

“Whose Are We?”

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HIS . . . FROM ETERNITY

Ephesians 1:1-14

We all know that matters of “Sex, Culture, and our Brain” now go places they would never have gone just a few years ago. How have behaviors that Christians can only call perversions suddenly become so widely accepted and even lauded? Today’s culture—but, in fact, our sinful natures which have dominated every culture since the Fall—would convince us that we are each free agents, beholden only to ourselves. Thus I can decide who I am and with whom I’ll do whatever I please. A clear understanding of whose we are answers many questions, including all the most important ones.

St. Paul was very clear on this. He opens his letter to the Ephesians (1:1-2) by identifying who he is, what he’s doing, and with (to) whom he’s doing it. What do you see for each? **He is an apostle of Christ Jesus, by God’s will, not His. He’s carrying out his ministry writing this epistle. He’s writing to saints who are also faithful to Christ.** Now this: There’s precisely one possessive pronoun in these opening verses (a genitive in the Greek). It tells us that *we* possess someone. Ironically, though, how does the noun that that pronoun modifies tell us *who possesses us*, that is, whose we are? **The one possessive pronoun, “our,” means the Father is ours. But since He’s the Father, we first of all belong to Him.** Discuss how that noun expresses possession? Maybe even pray it! **That is, the Lord’s Prayer.**

Now read 1:3-14. We are, of course, God’s because He made us. Think of it as intellectual property. But how long, in fact, have we belonged to God (1:4)? **From before the foundation of the world—that is, from eternity.** Contemplate that! Talk about what it means that God “chose us”? **Very personal, etc.**

The Greek word translated “chose” (1:4), a form of *eklegomai*, gives us our English word “elect.” Does that start any thoughts percolating? How about this: “He predestined us for adoption to Himself”? (1:5). Ah, now we’ve opened a can of worms! **Election/predestination/why some, not others are saved.**

Who in the group can explain how John Calvin understood predestination? **Double**

predestination

What about Arminianism (election as taught by Jacobus Arminius)? **We are predestined because we will at some point make a decision for Christ.**

Now remember we're talking here about whose we are. Describe the Father to whom we belong in a Calvinist understanding of predestination. **That Father is terrifying because His sovereignty is the more important attribute than His love and His desire to justify us sinners. He actually wills most people to go to hell.**

Arminianism is certainly different on this, but how does it affect the question of whose we are? Is there a sense in which Arminianism makes us less fully God's? **If we are saved by our decision for Christ, we are at least to some extent on our own, not wholly dependent on God.**

Luther addressed this issue earlier than either Calvin or Arminius. What did he say about why some are saved and not others? **We don't know why some not others; only God does. But He truly desires all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), Christ truly atoned for all (1 Jn 2:2), and we can contribute nothing to our salvation (Eph 2:1). Lutheran understanding of predestination is based on the following question:**

Look closely at how Paul views predestination/election (1:3-14). See how many times he uses the preposition "in" (*en* in Greek). Who and what are the objects of that preposition?—in whom? in what? **"In love," "in Christ," "in Him [Christ]."** Also, what the ESV translates as "purpose" (1:5, 9), can be quite reasonably translated as "kind intention" (NASB; *eudokia* is not neutral, but definitely carries a connotation of being "beneficial"). What do these words teach us about predestination as far as God Himself is concerned? Could it possibly include predestining some to hell? Can predestination be left up to us? **Predestination can only be understood in light of God's loving will to save all people in Christ Jesus, even though many are indeed lost.**

One more intriguing translation matter: In 1:14, the ESV speaks of "possession" as something *we* acquire (which is, obviously, very good!—"our inheritance"). But when the same Greek word, *peripoiāsis*, is used in 1 Peter 2:9, who is possessing and what is the possession? **In 1 Peter 2:9 God clearly possesses us.** Thus the NASB translates Paul's verse here as "God's own possession." However this is to be understood, Paul is certainly clear from start to finish that from all eternity "we are His," that is, God's.

How do you feel about this, being His? Is this what our world suggests we should desire? **Unfortunately, the world thinks we're better off being our own free agents rather than belonging to God. Bad choice!!!**

Are you aware of any problems that arise from not belonging to a father? Are any of these problems documented? Homosexuality among men is strongly correlated to a boy having an absent father or one he perceives to be distant. Anthony Esolen (a Roman Catholic many of us at CTS admire) notes that boys need to be taught how to grow into men; it doesn't just happen with physical growing up. The African-American community suffers badly as a result of some 70% of households lacking a present father. Others . . .

“Whose Are We?”
HIS . . . THAT NEAR!
Ephesians 2:1-22

So from all eternity we’ve belonged to God; we are His. With His Son at His right hand, He governs from “the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named,” “all things under [the] feet” of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-21, 22). Meanwhile, down here, most people still acknowledge a “Man Upstairs.” Yet most also treat Him as some kind of absentee owner; He doesn’t much figure into what I do with my life.

