

Resolving Our Identity Crisis
[Who Am I... In Christ – Part 1]

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Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church

Where do you find your identity? Who are *you*? With whom do you most identify? These are questions that – consciously or unconsciously – we all wrestle with at some point in our lives. As we get a little older, it is easy for us to try and shrug off this question and think that it only applies to those who are younger, who haven't "lived" as long as we have. But the truth is that many people, if not most, struggle with their identity from time to time throughout their lives.

Changes in life, crises that occur, and just the self-doubt that everyone faces from time to time can cause us to again question our identity. When this happens, how do you deal with it? Do you give it some thought and wrestle with the question, or, do you try to ignore it and bury the questions and any emotions that may accompany them?

The good news is that there are clear, definitive answers to the questions of who you are and where you can find your identity. Over the next four weeks, we're going to look at how we can resolve our "identity crisis" as we look at the One certain source for knowing who we are *and* who we can become. To begin our quest, let's take our Bibles and turn to the letter of Paul to the Ephesians.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Within Paul's words in Ephesians 1, there are some very key clues to the identity that each and every one of us can know and enjoy. But, before we can look at this, we need to get a grasp on where we currently find our identity – how we currently see ourselves. It's interesting how different people have different ways of identifying themselves. Some consider themselves to be a package of facts. "I am 31 years old, married, and the father of three. I am 6 foot 3 inches tall, weigh too much and have brown eyes and brown hair. I work at Comerica Bank as an investment advisor and live at 555 Jones Rd." – and so on and so on. You might call this the "data-based you." But, is that the *real* you? Does that fully identify who you are?

Some like to describe themselves using this "data-based description." Others lean more to their accomplishments, skills or interests. They describe themselves as a fisherman, or a seamstress, or a Detroit Lions fan – although there seem to be fewer and fewer of those these days. Most people will combine the various "categories" to describe themselves. But one way most people do identify themselves involves their relationships. You might describe yourself as a daughter, a father, a grandmother of six, a friend, and so forth.

One reason that most include relationships in their description of who they are is because most people take their cues from others and assume that how others view them is who they are. That's why peer pressure is so often effective. We tend to not only look to others for acceptance but also for identification. So, if you ask someone to describe themselves, they will usually include the people and groups that they associate with as part of their description. "I'm a member of the Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church," or "I serve on the board for the March of Dimes," or "I play soccer on the Rangers soccer team" – descriptions of this type.

Our personal identity *is* greatly affected and even intertwined in the lives of those with whom we interact and identity. Thus the age-old adage, pick your friends wisely! So, this morning I ask you again...Who *are* you? You are certainly more than what a computer database indicates. You are more than a collection of "facts." The psalmist, in worshipping God, declared "I praise You because *I* am fearfully and *wonderfully* made (Psalm 139:14). God created each of us to be unique and special. He also knew exactly who we would be even before we were conceived. In Psalm 139:16, the psalmist said to God, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Why would God take such personal interest in each of us? Why would God even consider uniquely creating *you* long before your parents even met? It is because of the greatest eternal truth there is: God *loves you!* What is the first verse of Scripture that most people commit to memory? It is John

3:16 - *For 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.* This verse tells us that God's love for each of us is so deep that He was willing to send Jesus to die for us – pay a price we couldn't pay ourselves – so that we could live eternally with Him. Just as a mother or father will do anything to save the life of their child, so our Heavenly Father did the only thing He could to save us. And God the Son, Jesus Christ, loved us so much that He agreed with the Father and willingly came to die – to pay the only price that *would* save us from eternal death and instead give eternal life. There is *no* greater love than that... No greater love than what God has shown each and every one of us! So, remember, God loves you and when you receive His gift of love and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, then you will come to realize more and more and be able to declare that **in Christ, you are blessed.**

