



Lesson 3

RG and OUR IDENTITY

OPENING STORY

“How To Find Yourself: 11 Ways To Discover Your True Identity”¹

Knowing who you are is a big deal. Unfortunately, we allow the horizontal to define our identity in the vertical. The above cited article offers a lot of “helpful” thoughts concerning your identity in the horizontal, but it does not shape your identity in the vertical.

David Benner, a psychologist and author of the book *The Gift of Being Yourself*, defines identity as “who we *experience* ourselves to be – the I each of us carries within [Emphasis added].”²

Why is this a wrong way to think of identity?

If we reject our vertical identity, then all we have is the horizontal. But if we accept the vertical, then and only then will our horizontal be impacted and changed.

SOME INITIAL THOUGHTS

Although our story speaks to Adam and Eve’s refusal to obey God, their sin became our sin. How is such possible? Two ideas fuse together at this juncture in the *Story*. **First**, Adam and Eve are Race Progenitor [Seminal Headship | Physical]. All of humanity existed in the loins of Adam and Eve. We carry within us their DNA. Their sin is intrinsic to our very makeup. Who he is becomes who we are. This is *original sin*. **Second**, Adam is Race Representative [Federal Headship | Spiritual]. Because of his position of headship, he represents each part (Rom. 5:12-21). Thus, the Scripture speaks of humanity as in Adam. This is *imputation*.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. It is only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that anyone can be saved.
2. In Adam, all are condemned. In Christ, all are justified.
3. The need for Jesus never changes regardless of whether one is in Adam or in Christ. One’s relationship to Christ, however, does change.

Who he is forms our identity before God.

In Adam

We Are Condemned by Position

We Are Condemned by Practice

In Christ

We Are Justified by Position

We Are Justified by Practice

Collectively, in Adam, all of humanity is guilty of transgression and condemned. Yet individually, we all like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6). We are in the *Story* through Adam but also by our own choice.

One of the needs we have as Christians is to understand who we were in Adam and who we now are in Christ. This “position” [Race Representative | Federal Headship | Spiritual] causes our identity before the Father. This identity is based on who we are, not in what we do. What we do always comes from who we are.

Our “In Adam” identity necessitated God’s action of grace. The Scripture describes the unbelieving as being “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1-3). Because they are neither good nor righteous (Rom. 3:10-12) they are “by nature children of [divine] wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Their present condition is so atrocious that the wrath of God is even now abiding on them (John 3:36). Fortunately, *what we once were, we no longer are*. The Bible describes for us the condition of the lost. The picture painted is anything but flattering. We will attempt to answer three questions:

- **First**, what were we in Adam?
- **Second**, why is salvation by grace and not works?
- **Finally**, what happened to our old self, in Adam, at the cross?

We will begin with the first question.

Why the stress on what we were in Adam? The purpose of the study is to show us our inability. To study our **fallen nature** is to receive a healthy dose of reality. Because all this is true, we need to consider what we are as believers. This is what makes our justification or salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone **so exceptional and essential**. What we could not do, He did. This leads us to consider Ephesians 2:1-10, which provides for us a context to look at His grace holistically. Before we consider Ephesians 2, let us look at Paul’s preceding thoughts in chapter 1.

“In chapter one Paul wrote of the great purposes and plan of God, culminating in the universal headship of Christ.”³ This purpose finds its inception in the salvation of man. The entire passage accents God’s greatness and man’s debasement.

“One of the richest passages about identity in the Bible is found in Ephesians 1:3-14. In this passage, Paul addresses the church in Ephesus, explaining the new identity given to a person when they are in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, grace-lavished and unconditionally loved and accepted. We are pure, blameless and forgiven. We have received the

hope of spending eternity with God. When we are in Christ, these aspects of our identity can never be altered by what we do.”⁴

Please notice **the literary flow** of the Letter to Ephesus.

Literary Context:

1:1-14 (v. 3 is the thesis, the premise; vv. 4-14 is the evidence)

- Chosen by the Father (v. 4) to the praise of His glorious grace (v. 6)
- Redeemed by the Son (v. 7) to the praise of His glory (v. 12)
- Sealed by the Spirit (v. 13) to the praise of His glory (v. 14)

Paul’s intent is for our minds to explode!

Paul then prays his audience would come to understand how incredible this opening statement is (1:15-23).

- The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (v. 18)
- The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe (v. 19)
- The working of his great might that he worked in Christ (v. 20)
- The placing of Jesus above all rule and authority and power and dominion (v. 21)

This inflated speech extends throughout the entire Letter. The inflated speech, however, isn’t exaggeration, but revelation.

