

Who We Are Part 2

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[0 : 00] How lovely it is to be with you all again this week. Just to refresh your memories of last week, in case you weren't here, last week we started our series on identity and we compared the difference between the identity of Adam and Eve before the fall and after the fall.

And we saw that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God and that we too are created in the image of God. Adam and Eve had significance in that they had purpose in life, they had security, that they had an intimate and full relationship with God and they were fully accepted and had no need to strive to be loved in any way.

Then came the temptation in the garden, which Chris has already alluded to, the giving into temptation and the disobedience of Adam and Eve saw God banishing them from his presence and Adam and Eve spiritually dying.

This state is what we are born into. We are born physically alive but spiritually dead. We also saw that as a result of the fall, we were born with a strong desire to regain the acceptance, the security and the significance that Adam and Eve had lost.

Well, one of the greatest problems facing Christians today revolves around this identity crisis. Many believers are not growing in Christ or experiencing fruit because they somehow have lost or never realised or appropriated their identity that comes in Christ.

[1 : 54] Well, what does that all mean then? Well, we need to look at Ephesians and allow the word of God to give us an answer. And some would call Paul's letter to the Ephesians God's love letter to his church.

Now, I have a special letter here. This is to me. This letter was written 36 years ago. I have treasured this letter, 12 pages of it.

And it was a letter from my sister who lovingly wrote to me to give me warning to say that my life was on a road to destruction if I continued the way I was continuing.

She pointed out that I was looking for love in all the wrong areas. She pointed out that the only person who could love me unconditionally was Jesus himself, the one that I had learnt about at Sunday school and at fellowship.

She pointed out that I was lost. And you see, I actually grew up not knowing where I belonged.

[3 : 11] I desperately wanted to belong somewhere. I didn't feel that I belonged anywhere and I didn't feel that I was loved. And so I went searching elsewhere. The words in this letter were words of life to me.

They were words that Jesus himself directly spoke to me. And they changed my life for all eternity. Hence, I treasure this letter.

Well, these days with text messaging, emails, Facebook and twexting and all of those other things that I actually don't understand, but I think that's the word, isn't it?

Have I got the right word? Twexting? Yeah. It seems as if we've lost the joy of receiving words from someone special.

So what we read today in Ephesians, I want to encourage all of us to hear the words of Paul from Ephesians with an openness and with an enthusiasm of receiving a word from someone really special.

[4 : 25] Someone who loves us and who loves us beyond all comprehension. So verses three to six in the passage that Gus read to us.

Praise be to the God of our Father or of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

We have significance. We have been chosen to be holy and blameless. We have security. We have been given every spiritual blessing.

We want for nothing. We have acceptance. In love, we have been predestined and adopted as sons. What is it Paul is talking about here when he talks about blessings?

[5 : 38] He says we're blessed with every spiritual blessing. Now, Paul was sitting in a prison in Rome when he wrote this letter.

So I can guarantee you that he is not talking about material possessions or material blessing. It's a spiritual blessing that he's talking about.

And God planned them for each and every one of us from eternity past. He planned to bless us by making us holy.

Not out of obligation, but out of love. Paul's addressees were holy because God had set them apart to be his people.

The focus is entirely on God's action and the reference is to God's saving work. It is the same for us as well.

[6 : 35] And he planned to adopt us into his family. He didn't have to. There was nothing in us that compelled him to accept us.

He accepts us purely and simply out of his eternal love for us. A love that he has had since even before he created us.

That was his plan all along. His plan was to take us rebellious, selfish creatures and adopt us as sons through the shed blood of his son, Jesus Christ.

Being adopted now means that we have all the legal rights of a blood-born child to the family.

Nothing is withheld from us. We take on the name of the family and we are accepted fully in every way. He planned to bless us in Christ.

[7 : 39] Bless us by adopting us and bless us by making us holy and set apart to be gods. This also means that we can have confidence in the title saints.

That is in verse 1. It is the way that Paul has addressed the Christians in Ephesus. And it's how we too are addressed. First, look around you now.

Have a look. Have a look at the people around you because they are fellow saints. You are sitting amongst the saints of our great God.

I'm hoping that you're starting to see the change that has occurred for those who are in the family of God is significantly different as compared to Adam and Eve and what from when they were banished out of the garden.

