

MADE NEW: New Identityⁱ Ephesians 1:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so good to see you today. My name is Chris Wigley, I'm one of the pastors here at Trinity. If you are a first-time guest, we are just thrilled to have you with us today. We'd love the opportunity to get to know you a little bit. You can provide information to us by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a form that is less than a minute to fill out. When you click "submit," it notifies me, and I always look forward to following up with our guests each week.

If text messaging isn't your thing, please swing by our information center located in the fellowship area, right out these doors in the lobby. We have a gift there for you just as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. Again, we are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we are beginning a new teaching series that we are calling Made New. Over the course of the summer, we are going to study the New Testament book of Ephesians. One of the major themes throughout Paul's writing to the Church in Ephesus is the idea of being made new, that we have new life in Christ and that has a profound impact on the way in which followers of Jesus operate. And over the course of the next 10 weeks, we are going to look at the fact that in Christ, we have a new identity, new focus, new life, we are a part of a new body of Christ, there is a new plan to reach the world, we are called to a new level of prayer, we have a dynamic unity together, relationships are made new, we have a new walk, and we fight a new kind of battle.

So, I want to invite you to grab your bibles and turn with me to the first chapter of the book of Ephesians. This book is located in the New Testament, after the gospels, after Acts and Romans, and after 1 & 2 Corinthians. Then you will come to the book of Galatians, and the very next book is the book of Ephesians.

BACKGROUND TEACHING:

Before we jump into our study, I want to give some background information that provides for us the setting, the backdrop, by which the book of Ephesians was written. And what we are going to see in looking at the background is how relevant the Bible is for us today.

We learn in the opening verse that Paul is the writer of this letter. Most scholars believe he penned it between 60 and 62 AD. About 30 years after Jesus' crucifixion. And during that time, Paul was in prison in Rome. It is also believed that this letter, written to the believers in Ephesus, was also intended to be circulated to all the other churches in the region.ⁱⁱ

One commentator I read said, "Pound for pound Ephesians may well be the most influential document ever written."ⁱⁱⁱ The first three chapters are doctrinal in nature and the last three chapters talk about the way a Christian's doctrine affects the way they are to live. So, the first half is theological, and the second half is practical.^{iv} Really, it's all practical in a sense because our theology always informs our practice. And that's the way the book is set up.

Now, while this letter would be passed around to other churches, and God preserved it for us to study today, it was first delivered to Ephesus. First century Ephesus is something that we would understand in our culture and time today. It was known as a diverse melting pot and even given the name, "The Supreme Metropolis of Asia." There were many different religions and shrines to false gods everywhere.^v In fact, the popular view of Ephesus was that the spiritual world was very involved in what was happening in your life; Karma.

Ephesus was the economic leader in the region. The harbor was a hub for ships, major roadways went right through the city, and it was the primary banking center in Asia.^{vi}

Now, Ephesus was very morally corrupt. Celebration of what was perverse, rampant prostitution, and idol worship were commonplace.^{vii} We would probably liken Ephesus to modern day Las Vegas. Very similar cities filled with the same types of things. You know, a lot has changed in 2,000 years but a lot has remained the same, especially about the human heart.^{viii}

Yet, in that city, God was at work. He had caused the gospel to awaken hearts to a new identity, a new life, in Christ. And Paul's letter is going to be both encouraging and challenging, not only to his readers then, but also to us as we

study through it. I have entitled today's message, A New Identity. Just like God gave the Ephesians a new identity, for those of us that are in Christ, we, too, have been given a new identity. And we are going to look at that by looking at who we were, who we are, and who we will be. That will serve as our outline this morning.

Identity is such a huge thing in our culture, isn't it? In fact, Forbes Magazine, and many other sources, have said that America is currently experiencing an Identity Crisis.^{ix} Racial identity, cultural identity, sexual identity, gender identity, are major topics of discussion in our world today. According to WordNet, the definition of identity crisis is, "distress and disorientation (especially in adolescence) resulting from conflicting pressures and uncertainty about and one's self and one's role in society."^x That could be said of first century Ephesus and it can be said of culture today. We are a people defined by uncertainty and confusion about who we are.^{xi} But for those that are in Christ, any confusion and conflict is made clear and right.

Just like there was encouragement and security in the Ephesian believers knowing the source of their identity, we too find comfort in knowing the same today. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, have a new identity. So, let's look at that by first looking at...

MESSAGE:

1) Who we were.

When I say, "who we were," I'm talking about what our identity was prior to knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Now, I know that there might be those here today that are apart from a relationship with Jesus. You have not found a new identity in Him yet. Later in the service, you'll be given that opportunity. But if that's you, what I am going to describe is who you are right now, and who believers were prior to faith in Christ.

Let's look at verse 1 of Ephesians 1. You follow along in your copy of God's Word. *¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To **the saints** who are in Ephesus, and are faithful **in** Christ Jesus.* A couple of key words that point to identity here in this passage, "saints," and "in." Who are saints? How do you become a saint.

