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"The Answer to Identity Confusion"

Ephesians 1

Pastor Gary Hamrick



We are living in a world of identity confusion. Our culture is wrestling with questions about sexuality, biology, and definitions of "male" and "female." Would you be surprised to learn that this is nothing new? Ancient cultures wrestled with the same issues, particularly in the city of Ephesus. When Paul stepped into Ephesus to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he encountered the same chaos that our culture is experiencing today. In response, he wrote Ephesians 1 to remind us as Believers of our identity in Christ, so that we can know who we are and whose we are! Only then will we be able to deliver the Gospel to this identity-confused world.

1. The letter to the Ephesians
 - a. The date
 - i. Paul wrote Ephesians from prison around 60–62 A.D.
 - b. Paul at Ephesus
 - i. Paul had been at Ephesus about five years prior to writing Ephesians (**Acts 19–20**).
 - ii. Paul spent approximately three years in Ephesus.
 1. Paul was a missionary spreading the Gospel from town to town.
 2. Usually, Paul would only stay in a city for a few months before leaving the new church in the care of the new Believers there.
 3. Paul's first visit to Ephesus was a short recon mission, but he returned in 54 A.D. for three years because he saw the need there.
 4. Paul spent more time in Ephesus than he spent in any other city.
2. The symbol of the fish
 - a. The etching **IXOYE** or **IXTHUS** appears on 1st century stones in Ephesus.
 - i. The symbol of the fish appears alongside these etchings because **IXOYE** means "fish."
 - ii. The discoveries indicate a strong Christian presence there.
 - b. **IXOYE** or **IXTHUS** was a code Christians used to identify each other.
 - i. **IXOYE** is an acronym for five Greek words: **Iesous Xristos Theou Yios Sotare**.
 1. These five words translate to "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."
3. Diana of the Ephesians
 - a. The city of Ephesus

- i. Ephesus was situated along the Aegean Sea in present-day Turkey.
- ii. Ephesus was a prosperous city along a major trade route.
- iii. During 1st century A.D., Ephesus had 200,000—250,000 people.
 - 1. Ephesus was the third most populated city in the region, and one of the most populated cities in the empire.

b. Diana and her temple

i. The temple of Diana

- 1. The temple was a central place of culture, a symbol of Ephesus, and a source of pride across the Roman Empire.
- 2. Pliny wrote of the temple's appearance:
 - a. The temple was 425 feet long and 220 feet wide.
 - b. The temple had 127 pillars, each 60 feet high.
- 3. This is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
 - a. The temple was rebuilt three times until its final destruction in 401 A.D.

ii. The goddess Diana

- 1. Diana was the Roman name for Artemis.
- 2. Diana was the Greco-Roman goddess of the hunt, moon, and animals.

4. **Ephesians 1:1-14** – *“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. In Him** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed **in Himself**, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in **Him. In Him** also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted **in Christ** should be to the praise of His glory. **In Him** you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; **in whom** also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the*

guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

- a. Paul emphasized our identity “*in Him*” (Christ) throughout **Ephesians 1**.
 - i. Verses 3–14 are one long sentence in the Greek text.
 - 1. Paul does not take a break as he speaks on the singular theme of who we are in Christ.
 - ii. If you lose sight of your identity in Christ, you lose sight of who you truly are and lose your ability to affect the culture.
 - 1. **DISCUSS**: How has knowing Christ and that you belong to Him helped you stay grounded in truth and speak truth to others?

5. Diana in Ephesus

- a. The worship of Diana dominated Ephesus.
 - i. In Ephesus, Diana took on the role of **magna mater**, the mother goddess.
 - ii. The Ephesians worshipped her as the goddess of sex and fertility.
- b. Diana’s cult worship has a long history going back as far as Babylon.
 - i. The Babylonian goddess of sex and fertility, Ishtar, was a precursor to Diana.
 - 1. Ishtar was worshipped by Sumerian priests.
 - 2. In the 8th century B.C., the Epic of Erra records that the worship of the Ishtar involved changing men into women.
 - 3. The worship of Ishtar was said to change men into women.
 - 4. Men were castrated in the worship of this false goddess and dressed as women.
 - ii. The Greeks adopted Ishtar and called her Cybele.
 - 1. In the 6th century, the worship of Cybele retained the same practices as the worship of Ishtar.
 - 2. Cybele was served by the Galli.
 - 3. The Galli were men who had castrated themselves, bleached their hair and grew it long, and wore women’s clothes and makeup in the worship of this goddess.
 - 4. Cybele was the main goddess of Ephesus.
 - iii. The Romans adopted Cybele.
 - 1. In the 3rd century B.C., around 240 B.C., the Romans merged the worship of Cybele with the worship of Diana in Ephesus.
 - 2. The statue of Ephesus in Cybele is adorned with sexual symbols.
 - 3. During the 3rd century A.D., Christian apologist Marcus Minucius Felix wrote in *Octavius*, chapter 22, that “sometimes [Artemis] is a huntress, with her robe girded up high; and as the Ephesian she has many and fruitful breasts.”

iv. **Ecclesiastes 1:9b** – “There is nothing new under the sun.”

