



Our Identity

The Truth About Us

Community Group Discussion | part 1

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [ESV]

Everyone wants to be somebody, right? People want to know who they are and that their identity goes further than just a first and last name. All of us, at some point in our lives, go through an identity crisis. Some of us may even forget who we are, and this, of course, leads to many other issues. Many times we align ourselves with a specific sub-culture in order to create a desired identity, or perhaps because that specific group of people seemed to care for us! Whatever the case is, we all desire to be known...to have an identity. The book of Ephesians, in a sense, starts out establishing an identity.

Ephesians 1 states the author's identity right away. The Apostle Paul states who he is, where his authority comes from, and to whom he is writing. He states his identity, authority, and audience.

Who is Paul? He was once named Saul, as we see in the book of Acts, and he persecuted Christians. He had been raised a devout Jew and was also a Roman citizen. While on one of his missions to persecute Christians, Acts 9 records that Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, and changed his name to Paul. Jesus changed his identity completely!

Where did his authority come from? Jesus called Paul to be an apostle, to preach the Gospel – apostle means “sent one” or “one sent on mission”. Paul was now on a new mission, with a new life, to proclaim that which he had once persecuted so many for – PREACHING THE GOSPEL!!!

Who is Paul writing to in this book of the Bible? Who is his audience? His audience is the Church at Ephesus, and most likely several churches around Ephesus. Acts 18-20 records Paul's missionary journey's which included Ephesus. We understand Paul would have first ministered and preached in Ephesus around A.D. 53 [Acts 18:19-23]. A couple of years later, Paul was on his third mission trip, and he ended-up staying in Ephesus for about 2 years.

It was during this last stay in Ephesus that he most likely saw a vast number of converts, and the local church in Ephesus was firmly planted. The Church at Ephesus most likely began planting other churches around Ephesus as well – healthy things grow and reproduce – churches plant and reproduce other churches!

There is another side of this, as well. Paul and other Christians experienced some persecution in Ephesus. The reasons for this persecution in Ephesus would have been because this was the home of the temple goddess Diana, or also referred to as the Temple of Artemis. People would come to this temple to leave large offerings for this goddess, while also bringing business to Ephesus as well. Since the Ephesians were committing their lives to Jesus, fewer people were coming to the temple, and this would have had a great impact on the economy in Ephesus. The change Jesus brought to Ephesus actually affected the economy! Some business owners in Ephesus decided to try to stop the cause of Christ, and of course, they failed. [This had a negative impact on their economy.]

About 10 years later, approximately A.D. 62, after Paul had been in Ephesus, he finds himself in prison. While in prison, he decides to write this letter, using his time to invest in the church and to encourage her. He writes this letter to encourage the Ephesians in all that God had taught him about the church of Jesus Christ! He is also on trial for his life, but his main concern is not his life, but the life of the church. Even in jail, Paul is still passionate about Jesus and HIS bride, the Church! Paul begins the letter by not only sharing his identity, but our identity as well!

How does Paul identify himself in the first part of verse 1, and how do we define how he refers to himself?

Ephesians 1:1a - Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

How does Paul refer to the Ephesians he is writing to, and what does this mean to us and for us?

Ephesians 1:1b - To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Sainthood would have been defined in this way: they would have had to exemplify exceptional character, and they would have had to have conducted at least 2 miracles. Here is the issue with sainthood – it is nowhere mentioned in the Bible. Paul uses the word nine times in this letter, but he is referring to Christians – ones that are still alive on this earth, not dead miracle workers. These people may not have ever performed any miracles, but they sure had experienced one in their lives, when they were changed by Jesus!

The word saint is actually taken from the word sanctified which means “set apart.” The doctrine of sanctification teaches us that God makes us like Jesus; HE sets us apart from the world to become like Jesus – to reflect the Image of Christ!

What happens to us when we experience the Grace of God through Jesus Christ, and how does our identity change?

Ephesians 1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[If you have trouble answering this question, you may want to talk with one of the people in your group, your group leader, or one of the leaders in our Church. Also, you should read Romans 3, Romans 6, and John 3 in your Bible!]

The word “grace” in verse two literally means “God’s unmerited favor and kindness toward a group of undeserving people!” This is a free gift of new life, given to us that did not deserve it nor could we have ever earned it! Paul states this, because it is how he has his identity, his only identity! He was a murderer of Christians, and now he is a Christian on mission! Paul has a deep understanding of this word grace, and we should as well. We should strive to be extremely gracious towards others! The Ephesians did not get saved because they were good, faithful people. NO! They were saved because of grace through faith in Jesus! Jesus made Paul worthy, Jesus made the Ephesians worthy, and Jesus makes us worthy!

How does realizing that our identity is in Christ change the way we think, the way we view others, and the way we live our lives?

Discussion and reflection:

1] Who do I desire to be?

2] What is my mission, and what has God sent me to do?

3] How can I share the grace and peace of Jesus with others?