



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

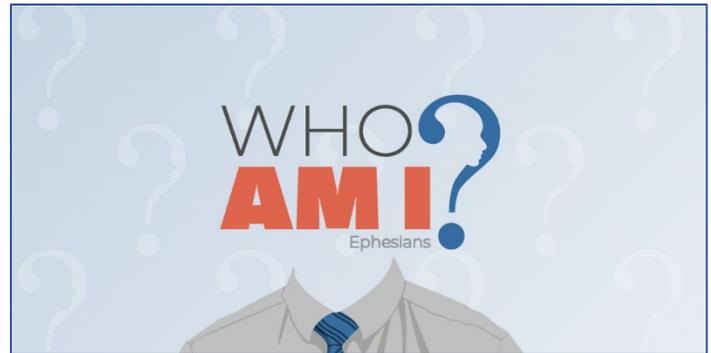
## God's Answer to Our Identity Crisis

### WHO AM I?

### Ephesians 1:1–6

Tim Badal | January 8, 2023

Turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter one. We're going to be in this new series we've titled, "Who Am I?" . Here at Village Bible Church, we pick up the Bible, start in verse one of a specific book, then work through it until we get to the end. We try to glean all the truths that God wants us, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to understand and know about Him, so we may know ourselves and live differently in light of these truths.



Today we're starting at the book of Ephesians and right away we see why it was written. In Ephesians 1:1-2 we read, *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

The first thing we see is that the apostle Paul wrote this letter. Before he was converted to Jesus, he was known as Saul of Tarsus. He came to know Jesus as his Savior while he was en route to persecute Christians. Jesus confronted him and won him to the gospel, after which Paul became a servant of Christ and an apostle. In fact, Paul wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. He became the great spokesman for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He wrote Ephesians about 30 years after the resurrection of Christ, so around 60–65 A.D., to a group of Christians in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus was an ancient city, located in modern-day Turkey, and you can still visit the ruins. . You won't find it on a map, since it has been renamed Selcuk.

Selcuk, Turkey, is a place of great beauty and is inhabited by about 30,000 people. Here you see the ancient ruins of Ephesus with the modern city in the background. This city was known for its love of politics, sporting events, entertainment and pleasure. It was also known for a stadium that held up to 30,000 people for sporting events, theater and other entertainments.



Another claim to fame in Ephesus was the temple of the goddess Artemis, or Diana, depending on if you followed Roman or Greek mythology. Pilgrims would come to the temple, which especially focused on the matter of fertility. For that reason, sexuality was emphasized and male and female prostitutes were present. In other words, it was a place of debauchery. Ephesus was also a city of economic prosperity and commerce. In fact, they had an ancient mall, a sort of one-stop shop for any need.

Paul was writing to a group of Christians whom he had led to the Lord during his three-year stay in Ephesus. After he started a church there, he established his disciple Timothy as their pastor. So we actually have three letters to this group, Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy, the latter having been written near the end of Paul's life.

The book of Ephesians, which is filled with so many awesome truths, was written to people who were being pushed to the margins by a secular and perverse culture around them. Sound familiar? It's written to people who are called to be holy in a world of unholiness, to be chaste in a world of debauchery, to live as Christians among the godless. Paul writes this in order to nail down one particular truth: you and I need to know who we are. We need to know what we're about. If we don't know who we are or what we're about, then the culture around us will invade our thinking and our lives. As a result, we—like frogs in a kettle—will not realize how far we've gone toward the culture until it's too late.

So in this letter Paul provides what many scholars believe is some of the most excellent writing in all the Bible. Listen to what a few different scholars have written about this book,

- "It is the divinest of all compositions man has ever written."
- It's "the crown jewel of St. Paul's writings."
- "The queen of the epistles."
- "The greatest and most relevant of Paul's works."
- "The greatest piece of writing in all of human history."
- "The most influential document ever written."

This is what we have in our hands. This is what men and women have said about the text we're going to study. Why would they say things like this? Because of the great truths it contains, the things we'll be examining under the heading "Who Am I?" I believe with all my heart that this is the most significant question this generation is facing. We live in a world that is suffering from a massive identity crisis. We're trying to know who we are and we want to know how we are to live. What are we supposed to do with this thing called life? We cannot know our purpose until we know who we are. This is why we try to label ourselves in various ways, hoping to identify the meaning of our lives.

We label ourselves in a number of different ways, so maybe you'll identify with these.

