

## WEEK 1: ROOTED IN IDENTITY – WHO DOES GOD SAY YOU ARE?

**Scripture References:** Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Romans 8:14-17

**Focus:** Understanding identity in Christ brings stability and security to every area of life. This week explores key scriptures that reveal who we are according to God's Word.

**Opening Prayer:** *"Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together. We pray that as we open Your Word, You will speak truth into our hearts and remind us of our identity in You. Help us listen, share honestly, and grow together. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

**Icebreaker:** "When you hear the word 'identity,' what comes to mind?"

### **Read: Ephesians 1:3-14**

*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. <sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup>he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*<sup>11</sup>In 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, <sup>12</sup>in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

**Summary:** This passage reminds us that we were handpicked by God, adopted into His family, redeemed by His Son, and sealed with His Spirit. We don't earn our identity; we receive it by grace. Paul wants us to know how blessed we are because our identity is secure in Christ.

God doesn't just tolerate us—He chose us. Before the foundation of the world, He saw us and wanted us to be part of His family. That's not performance-based approval; it's predestined love. He adopted us, redeemed us through the blood of Jesus, and sealed us with His Holy Spirit. That means your worth isn't tied to what you do, but to Whose you are. Our spiritual blessings are already secured in the heavenly realms. We are rich in grace.

**Modern Illustration:**

Think of how many people define themselves by career, achievements, or their social media presence. But Scripture tells us we are God's children, loved and chosen. Social media identity curation leads to performance; God calls us to authenticity.

**Relevant Statistic:**

91% of Gen Z feel pressure to define identity through achievement (Barna, 2023).

**Discussion Questions:**

- Where do you currently find your sense of identity or purpose?
- When you hear the words in Ephesians 1:3–14, what truths stand out most to you? Why?
- Upon reflection, how have outside influences shaped your self-perception?
- What does it mean that you are "sealed with the Holy Spirit"?

**READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. This isn't just moral improvement—it's a brand-new identity. The old has gone; the new has come. Remember: our past doesn't get the final say. In Christ, your identity is not your failure. You are not what happened to you. You are who God says you are.

**Modern Illustration:**

Imagine someone being released from prison but still wearing chains. Christ broke the chains. We're free. Why live like we're still in bondage?

### Discussion Questions:

- What does being a "new creation" mean for your daily life?
- Are there lies from your past identity that you still believe?
- How do we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ when we fail or fall?

### READ:

- **1 Peter 2:9-10:** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
- **Romans 8:14-17:** *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Peter says you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession. Paul says that we were adopted in Christ Jesus. That's not symbolic talk—it's your new status! As a priesthood, we carry the presence of God to others. As royalty, we represent the Kingdom. And as God's possession, we are deeply valued and secure.

### Modern Illustration:

Think of a passport. It identifies where you belong. Your spiritual identity declares your citizenship in God's Kingdom—and no one can revoke it.

### Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean to you to be part of a "royal priesthood"?
- How does being God's possession change your view of yourself?
- What does it mean that Christians are adopted into God's family?
- What role does identity play in how we treat others?

### Potential Additional Discussion Questions:

- How should we understand the words "chose" and "predestined" in these verses?
- How does understanding your identity in Christ provide stability?

- Why do we sometimes struggle to live from our identity instead of trying to earn it?
- What lies about your identity have you believed, and how can Scripture correct them?
- In what practical ways can you remind yourself of who you are in Christ this week?
- How does your identity in Christ impact your relationships?
- What would change in your life if you fully believed God's definition of you?
- How does the Holy Spirit function as a "seal" and "down payment" of our inheritance?
- How can our group encourage one another to live rooted in identity?

### **Ephesians 1:3-14 Commentary**

1:3 Paul writes verses 3–12 as one long sentence in Greek (in English we'd call it a run-on sentence), and it's all about what believers possess because of the Cross of Christ. He begins in verse 3 with worship: Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To bless the name of God is to speak well of Him, to praise Him. *Worship* is the celebration of who God is, what He has done, and what we trust Him to do. God is not interested in spectators. He invites you to praise Him.

Why? Because, in Christ, He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens—or we could translate it "heavenly places" (see 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). What are heavenly places? This is a reference to the spiritual realm where God and Satan battle for our allegiance. We live in the physical realm with our problems, needs, struggles, and sins. But whatever happens in the physical realm originates in the spiritual realm. Conflict in our homes is a spiritual problem. Although conflict is visible fruit, its root is spiritual in nature. Thus, we need a spiritual solution to our circumstances. That's why we must live with a spiritual worldview.

Paul says God has already done everything He is ever going to do for believers. He's blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And, as Paul will soon say, believers are "seated" there with Jesus (2:6). Think of this like a video teleconference in which you're in two places at once—seated physically in one place but operating in another. Believers are present in two places at the same time: we're physically located on earth but operate from heavenly places. God wants our position there to dictate our activity on earth. Only by operating from a spiritual perspective will you have access to God's Kingdom power and provisions to deal victoriously with life in the physical realm.

1:4 Spiritual blessings are accessible because God chose us, drafted us, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless. *Sinning* is failing to give

God glory, attempting to make God revolve around us when we're supposed to be revolving around Him. It's approaching things wrongly, like those who once thought the earth was the center of the solar system. But God created us for Himself, for *His* happiness. He's chosen us "to be holy and blameless" so that the Church will bring *Him* pleasure. When we pursue His pleasure, we position ourselves to experience the blessings of God, which have already been preordained for us.

1:5–6 We can do this because He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ (1:5). Paul thus introduces us to the mysterious doctrine of election. God has predestined to save a people who will be trophies of His grace. Those who believe the Gospel are chosen "in Him" (1:4). Paul uses the phrase "in Him," "in Christ," or "in the Beloved One" throughout the passage (1:3–4, 6–7, 9–10, 12–13). So, God's election isn't abstract; it's centered in the person and work of Jesus.

