



I AM IN CHRIST

Part 2 of Ephesians

Pastor Mark Driscoll | January 20, 2013

THE FIRST ADAM AND THE LAST ADAM

Alright, you ready? Big question, big question. Who are the two most important people who have ever lived in the history of the world? First one, Jesus, yeah. Even if you're new, there's a layup, okay? I'm like the teacher who gives you an easy one before crushing you, alright. So, the most important person who's ever lived is Jesus.

Who's the second most important person who's ever lived in the history of the world? It's very quiet. One guy said his wife. That guy is a genius. His life is pretty good because of his genius answer. Think about it for a moment. The second most important person who's ever lived in the history of the world. Your answer reveals a lot about something called your worldview, how you see history and your place in it. The Bible teaches us that the second most important person in the history of the world is a guy named Adam. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:45, it talks about Adam, the first Adam, and Jesus, the last Adam.

One of the great myths, particularly in the West, is that each of us is exclusively an isolated individual. We see ourselves almost exclusively, in individualistic terms, at the very most, perhaps, part of a family and a role and an identity within the context of a family. The result is, then, we tend to have an identity based upon things like: "Am I young? Am I old? Am I black? Am I white? Am I rich? Am I poor? Am I Republican? Am I Democrat? Am I smart or not so smart? Am I beautiful or am I average? Am I a winner? Am I a loser? Am I healthy? Am I sick? Am I single? Am I married? Am I divorced? Am I widowed?" All of these things may help explain us, but they don't define us.

Really, there are only two categories of human beings today, yesterday, and tomorrow: those who are in Adam, and those who are in Christ. Those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ, that's how God sees all of humanity in human history. So, the next question is for you, personally, practically: are you in Adam or in Christ?

ARE YOU IN ADAM OR IN CHRIST?

Sometimes when we talk about Adam or we talk about Jesus, because of the therapeutic nature of the culture we live in where everybody's almost only, exclusively thinking about, meditating upon, and talking about themselves, when we start to talk about Adam or we start to talk about Christ, some of you may be disinterested. But here's a very important point: you're either in Adam, or you're in Christ. And this is so incredibly important because, literally, your identity and your eternal destiny hang in the balance of whether you're in Adam or you're in Christ. You're born in Adam as a sinner and you're born again in Christ, who is a Savior. So incredibly important.

Here's how God sees history: he sees two leaders, two heads, two captains. You'll read with me, as we're going to spend the next few months together going through the book of Ephesians, you'll see this word come up a few times, this word "head." The word "head," and what that means is leader. That means captain. That means one whose decisions implicate and affect everyone else who is associated with them.

None of us are individuals. None of us are isolated. None of us stand alone. We're part of one of two groups, one of two families, one of two teams, one of two nations: those who are in Adam, and those who are in Christ. Here's how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. "For as by a man came death," that's Adam, "by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead," that's Jesus. And here's the language: "For in Adam," there's one team, one group, one category, "all," what? "die, so also in Christ," there's our big idea, "in Christ shall all be made alive." I want you to start to see yourself in these two terms: in Adam or in Christ.

Now, this is why it is so incredibly important. We're all born in Adam. We all inherit from him a sinful nature. We all inherit from him separation from God, and we need to be born again. We're physically alive, but spiritually dead to God. We also need to be made spiritually alive to God, born again in Christ. This is the foundation, this is the framework for your identity. And the big theme we're going to be studying through the book of Ephesians for months, and months, and months is this big issue of identity. Identity.

The Bible speaks of identity as being in Adam or in Christ, so much so that the Bible speaks of believers being in Christ no less than 216 times. Just the Apostle Paul himself, in the thirteen letters of the New Testament that he writes, he talks about us being in Christ. He'll use language like, "in him, in the Beloved, in Christ," 216 times. Let me say this: anyone who tells you something 216 times, number one, it's important, number two, they're afraid you're going to forget it. Right?

Do you know how many times the New Testament says that a Christian is a Christian and uses the language of "Christian"? Three times. The Bible says that your identity is as Christian three times, and that your identity is in Christ 216 times. It's one of the primary ways, if not the most common way, that God refers to a Christian.

Here's the difference between being in Adam and being in Christ: at the cross of Jesus Christ, he traded places with us. He literally traded places with me. All of the death, all of the shame, all of the condemnation that I deserve went to Jesus. All of the forgiveness, all of the love, all of the grace that Jesus rightly has as the sinless Son of God comes to me. What that does is that changes our identity.

I want you to see this: if you are in Christ, you are in Christ's position and Christ is in your position. He suffers and dies so that you might be blessed and live. Do you believe that God the Father loves the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that he is kind toward him, and gracious toward him, that his ear is attuned toward him, that his affection is devoted to him? Mars

Hill, I have great news for you. If you are in Christ, you stand in the position of Christ. You are loved as Christ is loved, you are blessed as Christ is blessed, you are embraced and adored as Christ is embraced and adored. I need you to see that so that you'll live from your identity in Christ, that you'll realize that you're free from religion and trying to perform for God. You'll be free from shame and condemnation, because all of that is taken care of for you by Christ and is available to you in Christ.

