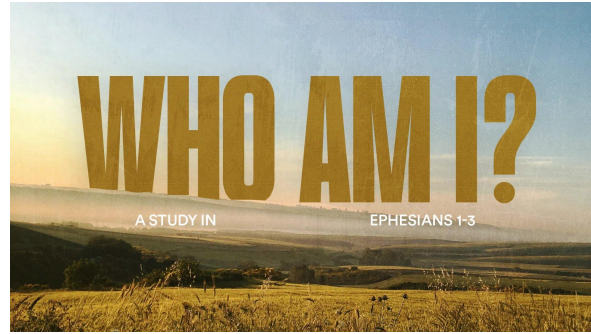




## **Who Am I? | Part One**

Message 1 | Blessed

Pastor Steve Robinson

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I want to welcome all of you to the first message in our new series entitled **Who Am I? A Study in Ephesians 1-3**. Over the next six weeks, we're going to walk through the first three chapters of Ephesians, and then next year, we'll pick up Ephesians 4-6. How many of you are excited to learn about a book of the Bible? What's so cool is that I believe the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church of Ephesus answers one of life's universal questions, which is: **Who am I?** Let's start with what God says about us after we've trusted Christ as our Savior. In **Ephesians 1:6**, Paul writes: **to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved**. That word Beloved refers to Jesus. Right off the bat, we see that if you're in Christ, you've been accepted by God through Christ. You didn't earn that acceptance—God gave it to you by His grace. Before Paul tells us how to live, he establishes who we are. **Our behavior flows out of our identity.**

As I've studied Scripture, researched neuroscience for my book *Soul Leadership*, and done a lot of inner work, one thing has become clear: **We all need attachment and acceptance.** **Proverbs 19:22a** (NIV) says: **What a person desires is unfailing love...** We want to know we're loved without having to keep proving we're worth loving. And right up front in Ephesians, God speaks to that need. Paul tells us we're accepted in Christ, yet so often we still look to other people to tell us we're worth being loved. Think about social media. It's become more than a place to connect—it's a place where people look for approval. We compare our

everyday lives to somebody else's highlight reel and start measuring our worth by the response we receive. Those voices get added to what we heard growing up and the experiences that have shaped us. But here's the question: **What if the loudest voices in our lives aren't the truest voices?** If we build our identity on opinions that keep changing, we'll never feel secure. We need to settle our identity in what God has already said about us—that's why the book of Ephesians is so important!

When you know who you are in Christ, you no longer have to let the world tell you who you need to be. **The fact is, we are who God says we are—nothing less and nothing more.** But the enemy wants to keep you from knowing and living in that truth. He plants lies about who you are, and here's what we need to understand: **Any lie believed long enough will begin to feel true... even though it's a lie.** Those lies affect how we feel and how we live. Here's the progression: **Need for acceptance + lies about your identity = negative emotions that rise up & unhealthy or sinful behavior.** Let me show you **Four Lies We Often Believe:**

### **A. God doesn't love you unless you're perfect**

If you believe that, every mistake becomes a reason to question God's love. You'll keep trying to measure up and never feel like you've done enough. It's like a hamster running on a wheel—you wear yourself out without getting anywhere. How many of you are grateful you don't have to be perfect to be loved by God? He doesn't wait until you have everything together to love you. He loves you while He's helping you grow!

### **B. You'll never change**

*"That's just who you are. Your grandfather was that way. Your father was that way."* So you figure that's who you'll always be. But Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** Say it with me: **NEW!** Your family history might influence you, but it doesn't determine you. Jesus has the final word over your life.

### **C. You are what you feel**

This is a big lie in our culture today. Just because you feel inadequate or unloved in a moment doesn't mean that's who you are. **Emotions are**

**good indicators, but terrible dictators**—they deserve our attention, but they don't get to define our identity. Feelings come and go, but God's Word is our compass, our true north—**you are who God says you are.**

#### **D. You are what you do or what you've accomplished**

This one hits home for a lot of people, and I've had to work through it myself. **Personal:** Growing up, I was very performance-oriented. If I made the grade or did well in a game, I felt great. If I didn't, I felt like a failure. Now, there's nothing wrong with wanting to do well. But when a setback leaves you feeling worthless, your identity has become too deeply rooted in your performance. I've had to learn this the hard way, and I still have to remind myself: My accomplishments don't determine my identity. Neither do my shortcomings. My identity is in Christ.