Q1 – What is Paul wanting his audience to hear as he presents his thoughts in chapter 1?

Q2 – What could be our response to all of chapter 1?

Paul then brings us to **GROUND ZERO** in 2:1-10. What begins in chapter 1, shows itself in us. Notice how Paul ends this description in verse 10. Verse 10 speaks of walking in GOOD WORKS. The GOOD WORKS are then noted in CHAPTERS 4 and 5. Chapters 4 and 5 are the fruit of the gospel. Only the gospel can and will cause this. The world always works to produce this without the gospel and it is nothing but Babel. Chapter 6 tells us that this is war, we are wrestling against principalities, power, and spiritual wickedness in high places and we need to see how life is lived in these two competing realms. We live in a very tangible world, but what you see isn’t all there is to see. Ephesians tells us as much.

What we see throughout Ephesians is, “Human depravity is no match for Divine generosity.” Whatever has been is completely swallowed up by what will be. God’s grace always wins.

He then shows us the magnitude of this generosity in 2:11-22.

God causes Jews AND Gentiles to become

- The household of God (v. 19)
- A Holy Temple in the Lord and (v. 21)
- A dwelling place for God by the Spirit (v. 22)

“The faith which God’s grace elicits is for him incompatible with anything like merit, and it is also beyond any racial distinctions; these are the two foci of his ellipse, ‘all is of grace’ and this ‘grace is for all.’”⁵

There is intentional language taking us back to the Garden in Eden and all the way forward to Revelation 21 and 22.

Think about the divisions that form because of differences created by social, economic, and domestic markings in any community. Think about how we view others who are different than us. Now think about what Paul says here and in chapters 4 and 5.

Paul’s intent is for our minds to explode! As we continue to walk through the Letter, chapter 3:1-13 speak of Paul’s stewardship. He is a steward of *this* gospel. The gospel that is sourced and originating in the Triune God, saving sinners and reconciling the alienated and ostracized. It is the gospel where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). It is that gospel that Paul preaches.

This gospel takes all who are in Adam and transfers them together into Christ. They become **in Him**, the household, the living temple, and the dwelling place.

Paul’s continued prayer (3:14-21) is for the fullest impact of this immeasurable greatness of His power in and through His Body, the church.

Now, let us go back to 2:1-10 and look at GROUND ZERO and what we will see is how human depravity is no match for divine generosity. Whatever has been is completely swallowed up by what will be.

The gospel shapes one’s identity. It changes one’s identity from being identified by Adam (vv. 1-3) to that of being identified by Christ (vv. 4-10). In Adam, there is nothing but condemnation. In Christ, there is nothing but justification. Both are thorough and both are equally true.

What makes this study of identity in Adam and then in the transforming power of being in Christ so powerful is the historical and theological context of the audience.

Historical Context

- Paul is imprisoned in Rome and writing to the Church in Ephesus.
- Time wise we are at the end of Acts 28 at about 60AD.
- Ephesus was the capital of what is now modern-day Turkey.
- Noted for its Temple to Diana [roman religion] or Artemis [Greek goddess] (Acts 19). One of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In Acts 20, Paul speaks to the Elders of Ephesus and warns them against ‘savage wolves’ (vv. 17-38).

- Some suggest Paul never met the recipients of this letter. There are no personal names mentioned apart from the person who delivers the letter. This suggests the church was multiplying beyond Paul's initial impact.
- When you think of the capital city of Jerusalem in Israel, the capital city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, and the capital city of Rome in Italy, you can rightly conclude that these people were very diverse caused by distance, culture, ethnicity, society and economy. And **these differences not only caused occasion for division, but were also to be seen as occasion for celebration.** The power of the gospel is able to join people who are very diverse because of distance, culture, ethnicity, society, and economy and yet in Christ we are all one and together we are the household of God. That is amazing. And it is this incredible work of the gospel that the Book of Ephesians celebrates and we are to celebrate as well.

This is possible because human depravity is no challenge, no match to divine generosity.

Q3 - Why are there ethical or cultural divisions in the church?

Q4 - How do we overcome those differences in the church?

"To understand our new identity, we've got to uncover our old identity. We've got to dig deeper into who we were, beyond our ancestry and family of origin, to see the ugly truth. Paul is going to show us an unfiltered picture of who we really are. [Tony Merida, Pastor for Preaching and Vision of Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, NC]. Before we can understand just how much God has done for us, we must understand where we have come from or better yet, where we were without Christ."⁶

Let us walk through Ephesians 2:1-10.

