

## Who In The World Are You? Why In The World Are You Here?

### Introduction to the Book of Ephesians

There's a story about three elderly sisters who live together in a two-story home. The oldest sister is 96 years old. The middle sister is 94 years old. And the youngest is 92. One evening the oldest sister goes upstairs to take a bath. After preparing the water, she starts to put her foot in the tub when she suddenly freezes. For the life of her, she can't remember if she is getting in to take a bath or just getting out. So she calls another sister to come up and help her. The middle sister immediately starts up the stairway for the bathroom. But half way up *she* stops—totally confused. She mutters to herself—"Was I going up the stairs or coming down? I can't remember." The youngest sister sizes up what is happening with her older siblings and simply rolls her eyes. "I sure hope I don't become like them when I get older." And she immediately knocks on wood. By now the two older sisters are calling for help. The youngest sister replies: "I'll be right up—right after I see who's knocking at the front door."

Do you know what is really scary? I read that joke in a Reader's Digest while drinking a cup of coffee just before I left to come to church on Wednesday morning of this week. On the way here, I stopped at the bank to make a quick deposit at an ATM. Just as I pulled away, I realized I didn't have my glasses. Since I was less than a mile from home, I decided to head for the closest turnaround so I could retrieve them. As soon as I made my turn, I looked up in the rearview mirror and saw my glasses—on my face.

Is that scary—or what? Is it at all related to the fact that I turn *fifty* this year? No because I have been doing that for the past 20 years. And so have a bunch of you—quit laughing! Do you want to know what is really scary? Not spending 5 minutes looking for glasses that are already on your head. Not even trying to remember what you are supposed to be doing at a given moment. What is *really* scary is to be somebody, to have an identity—and to lose the part of your memory that keeps track of your identity and all significant information about yourself. We call that *amnesia*. That occasionally happens to people who have suffered a closed head injury or some other traumatic incident. It's not that they have no memory. It is that they forget who they are. Their name. Their occupation. Maybe even family, friends, and other significant relationships. I am not much of a fan of Jim Carrey. But he starred in a movie called *The Majestic*. It was about a Hollywood screen writer, played by Carrey who encounters some devastating personal problems and ends up accidentally driving his car off a bridge. He washes up on a beach with a severe blow to his head and no memory of his identity or his past. He is discovered by the people of a nearby town which has a war hero that never came home. And the two men happen to share an uncanny likeness. It doesn't take much imagination to see where the movie goes. The wishful townspeople embrace him as the hero who miraculously returned. And since he has amnesia—he is just as confused about his identity as they are.

***That is scary stuff.*** But even that is not as scary as what can and does happen to believers. Imagine having an identity that places you in a personal relationship with the Triune God. A relationship that moved God to set His electing love on you, that caused Him to send His Son to redeem you, that moved His Spirit to awaken your slumbering heart and initiate His saving grace in and through you. Imagine being a significant player in God's strategic plan—a plan that infuses your life with eternal significance and turns every day into an infomercial for the power and wisdom of God. Imagine your life being an instrument of change in the lives of people on earth and an object lesson to unseen spirits above. Imagine that you have ALL THAT—but you don't even realize it! Your memory might fade in occasionally on a Sunday—but as far as Monday through Saturday goes—your identity is shaped by whatever circumstances you happen to be facing at a given moment. Or perhaps it is shaped by the opinions or expectations that others have of you. ***But have you ever thought about who you really are?***

Our “consumeristic” society is forever trying to pigeon-hole us. We are young. Or old. Or somewhere in the middle. If you were born prior to WW 2, you are a ***Senior*** grappling with the challenges of living on a fixed income. If you were born between 1946 and 1964, you are a financially driven, “need to acquire and achieve more than my parents did” ***Baby Boomer***. If you were born between 1965 and 1975, you are a laid back, highly relational, “turned off by the mad quest for success ***Generation X'er***. If you were born *after* 1976, you are a tech savvy, media saturated, multi-tasking member of ***Generation Y***.

Our careers can all too easily become the primary shaping influence of our identity. I'm white collar or blue collar. Management or labor. Upwardly mobile or stuck in a vocational black hole from which there is little hope of escape. For most young people, the greatest challenge at school is not academic—but social. It is all about image. You're a *jock* or a *geek*. You're *prep* or *Goth*. You're either *hot* or you're *not*.