We tend to think that saints are some super spiritual people that wrote books a long time ago and did really great things. While those folks have the title of saint, that is not the biblical teaching of what it means to be a saint. And what Paul does here in addressing the "saints" is he is addressing the believers in Ephesus. In fact, Paul calls the Ephesian believers "saints" nine times in this one letter. So, what is a saint?

The word translated, "saint," here can also be translated as holy, sacred, and set a part by God.^{xii} The biblical use of this word, in the New Testament, is for those that follow Jesus. Listen, if you have trusted Jesus as Lord, the Bible calls you and I saints. Did you know that you are a saint? But we weren't always saints. While saint is our new identity now, we were not always that.

Who we were before Christ is far from being called a saint. And a part of understanding our new identity is understanding our old identity. Before following Jesus, the Bible tells us who we were. What does the Bible say about our identity before Jesus?

Well, before Jesus, Ephesians 2:1 says, *"And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins."*

Jesus said in John 8:34, *"³⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a **slave** to sin."*

John 3:18, *"¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is **condemned** already."*

Leviticus 5:17 says, *"¹⁷If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his **guilt**, he shall bear his iniquity."*

Romans 5:6 says, *"⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the **ungodly**."*

Romans 3:10 says, *¹⁰as it is written: "**None is righteous**, no, not one."*

And Romans 3:23 says, *"²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

In other words, who we were before Christ is: Dead, enslaved to sin, condemned, guilty, ungodly, unrighteous, and a sinner. That was our identity before Jesus.

Wow, Pastor Chris, that sure isn't encouraging. Why do you share all that bad news? Well, to understand who we are now in Christ, we need to understand who we were apart from Christ.

That brings us to point number two today...

2) Who we are.

We've talked about who we were, but now Paul talks about who we are. And when he does, he gets fired up. Paul is enthused by new identity found in Christ. Verses 3-14 in the original language forms one long sentence, 246 words in the English language, and is known as the longest single sentence ever found in ancient Greek.^{xiii} Let's look at it together, and as we do, I want to encourage you to take note of a common occurrence. Something we read in this passage that talks about our new identity. Here we go.

³***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [to bless God is to praise Him. Paul is praising The Lord for our new identity], ***who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love*** ⁵***he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*** ⁷***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*** ⁹***making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ*** ¹⁰***as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.***

Let's stop there for just a moment. There's so much in that passage that we could spend all summer just here. But I want us to see what I believe to be the main focal point of these verses. Don't get lost in the weeds here.

Did you catch the common occurrence? The phrase "in Christ" or its equivalent is used twelve times in verses 3-14. Now I know we only read 3 through 10. But even in those verses, that phrase is used 6 times. One commentator I read

said, "[The phrase] 'in Christ and related expressions are among the most important components of Paul's theology."^{xiv} Why is that the case? What is important to Paul is that we know that our new identity is rooted in Christ. And with that new identity comes what Paul says is every spiritual blessing.

So, who are we in Christ? Well, Paul says we are blessed, verse 3, we are chosen, verse 4, we are holy, also verse 4, we are adopted, verse 5, we've been shown grace, verse 6, we are forgiven, verse 7, we are given a purpose, verse 9, and we are united with Jesus, verse 10.

Do you see the identity change? Who we were and now who we are. Do you see why Paul is fired up?! He wants to bless God with the longest run on sentence ever. Why? Because of who he is in Christ.

You and I should be led to do the same. When we understand who we were and now, because of God's grace, who we are, we should constantly praise God. I want you to see your old identity stacked up to your new identity in Christ.^{xv}

Before Christ:

Dead in Sin
Enslaved to sin
Condemned
Guilty
Ungodly
Unrighteous
A Sinner

In Christ:

Made Alive
Freed from Sin's Bondage
Redeemed
Forgiven
Holy
Righteous
A Saint

Listen, when the enemy tries to confuse you and beat you down, and keep you in your insecurity and sin, you remind the devil who you are in Christ. And not only who you are but whose you are. 1 John 4:4 says, ***"Children, you are from God [that's who you are] and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."***

Our new identity, in Christ, changes everything for us. And beloved, we ought to walk confidently in our new identity, not in the confusion of our old identity. Oh, **I was once dead in my trespasses and sins, but I am now alive and adopted by God in Jesus Christ.** Therefore, I should walk as such. I should believe as such. And I should behave as one who is in Christ.

So, we have looked at who we were and who we are. Now, let's talk about...

3) Who we will be.

In this long run on sentence, Paul not only speaks of our identity change, but also talks about our future. And in knowing our future, there is a sense of peace of comfort that befalls us. Let's look at it together. Verses 11-14 of Ephesians 1.

*¹¹In him [there's that phrase again. In Him] **we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,** ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our **inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.***

Twice in this section Paul talks about our inheritance. Romans 8:17 says, *¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow **heirs with Christ...*** Who we will be, for those in Christ, are recipients of an inheritance of heaven. The reason I say this is future is because of verse 14 that says that we have received the Holy Spirit, at the moment of salvation, as a guarantee of our inheritance ***“until we acquire possession of it.”*** Meaning we have every spiritual blessing now, but we also have the assurance of dwelling with Christ in glory.