I. Human Depravity - THE BELIEVER'S PAST SIN – The Guilt of Humanity (2:1-3 [In Adam - Radical Corruption]).

This paragraph describes for us our identity in Adam. It is our trespasses and sins that cause the deadness. **We were as far removed from God as we could possibly be. In fact, the unbelieving are disciples, followers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is what we once were. All of this changed when we came to Jesus. Whereas once we were disciples of Adam, now we are disciples of Jesus.**

A. What does this look like (vv. 2, 3)?

Often the Christian speaks of the world, the devil, and the flesh as the villains within the story of God. Here is where such an idea originates.

1. We walked according to the course of this world (v. 2a)

The idea of “walked” (**parapateo** [Aorist Active Indicative]) speaks to a “course of life, manner or conduct of living. It denotes the notion of a continual, habitual action.” This walking speaks of deliberate progress in a particular direction. You and I are in the Garden, everything out there is Babel.

2. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air . . . according to the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (v. 2b)

The devil is the temporary ruler of this age or world. He is not an originator or creator but an instigator that provides ample opportunity for humanity to vent their rebellion against God. John 8:44 refers to the devil as being the father of the unbelieving. It is his philosophy of life/death that shapes and molds the thinking of depraved humanity.

The word “working” is the Greek word **energeo**. We have transliterated it into English as *energize*. It is a present active participle. There is within us a spirit that rebels against God and against those whom God places over us in our lives. We rage against the federal government, we rage against the state government, we rage against community authorities. We rage at our children’s teachers, we rage against our employers, we rage within our homes and we rage within the church. This thing that rebels is our fallen flesh and the prince of darkness feeds it through his control of this world system.

3. We lived in the lusts of the flesh (v. 3)

It is our fallen Adamic flesh that makes us anarchists. The unbelieving is in rebellion against God. The fallen world shaped by the prince of darkness appeals to our fallen flesh.

As a consequence of all this, we become . . .

B. What does this result in? We were children of wrath

What a man does can only be explained by what a man is. One's sinfulness is a result of one's inborn depravity. Our very nature demanded the wrath of God.

Just as God wants me to be overwhelmed by His generosity, so also does He want me to be overwhelmed by my depravity. He wants me to say, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

Jerry Bridges correctly notes, “We can never rightly understand God’s grace until we understand our plight as those who need His grace.”⁷

Thankfully, my depravity is no match for His generosity. Whatever has been, is completely swallowed up by what will be. This is God's grace filled act in behalf of undeserving sinners.

Q5 - Is the unbelieving world capable of solving its social problems?

Q6 - What is the only answer to humanity's social problems?

II. Divine Generosity - THE BELIEVER'S PRESENT STANDING – The Grace of God (2:4-10 [In Christ - Radical Conversion]).

This paragraph describes for us our identity in Christ. We are made alive together with Christ (2:4-10). Listen to the generous language of God.

A. Notice the Richness of God's Generosity

2:4 **plousios** [rich] occurs five times in Ephesians.

Riches [ploutos]

- Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to **the riches of his grace**;
- Eph 1:18 Having the eyes of your heart enlightened; that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**,
- Eph 2:7 so that in the coming ages **he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**.
- Eph 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**;
- Eph 3:16 That **according to the riches of his glory** he might grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

Notice God's generous or excessive language.

- 1:3 **spiritual** blessings
- 1:3 **heavenly** places [1:20; 3:10]
- 1:6 **glorious** grace
- 1:19 **immeasurable** greatness [**hyperballo**]
- 1:19 **great** might
- 1:21 **far** above all
- 1:23 the fullness of him who fills all in all
- 2:4 **great** love
- 2:7 **immeasurable** riches of his grace [**hyperballo**]
- 3:8 **unsearchable** riches of Christ
- 3:10 the **manifold** wisdom of God
- 3:11 the **eternal** purpose

3:19 to know the love of Christ that **surpasses** knowledge [**hyperballo**]
3:20 far more **abundantly** than all that we ask or think

The generosity of God springs up and overflows with such power and magnitude that we cannot contain it nor stand up against it. It is like resisting the advances of an avalanche or tsunami. God's power destroys and kills sin and transforms and rescues sinners.

[Pastor Pete Zolkowski, Sermon - Liberating Limitations: Surrender, •Streamed live on Nov 29, 2020
{@52 Minute Mark}]

“The only thing that can keep us from the love of God is our sin and Jesus paid for it all. It is finished. We can't even pay for it if we wanted to because Jesus already did. We do not have to secure His favor or earn His blessings. Because in Christ God does not love us as we are but He loves us as Jesus is. Now, in Christ, God looks at us and says you are my children. With you I am well please because of what Jesus has already done.”