So, let's look again at our passage in Ephesians 1 and begin to uncover this new personal identity that we can discover and enjoy. In Paul's opening words in Eph. 1:1... *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to **the saints** in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus...* he identifies the people in the Ephesian church as *saints*. For some of you, this word may conjure up visions of halos, long robes and excessively meek individuals walking about singing Gregorian chants – perhaps not the most appealing “identity” for you! But, the word *saints* is first and foremost a *positional* word, not merely a description of outward appearance or even behavior. The word is derived from the Greek word *hagios* which literally means **holy**. So, to be a saint in the New Testament sense is to be a “holy one”... and that *is* who we **are in Christ**. All followers of Jesus Christ are saints, *not* because of what other people say about us or even because of the good things that we might do, but because of what Jesus did *for* us. In other words, we are not holy because of our own good works, but we are “holy” in God's sight because of what Christ did for us. Look at what Paul wrote elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When we accept Jesus' gift of salvation and, in response, invite Him into our lives as our Lord and Leader, *then* God no longer sees our faults and failures when He looks at us, but He sees us as *holy*... as **His righteousness**. Why? Because He sees *Jesus* in us! *That's* significant and that is the first indication of our new identity that I want you to note.

I. In Christ, You Are Significant.

It is important for us to realize this aspect of who we *are* because it will directly affect who we *become*. People tend to *do* according to who they believe they *are*. Again, our perceived identity will

drive our behavior. So it makes sense that if we never know our true position in Christ, we'll never begin to really *live* in a way that reflects who we now *are* in Christ. But, once we know our position in Christ – our connected identity to Him – then we are challenged to live with that in mind. Look at how Paul puts it in Colossians 3:1-4.

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

You are *significant* in Christ and are called to live accordingly. When Paul points us to Jesus and says keep your focus on Christ where it belongs, He is reminding us to keep our priorities straight. Jesus is where we get our significance. We do not get our significance in our homes, our cars, our jobs, our families, our possessions, or even our accomplishments. We realize that, without Jesus, we are simply dead men and women walking. But, *in Christ*, we are significant and *in Christ* we are truly alive!

Paul goes on in our Ephesians passage to share the second indication of our new identity.

II. **In Christ, You Are Sufficient**

Paul writes in the third verse of Ephesians 1, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* Note what Paul says here. It is not that God *will* bless you. He has *already* blessed you.

Notice also that God has not just given us *a* spiritual blessing. He has given us *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. What a promise! But it is more than a promise. It is a current reality! We do not have to wait until we get to heaven to realize these spiritual blessings. We have them now!

It is as if someone has made an anonymous deposit into your checking account. If you did not know about it, you would never be able to draw upon it. But when you find out about it, then you immediately have access to those resources.

Paul is telling us that in Christ, we are spiritually rich. He has deposited every spiritual blessing into our “account” already and we can draw upon it! So, those times when we feel that we do not have what it takes to do what God is calling us to do, remember this: God has already provided the means for you to do it. You need to believe that and draw upon the riches He has already given you.

That means no matter what we face, we are **sufficient in Christ** - not in ourselves, but in our Lord and in His strength. Paul recognized this. That is why, while he was sitting in a Roman prison,

Paul could write, *I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil 4:13)*. His identity was rooted in the One who had invested everything in him and provided all that Paul needed.

So, In Christ you *are* significant and sufficient, and, as Paul points us to the third aspect of our new identity, you can discover that...

III. In Christ, You are Secure

Look with me at Paul's words in Ephesians 1:4-6.

⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Paul states here that, in Christ, I am chosen. In fact, he tells us that we are chosen *from eternity* (v. 4)! Let this sink in. God *chose* us. He *always* intended for us to be His children. God had always planned to *adopt* us as His children (v. 5). And so, through Jesus, God provided the grace necessary for us to be His children. That means that right now, through our relationship with Jesus, we can be secure in knowing who we are - We are the *children of God!* John writes about this in I John 3:1.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

I realize for some of you this idea causes another "identity crisis." You are thinking, "Not me! God doesn't want me as His child, not after all that I've done in my life!" Listen closely. There is *nothing* – absolutely *nothing* - you can do to make God love you more *or less* than He already does. I know that may not make any sense to you right now, but just force yourself to reach beyond those feelings you are having and take hold of this - God wants *you* to be His child and so, through Jesus, He has made the provision to adopt you into His family!