So, we're born in Adam. That's our original, inherited, fallen identity. We're born again in Christ. That's our new, redeemed, resurrected identity, given to us in Christ. I'll say it this way: in Adam there is defeat, but in Christ there is victory. In Adam there is condemnation, but in Christ there is salvation. In Adam we receive a sin nature, but in Christ we receive a new nature. In Adam we are cursed, but in Christ we are blessed. In Adam there is wrath and death, but in Christ there is love and life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN CHRIST?

My question to you is this: are you in Adam or in Christ? And I need you to see your identity and your destiny as God does. The next question: what does it mean to be in Christ? What does it mean to be in Christ? When the Bible uses this language of "in Christ," or "in him," or "in the Beloved," and it speaks of our identity in these various ways, what does it mean?

Well, this understanding, this new concept is revolutionary. Before the Apostle Paul starts writing, "in Christ, in Christ, in Christ," 216 times, that language was not used. Outside of Paul's writing, it is rarely used. Paul was trying to, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, help you, and me, and all of God's children understand our identity, who we are. Not who we think we are, not who others say we are, but who God says we are. And so he came up with a brand-new concept and some new language, because when Jesus rose from the dead, all things became new and language was straining to understand, to articulate all of the changes that have happened because of his resurrection. And so Paul coins this phrase, "in Christ," and he's echoing the very words of the Lord Jesus himself.

Let me read it to you from John 15:5. What does it mean to be in Christ? Well, here's what Christ says: "I am the vine; you are the branches." Any of you do any gardening? Any of you landscapers for a living? The branch needs the trunk. The branch cannot survive without the trunk. There's no nourishment, there's no life for the branch apart from the trunk.

You need to know this: you're a branch, not a trunk. You're not the strong one who's going to nurture others. You're not the essential one that others cannot live without. You're also not independent unto yourself where you can nourish and sustain your own spiritual life. You and I, we're branches. He's the trunk. Every time you see a tree, every time you see a plant, remind yourself, "He is the vine, he is the trunk. Me? I'm just a branch."

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me—" This is language of relationship and affection. Jesus is a person, not a concept. He's alive, not dead. He speaks to you through Scripture. He hears you through prayer. He wants a relationship with you, a personal, loving friendship.

And if you continue in that friendship and you grow in that friendship, and you nurture that friendship— "Whoever abides in me and I in him," there's our language. "He it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do," what? "Nothing." Some of you say, "I can do a lot of things," and in the sight of God, it's nothing, and in the end, when all is said and done, it will account for nothing.

The illusion could be, in this world, that you're accomplishing a lot, but ultimately, eternally, as you stand before him for whom we must all give an account, it will be nothing. You will have wasted an entire life. The only way life is rightly to be lived and eternally to be credited is if we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, and our life is the overflow. It's the outpouring of the life of Jesus in and through us.

I want you to see that the beginning of your identity is in Christ, and then that is also the beginning of your activity. So, from your identity comes your activity. Now, for those of you who were raised under religion, or guilt, or manipulation, or condemnation, or shame, you will wrongly think, "I need to live my life in such a way that I'm fruitful, and I'm holy, and I'm mature, and I'm moral, and I'm growing, so that then Jesus will want to have a relationship with me." That's exactly the opposite of how it works.

Jesus wants to come into your life, he wants his life to flow through your life so that you can begin to change, and from you comes something called fruitfulness: a new way of thinking, a new way of acting, a new way of living. But it's not you, it's Christ in you, it's Christ through you. It's Jesus' life changing your life, Jesus' life taking residence in your life, and it is the life of Jesus producing fruit through your life. Now, what this leads to is a far more productive and humble life. You can do things by the power of God that you cannot do on your own, but you're doing them to the glory of God, which means there'll be greater humility.

How's it going with Jesus? So oftentimes what happens in this world—again, dominated by psychological concepts, not all of which are bad—but we can look toward a goal, and then we can look to ourselves to try and meet that goal rather than looking to Jesus, asking how we can grow in relationship with him so that his life, and love, and power would be present in us and then would flow through us for whatever future he might have for us. You understand the difference?

If you don't understand that Christ is the essence of your life, that your hope, your future, your joy, your power are in Christ, you will either become arrogant trying to be a trunk, or you will become discouraged knowing that you can't change your life, and you can't do all that you're supposed to do and be all that you're supposed to be. But if you understand that your identity's in Christ, then suddenly you understand that your hope is in Christ, and your power is in Christ, and your fruitfulness is in Christ, and that gives you great courage, and it also gives you great humility. "I can change by the grace of God." Are you in Adam or are you in Christ?

The reason I tell you this is when it comes to our understanding of God, particularly in the present-day church, people still tend to, for the most part, go to the Bible: What does it say about God? But here's what happens: when we ask questions about ourselves, and our identity, and who we are, it is increasingly common to go to the social sciences, to go to psychology, to sociology, to anthropology.

"Am I the first-born, the middle child, or the youngest, the baby in the family? Am I an introvert? Am I an extrovert? What's my personality type? ENTJ, J-E-R-K? You know, what personality type am I? Where am I in the Myers-Briggs? Where am I on the various psychological tests? Am I a feeler? Am I a thinker? Who am I?"

And all of a sudden, we hand over much of our identity and the understanding of who we are and who we're supposed to be to the social sciences and we walk away from Scripture. Some of you say, "What? We shouldn't use those things?" Those things may explain us, but they're incapable of defining us. They may tell you some things about who you are, but they don't reveal to you who you are in Christ. So, let's go to the Scriptures and let's ask, "What's our identity?" Because the worst place to start forming your identity is to start with

you. In addition, the next worst place to start is others. “They’re like this, I’m like that. Now I’m getting an identity based upon how I’m similar or different from those people.”