Notice throughout the passage and all of Ephesians the term in Christ. And we have sung it. We have prayed it. Christ has mentioned it.

[8 : 45] The term in Christ. In the 13 letters that Paul wrote, he uses this expression. In Christ, in the Lord, in him or something similar.

He uses that expression 164 times. And in Ephesians the term is used 36 times.

There are various reasons for using the terms. But here the language expresses the oneness or the unity and the identity that a believer shares with Christ.

It is a powerful statement in Christ. It is Christ lifting us up into him and to enjoy and to be part of all that Christ himself is.

It is not us bringing Christ down to our level. Many people make that mistake of bringing Christ down to their level.

[9 : 50] That everything we want and know in our limited thinking is how life should be. This pattern of belief will mess with your head and it will also mess with your life.

Because you inadvertently will make yourself an impotent little God. Because you are wanting to call the tune for all things but without success.

Believers have their identity in Christ. Where all that was lost at the fall is made new. And we are welcomed to be part of this new creation.

All because of Jesus himself. And nothing of our own doing. We were spiritually dead and we were made spiritually alive in Christ.

We have been given significance through Christ. We have purpose through Christ. And we are accepted because of Christ.

[10:55] Verses 7 to 10 read. In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins. In accordance with the riches of God's grace. That he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

And he made known to us the mystery of his will. According to his good pleasure. Which he purposed in Christ. To 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. Apart from Christ we are slaves to sin.

Which is the Bible's language for addiction. The imagery of slavery and redemption is birthed out of the book of Exodus. Where God's people were in slavery to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh, you know this story. Pharaoh repeatedly refused to repent of his ways and to release God's people. So the wrath of God was poured out on all the households.

[11:59] Killing the firstborn of every household in one night. Those who were spared were those who killed a pure lamb as a substitute. And put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts.

The wrath of God passed over them and God's people were redeemed. Free to leave their slavery and live as free worshippers of God.

All this symbolizes the fact that sin rules over us. Enslaves us and destroys us. But Jesus was the lamb of God.

Whose blood was shed for us. That we might be spared and be made free. In Christ you are redeemed. Whatever has enslaved you.

Jesus has redeemed you. He has bought you with a price. And that price was his life. In Christ you are totally, completely and eternally forgiven.

[13:07] It doesn't matter what you have done or will do. Jesus died for it all and lives to forgive it all. You're forgiven. God doesn't hold your sin against you.

Isn't going to punish you. And loves you in spite of your sin. This is love and acceptance. In its absolute fullness.

We cannot earn it. Work for it. Feel we deserve it. In any way. Why? Because it is all given by God's grace.

It is not possible to be in Christ in any way or to any degree apart from the grace of God. Ephesians 2.8.9.

A very familiar verse to many of you. It is by grace that you have been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God.

[14:04] Not by works. So that no one can boast. Don't you just love the honesty of scripture? God knows that we would want to take the glory for ourselves whenever we can.

And so it is plainly written for everyone to see. So that no one can boast. In Christ you are graced. You're chosen by grace. You are saved by grace. Kept by grace. Gifted by grace. Empowered by grace.

Matured by grace. And sanctified by grace. You persevere by grace. And one day you will see Jesus, the best friend that you've ever had, face to face by grace.

Verses 11 to 14 read, In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

[15:23] And you were also included in Christ. When you heard the word of Christ, when you heard the word of Christ, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, having believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

Insecurity means depending upon temporal things that we have no right and no ability to control. It doesn't take a genius to know that our world is fragile and there will be tough days ahead. Our security can be found only in the eternal life of Jesus himself.

Paul in Romans declared that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. And so that you are sure in our verses, here we see that we are also sealed with the Holy Spirit.

In the ancient world, owners would affix a personal seal to their possessions and God is doing that with us. By placing the Holy Spirit in us, God also places his seal upon us.

[16 : 48] We now belong to the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the beginning of the blessings that await us as his possession, as part of our inheritance.

Practically, this means that the foretastes of the kingdom that we enjoy in this life are only the beginning. The Holy Spirit is also the guarantee that we are being sanctified.

That is, we're being transformed. If the Holy Spirit is at work in us, then Christ is at work in us and we are in him.

Aspects of this moulding we see when we read the Beatitudes. Humility, compassion, love of one's enemies, a forgiving spirit and loving fellow Christians.