One day, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth. Every knee will confess Jesus is Lord. There will be a new Heaven and a new earth. And that we are just aliens in this world as we are citizens of heaven.

But here's the truth that gives us hope today, even in the midst of the brokenness of this world, that while we await the fulfillment of what is to come, that fulfillment has already begun in the work Jesus is doing now. What do I mean by that?

Paul said in verse 11, that, ***“all things [work] according to the counsel of His will.”*** This has a profound impact on us today. If God is working things according to His will, then that means He will harness every occurrence in our lives to that end. Now, I personally do not think God is the author of that which is evil and causes pain in our lives, but He certainly leverages even the bad things to accomplish His will. This is why Paul writes Romans 8:28, *²⁸**And we know that for those who love God [those who are in Christ] all things work***

together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” This truth means a couple of key things. Number one, Your identity cannot change, once you are in Christ that is permanent, and Paul tells us that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a seal of that, and 2) God is always working for His glory and our good.

Listen, child of God, if that's your identity, even if you are going through a difficult time, God is working it for His glory and your good. Knowing that brings a sort of peace and security that we all long for.

APPLICATION:

Paul's focal point of this passage in our new identity in Christ. And the implication of this new identity speaks to us today. The enemy whispers lies to us about our identity all the time. His lies have now become shouts in our culture, especially in the arena of identity. And the effects are devastating.

As a pastor, along with our staff, one of the most prevalent things we counsel people in is in the area of identity. Did you know that now, elementary age kids struggle with body image, self-identity, and eating disorders? Teenagers struggle to find worth and their self-esteem is at an all-time low. Adults lose their identity in their jobs, their kids, and their hobbies. So much so they wake up one day and don't even recognize themselves.

Listen, the antidote to all this lies in knowing who you are in Christ. That's what Paul said. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ! It is time, beloved, for us to reclaim who we are in Christ.

When the world says you're ugly and fat, in Christ you are fearfully and wonderfully made. When the world screams that you are worthless, in Christ you have a great purpose. When the world says you're not lovable and you need to change everything about in, in Christ you are loved already, and you don't have to earn His love. When the enemy shouts that things are hopeless, in Christ your future is secure. And listen, there is a cross and an empty tomb to prove all that to you. When you are tempted to believe the lies of the enemy, turn right back at him and say, “Oh but in Christ!”

CONCLUSION:

I'm going to ask Micah and the worship team to make their way to come and lead us in a time of response.

God is drawing you right now. There's a reason you are here today. Are you in Christ? Have you come to a point where you recognize that you are a sinner and that you need a savior? Has there been a moment in your life where you have trusted Jesus as Lord? If not, today can be that day. The choice is yours to respond to The Lord's call on your life to be saved. If you'd like to respond to Jesus today, you come during this time and take the hand of one of our elders and simply say, "I need Jesus." And we would love to visit with you about what it means to trust Jesus as Lord of your life.

Others of you are here this morning and you are reeling in some sort of struggle. There's real pain that you are walking through. God is at work in and through that pain, right now. Not all of the things we walk through are good, but God is good and works even in those things to bring about good.

It is sometimes in those moments that we need another person to lean on. That we need the prayers of our church family. I want you to know that we are here for you as well. We would love to pray with you and over you that The Lord would work in and through the challenges of life. We are here for you.

I'm going to pray, we will stand and sing, but most importantly, let's respond to Jesus this morning. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1986; Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Word Books: Dallas, 1990; David L. Allen & Steve W. Lemke, *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*, B&H: Nashville, 2022; Leighton Flowers, “Ephesians 1: ‘He Chose Us to be in Him’ or ‘He Chose Us in Him?’” article published by Soteriology 101, accessed online: <https://soteriology101.com/2015/03/14/ephesians-1-he-chose-us-to-be-in-him-or-he-chose-us-in-him/>; J.D. Greear, “Embrace The Mystery: Mystery 1: We are Chosen,” sermon preached at Summit Church, North Carolina, January 24, 2010, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/mystery-1-we-are-chosen-ephesians-13-14/>; Vance Pitman, various sermons preached at Hope Church Las Vegas; Jack Graham, “Much More: Beyond Blessed,” sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church on February 2, 2020, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvIOvu5XLFY>.

ⁱⁱ MacArthur, page xii.

ⁱⁱⁱ Snodgrass, page 17.

^{iv} MacArthur, page xii.

^v Taken from Bible Tools, accessed online: <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/1267/Ephesus.htm>.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Quip taken from Vance Pitman, “An Introduction to Ephesians”.

^{ix} Glenn Llopis, “America’s Identity Crisis Has Revealed Its Injustice To The World,” published by Forbes, June 1, 2020, accessed online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2020/06/01/americas-identity-crisis-has-revealed-its-injustice-to-the-world/?sh=75d117d831f1>.

^x <https://www.onelook.com/?w=Identity+Crisis&ls=a>.

^{xi} Quoted from Vance Pitman.

^{xii} Strong’s Concordance, 40.

^{xiii} Life Application Bible Commentary.

^{xiv} Snodgrass, 47.

^{xv} List inspired by Vance Pitman’s sermon.