

Week 3 - “Finding Identity in Jesus” (Ephesians 1.3-14)

Today in the United States, many people are experiencing an identity crisis. The labels and categories that used to provide a sense of security and purpose no longer do. To make matters worse, identity has become highly divisive. Race, culture, ethnicity, gender, orientation, partisan politics, and faith are just a few of the areas where battle lines have been drawn. Still, many are looking for something solid, true, and real—an identity in which they can be rooted.

In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul ascribes to the church a new identity using the phrase “in the Messiah” eleven times in eleven verses. But what does it mean and how are we included?

Group Discussion Questions

Read Ephesians 1, verses 3 through 14

- In light of this passage’s theme of “finding identity in Jesus,” reflect on your own journey of discovering your identity. **What are some of the ways your sense of identity has changed? What are some senses in which your identity has remained the same?**
- Today, there are many labels and categories that people use to identify themselves. **Have you ever felt like you don’t neatly fit into a category or identify with a label that’s been applied to you? If so, what was that experience like?**
- In this chapter, Paul uses some language that might sound loaded to some who have experience in the English-speaking church. The terms “election” and “predestination” are often associated with the system of theology called “Calvinism,” named for John Calvin. He was a sixteenth-century French Protestant Reformer who wrote about these subjects. **What experience or non-experience do you have with these ideas? What thoughts and/or feelings do these concepts surface for you?**

Verse 3: **In the Messiah** we are blessed with every spiritual blessing

Verse 4: **In him (the Messiah)** we are chosen to be holy and blameless in God’s sight

Verse 5: In love, God predestined us to be adopted as his sons, **through Jesus the Messiah**

Verse 6: We are freely given grace, **in the One God loves (the Messiah)**

Verse 7: **In him (the Messiah)** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins

Verse 9: **In him (the Messiah)** God has made known to us the mystery of his will

Verse 10: Under one head, **the Messiah**, God is bringing all things in heaven and earth together

Verse 11: **In him (the Messiah)** we are chosen and predestined according to God’s plan

Verse 12: **In the Messiah**, the first people to place their hope in Jesus are to the praise of God’s glory

Verse 13: **In the Messiah**, we were also included when we heard the Gospel

Verse 14: **In him (the Messiah)** we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

- Eleven times in eleven verses, Paul uses the phrase “in the Messiah” or its equivalent. **What does this emphasis teach us about corporate identity?**
- To be included “in the Messiah” is often referred to as conversion, new birth, or surrendering one’s life to God. **What has been your experience with these concepts or ideas? What thoughts and/or feelings do they surface for you?**
- Throughout Paul’s letters, he teaches that baptism is God’s means of joining persons and households to God through the Spirit. **What has been your experience with baptism?**

- Paul's language shifts in verses 13 and 14 from "we" and "us" to "you." This indicates that he's speaking to two different groups in God's new, diverse family. **Why would God want people to be joined to a diverse community? What has your experience been with diverse communities?**
- "Finding identity in Jesus" could be used as a way to paper over our distinct identities or ignore our real and significant differences. This can lead to the "erasure" of one's unique particular identity. **Why is it important that we don't view identity in Christ this way?**
- Shared identity in Jesus could be used promote the ideas of "color-blindness" or "culture-blindness," that a person doesn't "see" differences between people's ethnicities or cultures. **What has your experience been with this idea? What's wrong with these ideas and how can we prevent them?**
- Roots Covenant is a community that intentionally seeks to celebrate the diverse identities represented among us. **Why is this an important value? What does the celebration of our diverse identities have to do with the Kingdom of God?**
- **Has finding identity in Jesus transformed your life in meaningful ways? If so, please share.**