- First, we start with our status. We determine this by looking at our homes, cars, jobs, socioeconomic ranking.
- Others might identify themselves by the color of their skin. "I'm black. I'm white. I'm brown. I'm something in between." We wrongly identify ourselves through these categories.
- Another trend in today's culture is to identify ourselves by our sexuality. We have certain feelings or attractions or desires, wrongly assuming this is what determines who we are. We think our identity comes from how we express ourselves sexually. Our world has gone headlong into this kind of thinking.
- Another way we find our identity is through our struggles. We hear from a doctor or therapist that we have a certain condition or ailment, so we take on those labels. Others find identity in the things we possess. When we buy that new car, we feel different about ourselves. When we buy that new outfit or new piece of technology, we feel different than we felt before we had them.

Paul wants us to know there are actually only two identities in this world and all the other categories are meaningless in comparison. In fact, they can actually be unhelpful or even sinful. The Bible offers us two identities; you are one or the other.

First, you identify in biblical language as being in Adam. Adam represents all those who rebel against God. If you are living your life for self and apart from God—if God is absent from your life and you are living as Adam did—you are living in yourself. The Bible says those who live in Adam—who live in self—are the ones who are on the broad way that leads to destruction. You're in rebellion. You're living outside of God's will for your life. Paul talks about these individuals in Ephesians 2, starting in verse one:

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind

If you are living life apart from God, this is how God defines you: "You are under My wrath. You're living in trespasses and sins. You're following the course of this world." Paul says to these Ephesian believers—and to us today—"You are either going to follow the course of this world, identifying yourself as the world identifies themselves, or you are going to find an alternative. The only alternative to living in yourself—living as Adam—is living in Christ."

Twenty-five times Paul uses some variation of "in Christ" or "in Him" in this book. We identify as "Christians," but that term is only used three times in the New Testament, yet 75 times it says we are to identify ourselves as being in Christ. One third of those

times are found in the book of Ephesians. What Paul wants us to know is that it's not our status, skin color, sexuality, struggles or the stuff we possess that identify or bring meaning and purpose to our lives. It is our relationship to Christ and to Him alone that sets the trajectory of our lives. That's why Paul says, "I want you to know who you are in Christ, because if you don't know who you are in Christ, then you will fall for every lie in the world."

The world is sending out tons of lies and trying to get us to believe those lies. It's the job of the church—the job of your pastors and elders—to remind you over and over again who we are in Christ so we will not fall prey to the ploys and lies of the devil and the world. So Paul begins this letter to a church that is struggling to stay holy in the culture around them by saying, "I want you to know you are three things because of Christ."

## **In Christ I am beloved.**

Let's start with Ephesians 1:3:

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

The first truth God wants us to know is that we are loved by Him. This love isn't something that started yesterday or the day before. Notice that Paul says it began "*before the foundation of the world.*" That's before this world was created before Adam and Eve stepped foot in the garden, before Abraham was called to Cana, before Moses was given the Ten Commandments, before David took his seat on the throne of Israel, before Bethlehem was put on the map because Christ was born there. Before all of that happened, God had you and me on His mind. He put His affection and love on us. From verse three to verse 14, Paul writes one long sentence in the Greek language without any punctuation. He's bubbling over in praise, thanking God for who God has made him through Christ. When was the last time you bubbled over because of what God has made you through Christ? Maybe through a Bible study or a song, you came to realize, "I am all these things," then you simply said, "Oh, what He has done!" Can we bubble over with gratitude? To be blown away by the love of God which we've found in Christ Jesus is a marvelous thing. We will never be more alive, nor more Christ-honoring and God-glorifying, than when we rehearse over and over again the love of God which He gave us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He says the first thing we need to know about this love is that it involved a choice. God chose us. Later in the text he uses a theological word that we bristle at: He predestined us. Now, for those who have been around church, you know these are some difficult waters to traverse. Maybe if you're new, it sounds good to you. "God loved me and chose me. Yeah, I'm down with that." But for some of us who have been around, we know these are debatable things. These are things we struggle with. Yet Paul doesn't give us any sense that he's struggling with this. God chose us and Paul is overflowing with praise for this. Why? Because Paul knows what we should know—that God is a choosing God. Throughout the Scriptures, we revel in the fact that God chooses people.

Here's the crazy thing. We usually love God choosing others, but we struggle when it says God chooses us. Let me remind you that it was God Who chose Noah, Who redeemed Noah, Who gave Noah the job of building the ark. We're thinking, "Praise be to God." It was God Who chose Abraham, calling him out of the land of the Chaldeans—a godless culture—and took him to a promised land where He would bless him. We praise God for that. We praise God that God protected Moses amidst the killing of babies in Egypt, that God protected and sovereignly intervened in such a way that Moses rose up to be the prime minister over all of Egypt, then Moses was able to set his people free. We're blown away by God's sovereignty in the choosing of David, in the choosing of the nation of Israel, in the choosing Levites to be the priests over the people of God.