Human depravity is no match for Divine generosity. Whatever has been is completely swallowed up by what will be. This is God's grace filled act in behalf of undeserving sinners.

B. Notice the Consequences of God's Generosity

Because God is generous, three things happened.

- **He made us alive (v. 5)**
- **He saved us by grace (vv. 5a, 8)**
- **He placed us in Christ (v. 6)**

The purpose of the church being made alive, raised up and seated with Him is for this end. Verse seven gives us the reason as to why He did verses five through six. It is a **cosmic display**.

In mercy, He withheld wrath. In love, He looks upon us favorably. In grace, He gives us His life. Our identification with Christ is all an expression of grace. Why is it all of grace? **So that in the ages to come** He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (v. 7). Here we see the motive of God as to why He did what was done.

We see His grace by His actions.

Verses 8 through 10 answer the why we are this glorious cosmic display.

- God will be glorified BECAUSE |For it is by grace (vv. 8, 9)
- God will be glorified BECAUSE |For we are his workmanship (v. 10)

Paul's intent is for our minds to explode!

“The main thing Paul wants to stress about all this is the sheer, almost unbelievable, magnificent kindness of God.”⁸

Paul notes three thoughts in verses 8-10.

- 1. Salvation is a gift from God (v. 8)**
- 2. Salvation leaves no room for boasting (v. 9)**
- 3. Salvation is the good work of God causing good work from God (v. 10)**

Chapters 4 and 5 show us what this looks like in the church.

What these good works look like become apparent in chapters 4-6. The redemption of His people by His means is His triumph and culmination of His story (2:7; 3:10).

Human depravity is no match for Divine generosity. Whatever has been is completely swallowed up by what will be. This is God's grace filled act in behalf of undeserving sinners.

My wife and I enjoy viewing art. I find art beautiful and shadows of the greater craftsman. But when I view the art, I do not simply think the art is beautiful. I also marvel at the gifting that produced such work.

The Church is the redeemed people of God. We are this picture. We are trophies of grace, and it is as we live as the redeemed that this good work of redemption is showcased in our community. The Church glorifies God. Our good works do not point to us, but to Him. God has called us out from the world and into His church. And then from His church into the world.

Q7 - How is God described in this section of our paragraph and in the Letter to the Ephesian Church?

Q8 - What three things happened because of God being generous?

Q9 - What application can we make from this chapter?

Q10 - What does this study cause you to change in your thinking and/or actions?

CONCLUSION

You and I have "eaten" all the garbage the world has to offer. Only the gospel can cleanse our palate. Ephesians resets our taste buds; it cleans our palate - so that we can "taste" the riches of His grace and see through the clutter of this world and hear more clearly the voice of God instead of the invasive chatter engulfing us all.

The believer must live with the tension that exists in possessing two natures continually in opposition to each other (Rom. 7:14-24). Sanctification is the process by which God renews the mind of the believer to live in light of his new nature rather than his old nature (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:15; Col. 3:1-14; Titus 3:11-12; Eph. 5:8 [Cf. L5]). It is not a process where God cleans up the old nature in order to make it good. The old nature is non-redeemable (Eph. 4:22). The new nature is non-corruptible (Rom 6:9). Choices made, experiences interpreted, truths believed either exist within the framework of our old nature or according to His Spirit living within us. As our choices are made according to His life within us, our new nature shines forth more brilliantly (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:10-11). The good news is Christ always wins and therefore His life within us is always victorious (Rom. 6:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3-5).

Listen to this powerful conclusion by Dudley Hall.

Grace doesn't just change your destiny, it changes your identity. You're no longer a slave to unrighteousness, but a slave to righteousness. Every chance you get to obey, to submit to Christ, do it. For in this you are establishing righteousness in your life. Then, when you look in the mirror, you will not be tempted to judge yourself by your history but you can, with sincerity of heart, agree with God and judge yourself by your destiny.⁹

NEXT LESSON – RG and the Cross

¹ <https://www.aconsciousrethink.com/10395/how-to-find-yourself/>

² <https://www.cru.org/us/en/blog/life-and-relationships/identity/who-am-i-a-new-way-to-define-identity.html>

³ *NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁴ <https://www.cru.org/us/en/blog/life-and-relationships/identity/who-am-i-a-new-way-to-define-identity.html>

⁵ James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament*, p. 9.

⁶ <https://jasonsneed.com/2017/02/15/ephesians-your-identity-in-christ-part-2/>

⁷ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, p. 32.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 20.

⁹ Dudley Hall, *Grace Works* (Multnomah Pub., 2000), 263.