The best place to start your identity is to start in Christ. “Who’s Jesus? What’s he done? Who am I in him? Now, out of that, there may be things that explain me—introvert, extrovert, a thinker, a feeler, those kinds of things—but they don’t define me. They’re not the essence of who I am. They may be activities, but they’re not my identity.” Do you know who you are?

As we were beginning this series, I had one mother say, “I’m terrified. All I know is that I’m a wife and a mom.” That’s activity, that’s not identity. Her identity is in Christ, and that should affect her relationship with her husband, that should affect her relationship with her children, allow that fruitfulness to come from Jesus, through her, to her family. But so oftentimes, our activity becomes our identity. Things that explain us start to define us, and the result is, invariably, they fail us.

What does it mean to be in Christ? Let me tell you how I see this very practically. I’m trying to take a very large, complicated, theological idea and present it in a way that is really practical, and pastoral, and personal for you. I tend to see this identity issue playing itself out personally, parentally, and pastorally.

PERSONALLY

Personally, this is a very important concept for me. I love my wife, Grace, but if I make her the source of my identity, I’m putting her in the place of God, and she becomes the center around which my whole life orbits, and she will be crushed under the weight of being God to me. I love my five children, I love being a dad, but similarly, the children cannot be the center of my life. They cannot be the hope for my future. They cannot be, in any way, God to me.

My identity has to be in Christ so that I can love and serve Grace. My identity has to be in Christ so I can love and serve our five children. It’s really important for me personally, otherwise I will take those that I love the most and eventually I will destroy them, or I will be discouraged by them or disappointed in them, and in so doing, then I will destroy them.

Have you been there? I’ve seen, personally, you can find your identity idolatry—an identity idolatry is where our identity’s not in Christ, but we’re trying to have someone or something other than Christ be that which defines our life, our value, our dignity, and to live in light of that.

Here’s one way you can find your identity idolatry: pay attention to what you count. What do you count? There’s a difference between something being important to you and something being an idol to you. I count five kids. I always want to count five. If we have four, it should concern me, amen? Right? I do want to be healthy, I do want to pay my bills. Some things do matter, but if those things move from being things that are important to things that become my identity, then all of a sudden I am incapable of living the kind of life that Jesus has for me.

Because suddenly, I’m not getting my life, and my sustenance, and my nourishment, and my hope, and my courage, and my joy from Jesus, but from someone or something that has taken his place. What this also means, personally, is that you are not just discouraged but destroyed by criticism, because you’re living your whole life for your identity idolatry, and as soon as someone should critique that, it doesn’t just concern you, it crushes you.

PARENTALLY

Parentally, I think a lot of parenting—and this has huge implications for parenting—is helping your children know who they are in Christ. That’s why, in some regards, parenting is really discipling. Do you have a kid who has a lot of self-confidence? We call it high self-esteem, the Bible calls it pride. You got one of those kids? They’re smart, they’re athletically gifted, they’re musically talented, they’re artistically capable, they’re beautiful, they’re funny, they’re likeable, whatever their thing is, or they’re none of those things, but they think they are, right? They think they are. That tends to be American kids: low test scores, high self-esteem. That’s how we do it. “I can’t read or write, but I think I’m a genius.” That’s an American kid.

Do you have a kid like that, high self-confidence? You need to tell them that their identity in Christ means, “No, God made you and you are a sinner. Your sin is pride. And any gifts you have, they’re gifts from God, and any opportunities you have are opportunities from the Lord, and apart from Christ, you can’t do anything. I want you to understand that it’s not about self-confidence, it’s about confidence in Christ.”

Conversely, any of you parents have kids that have very low self-confidence, very low self-image, very low self-esteem? What you don’t start doing is finding things that are good in them and then praising them, because all you’re doing is appealing to their pride. Instead, you tell them who they are in Christ. “Do you know that God made you? Do you know that Jesus saves you? Do you know that in Christ you have a new identity? See, Jesus is your grade point average. It doesn’t matter if you’re an A student or a D student. If you’re worshiping the Lord, doing your best, you are who you are in Christ and Christ is your perfection.” It doesn’t matter if you take a risk and fail because in Christ all things are completed. “In Christ, all things are finished,” he says. You and I are freed from the pressure, then, of being perfect, of performing. We don’t work for our identity, we work from our identity.

It means whether we succeed or whether we fail, or whether we’re rich or whether we’re poor, if we’re living a life that glorifies God, in Christ our identity is unshakeable. This means that our life is not poverty-free, it’s not affliction-free, it’s not suffering-free, but it’s poverty-, sickness-, and affliction-proof. We’ll get through it in Christ. We’ll get through it in Christ. We’ll grow through it in Christ. We might even overcome it in Christ. We may not overcome it in Christ. The good news is we’re still in Christ and our identity is secure.

PASTORALLY

Pastorally, as I see people who sin and allow others to sin against them, both of which cause suffering, I find that under a lot of the pain, and the strife, and the struggle, and the difficulty, and the complication is people don’t know that their identity’s in Christ. They don’t know that their identity’s in Christ. The result is they will assume a false identity, and that identity is never one that leads to life, it always leads to death. It never leads to joy, it always leads to despair. It never leads to Christ, it all leads back to Adam. Does this make sense? Am I making sense? Okay, for both of you, good. For the rest of you, I hope to do better.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS?