We just spent a whole month reveling in the fact that God chose those individuals who had a part in the first Christmas. We love the story of how John the Baptist was in his mother Elizabeth's womb, then at the very mention of Jesus by Mary, John flipped and jumped for joy. He was filled with the Holy Spirit beforehand and we rejoice at that.

But then we say, "But not me. I have free will. I have free choice." We'll get to that in a moment. But let's just recognize what Paul is saying here: "Before the foundation of the world, you, Christ follower, were loved by the almighty, eternal God." If that doesn't

shower you with a sense of gratitude, then your theology is getting in the way of you seeing God. God did this. You ask, "Well, how could He do it?" Let me give you an illustration that does not hold water if you push it too far, so don't do that.

I remember when Amanda announced to me that I was going to be a father three times. I remember loving those children. I didn't know who they were. I didn't know what they looked like. I didn't know if they were boys or girls; we didn't find that out with any of them; we left that to the Lord until they came out. But I loved them and I changed my life for them. I positioned myself as their father. I made sure that there was a house prepared for them. I didn't know what kind of kids they were going to be. I didn't know if they were going to be trouble. I didn't know anything about them. But I knew I loved them. If you're a parent, you know exactly what I'm talking about. This is just a sample of what God did before the foundation of the world. He made a decision to put His affection on you.

Now, why is this so important? Because the world tells us we're unloved. The world tells us we are a blip of chance in a cosmic chaos. We're told we're insignificant. We're told we lack value. But I want you to know today, no matter what someone has told you or what the world is telling you, you have value. You have worth because before the foundation of the world you were loved by God.

Wayne Grudem reminds us of what Paul is saying here: "Election is God's act before creation in which He chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of His sovereign good pleasure."

We need to understand that God made a decision about us before we were born. We have to grab hold of that and never let that go. I know some of you are thinking, "But Tim, the Bible says we have to believe. It says whosoever believes will be saved." Yes. For you to be saved, you have to believe. For you to be saved, you have to make a decision. For you to be saved, you have to trust. You have to give your life to Jesus. Yes, the Bible is clear on that. But never forget that for that to happen, God's sovereign choice must happen first. It is God Who says, "I began the work in you and I am the God Who will see it to completion." So we hold in tension these two truths: God chose us, and we ask Him to come into our lives. We bow the knee.

Now, what many of us will do, being incoherent in our theology, is we'll grab one or the other of those pillars. We'll say, "No, I have free will. I made the decision. God didn't do it for me. I'm not a robot. I'm not His. I do it all on my own." The answer is, "You're wrong." The Bible says right here in the text that God chose us.

Others will say, "God did it all. I didn't do anything at all." To say that is also wrong. Paul is bringing this tension to cause us to stretch and recognize this truth: my salvation is beyond my understanding. It should lead me, as Paul says, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Maybe you've been told how unlovely you are. Maybe you've been told what a mistake you are. Maybe you've been told you're a waste of space. I want you to know, if you are in Christ, you are none of those things. You are beloved by the God of the universe. Never forget that. That truth is as important for us as adults as it is for the young people. Brothers and sisters, especially the young among us, you're going to be told by someone you want to fall in love with that the only way you have merit or value is if they label you with that merit and value. You don't need anyone to say anything more than what God says about you right now: you are beloved by the God of the universe. You don't need a boyfriend or girlfriend to say that. You don't need your friends to say that. You don't need culture to say that. Here in Scripture, God is clearly saying, "I love you, and I have a purpose and plan for you. You are special; you are the apple of My eye." Let us never forget that, because as soon as we forget, we fall for every one of the devil's lies and ploys.

## **In Christ I am blessed.**

We are beloved, and second, we are blessed. Paul says in verse three that you are "*blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*" That blessing begins with His choosing, then it moves in progression. You are adopted as a son or daughter, which we'll talk about in later verses. The word "blessed" in verse three is used in the past tense. That means that before eternity began, God made a decision that you were going to be His child and that He was going to bless you as His child.

Notice in verse eight how this blessing is lived out: He lavishes His blessings upon you. The emotion behind that blessing is love. In love He predestined you. God made the decision, "I am going to bless My children every day of their lives." In other words, God

is saying, "I'm going to bless you with everything you need from point A in your spiritual journey to point Z. Wherever you've begun, you will get to the finish line, and you will do so victoriously because I will give you everything you need in Christ."

Listen to me, church. For the believers in this place, every day in Christ is like Christmas morning. You're just opening new gifts from God. New blessings and mercies are coming from God. New opportunities for you to see the goodness of God running after you.