The focus of the book of Ephesians is on the corporate church, not on individual Christian salvation (see 1:22–23; 2:14, 16, 22; 3:10, 21; 4:16; 5:32). Therefore, the choosing and election to which Paul refers is not for individuals to eternal life but regards God's choice to establish a group of people (that is, the body of Christ) in the Beloved One (1:5–6) whose purpose is to live godly lives and reflect His holy character in a sinful world. This election defines the corporate identity believers share because of their relationship to Christ (as in the case with Israel; see Romans 9:3–5). This is like family members sharing the medical insurance benefits of the head of the household.

Those no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ" are predestined to be adopted by God. To be adopted in the ancient world meant receiving the same rights, privileges, and inheritance due to a natural-born adult son. In Christ, God adopts sons and daughters for Himself for a specific purpose. Once you're adopted because of your faith in Christ, you are defined by your new Father. God gives all of His children access to every spiritual blessing—according to His good pleasure and to the praise of His glorious grace (1:5–6). God predetermined to bring a group of people into His family, drafting them into His Son for the goal of receiving spiritual benefits and manifesting His heavenly rule in their lives and bringing Him glory. Election is for service and spiritual benefit, not for individual, personal salvation.

1:7–8 For this to happen, God redeemed us from sin (1:7). In the ancient world, slaves could be redeemed, and a price could be paid for their freedom. Redemption from sin comes through the price paid by Jesus Christ through His blood (1:7). Why blood? Because the judgment for sin is death (Romans 6:23) and shedding blood means taking life (see Deuteronomy 12:23). The sinless Son of God had to die to pay for our sins so we might have forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7)—God's grace richly poured out on us (1:8).

1:9–12 But God doesn't save people just so they can go to Heaven when they die. He saves them so they transfer kingdoms—leaving the kingdom of darkness for the Kingdom of Christ, their new King. Through God's "wisdom and understanding," He has planned to bring everything together in Christ (1:8–10), to bring all history under His rule. God's kingdom goal in history is that, in Christ, things in Heaven and things on earth are unified (1:10) so that we might be aligned under God's Kingdom reign, living transformed lives for His pleasure. God works out everything in agreement with His purpose and will (1:11) to advance this Christ-centered philosophy of history. Nothing is left to chance. All is for the praise of His glory and the exaltation of His Son (1:12).

1:13–14 Whoever hears and believes the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13). Official documents were sealed in antiquity, implying protection and ownership. When you believe in Christ as your Savior, God puts you inside an envelope called Christ. You are "in Christ." But God also guarantees delivery. He registers the letter and seals it with the Holy Spirit—indicating that He is its owner and the only One qualified to open it.

Paul also says the Holy Spirit is God's pledge to us—the down payment of our inheritance (1:14), the guarantee that God will do for us everything He promised for His children. Like an engagement ring, the Holy Spirit is like a down payment on an eternal commitment. The Spirit is a heavenly first installment given in anticipation of eternal life, a life that is eternally secure. He's a foretaste of what's ahead.

## **2 Corinthians 5:17 Commentary**

5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. If you are a Christian, you have been born again of imperishable seed and share in the divine nature (see John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:4). God has brought about a spiritual transformation inside of you, and your identity is tied to your new birth. You are no longer who you once were the old has passed away. Therefore, you are called to live in accordance with your new identity.

## **1 Peter 2:9-10 Commentary**

2:9–10 Peter describes Christians in several ways. They are a royal priesthood (also "a holy priesthood" in 2:5). Through Jesus Christ, we have access to God and need no other human priest to represent us or intercede for us.

Believers are a chosen race (2:9). As the last Adam (see Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49), Jesus is the head of a new race of people. The first Adam brought sin and death, but the last Adam brought spiritual life. This new race includes believers from every ethnic group. All physical or cultural distinctions are subservient to this greater category: we are children of God.

The people of God are a holy nation—not a perfect people, but a people set apart with a passion to live corporately to please God. We are a people for His possession—we're not special because of who we are, but because of the One to Whom we belong (2:9).

Along with this new identity, God's people are to live a new lifestyle. You are to proclaim the praises of the One Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. In other words, you are to serve as an advertising agency tasked with sharing the message of His love. We were formerly not His people. Now we are and have received mercy (2:10). Therefore, as we live in this world—both as individuals and when we gather corporately—people ought to be able to see what our marvelous God is like.

### **Romans 8:14-17 Commentary**

8:14–15 If we walk according to the Spirit as God desires, we prove ourselves to be God's sons (8:14). Not only are we sons (and daughters), but we are *adopted* children (8:15). If a person was adopted in Paul's time, that individual immediately received all the rights of an adult heir. The chief right that Paul mentions here is intimacy with God. We therefore can pray, *Abba*, Father (8:15). *Abba* is a term of intimacy meaning "Papa" or "Daddy." We can say it with complete assurance that God is listening.

8:16–17 Being adopted as God's children (8:16) may come with extreme benefits, but it also carries with it intense responsibility. Yes, we are already heirs of God, but we can only become coheirs with Christ if we suffer with Him (8:17). If we do suffer, we will be glorified with Him (8:17). If we shrink back in the day of trial, we'll lose something valuable. We cannot lose our salvation, but we can certainly lose some of the reward God intends to give us.

**Closing Challenge:** Encourage everyone to read Ephesians 1 each day this week. Ask them to underline or highlight every phrase that reminds them of who they are in Christ.

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for reminding us of who we are in You. Help us live out of that identity this week. Give us confidence, peace, and purpose. Amen."