my future**

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NLT)

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.

Jesus said he "will be with us always." He said that he and the Father will come make their home in us. How? By sending the Holy Spirit to indwell us. His divine nature has been sent to dwell within you.... in a way that identifies you. The Holy Spirit is the

### **Closing Prayer / Ministry**

Today some of us may recognize that we are still "in Adam"... still separated from God and claiming our own autonomy.

If you desire to exchange your position with Christ.... to receive his forgiveness on the cross...i invited you to join me in this prayer (...)

Some of us realize we need to lay down our lesser identities and open ourselves of the blessings that truly define you.

[This could itself be done in two ways:

- a time in prayer for all to do so in their own hearts as led to (seems fitting for the start of such a series...and having newcomers / long service)
- have special invitation to come down for prayer to do so.]

**Resources:** The title and general thematic idea used for the first part of our series on Ephesians was drawn and adapted from Mark Driscoll 'Who Do You Think You Are?: Finding Your True Identity in Christ.' The introduction to of series and some portions of the first few messages may draw from his messages, but it is generally the title we drew upon; Some notes I found that articulated what I found an accurate summary of Paul's focus throughout Ephesians were from Leavenworth Church of Christ; Mark Goens (Riverside Community Church);

### **Notes:**

1. This introduction drew from some of the flow of Mark Driscoll in an introductory message on Ephesians focused on identity.

2. Jesus spoke of the significance of life being found "in him"...in relationship to his life. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 (NIV)

3. The Greek word "inheritance" - τῆς κληρονομίας klērōō, klay-rō'-o;; to allot, i.e. (fig.) to assign (a privilege):— obtain an inheritance. Strong, J. (1996). The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.