Notice where these blessings come from; they come from the heavenly places. There's purity in these blessings. There's a supernaturalness to these blessings. These blessings aren't the blessings we might think we would get in this world. They're not cars and houses and other stuff. That's not how heaven operates. Heaven operates under a different scope and sequence of things. These blessings come from heaven down to earth. We're overwhelmed by these blessings in four ways.

### **We are blessed in our standing before God.**

The first blessing is because of our adoption as sons and daughters. Because of this, we are once and forever inaugurated and welcomed into the family of God. Nothing can take that away. For some of you this morning, you've sinned grievous sins in recent days. You have been blown away by your grief, guilt and remorse. The devil is saying, "That's it. You blew it. People in Christ don't live that way. They don't think that way. They don't talk that way." You're devastated by demonic guilt that has come over you. But God wants you to know that in Christ, your standing has not changed. Fellowship has been broken, yes. But you stand with the righteousness of Christ imputed onto you by Christ Himself. Nothing can separate us from that.

### **We are blessed by God supplying our needs.**

Our standing is a blessing God gives us, and second, we are blessed by God supplying our needs. Philippians 4:19 tells us, "*My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" We have everything we need. You never have to go to your tackle box and wonder, "Do I have what I'm going to need for today?" In the beginning of time, God destined you to have everything you need to accomplish the work He has for you. It's all there. The resources to follow Him, the resources to obey Him, the resources to say no to sin are there at your disposal. He's given them to you. If you don't have something, it's because it is a "want." God has promised to supply everything we need.

### **We are blessed with strength from God.**

Third, God gives us in times of trials and tribulations. As Christians, we may ask, "But what happens when this takes place, or when that takes place?" We can have confidence, knowing we will have the needed strength to get through whatever God allows in our lives—the good, the bad or the ugly in life. He will give us what we need to accomplish what He wants us to do in those trials and tribulations.

### **We are blessed with security.**

God gives us our standing, our supply, our strength, and finally, He gives us security. We have been told that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). When we bow the knee to Jesus and affirm His election in our hearts and mind, we then begin to open blessing upon blessing upon blessing in our lives. Like I said, it's like Christmas morning. It never ends. When we see that we're beloved and blessed, humanly speaking we can start to think there's something about us. Picture being on the recess playground, the captains of the teams are vying for you because you have some value or ability that will help them. You begin to think, "The reason God picked me was because I'm worth something." But remember, you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You are alienated from God. You're being worked over by the devil and living according to your passions, according to Ephesians 2:1-3. You bring nothing to the table except your sin, debauchery and disobedience. You need to realize that when God saves you, He saves you so you no longer have license to do what you want. It's so you will live differently.

Chuck Swindoll tells this story when speaking about election:

Our response to election should be like Queen Victoria's reaction when she realized she would be queen one day. When she was young, Victoria was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England, lest this knowledge spoiled her. When her teacher finally did let her discover for herself that she would one day be queen of England, Victoria's response was simple: "Then I'll be good."

That should be your response as well.

## In Christ I am burdened.

So you are beloved by God. Blessed by God. Therefore, you have a burden” This is the third and final point. Now, to be burdened when you live in Adam—when you live in self—is to be burdened with trying to find what is going to satisfy you. The Bible says you will be weary and heavy-laden in that pursuit (Matthew 11:28). But when you are burdened to please and glorify the One Who loves you, Who has blessed you, Who has saved you, that burden is easy. That burden is light. So Paul writes this group of Christians, saying, “I want you to be burdened with something.”

First, he writes to the saints who are *“faithful”* (verse one). God has done His work. He has loved you. He has blessed you. Now the question is: are you living in light of that? Are you faithful? As you look back at the past week, has your week been characterized by the love and blessing of God that He gave you before the foundation of the world?

This faithfulness is seen in verse four, where we are called to be *“holy and blameless.”* As we sit under this teaching of who we are in Christ, it should lead us to live differently. We can’t just believe something about ourselves and not allow it to direct how we live.

The book of Ephesians can be broken down into two sections:

- Who we are in Christ and what Christ has done for us, chapters 1-3.
- How we are to live in light of what Christ has done, chapters 4-6.

This should change every aspect of our lives. We are called to live in a manner worthy of the calling you and I have received in Christ. Is that true of you?

We’ll be challenged by this over and over again in this study. “You are this in Christ. You are that in Christ. Believe that, affirm that and hold true to that. Don’t fall prey to the world’s lies. Don’t believe culture’s definitions of who you are. This is who you are in Christ. As a result of that, now live, think and act differently, to the praise of His glorious grace.” So let’s do that this week. Let us live in the light of His glorious grace, in light of His sovereign love, goodness and blessings to us. In doing so, we will see the blessings from the heavenly places overwhelm us, to His glory and for His name’s sake.

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