Okay, so we’ve taken this big idea of what it means to be in Christ and I want to ask this question: what does it mean to be in Christ according to the book of Ephesians? This brings us to the book of Ephesians. We’re going to start into it this week and we’re going to then plow through it for fourteen consecutive weeks, starting next week.

Here’s what I want you to do: I want you to start reading the book of Ephesians. It’s in your Bible. Read it over, and over, and over. It was John Calvin’s favorite book of the Bible.

Read it over, and over, and over, and be looking for “in Christ, in him, in the Beloved.” You’ll see “in Christ” about a dozen times. You’ll see variations of it more than twenty times. In the six chapters of the book, you’ll see this concept of “in Christ” more than thirty times. Highlight it, circle it, surround it, pray about it, think about it, study it.

Get yourself into the Word of God, get the Word of God into you, and go through the book asking yourself, “What does it mean to have an identity in Christ?” because the big, unifying theme of the whole book is identity in Christ, and the scholars tend to agree. You know, guys who tuck their shirts in, and have a lot of free time on Friday nights, and they read a lot of dead guys, they all tend to agree that the book of Ephesians is about our identity in Christ. And that’s going to be our theme for the study of the book of Ephesians.

And so the question, then, is: how does Paul start his letter to the Ephesians? It’s a church that he founded and planted, he spent two years pastoring, teaching, and ministering at. These are people that he knows and he loves. And Paul sometimes is writing letters, perhaps even this one, from prison. Can you imagine if his identity was in his freedom, or his performance, or his public reputation? He’d be destroyed. But Paul is imprisoned, hated, opposed, despised, and he’s talking about our identity not being in our idolatry, but our identity being in Christ.

As he writes to the Ephesians, you would have to suspect that whatever he tells us first is probably the most important, right? Isn’t that where you and I would begin a conversation, or a letter, or an email? Whatever you start with, that’s kind of your big idea. It’s really important, you want to get it out there up front so that nobody forgets it. In Ephesians 1, I think it’s verses 3–14, in the Greek text that your Bible is originally written in, it’s one sentence. One. So all of you English pros, you’re just going to freak out. This is one seriously Holy Spirit –inspired, poorly punctuated verse of Scripture. And I want you to read with me what he says. He’s going to tell us nine things right up front, right in the beginning, of what it means to be in, what? Who? Christ.

IN CHRIST YOU CAN BE FAITHFUL

Okay, first one, here’s where he begins. Ephesians 1:1. He says, in Christ you can be faithful. “To the saints,” that’s what we’re going to talk about next week, “who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.” Question: have you ever struggled with spiritual faithfulness? Is it just me? Have you ever—any of you ever backslid? Any of you walked away from God? Any of you been inconsistent? Any of you can’t even find your Bible it’s been so long? Any of you back in church after a season away? Any of you have sin on the side, things you’re hoping that others don’t find out about?

Have any of you struggled with faithfulness, with perseverance? Have you asked yourself, “How can I become more disciplined? How can I become more faithful?” The answer is in Christ. You can only be faithful in Christ. When you remember who you are, then you’ll know what to do. When you know who Christ is for you, in you, through you, that affects the decisions you make and the life that you live.

I was talking to a guy this week and he said, “There are seasons of my life, as I look back on, that I have been unfaithful. Unfaithful to God, unfaithful to his people.” And he said, “You know, I’ve struggled with this for years.” And he said, “As I was thinking about it, as I’m tempted or frustrated, I just remind myself I am in Christ.” And he said, “Actually, this week, very practically, I was tempted to go back into an old sin, tempted to go back to some old ways, and I remembered I’m in Christ. What that means is I don’t have to do that. I don’t need to have this inconsistency. I don’t need to live out of a duplicitous identity, reversible jersey, ‘I’m in Christ and then someone or something else.’”

In Christ, you will live a faithful life. In Christ you can live a consistent life. In Christ you can live a persevering life. Because if you abide in him and he abides in you, you can bear much fruit. Amen? So, there’s your hope. This is different than motivational speaking. I’ve been asked this by some of the commentators, and some of the reviewers, and media interviews, “How is this different than self-help?” It’s totally different. It’s Christ’s help. This is not about me living a life that glorifies God. This is about God living a life through me that glorifies God, but it’s God’s life in me, it’s God’s life through me. It’s not just my life for him, it’s his life through mine.

In Christ you can be faithful, because friends, Christ was faithful. He never rebelled, he never sinned, he never strayed, he never repented. The one thing we must do frequently and continually is the thing that he never had to do, and that’s repent. He’s without sin, he’s perfect. Christ alone is faithful, and he’s faithful to us. And even when we’re faithless, the Bible says he’s what? He’s still faithful, and it’s the faithfulness of Christ to us that allows us to live out the faithfulness of Christ.

IN CHRIST YOU ARE BLESSED

The second thing that he says: In Christ you are blessed. Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.” He jumps down in Ephesians 1:6, “He has blessed us in the Beloved.” Have you ever felt cursed? Have you ever felt like your life is not what it should be? You’re working hard, but you’re not getting the promotion. Maybe you’re working hard and you don’t even keep the job. Relationally, you’re investing in people and they’re taking from you.

