

In Christ I am Blessed

Series: Made for More

Brad Bailey – April 24, 2022

Introduction

Welcome... **wherever you find yourself.**

I am **excited to launch into a new series** and focus today...one that really **flows from last Sunday's celebration** of the resurrection of Christ.

As we began to engage last week...when Christ arose... it created a **crack not only in human history** by which we date our calendars...but it brought the **power to be restored to the source of unending life and love.**

In the risen Christ was the **reality of being made for more.**

The truth is that apart from God we spend our lives with **shadowy identities... defined by the surface** of what **we see and do.**

Who do you think you are?

That is, **what is your ultimate identity? How would you finish the statement: "I am _____."**

If we're honest... it's not a question that we may be quick to answer.

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 **artsy** kid? But our ultimate identity is not simply our general traits.

As we continue forward in life and we hit **the teen years...** we usually become **even more uncertain...**and **try to find some group to identify with. It's like "survival of the fittest."** **But our ultimate identity is not simply some social fit.**

Often in college and young adult years we sense an **opportunity** to completely **reinvent ourselves.** We think it's **finally time to define who we really are...**as we begin to make our own choices. But our ultimate identity is not simply that we can make choices.

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 that spouse has a way of knowing that we may not be all that we think we are. They **seem to have their own ideas.**

If we become parents... we can find ourselves in the **strange position** of becoming **identity giverswho are still not sure who we really are.**

The truth is that...

If we look at others to define us... ultimately we are reduced to some desperate need to please and appease the needs of others.

If we look at our accomplishments ...we become **human doings.**

If we dare to look within... we will face **more questions than answers...** we may feel some genuine impressions about ourselves...but we're separated from the ultimate source.

Only God as the source of our existence can tell us who we really are.

So 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 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." ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ 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 to be a representation of God's nature in the created world.

So many of our identity decisions are about, "**How will this make me look?**" That's the wrong question. "**How am I to represent the likeness of God...the nature of God?**" That's the right question. "

You not just distinct because from other creatures you have an opposable thumb. You're distinct because you are a **unique representation of God.**

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 true identity was never achieved, it was 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 were created to bear 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.

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

Humankind has been **living outside the blessing... living in a world of shadows.** We see only shadows that are cast by the light... shadows that created religious ideas... and identities.

But as Paul sees... that **author has now entered the story...** beyond the shadows....and brought the light and love of God.

In that light we see who we really are meant to be.

This is in part what Paul the Apostle captures in his letter to those who lived in the city of Ephesus.

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 that 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)

¹ 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. ² May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. ³ 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. ⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ 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. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. If you were

an **English major... 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...**of what God has done to unite us with Him...through Christ.

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."** And in many passages Paul uses this **in contrast to being "in Adam."**

So here he is speaking about all the blessings that come with being "in Christ" verses being "in Adam." So let's take a moment to realize what this transition represents.

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.

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.

Being "in Adam" is to bear the nature of autonomy... of that which is depicted in the story of Adam and Eve choosing to accept the lie that they should reject God and seek to be their own gods.

We may not relate to having made such **a conscious choice**...but I believe if we consider what is really inside of our natural human nature... it rings true.

We bear something wonderful and beautiful...but we **also bear a self willed orientation**. No one has to teach us to be self-serving. We're like an apple tree. Even before the apple tree bears apples...it's an apple tree. That is it's nature.

We operate in relationship to **our own orbit**. ... an orbit that is not the true orbit...an orbit that lies in the outer darkness. We exist in this temporal world with temporal physical life...but our spiritual nature is not united with God. We may have experiences of God... but we have not become reconciled... not overcome the nature of our separation... our autonomy.

But God began to speak into our world... and said through the prophets that **another will come**.

And so the one comes who as a human... a **human representative** ...whose nature is **entirely united in God**. And he provides a way to **share that position with us**....and that nature to begin in us.

And this is what Paul is describing... Christ has come as a new representative....and those who receive his representation... receive his position with God.

Just as we were united in the nature of Adam...we can become united with the nature of Christ.

It's a spiritual union... in which he **sends his Spirit to dwell in us**. We are united in his death and resurrection...in his union with God... and his nature is now at work in us. [1]

Some may think that they want to know God... and respect Jesus... but **don't quite understand** the way that the Christian belief puts so much **emphasis on Jesus**. In a world of different religions... as we call them today.... It may seem like Jesus could certainly deserve to be recognized as among the great teachers... perhaps the greatest...but there's no need to judge other religious beliefs by seeing anything exclusive about the nature of Christ.

I can totally understand that sense. **If he was simply one of several teachers teaching how to be enlightened. But everything about Christ** is about something far **more powerful and profound**.

God had long spoken about sending one to redeem humanity by his atoning sacrifice.

Jesus spoke of becoming united in Him,,, as the one the Father sent to redeem us.

And that is what is being described here.

It's about receiving that which restores the very relationship that we were created in.

It's about who we belong to.

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]

In Christ, we are restored to the blessing we were meant to know and live out of.

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 am young...old....black.... white...rich... poor winner...loser...single...married... divorced."

C.S. Lewis "Your real self will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him."

But the truth is that who we really are... is defined by what lies in Christ... in belonging to Christ. **The Book of Ephesians is written to expound on our true identity in Christ...to grasp who we really are... not in ourselves...but "in Christ."**

It strikes me that we tend to think of being stewards of our time, treasure and talent...but Paul is revealing that as vital as these are... the most vital thing we are stewards of...is our identity.

I am blessed with every spiritual blessing

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

I am blessed with every spiritual blessing

> 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...and 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.

(**Now I so deeply need her** that I can lose sight...but I never forget the power of choosing her as well.)

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 he chooses those who will choose him... and does so with grace.

DENICE THE MENACE...Tommy... Mrs Wilson...

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.

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. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us

When Christ was crucified... it was painful to face... and still is...but it was the pain of watching sacrificial love. God took it all.

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. God will allow the natural consequences of our choices.

But the ultimate consequences... the weight of our shame and separation...he has paid for.

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

God as our Father doesn't just forgive us and set us free ...he wants us to **know how to live**. He wants us to understand what is most important about how to live well.

How many of us long for a Father's wisdom to help us understand life... it may be something your father couldn't give... didn't give... or is no longer in this world to give. God is the ultimate source of perspective... and that is what the living Word speaks... what Christ teaches...and what the Spirit helps provide.

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 blesses his children **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.

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**. We could imagine that as pretty life changing.

Now imagine...you just got notice of an inheritance from the eternal realm ...it declares that you will be receiving a new life that will last forever...where there will be no pain or suffering or death ... but rather in a goodness and beauty that our longings have only begun to grasp.

In Christ there is eternal life...and with it an inheritance of all that is eternal and good. And you will live with the source o that inheritance...forever.

And if we wonder...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. ¹⁴**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.

Some of us realize we need to lay down our lesser identities and open ourselves of the blessings that truly define you.
I invite you to join me in this prayer.

Closing Song: Good Good Father ([here](#))

Resources: 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. Two views on the nature of the meaning of being "in Adam" can be found at: Comments on the "In Adam/In Christ" Motifs - by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez - [here](#) and "Am I in Adam or in Christ?" - [here](#)
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" - *κληρονομία* *klērōnōmía*; 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.