The problem isn’t that God is distant. It’s that by nature we’re spiritually dead; we have zero ability for an actual, personal relationship with Him. And it shows. Read 2:1-3. **“Dead in our trespasses and sins”** What examples do we observe of “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air,” of “the passions of our flesh,” “the desires of the body and the mind”? (Remember to include yourself; we who are now spiritually alive still have that old nature clinging to us!)

But, yes, God has made us alive! And we know how! (2:4-10). In fact, we probably know two (or three) of those verses by heart. **Verses 8-9 (and 10)**. Say them! God is distant from us no more! (2:6). **“Raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”**

“You who once were far off have been brought near” . . . and it happened “by the blood of Christ” (2:13). *This is the essence of the Gospel!* So let’s talk about it:

There was already a time once when we were near to God. When? How near? **Creation; loved knowing God will (analogous to Gen 2:25).**

What happened? What did that do (that is, to our relationship with God—and others)? **Sin separates us from God/each other (Adam and Eve hide from God; Adam blames Eve and, therefore, God who gave him Eve), makes us belong to the devil.**

But you know what happened next! Hear it again: Genesis 3:15. You know to whom the LORD God was speaking. And you know what the bruising meant. But do you know what the enmity means? Best news we’ve ever heard! (The crushing and bruising is the “how”; the enmity is the “what”.) **Atonement of cross separates us from devil (“enmity”), brings us back together with God by removing sin that separates.**

Here’s a way to picture this: The Hands. Just *how* near does this bring us to the Father

whose we are? Talk about what it means to be *that near* to our Father! **He now is giving us every truly good thing.**

From here on out, everything is gravy! Read 2:11-22. Once the “enmity” (NASB; ESV: “hostility”) has been put to death (2:14-16), with whom else are we reconciled? **All people, but explicitly here Jews and Gentiles.** And as always, where does the horizontal relationship among Christians meet? (2:16, 18, 19, 22). **Our relationship with others meets where the vertical relationship with God also meets: in Christ and His cross.** We live together in the household, the dwelling place, of the One whose we are. Right there with Him!

“Whose Are We?”

HIS . . . FOR WHOM WE’RE ALL NAMED

Ephesians 3:1-21

Paul begins chapter 3 of Ephesians with “For this reason” (and repeats that in 3:14). Thus he’s giving a “therefore” for what he wrote in chapter 2, where he told us that Jews and Gentiles have both been brought near to God and to each other by the blood of Jesus. The “therefore,” which we actually hear in 3:14-19, is Paul praying that the Ephesians would know how wide and long and high and deep is God’s love for them. Why would Paul have to explain praying for the Ephesians?

Well, because it wasn’t previously obvious that the Ephesians were included in God’s love at all. Read 3:1-13. What word does Paul use to indicate this? (3:3, 4, 9). **Mystery**. What, precisely, is this mystery? (3:6). **Gentiles are included in the kingdom**. In what sense was it kept hidden? **OT Israel set apart, only limited interaction with Gentiles**. For what day of the church year do you suppose this is the Epistle lesson? **Epiphany Day**. Makes sense, doesn’t it!

Recall from chapter 1 that being His, God’s, isn’t, in its highest sense, just a matter of being His creation. What more is involved? **Chosen/elect from eternity in Christ (His redemption)**. (Do you see that key “in” phrase repeated here? **“In Christ through the Gospel,” 3:6**.) When, then, did Gentiles like the Ephesians become God’s? Was it just in the New Testament age? (3:11). **Actually also from eternity: “eternal purpose”**.

When, though, was the mystery revealed? How was it revealed? **After the resurrection (“all nations,” Mt 28:19); especially after Pentecost and in the apostolic ministry: Acts 10-11 (Peter and Cornelius), 13 (Paul’s missionary journeys), 15 (Jerusalem Council)**. Even notice this: To whom, perhaps quite unexpected, does Paul specify the mystery being revealed? (3:10; cf 6:12; Colossians 2:15). **Satan’s legions**. Why them? **Christ stands as our defense attorney against Satan’s accusations, and now Satan’s claim on Gentiles is also thwarted**.

The big “His moment” in this chapter is 3:14-15. The mystery is out: Gentiles as well as Jews share the very same family name, His name, the name of God the Father. The Greek word here for “family” is *patria*. We recognize that root in lots of languages, don’t we! All of us are named by the Father’s name.

Try, you Gentiles, to roll back your consciousness a couple thousand years. How sweet is this chapter for you?

Paul concludes his “therefore” with this: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think . . .” (3:20). Why does Paul finish with that? Because making the likes of you and me His, God’s, took far more than we would ever think. Only “in Christ Jesus” (3:21).

“Whose Are We?”