**Funny:** Several years ago at a Newcomers Dinner, I invited people to introduce themselves and share how they'd come to COTK. One couple talked about how much their teenagers loved the youth ministry. The next family said their little kids couldn't wait to come to church. Then somebody started bragging on the music: *"Where do y'all get those musicians? Is that even legal in church?"* I'm smiling, but inside I'm waiting for somebody to mention the preaching. Then the next guy stands up and says, *"My wife and I love the church—particularly the coffee."* Finally, I couldn't help myself: *"What about the preaching?"* I was joking, but there was a little truth behind it!

We've all had moments like that—wondering whether we measure up or whether anybody notices what we do. We can appreciate compliments, but we don't base our identity on them. Our identity has to be rooted in Christ. People's opinions will change, but who we are in Jesus keeps us secure. This is why I love Paul's writing to the church of Ephesus—it's so much about your identity in Christ.

The book of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul around **A.D. 60-62**, during his first Roman imprisonment—which we read about in **Acts 28**. We read in Acts 28 that Paul was living under guard in a rented house, where he continued to receive visitors and teach about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Paul sent the letter to the Ephesians from prison in Rome via a trusted courier named Tychicus. Think about that: Paul's freedom was

restricted, yet he was writing about the fullness of our life and identity in Jesus Christ. Paul wanted the believers in Ephesus to understand what God had done for them through Jesus and what it meant to belong to Him. He also showed them that Jewish and Gentile believers had been brought together into one family. Their identity in Christ changed both how they saw themselves and how they treated one another.



**[MAP]:** Let's take a moment to understand where this letter came from and where it was addressed to. **Paul was in Rome, and he's writing to the Church of Ephesus.** Here's Jerusalem, and farther northwest

is Ephesus, near the Aegean coast in what we now call western Turkey. Today, you can visit its ruins near the town of Selçuk. In Paul's day, Ephesus was a major port city in the Roman province of Asia. People and ideas moved through that city from across the Mediterranean. Ephesus was also a major center of idol worship. Its temple to Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Paul knew this city well—he had spent a lot of time there and continued to encourage the leaders of the church over the years. As a matter of fact, in **Acts 19**, Paul spent three years in Ephesus—teaching and performing miracles. We see that the gospel changed so many lives people were burning their old magic books and completely abandoning idol worship. So that's the backdrop... you guys ready to jump into his letter back to the church of Ephesus?

Turn with me to **Ephesians 1:1-6**. As we read, notice how often Paul uses the words **in Christ** or **in Him**. Everything he's about to tell us about our identity is rooted in our relationship with Jesus. Let's dive in: **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the**

**good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.** Friends, understanding who we are in Christ changes how we see ourselves and how we live. From this passage, if you're taking notes, I want to show you **Three Pillars of Your Identity in Christ:**

### **1) You have been blessed in Christ**

Look again at **Ephesians 1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.** Notice those words: **has blessed us.** Sometimes we live as though everything God has for us is somewhere down the road. One day, when we get to heaven, we'll be blessed. And heaven is going to be wonderful! But Paul is telling us something about our lives right now. If you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you're in Christ and God has blessed you. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus secured your forgiveness and made it possible for you to stand righteous before God. His favor is upon your life. His joy can sustain you even when your circumstances aren't favorable. His healing power is available to you. Friends, these are spiritual realities we can begin living in today! But there's a difference between knowing God has blessed us and learning to walk in what He's given us.

**Illustration:** Think about Joshua and the children of Israel standing near the Jordan River, preparing to enter the Promised Land. God told Joshua in **Joshua 1:3: Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.** Notice, God spoke of the land as something He had already given them. Yet they still had to cross the river and take possession of it. God's promise was settled, but they had to respond in faith.

How do we walk in what is already ours? **We believe what God says and let that truth shape our responses in life.** When the old lie tells you that you're worthless, come back to what we just read: You're accepted in Christ. When you fall short, come to Him for forgiveness instead of running away in shame. **We don't earn God's blessings; we learn to live in what He has, past tense, given us.** And Paul says we've been blessed with **every spiritual blessing.**

Now, what does Paul mean by **in the heavenly places**? He's pointing us to the spiritual realm. These blessings aren't limited to what we can see or measure, and we don't have to wait until we die to benefit from them. Later, in **Ephesians 6:12**, Paul describes a spiritual conflict taking place beyond what we see: **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.** There is a spiritual conflict going on in the heavenly places right now. Now, let me clarify: the term "heavenly place" refers to both the distant place we'll go to one day, called "heaven," where we'll spend eternity with Christ, and the present spiritual realm. How do I know that? The devil's not in heaven fighting anyone, but he is here engaged in a spiritual conflict.