It might also include accepting suffering for Christ, even to the point of death for Christ maybe, as in the case in many countries where Christians are under attack.

[17 : 51] There is no doubt that Jesus expects us to be growing into this new creation, this new identity.

For we are to be mature, in other words, to be complete. We will not be perfect whilst we live on this earth, but we look to the Holy Spirit to keep changing us and moulding our identity into conformity with Christ.

Romans 12.2 says, Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good and perfect will. How much more secure can we get than this?

You are given assurances as well, that you are significant and that you have a purpose. Our purpose is that we might glorify this great God.

[18 : 59] The verses 6, 12 and 14 all say to the praise of his glorious grace. Our role in life is to glorify God in all that we do and say.

Does that mean that we have to join full-time ministry? Definitely not. We need Christians in the workplace and in the community who are going to be lights for Jesus.

Giving words in season and living lives that are attractive to someone who doesn't know Jesus as yet. So that your life will point them to Jesus.

Whether you are an executive in business, retired, a stay-at-home mum with all the duties that calls for. No matter what your day-to-day role is, our purpose is to glorify God in all that we do.

That is, we do everything knowing that we represent the King of Kings and out of a thankful heart, we serve the best to our ability.

[20 : 10] Friends, there is much to say about our identity in Christ, in Ephesians and elsewhere. And as per usual, we can take it all on board and know it intellectually, know it up here.

But we need to live it, as mentioned at the beginning. We need to appropriate all that Christ has done for us in our day-to-day lives. That is, we need to live what we believe.

Or another way to say, we need to walk the talk. Now, I want to give you a whole bunch of examples that might give you a hint of whether you have your security and where your identity in Christ might lie.

And when I speak of these examples, I'm giving great generalisations. But I'm hoping that you will apply the little bits that are relevant to you and extrapolate where necessary.

So, example one. There is nothing wrong with wanting to lose weight and dress in a presentable manner. But if losing weight and how you look is attached to what will people think of me, or someone will love me if I look different, or I was always told that I was fat when I was a child and that no one will love me, and I have believed that lie my whole life, then you may have a problem with your identity.

[21 : 55] If you feel a failure as a person when your marks are not what you were hoping for, because the lie that you believed is that marks make the person, rather than being disappointed in the marks but knowing that you are secure in Christ, irrespective of any report, then you might have a problem with your identity.

If you are a parent and your children, be they adults or little ones, they make foolish mistakes or go off the rails or fail at school, and you think that you're a failure as a person because you should have produced kids that make all the right decisions and achieve in just the way that you want them to, and so you speak negative messages to yourself about yourself, you may have a problem with your identity.

If you are someone who is still hanging on to the past and telling people about your achievements in exams, even though they were years ago, or you are sharing with people the position you had some years ago, which was earning a huge salary, and yet you do not have it now, you may have a problem with your identity.

If you have been part of something that you believed was important, but changes are made that that position is no longer needed, and your response is that you believe that you are no longer loved, or needed, or acknowledged, you might have a problem with your identity.

If you have had a parent or a close friend who has told you that you are a failure, or that you are useless, and you believe these statements to be true, you might have a problem with your identity.

[23 : 54] If you're a child and you know that your parents are not happy with your marks or your choice of career, and that you take on that lie, that you are useless or that you are a failure, then you may have a problem with your identity.

If you are made redundant at work, and you become deeply depressed because you were totally wrapped up in the position and the kudos that work gave you, then you may have a problem with your identity.

And friends, I could go on and on and on with illustrations that will challenge your identity. But being in Christ gives us full and total significance, security and acceptance.

Not because of anything that we have done, but because of everything that Christ has done on our behalf. Being in Christ means that we reflect the values of the kingdom, apply these values to society in which we live, and show these values in our relationships with others.

We are members of both Jesus' kingdom and the community in which we live. As a member of Jesus' kingdom, we should also make a stance in our community for our faith.

[25 : 21] In this way, we can have some impact for the kingdom, its presence and its values. And in these practical ways, we will be giving evidence of our new identity status as members of the kingdom of God.

Christ has given us everything that we need for a new identity. It is now time to appropriate all that is in Christ to our lives and to encourage each other to live in Christ.

We can be sure that in Christ we have security, we have significance, we have acceptance. Let's be the church that lives with our identities securely grounded in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.