And that battle continues well into adulthood. As an adult, you are single, married, or divorced. You either have kids, wish you could have kids, wonder why you even dreamed of having kids, or have become an empty nester—or you just wish your adult birds would grow up and fly away. Materially, you are what you drive or the house you live in or the zip code of your address. You are the label of the clothes you wear. Ethnically, you are Caucasian or African-American or Hispanic or Middle Eastern or Asian. Politically, you are a democrat or a republican, or an independent.

Can you see how many ways we define ourselves or each other? Chronologically, vocationally, socially, materially and ethnically, and politically. And those are just a few examples. Do you see any problems with those definitions? I am not saying that none of them are relevant or even valid. I am asking the question—are these the things from which you derive your identity and purpose in life? If so, life will be very fragile—and unpredictable.

**Question:** What do these descriptions really tell us about ourselves? Do they actually define us? Or do they have to do with our circumstances, upbringing and the opinions of

others? Do they ultimately determine our destiny—or are they things that for good or bad we have allowed to shape us thus far in our lives?

I am not saying that these things are necessarily wrong—although many of them can become a serious threat to our ultimate well-being. What I am saying is that for the believer—your identity and mission in life has got to come from something much deeper and far more enduring. You are more than your age. You are more than your marital status or the clothes you wear or the house you live in or what you drive. You are more than what others say about you. You are more than you can even imagine about yourself! But we have forgotten. We are like Cinderella with amnesia. We have an appointment with the King—but sadly we stay at home, prisoners of our circumstances and the opinions of others whom we have conceded the right to define us. Accordingly, I think the church in America is suffering from one of the worst epidemics of an identity crisis in several centuries. It is time for us to take a fresh biblical look at who we really are and why we are here on earth.

That is why God through Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians for the church of the first century—and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This letter was John Calvin’s favorite among all the epistles. Martin Luther called it “among the best and noblest books of the New Testament.” The famous early twentieth century author and pastor, A.C. Gaebelien called it “The Masterpiece of God.” Why? Because this book connects believers of all ages and in the most diverse circumstances and backgrounds and grounds us in the timeless truths of God’s eternal plan. A plan that every believer here tonight is privileged beyond measure to be a part of.

I am so excited about this—I think I am going to preach the whole book in one night. Well—not exactly. I just want you to get an overview of what we are going to be studying over the next several weeks. And I want you to get a sense of the importance and the timeliness of this book for a generation that needs to recover its identity and mission. So let’s get started....**Read Ephesians 1:1-2.**

Ephesians—not unlike some other of Paul’s letters easily divides into two sections. Chapters 1-3 deal with our identity. Chapters 4-6 deal with our mission. Chapters 1-3 answer the question: Who on earth are you? Chapters 4-6 answer the question: Why on earth are you here? Let’s start with the first half of the book...

I. Understand *who* you are. [You are more than your name, your circumstances, your sickness, your clothing labels, your marital status, your political affiliation etc].

A. You belong to God! (1:1)

“Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus”

You are a saint. Sounds pretty pious doesn't it. Some of you may even feel a bit uncomfortable with that description because you know you are far from being all that God wants you to be. Yet, saint does not so much emphasize personal piety as much as it identifies the new relationship you have with God. Just as the Israelites were the people of God in the OT, so believers in Christ are *God's people in this age*. This is not anything you did or earned. It has to do entirely with what God has done.

1. The Father chose you (3-6) If you struggle with this doctrine because it doesn't sound fair, just wait until you get to chapter 2. Then it will start to make sense. Paul isn't amazed because God didn't save everybody—he's amazed that God saved anybody! This is not a doctrine to fret over but rejoice over!
2. The Son redeemed you (released you from servitude to sin) with His blood (7-12)
3. The Spirit is your seal of ownership and pledge that God will *finish* what He has begun (13-14)

B. You are part of His plan (1:9-10).

Though he does not spell out in this section where we fit into God's plan, He does show us the BIG PICTURE of what that plan looks like. Notice verse 10b: "*To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*" In essence, Paul is saying that Jesus is going to bring everything back to where it was before the sinful angels rebelled and before man sinned in the Garden and thus plunged the whole world into sin.

