

Who Are You in Christ?

The book of Ephesians is often called the “queen of the epistles.” It is like a *Reader’s Digest* condensed version of the whole story of **redemption** from Genesis to Revelation. In one short book, the apostle Paul teaches in glorious detail what **Christ’s death** on the **cross** accomplished for us, the seriousness of our need as sinners that caused God to do this, and the ways this gospel changes us practically.

Paul presents in Ephesians a great manual on “gospel-centered” living. He uses the phrases *with **Christ**, in **Christ**, through **Christ**, with Him, in Him, and through Him* over 30 times in Ephesians’ six short chapters. The gospel, we see, has not just given us access to God through Christ, but it has also included us in Christ. It has sealed us in Him—a phrase that would sound blasphemous if the Bible did not say it first.

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the **gospel of your salvation**—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the **Holy Spirit** of promise” (Eph. 1:13, NASB).

Our **inclusion** into Christ changes everything. It gives us a brand **new identity**—righteous, virtuous and powerful—because it is His identity.

Our identity is our sense of self. It is the thing that gives us continuity in how we interact with others despite changes in our circumstances. We often identify ourselves by lesser things than how God identifies us. Some of us identify ourselves by our career, our relationship status, or our children.

I have been a middle school, high school and college math teacher, jobs in which I found a great deal of personal fulfillment. Now I am a wife and mother. On the side, I am an author. Depending on the season of life, I have looked to each

role to feel good about myself, to identify myself positively. But those are just roles I steward for a season. They are not my ultimate identity.

Even being the daughter of a **family** firmly rooted for generations in the low country of South Carolina does not ultimately define me. Jesus Christ, along with all His name invokes, defines me both here on earth and for eternity in heaven. He is my identity because I am in Him.

Practically speaking, when I mix up my **roles** at any given stage of life with my ultimate identity, I end up in idolatry. At the stage of life I am now as wife, mom, and author, my husband and children cannot be my identity. I cannot pin all of my hopes for the future on their personal successes. It is not fair to them, and it keeps me from placing my hope for the future in God's hands. They become my idols when I do that.

I also cannot place my hopes for feeling good about myself on the books I write. It did not take long after publishing my first book to receive criticism from a reviewer. I figured out quickly that I would be undone if I allowed the way my books were received to make me feel good or bad about myself. Instead, God calls me to be a good steward of my roles of wife, mom, and author, not an idolater who looks to her husband, children, or books (or whatever stewardship God has given at the time) for her sense of personal achievement.

The problem with idols is not that they will not affirm us and satisfy us in the way that we long. The problem is they cannot. It is not in their power. We devastate relationships in our lives when we look to certain people to meet needs in us God never intended them to meet.

A spouse, friend, or child may try for a season to fill those needs and make us happy, but at some point, they will become so discouraged by the utter depth of our need and our inability to be satisfied with anything they do that they will

push us away, perhaps even severing the relationship completely.

Jesus alone is our ultimate source of identity. But what exactly does it mean for us to find our identity in Christ? The Bible uses several word pictures which I find helpful to communicate the details of our relationship with Christ. The Word paints believers at multiple places in Scripture as, first, Christ's cherished bride.

"And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' ... And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy" (Hos. 2:16, 19).

The Bible also gives the illustration of Christ as the vine in which believers are the branches: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:1-2, 4-5).

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22-23).

All three of these illustrations point to the intimate union between Christ and His church. Colossians 1:17 says that Christ "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." We are in Him, and He holds it all in unity. If you belong to God, then you are supernaturally connected to Christ along with all of God's children.

Instead of seeing myself as connected to Christ at all times, I used to view my relationship with God in terms of intersecting moments during the day. The more times my life intersected with God in a given week, the more “spiritual” I thought I was. In that paradigm, God went on His way and I went on my way until we intersected at some corner on some future day.

Instead, I have learned to think of myself walking with Jesus continually, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Our daily walk together is not just parallel but actually intertwined. I, of course, do not take full advantage of that walk with Him all day every day, but I am learning that it is indeed my reality, and the more I am aware of it, the more stable I am emotionally and spiritually. If you are a believer, God is with you, in you, holding you together at all times. The goal is for us to be aware of that reality and live like it is true, for Christ warns us that apart from Him we can do nothing.

In John 15, when talking of the vine and branches, Christ says, “Abide in Me.” The Greek word for *abide* is *meno*, meaning “to remain, tarry, be held or be kept continually.” There are two mental pictures in the Bible that seem to contradict each other.

We just discussed those pictures that show us united with God the Son, Jesus Christ. But the Bible also invites us to boldly and confidently enter the presence of God the Father at His Throne of Grace. Instead of contradicting each other, these pictures enhance each other in my mind.

We are children of God who are both passively connected to God and actively encouraged to seek His presence. These dueling images of abiding free us from both legalism and apathy. I am kept secure in Christ through no work of my own, yet God calls me to actively participate in using the resources provided to me through this union.

Christ is my perfect Bridegroom. I am connected to Him as a branch is to a vine and as a body is to its head. From Him, I get the nourishment I need to live out my part in His larger story. He is the answer to the misplaced desires predicted for women in the curse of Genesis 3:16.

He nourishes, sustains and equips you and I. God, through Jesus, affirms us, speaking deep words of grace and purpose over us. The core longings of our hearts for relationship and identity are perfectly fulfilled in Him. I encourage you to take time to read the entirety of Paul's beautiful description in Ephesians 1 of the blessings from this union we have with Christ.

*This is an excerpt from The Gospel-Centered Woman by **Wendy Alsup** ©2013 used with permission. Alsup is a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women. Visit her website at .*