Do you feel like your life is one in which you’re cursed, that others are just taking? They’re greedy, not generous financially, emotionally, spiritually, practically. Have you ever woken up and looked in the mirror and wondered, “Is everyone using me? Is everyone taking from me? Does no one care about me? Is no one giving anything to me?”

In Christ, you’re blessed. In Christ, you’re blessed. Sometimes that’s financially, sometimes that’s emotionally, sometimes that’s physically, all the time, that’s spiritually. You’ve been blessed with the righteousness of Christ. You’ve been blessed with the love of Christ. You’ve been blessed with the forgiveness of Christ. You’ve been blessed with a guaranteed resurrection from the dead and an eternal life in Christ. We deserve hell. Everything else is a blessing. Everything else is a blessing. You are blessed.

And I want to be careful how I say this. I don’t want you to become lazy, I don’t want you to stop striving, I don’t want you to stop growing, but I do want you to have an attitude of gratitude, where looking around your life, you assume that God blesses you, and you look for the ways that he has blessed you. And when he does bless you, I want you to start to get in the habit of pausing, even momentarily, to prayerfully thank him. If you wake up from a nap, “Hey, thanks Lord Jesus for the nap.” You wake up in the morning, “Thanks Lord Jesus for another day.” The day’s over, “Thank you Lord Jesus that day’s over.”

You and I are blessed, but sometimes we’re blind to the blessing. It’s not that it’s not there, it’s that we’ve closed our eyes. It’s that we are so consumed with wanting something else or mourning something that we didn’t obtain that we forget to appreciate and praise God for what he’s already provided.

I want my children to know they’re a blessing, not a burden. I want my wife to know she’s a blessing, not a burden. Now, I’m a burden, I fully get that, but they’re a blessing. They’re a blessing. And when God provides things in our life, I try as I’m able to tell the kids, “Hey, that came from the Lord, you know? He’s good to us, and that’s his provision, and he

answered our prayer, and this comes from his hand.”

Because in Christ, there is blessing. Now, the truth is we only see perhaps a modicum of that blessing in this life and the rest is waiting for the life to come. So, it’s not that God is withholding blessing, it’s that he’s storing it up so that we can enjoy it eternally. In Christ you are blessed. In Christ you are blessed.

You know, with my father-in-law dying recently, I was talking to the kids. We were crying, and we were mourning, and we were praying for Grandpa after he died, and one of my kids said, “Well, this is really hard, but Grandpa knew Jesus and Jesus loved Grandpa. And his suffering is over, and he’s still alive, and we’re going to see him.” Then one of my other kids said, “Yeah, so this isn’t the worst thing.” Yeah, the worst thing is not dying, the worst thing is not dying in Christ. Every situation has a blessing for those who are in Christ.

IN CHRIST YOU WERE CHOSEN AND MADE BLAMELESS

Number three: in Christ you were chosen and made blameless. Here it is, Ephesians 1:4, “He,” that is God, “chose us.” Calvinistic, Reformed, predestinating language, some of you like it, some of you don’t. I’m just delivering the mail, didn’t write it. “He chose us,” how? “In him,” that’s in Christ, “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

“In Christ,” he says, “you’re chosen and made blameless.” Let me ask you a question. Has anyone ever chosen you? Were you the kid in school—it’s down to you and a potted plant, the last two potential choices for the team, somebody’s like, “I’ll take the potted plant.” You’re like, “Dang it! I never get chosen.” How many of you have never been picked for anything awesome? Never. You were the kid in school, they’re like, “Today, we’re going to draw a name out of a hat,” and you’re like, “It’s not mine. I know it’s not mine. Now, if it’s chicken pox, I’ll get picked. But you know—”

How many of you feel that way? You’re like, “Yeah, I never get picked for anything.” You’re never chosen, you’re never favored, you’re never graced that way. In Christ, you’re chosen. I don’t think this—we’re going to get into this a little more in the ensuing weeks, don’t worry. This is not something for Christians to debate about. It’s not something for Christians to ask the wrong questions about. It’s something for Christians to delight in.

Let’s say there’s an orphanage filled with not great kids, and a dad walks in and says, “I’m going to love that kid.” You know what that kid should do? Rejoice. “Yay!” They shouldn’t ask questions like, “Why was I chosen? Why were the others not chosen? Could the father have not chosen all of the children? What does this reveal about the character of the father? Is he all-loving? Does he love us all? Does he love us equally?”

“Yay. Hey, I got a dad. My dad loves me. I’m no better than the other kids. In fact, I know I’m worse than some of them. And the good news is he didn’t come looking for the prettiest one, or the smartest one, or the best-behaved one. He chose me.”

This is where salvation, friends, is of grace. You’re chosen in Christ. Again, there are two teams, two categories: in Adam, in Christ. If God chooses to save you, to love you, to adopt you, you’re chosen in Christ. Not only that, to “be holy and blameless before him.”

Now, the truth is in the eyes of others, we can appear fairly holy and blameless unless they’re our spouse, and then they see it all. We can’t fool them. But your coworkers, your friends, the people in your Community Group, those of you who you have just some sort of passing relationship with, right, you can fool some of the people some of the time, right? But God sees all, God knows all in his sight. This is what it means to live *coram deo*, which means “in the face of God,” that God sees and knows all, and that he has chosen you, if you’re a Christian in Christ, so that you can live holy and blameless in his sight.