**Illustration:** [Using hands vertically and then horizontally, illustrate the following]: God made us His creatures for His glory. Sin cut God's creatures off from Him. It made them competitors and enemies of God and thus competitors with other images of God (i.e. other people). But in Christ, He will take that which sin has divided—and will head up everything once again under Christ. Though He doesn't elaborate here—we are a key part of this plan as you will see.

C. This plan involves overwhelming odds (1:17-23) (Notice the drama!) There is no "ho-hum" in God's plan.

This plan is so big and awesome, it is so incredible in reversing the overwhelming tide of sin—that it requires a power that we can't even imagine. So Paul stops and prays that it won't go flying over the heads of his readers. He prays: "God help them get it. Help them begin to see your incredible power to pull off this plan!" This power is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and which has subdued the entire spirit world.

It is *all* under His control (Something that people who had been saved out of pagan religions and demon worship needed to know).

- D. This plan did for you what you could not do for yourself in restoring you to God (2:1-5).

**Vertical hand illustration.**

- E. This plan likewise has restored sinners to each other—making us into one new entity (14-16).

**Horizontal hand illustration.**

Thus, you need to know your restored identity. Just look at the descriptions: We are Christ's body (16); we are fellow citizens; and we are members of God's household (i.e. His family) (19).

But what is all this for? This new entity consisting of people formerly broken and shattered by sin, God takes and puts together so that they become His restored image before the angels and before a watching world (See 3:10). *The church becomes the trailer for the final movie that God directs and produces when He finally finishes his redemptive work in the book of the Revelation!* We show, we illustrate, and we demonstrate what the end of the world looks like by how we relate to each other and how we relate to the problems of a sin-cursed world.

You want identity? You have no greater identity than living out who you are with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. *Who are we?* We are people who have been changed and are changing by God's grace. Not just individually—but as a body, as fellow citizens, as God's family!

So what does all this mean *practically*? What are we supposed to do with this?

- II. Understand *why* you are here.

- A. To live out your identity as a part of God' family (4:1-3)

You don't have to work to develop unity. You already have that by virtue of the Gospel. You must work to maintain it. (Example: Men who fail to live out their role as husbands and fathers aren't just hurting their wives and kids, they are misleading *others* about the theme and outcome of the "movie" of God's redeeming work!

- B. Practically speaking, what does this involve?

1. Living toward each other with humility, gentleness, patience, and putting up with each other's failures. In short, understanding God's attitude toward us and giving each other lots of room to grow and change (Ephesians 4:1-3).
2. Faithfully using your gifts to serve and build up each other (4:7, 11-16).
3. Being seriously committed to godly communication in the way you address problems with other believers (4:22-32).

Illustration: A Christian lawyer named Ken Sande (author of the book, *The Peacemaker*) tells of a situation where he invited an unsaved female colleague to his church. But the Sunday she came happened to follow a previous week in which two church leaders had had a public agreement in front of a Sunday School class resulting in an exchange of some harsh words. They had already privately sought each other's forgiveness. But due to the public nature of the conflict, they decided to seek the forgiveness of the class members as well. And so, that particular morning, they acknowledged their sin and confessed their failure to the class. Ken Sande's initial response was: "Of all the Sunday's my colleague would come, it would have to be on a day where dirty laundry is being aired! What is she going to think?" To his surprise, her response was not revulsion—but amazement! She had never seen conflict end in such a resolution. The conduct of the two leaders turned into a powerful illustration of the reconciling power of the Gospel!

4. Living out biblical submission by selflessly pursuing the roles God has given you in your personal relationships and vocational responsibilities (5:1-6:9). As God's Spirit fills His people, He actually allows us to live in Christ-like ways in our relationships and responsibilities. In fact, God's goal is that we become like His Son, our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, in serving others.

Illustration: This means living life as though we are perpetual "hosts" to others (rather than "guests" who continually expect to be served).

In short, God wants the Church to be people who are pursuing exceptional lives—that is people who are living in such a way that we begin to reflect reality of God to watching angels! (Ephesians 3:10). God is their instructor. The angels are the students. The universe is the class room. And the Church is the object lesson. And the lesson for them as well as a watching, unbelieving world is this: *The infinite power and wisdom of a God who can take people ruined by sin—and put them completely back **together** again. Believer, do you understand who you are? Are you living it out?*