Adoption is a wonderful thing. Unlike a child who is born naturally into a family, when a child is adopted, it is because the parents have *chosen* this child to be a part of their family. They have gone the extra mile to make it possible for this child to become their son or daughter. And believe me, there is a lot that has to be done - not by the child, but by the adoptive parents – for this family to be formed! Likewise, God's love for us is so great that He has gone beyond measure in order that we might become His sons and daughters! He has made the arrangements and taken care of all that is necessary for us to join His family.

The only thing you *can* do, if you haven't already, is to accept Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord. This is how *you* sign the adoption papers and finalize your adoption into God's family! When

you do that, then you are *secure* through your relationship with and in Christ. In Christ, our new identity is formed. In Christ, find our *significance* and our *sufficiency*. In Christ, we find the security we all crave. And, in Christ, Paul tells us another promise that enables us to discover who we are.

IV. In Christ, You Are Set Free

Look with me at Paul's words in Ephesians 1:7-10.

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

What Paul shares here is a “cause and effect” relationship that is at the very foundation of our new identity. He states that in Christ, we have *redemption* through his blood. Today, the word “redemption” is not used a great deal. It is used in financial circles when a note or mortgage is paid off. It is used at “Chuck E. Cheese” when the kids turn their tickets in at the “Redemption Center” for one of the cool prizes in the showcase. And, we also “redeem” coupons at the grocery store to reduce the cost of an item. But the redemption that Paul is speaking of goes to the meaning that Webster included in his definition of the word: *deliverance, ransom, and liberation*.

Before Jesus came and willingly shed His blood on the cross and died, you and I and every person who has ever lived or ever shall live were held hostage by sin – not just the wrong thoughts, attitudes and actions we commit, but the very nature we were born with. (Today, time doesn't allow for us to go into detail about that, but if you would like to know more, please contact me.) The fact that we were captives of this sin and unable to liberate ourselves meant that, without a Savior, we were helpless. That's not something anyone likes to hear. We want to believe that we are all capable of caring for ourselves and all of our needs, but we're not. We all needed someone to come along and deliver us.

That is exactly what Jesus did. His shed blood and very death paid the ransom on our lives that set us free. The physical beating and suffering Jesus endured were only part of the pain he felt as He hung on the cross. In addition to all of that, He also had the sins of the world placed upon Him. Now, you know how it weighs on you when you do something wrong. The guilt and remorse you feel can be very heavy on you. Imagine having the guilt of every person who has ever lived for every wrong they have ever done piled upon your heart. That's what Jesus endured – for you and me and everyone else. That's quite a price to pay, isn't?

Now, imagine for a moment that you wanted to ransom just one person in prison. You personally pay the price required – a price that includes great anguish, suffering, and even death – and yet the person you sacrificed your life for chooses to remain in prison. They know that you have paid the price and that they are free to go, but they choose to remain in a prison cell, chained to the walls and left to die. How would you feel?

How do you think Jesus feels when we refuse the ransom that He has paid for our sins? Many people do refuse it. They choose to hold on to their past, to their old way of living, to their old identity that is all going to lead them to more pain and eternal suffering, while Jesus is offering them new life, a new beginning, a new identity with more hope than they can imagine! Is that really what you want? Listen to a couple promises that Scripture gives us. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 we read, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”* This is a wonderful promise. But, listen to what Jesus himself said in John 8:34-36.

³⁴ “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

In Christ, the Son of God, you are set free! You can know the freedom of having the weight of your sins lifted from you as He forgives them. You can declare, “I am free to be the new me – in Christ my Lord!”

A new you... significant, sufficient, secure and set free... all in Christ Jesus! When we identify with Jesus and truly seek to place our identity squarely in Him, we enjoy a new life and a new way of living. Paul emphasizes this relationship over and over in his Ephesian letter. In fact, over 25 times in just the first two chapters of Ephesians, you will find Paul using phrases like “in Christ,” “in him,” “through Christ,” and “with him.”

So, again, I ask you, who are you? Where do you find your identity? With whom do you most identify? In Christ, you can find real significance, sufficiency, security and freedom. If you haven't yet chosen to entrust Him with your life, I invite you do so right now. If you have followed Jesus in the past, but have found yourself wandering away from Him, then I invite you to recommit your life to Him. In Christ, you can find the life and identity that you've always wanted!