Here’s my next question: have you ever felt dirty? Have you ever felt, “I’m not clean, I’m dirty”? “Things I’ve done, they’re dirty. Things I’ve thought, they’re dirty. Things I’ve said, they’re dirty. Sometimes even desires I still have, they’re dirty. They’re not clean, they’re dirty. They’re not holy, they’re unholy. They’re not godly, they’re ungodly.” Have you struggled with that? Have you felt that?

How many of you have committed a sin that you just feel like that has become your identity? You’re the worst day of your whole life. That’s what you’ve done and then that’s who you are. That’s not true. Who you are is who you are in Christ. What you’ve done is a sin, and it may explain you, but by the grace of God it doesn’t have to define you. It may be something that was in your past, even your recent past, but it doesn’t need to be in your future, including your immediate future.

How many of you have been sinned against in a way that you feel dirty, defiled? You don’t know your dad, or he walked out on you, or he mistreated you, or abandoned you, or abused you, or betrayed you. Or perhaps it was even your mother. Or they said that they loved you and then they ran off with someone else; or they said they were devoted to you and then they committed adultery on you; or they did violence against you emotionally, physically, spiritually, sexually, and suddenly you feel defiled, you feel unclean, you feel as if your identity is in what others have done to you and their sin against you.

If you are in Christ, you are holy. See, again, Jesus took your place and he put you in his place. You’re holy, and he says that you’re what? Blameless. Now, I don’t know about you, I don’t usually feel that way. “Pastor Mark, how do you feel today?” “Blameless! Blameless, yet again. Yet again, blameless.” You know why? Because I know my sin and I know the sins that others have committed against me, and sometimes those can become all-consuming and I lose sight of what Christ has done for me.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are—” what’s it say? “In Christ.” That’s what Paul says to the Romans. “There is now no, no, no, not a little, no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” In Christ, you’re not condemned, you’re forgiven. In Christ, you’re not dirty, you’re clean.

Now, some will say, “You can’t tell people that, they’ll just start sinning like crazy.” Not if they’re in Christ. If they are in Christ, they’ll be so grateful for Christ, so thankful for Christ, so in love with Christ that the last thing they’ll want to do is betray Christ. They won’t want to abuse their new identity, they’ll want to embrace their new identity. They’ll be so grateful that they can change, and grow, and mature that they will not want to revert back to their ways in Adam.

In Christ you’re holy. His perfection is your perfection. In Christ you are blameless. God does not have a list with your transgressions, failures, and offenses. He’s not looking for a way to condemn or to punish you. This frees us up to live out of the righteousness of Christ, and to live for the glory of Christ. Do you see where this is different than religion? I don’t want you to be motivated by guilt. I don’t want you to be motivated by shame. I don’t want you to be motivated by fear. Perfect love casts out fear. I want you to know who you are in

Christ so you can begin to live the life that Christ has for you, and that's Christ's life in you and through you. In Christ you were chosen for this and you can be made holy and blameless.

IN CHRIST YOU ARE FORGIVEN

He goes on to say, in Christ you are forgiven. Ephesians 1:7, "In him." See, how many of you have read the Bible and you missed the 216 times? "In him, in Christ, in him, in Christ, in the Beloved." It's there over, and over, and over. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." In Christ you are forgiven.

Have you ever felt punished? Have you ever felt like, "Man, life is hard right now because God is punishing me"? "This is a difficult season, but I brought it on myself. The Lord is angry with me and he's punishing me." Have you felt that? Let me say this, "In Christ you're forgiven, not punished." See, Jesus died in your place for your sins, and when he said, "It is finished," that's what he meant. And so he traded places with you, so you're in the place of forgiven and he is in the place of condemnation. That's what happened on the cross.

Now, what that means is in Christ you are forgiven. You're forgiven for things you haven't even done yet. You're forgiven for things you will do and fail to do tomorrow. See, sometimes we have this ability to look back on our life and say, "Yes, Jesus forgave all my sin, but today I'm ruined," or "Tomorrow when I sin, that will be the end of me, and Christ will want nothing to do with me." That's not true.

Because Jesus was punished in your place for your sins, God never punishes those who are in Christ because he's already punished Christ. The wrath of God was poured out on the Son of God, not the children of God. Now, it is true we reap what sow. Sometimes we do something wrong and there's consequences for that, and that's God's way of helping us learn and grow. Just like sometimes a parent tells a kid, "Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that," and then the parent lets the kid do it, and the kid realizes, "I shouldn't do that." That's where the Bible says in Proverbs and Hebrews that the Father disciplines the children that he loves. It's always in love, it's never in anger; it's always for our good, never for our destruction; and it's always that we might grow, not that we would be discouraged.

Satan is going to lie to you. He's already lied to some of you, and you think that when you're suffering, God is punishing you. The result is, then, you won't remember who you are in Christ. Instead, you'll have this very sick perspective that to be a Christian is to get crucified. That's idolatry, friends. One was already crucified. You hear people say things like, "Well, you know, I need to pay God back for this," or "I need to suffer for this," or "I brought it on myself." It sounds spiritual, but it's really idolatry. It's saying, "Jesus died, but that's not enough. I need to pay a little bit of this debt myself." No, you don't.