There is more going on than our circumstances reveal. If we judge God's blessing only by how smoothly life is going at this current moment in time, we'll miss what Paul is teaching us. Remember where Paul was when he wrote this: in chains. His circumstances were difficult, yet his position in Christ was secure. That's what I want you to understand. **A difficult season doesn't cancel or change what God has given you in Christ.**

## **2) You have been chosen in Christ**

The Apostle Paul continues in **Ephesians 1:4: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.** Think about that: Before the world was created, God chose us in Christ. Maybe you've spent years feeling unwanted or wondering whether anybody really values you. Friends, let this truth settle into your heart: **You have been chosen by God.** You're not an accident or an afterthought. God knew you before anybody else knew your name. He knows your strengths and your weaknesses, and He has a purpose for your life. Some of you who've built a house know about change orders—something doesn't turn out right, so you have to change the plan. God didn't get to you and say, *"Well, that was a mistake. We need a change order!"* He made you intentionally, and He has something for you to do in your generation.

**Personal:** Growing up in Metairie, our neighborhood was full of kids. We'd play football in the lot between our houses, and my older brother's friends

would join us. You know how it worked: Two captains would start picking teams. As the names were called, you'd stand there hoping somebody would pick you. The longer you waited, the more nervous you got. A few times, especially playing with those older kids, I was the last one picked. You got on the team, but you felt like a leftover!

That feeling can follow us into adulthood. Maybe you were passed over for a promotion or rejected by someone you loved. The enemy takes that experience and tries to turn it into your identity. Somebody didn't choose you, so you begin believing you're not worth choosing. There's a difference between experiencing the pain of rejection and letting rejection define your life. **People may have overlooked you, but God sees you and has chosen you in Christ.** His love isn't a competition where somebody else's worth diminishes yours. You belong to Him.

Now notice again in **Ephesians 1:4b** what He chose us for: to **be holy and without blame before Him in love.** You might think, *"Pastor, you don't know what I've done. How could I ever be holy?"* You are positionally holy before God because of the blood of Christ. Now, when your behavior or attitude doesn't line up, bring that to Jesus. When you sin, confess it and receive His forgiveness. You don't have to hide from the One who loves you. Keep coming before Him and responding to His Word. He'll work in the places you can't change through willpower alone. **The God who chose you is also at work changing you.** As you walk with Him, you'll begin to live more like the person He says you are.

### **3) You have been adopted in Christ**

Let's finish with **Ephesians 1:5-6: having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.** God's plan was to bring us into His family through adoption—this is so powerful for Jennifer and me because of our adoption of our precious daughter Annaleise. We chose to adopt her. And notice, this was according to the good pleasure of His will. Friends, God delights in bringing us close to Him. Now, that word **predestined** has generated a lot of discussion through the years. It means to determine beforehand. I believe God desires every person to come into a relationship with Him, and His plan from the beginning was to make that possible

through Christ. But that doesn't mean everybody automatically receives salvation—we still have to respond in faith. Later, Paul describes that response in **Ephesians 1:13b: in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.** God has made the way through Jesus, and we're called to believe and receive what He's offered. Think about what adoption means. God brings you into His family with the standing and inheritance of His child.

**Illustration:** When you're a guest in somebody's house, you might hesitate to open the refrigerator. You're wondering whether you're allowed to help yourself. But a son or daughter knows they belong there. It's home. Some of us approach God as though we're barely welcome, afraid we're asking too much just by coming to Him. But through Christ, He has welcomed you as His child. You can come to your Father with confidence because you belong to Him.

In a few weeks, we're going to talk more about the importance of being in God's family. But for now, let this truth settle deep into your heart: **when you're in Christ, you're accepted and loved by Him.** That's who you are: a child of God.

## **Prayer**

## **Outline:**

### **Who Am I? Part One**

#### Message 1 | Blessed

Ephesians 1:6, Proverbs 19:22a (NIV)

Need for acceptance + lies about your identity = negative emotions that rise up & unhealthy or sinful behavior

Four Lies We Often Believe:

A. God doesn't love you unless you're perfect

B. You'll never change

2 Corinthians 5:17

C. You are what you feel

D. You are what you do or what you've accomplished

Ephesians 1:1-6

Three Pillars of Your Identity in Christ:

1) You have been blessed in Christ

Ephesians 1:3, Joshua 1:3, Ephesians 6:12

2) You have been chosen in Christ

Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 1:4b

3) You have been adopted in Christ

Ephesians 1:5-6, Ephesians 1:13b

All Scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. Message notes...