1. The demonic influence present in our culture today is the same one that ruled 1st century Ephesus, just by a different name.
2. Our culture is confused and oversexualized, a carryover from the pagan influence of Ishtar in Mesopotamia, Cybele in Greece, and Diana in Rome.
 - a. **DISCUSS:** What are some ways you have encountered the spirit of this same demonic principality in culture?
3. As Paul brought the Gospel to Ephesus—a culture like ours—he saw both revival and revolt.
 - a. Satan incited people to riot against the truth.
 - b. God was on the move, renewing men’s hearts.

6. **Acts 19:23–41** – *“And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.’ Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: ‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let*

them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.' And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."

- a. The riot
 - i. The craftsmen began the riot because the decline of Artemis hurt their profits and civic pride.
- b. The Way
 - i. *"The Way"* is a term used to reference Christianity.
- c. The theater at Ephesus
 - i. The theater at Ephesus seated 25,000 people.
 - 1. At least 10 percent of the town gathered around Paul's companions.
 - ii. For two hours, the **Acts 19** mob shouted, *"Great is Diana of the Ephesians."*
- d. Similar culture
 - i. The corruption in that day included transsexuality, cultic worship of evil, and great confusion.
 - ii. Our culture also faces similar problems.
- e. The church in Ephesus
 - i. Though there was revolt, there was also revival.
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** When have you seen the competing forces of heaven and hell play out in response to the name of Jesus?
 - ii. Paul wanted Believers to know their identity in Christ so that they could influence the culture rather than fall into the same confusion.
 - 1. **John 4:35** – *"Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"*
 - 2. **DISCUSS:** How do you know that you are operating in the Spirit of God? How does working under the power of the Spirit impact your ability to witness?

7. What God says of us

- a. God says we are chosen, loved, predestined, adopted, forgiven, saved, and sealed.
- b. God calls us chosen.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:4a** – *"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."*
 - ii. God pursues, and we respond.

1. **John 15:16a** – “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” (NIV)
2. **Romans 3:11** – “There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.” (BSB)
- iii. God chose us “before the foundation of the world.”
 1. Some translations say, “before the creation of the world.”
- iv. God is timeless, though He involves Himself in time.
 1. Jesus was crucified around 32 A.D., and yet **Revelation 13:8b** calls Him “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”
 2. God is not restricted by time; He can see past, present, and future all at once.
 3. **DISCUSS**: In times of trouble, what do you do to remember God knows the end from the beginning and can give you peace?
- c. God calls us loved.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:4b** – “. . . that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”
 1. **DISCUSS**: How does love—both being loved by God and loving God—motivate you to obey Christ?
 - ii. God is in love with us.
 1. **Jeremiah 31:3b** – “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”
 2. **1 John 3:1a** – “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!” (1984 NIV)
 3. **Ephesians 3:17–19** – “. . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”
 4. **DISCUSS**: What has helped you grasp a little of the great love of God?
- d. God calls us predestined.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:5a** – “. . . having predestined us.”
 1. Does God predetermine some to be saved and some to be damned? No. We must interpret Scripture with Scripture.
 - ii. God predestines according to His foreknowledge.
 1. **Romans 8:29a** – “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” (1984 NIV)
 2. **1 Peter 1:2** – We are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

3. **DISCUSS:** How has knowing the Father predestined you to become more like His Son encouraged you to draw near to God?
- iii. God's election and predestination work in harmony with man's free will.
 1. **Revelation 22:17b** – *"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."* (KJV)
 2. God does not violate the free will He has given us.
 3. The main idea behind the word *"predestined"* is that God has a plan for us and knew us before time.
- e. God calls us adopted.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:5b** – *"... to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself."*
 1. God has no grandchildren: joining God's family is an individual choice.
 2. Those who put their faith in Christ are God's children, adopted into His family.
 3. **Galatians 4:4–5** – *"When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."*
 - ii. God gave us rights, privileges, and positions when He adopted us.
 1. **Romans 8:15** – *"You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"*
 2. **DISCUSS:** How are you making use of the privilege you have as children to communicate with and call on the Father?
- f. God calls us forgiven.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:7** – *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."*
 - ii. **1 John 1:8–9** – *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
 1. To be forgiven, we must confess our sins to God.
 2. To confess our sins means to agree with God about our sinful condition.
- g. God calls us saved.
 - i. Salvation comes by faith in Jesus, the Son of God.
 1. **Ephesians 1:13a** – *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."*
 2. **Acts 2:21** – *"It shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*

- ii. **Luke 19:10** – *“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*
 - 1. Except for the intervention of God, we are all lost.
 - 2. We all need a Savior, so Christ came down to rescue us.
- h. God calls us sealed.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:13b** – *“In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”*
 - ii. The word “sealed” would have been understood in the seaport city of Ephesus.
 - 1. In that setting, cargo was sealed with wax.
 - 2. The wax was melted, and the owner’s insignia was pressed into it to mark whom the cargo belonged to.
 - 3. As Believers, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, identifying us as belonging to God and guaranteeing to us the promise of what is to come.
 - 4. **DISCUSS**: In what ways can you make evident the seal of God in your life?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)