Some of you say, "This doesn't make any sense." That's why the Bible calls it grace. Why would God put us in the position of Christ and put Christ in the position of us? He didn't deserve that, we don't deserve it. He didn't do anything wrong, we did everything wrong. It's grace. This is what the Bible means when it uses words like "love," that "God demonstrates his love for us in this, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

You're forgiven. You're not a little bit forgiven, you're totally forgiven. God doesn't keep a record against you, it's erased in Christ. And when you sin tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that, remember that your identity is not in your sin, your identity is in your Savior; that you don't need to pay God back, that Christ already has; that God isn't punishing you, that Christ already was. And then you can live through your identity in Christ. You can be bold enough to confess your sins and be forgiven, not only by God, but others; and stop pretending, and blame-shifting, and hiding, and excusing, and managing your sin; and start putting your sin to death, because in Christ it's already died.

IN CHRIST YOU CAN KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

Number five: in Christ you can know the will of God. He says this in Ephesians 1:9, "Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ." Here's my next question: have you ever been confused about what the will of God is? Yes? You ever woke up just like, "I don't know! What do you want me to do?" He says, "In Christ, we find the meaning and purpose of life."

"God, do you want me to work here or work there?" Sometimes it's, "I want you to work in a way that glorifies Christ, wherever you work." "God, am I going to be sick? Am I going to be healthy? Am I going to be rich? Am I going to be poor? Am I going to be married? Am I going to be single?" Sometimes those are the wrong questions. The question always has to be: how should I live in this season in Christ? My purpose may not be rich, it may not be healthy, it may not be married, it may not be successful, but God's purpose, God's will for me is whatever circumstance I find myself in to live out of my identity in Christ.

If I'm poor, to live in Christ through poverty. If it's rich, to live in Christ with generosity. If it's single, it's to live as Christ did, as a chaste, godly worshiper through singleness. If it's in marriage, then in Christ I want to love and serve my spouse. If it's infertile, I want to love, and serve, and endure, or perhaps even rejoice in those circumstances in Christ. Or if Christ should give me children, then out of my identity in Christ, how do I share the love of Jesus with the kids?

We all have the same purpose. He says it. The purpose is set forth in Christ. Those other things may explain us, but they do not define us. The question should never be, "God, what exactly is your perfect, narrow-road, detailed-step will for my life?" It should always be, "Right now, what does it mean to live my life in Christ?"

IN CHRIST YOU ARE RECONCILED

He continues. Number six, in Christ you are reconciled. He says in Ephesians 1:10, "As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him," that's in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth." How many of you have felt lonely? You feel like God is far away, people are far away. "Sin is separating me from God, sin is separating me from people. I feel very isolated, I feel very lonely. Reconciliation is not something that I practically feel, or experience, or sense in my life. It's not reconciliation, it's alienation."

In Christ you're reconciled. What this means is you're reconciled to God in Christ. You are! Believe it, trust it. Don't doubt it, don't deny it, don't disregard it. In Christ you're reconciled to God. You are. You are. And what this means is when you sin, you'll feel like you're distant, but positionally, you're still in Christ. Practically, you may have wandered, but positionally, you're still in Christ, so come back to Christ.

And what this means as well, between Christians, is that we are reconciled together in Christ. We're reconciled to God as Christians and we're reconciled to one another as the church. That means that if there is conflict between two Christians, they have positional reconciliation in Christ, because Christ died for their sins so they don't need to kill one another. And

Christ rose, and he is the mediator between them and God and between them and one another. And what this means, functionally and practically then, is Christians can pursue reconciliation because their reconciliation is ultimately in Christ.

This gives us hope for our earthly relationships, and it gives us certainty for our divine relationship. How many of you have difficult, divided relationships with believers right now? The only hope is that the two of you, in Christ, come together in Christ. He becomes the one who forgives, he becomes the one who suffers, he becomes the one who reconciles, he becomes the one who allows you to live in your identity together in him.

IN CHRIST YOU HAVE AN INHERITANCE

Paul continues. In Christ you have an inheritance. Ephesians 1:11, "In him we have obtained an inheritance." Next question: have you ever felt cheated, stolen from, disregarded, overlooked? In Christ there's an inheritance. Now, you and I, we tend to be very short-sighted people. Someone recently said I was the least patient person they'd ever met. So, I don't think that's a great victory or that I should get a trophy, right? I'm number one, the least patient person on earth. I'm not. I like immediacy. I'm the guy who honks his horn at the person going in the fast lane because they're not going fast enough. I'm the guy who yells at the microwave because the microwave is too slow. I'm that guy, alright?

God has an inheritance. We get some of it in this life, the rest is awaiting us in the life to come. When the Bible talks about this life, it calls it, quote, "A little while." Now, I know when we're in the middle of it, it seems like a long while. But in Christ there's resurrection from death. In Christ there's eternal life. In Christ there's an inheritance that is awaiting you and me. You are one whom God has graced in this life and there is an inheritance.

It's a physical inheritance where all of your sickness will be gone. It's a spiritual inheritance where your reconciliation with God and others will be perfected. It is an emotional inheritance where you will be filled with everlasting joy. It is also a financial inheritance where you will not be hungry, and you'll not be poor, and you'll not be in need forever. There's this great inheritance in Christ, and knowing who we are, and knowing where we're going helps us to persevere along the way of the journey.

IN CHRIST YOU HAVE HOPE

Paul continues. In Christ you have hope. He says in Ephesians 1:12, "That we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." Mars Hill, your hope is in Christ. Your hope is not in your government. Your hope is not in your beauty, your hope is not in your IQ, your hope is not in your degree, your hope is not in your marriage, your hope is not in your children, your hope is not in your success, your hope is not in your family, your hope is not in your friends. Your hope is in Christ. Your hope alone, forever, has to be, must be, I beg you that it would be in Christ. Apart from Christ, there is no hope.

If you've been hanging your hope on the economy, there's no hope. If you've been hanging your hope on morality, there's no hope. If you've been hanging your hope on your friends, your family, your coworkers, your neighbors, your spouse, your kids, your intellect, your competence, your ability, it will fail you. Hope is only in Christ. And I want you to have that hope in Christ and then go to work, and then love your friends, and then deal with your enemies, and then endure your suffering.

Whatever God should have for you, it cannot be that your hope is in someone or something. It has to be that your hope is in Christ so you can endure anything. That has to be how it is. And I'm your pastor, and I love you, and I get so concerned for those who hang their hope somewhere other than in Christ, because I know that it will fail them, and destroy them, and devastate, and grieve them.

IN CHRIST YOU HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lastly, he says, in Christ you have the Holy Spirit. This is just the introduction. There are thirty times that Paul says this, I'm just pulling out the first nine. Do you see where this is so incredibly important? He keeps saying it in a whole bunch of ways. Some of you are right now saying, "I've got it." We've only begun because we forget it.

Ephesians 1:13, "In him." Who's that? Jesus. Okay, you got it right. Okay. "In Christ you also." This isn't just stuff for them. It's not just stuff for the guys in the Bible, or the guys in other nations, or the guys in other churches, or the people sitting in other rows today. You, this is for you.

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth." See, and this is the truth. We're hearing the truth. The world is filled with lies about who God is, about who we are, about what our identity is, about what our purpose is, about what our destiny is. This is the word of truth. "The gospel," the good news, the grace of God, "of our salvation, and believed in him." Salvation is believing in him. "Were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."

The way you know your identity in Christ is through the presence, person, and power of the Holy Spirit. He writes the Scriptures, he illuminates our understanding, he awakens our awareness, he changes our desires, he refashions our identity. The Holy Spirit is the means by which the power and the presence of Christ come into those who are in Christ. You do not live a life by your own power; you live a life by the power of the Holy Spirit. You do not need to muster up your own energy. You do not need to motivate or discipline yourself. You need to allow the Holy Spirit to motivate you and to be filled with the Holy Spirit to live a life of blessing and obedience to God.

It is so odd that sometimes we who are in Christ forget that the Holy Spirit is in us. We can live functionally as if we were deists or atheists, as if God was perhaps not existent or lived far away and was disinterested. God lives in the child of God. God transforms, works from the inside out in the child of God. In Christ you have the Holy Spirit. He comes with new wisdom, he comes with new passion, he comes with new pleasures. He comes to change you by allowing you to experience the life of Christ.

It was the Holy Spirit who empowered the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life is not one just to be observed, but to be experienced, and his life was lived by the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit descended on him at his baptism. The Holy Spirit filled him throughout the course of his life. The Holy Spirit caused him to rejoice. The Holy Spirit led him and also empowered him through trial and temptation, through suffering and sadness. And it was the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead, the Bible says.

The Holy Spirit is not a force, he's a person. He's not impersonal, he's personal. He's not far away, he's near. He's not against you, he's for you. He's not wanting you to perform, he's wanting to perform new life in you. He doesn't want you to be in lies and in death, he wants you to live a new life on the truth that you are in Christ. And when you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. You are someone that you would never be. You can live a life you have never lived. You can do things you would otherwise be incapable of doing. And you can endure suffering that you never thought you could endure. I want you to think about these things, study on these things, pray on these things. Ask the Holy Spirit, as you open the

book of Ephesians, to teach you, to transform you.

Father God, I pray right now for our people. I pray, God, for those who are not yet in Christ. They may be in sin, they may be in Adam, but they're not in Christ. God, we're all born in Adam and we all need to be born again in Christ. I thank you, Lord Jesus, that we can be born again in Christ. I pray that for my friends. God, for those of us who are in Christ, I pray we would never forget it, that we'd always remember it, that we'd live in light of it, that we would not allow our identity to be shaped by our idolatry, that we would not have someone or something, including ourselves and what we have done or failed to do, be the defining aspect of who we are. Lord, I don't want our people just to be motivated, I want them to be in Christ. I don't want them to just have high self-esteem, I want them to be in Christ. I don't want them to just do better and try harder, I want them to be in Christ. So, I pray for our people, Lord God, that right now you would send the Holy Spirit to regenerate hearts, to renew minds, to redeem lives, to reclaim identities, for this deep truth to take a deep root in the soul of your people. God, I pray for the reading of Scripture privately as people go through Ephesians. I pray for the discussions around dinner tables with families and in Community Groups; that in this time together, this season together, that we would know what it means to be in Christ; that we'd remind one another of what it means to be in Christ; that we'd be loving, and gracious, and encouraging, and truth-telling, and kind with one another in Christ. And it's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.