HIS . . . FOR *ONE* ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:1-5:21

Notice all the “ones” in this intro. Being a free agent, belonging only to oneself, means I do what’s best for me. It really is that crass. Oh, society (including the law) puts limits on it; supposedly we can’t impose on anyone else’s free agency. We even assert that complete personal autonomy is the way everyone can have what’s best for her or him. But then there’s this problem: we have to share one house with two or six or eight people; we have to share one classroom with twenty-two others; we have to share one community with all kinds of other folks. And there are only so many bathrooms and scholarships and traffic lanes to go around. When we belong to God, when we’re His, we also share one Father with one another. And it’s not easy. But we’re not having to do it on our own, making only the best *I* can make of it.

This section of Ephesians (4:1-5:21) is loaded with “we are His” passages. See below. No need to list them now, but note each one as you go through. The first one we might easily miss. What does Paul mean when he says he is “a prisoner of the Lord” (4:1 NASB, NKJV; this time, too, it’s *en* in Greek). It’s as if Christ is holding him prisoner, because Paul really can’t do anything but preach Christ, whatever the consequences (see 1 Cor 9:16 and the context). Paul belongs to Christ! He’s not a free agent at all, is he! We, meanwhile, are “on the outside,” which means we’re able to “walk” (a major motif in this section: 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Which characteristics of worthy walking involve just oneself, and which affect others? (4:1-3). All activities listed affect others.

“His” passages in this section:

- 4:1 “prisoner of” (essentially held in “prison” by Christ—for the sake of His Gospel)
- 4:6 “one God and Father”
- 4:11 “He gave some” (pastors, et al are *His* pastors, since He could give them)
- 4:24 “new self” is in the “likeness of God”
- 5:1 “imitators of God as beloved children” (His children)
- 5:20 “thanks for all things . . . to God, even Father” (everything we have is His to give)

Everyone read aloud in chorus 4:4-7 (that is, if you can call it “chorus” when we’ve got different translations; it’ll be close enough). You heard the word that stood out, eh? **One!!!** Obviously, it begins with “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (4:6). We are all His! But, then, having the same Father makes us one with each other. Talk for a while about each of the other “ones.” (But remember, we have to finish by chapel time on Wednesday!) We are each individuals (4:7), but how different is that from being free agents? We are individually gifted, but God gives us these gifts to use for the whole body of Christ, and we each benefit from every other Christian’s gifts.

Read (just one person this time) 4:11-16. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—whose are they to give? (4:11). **They are God's to give; they are His!** What, in these verses, is their purpose? **Equipping saints, building up body.** What will mark the job well done? **All attaining full understanding of Christ (unity of doctrine, not tossed about in confusion of doctrine).** What is the bond that joins the body together? **It is pure doctrine of Christ, the Head.**

The rest of this section goes back and forth describing two very different “walks.” Scan quickly 4:17-32. List some of the traits of those who walk “as the Gentiles do” and, likewise, traits Paul says we should evidence in our walk. What label does Paul give to each walker? (4:22-24). **Old self/old man; new self/new man.** Whom does the old self seek to please? **Only self.** Whom does his behavior impact? Only himself? **The examples of the traits of the old self all impact others--harmfully.** Whose is the new self? (4:24). **God's—in His likeness.** Compare how well this new self plays with others? **All these traits also affect others, but helpfully.**

Again compare the two kinds of walks (5:1-5:21). The difference really is a matter of whose we are! . . . for we are God's beloved children! (5:1). What's the difference between God's love for us (5:2) and “love” as it's marquee'd and slogan'd for today's social agenda? **Abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, et al are generally portrayed as loving/caring, while biblical Christians are caricatured as narrow-minded—anti-women, homophobic, insensitive, etc.** Is God's love “what's best for me”? **He has already done everything that's good and best for me! So I'm free to do what's best for others.**

Share illustrations of how being loved enables us to love.

It's apparent that Paul was quite familiar with all the immoralities we see today (5:3-6). Wouldn't it be easier for us just to ignore them, let each one go her or his own way? Why can't we? **When our neighbor is doing something or being led somewhere that endangers her/his salvation, the only loving thing we can do is warn—and then assure of forgiveness when there's repentance.** We also seek to provide loving alternatives (e.g., to abortion).

One final “His” passage in this section: 5:20. How much of what we have really belongs to us, have we garnered by our own free agency? Do we want to go it alone? Rather, being children of one Father and blessed by Him with everything (all the bathrooms, scholarships, and traffic lanes we need), we interact with one another how? (5:19, 21). **He has given every good thing! Way better than every man for himself!**

“Whose Are We?” HIS . . . THEIRS AND PERHAPS HIS, TOO Ephesians 5:22-6:9

If any section of Ephesians is sure to run afoul of the spirit of our age, it's 5:22-6:9—Paul's discussion of the vocations of wives, husbands, children, slaves. *His?!?* Chattel! Property! There are even amendments to the Constitution to outlaw such things! Let's start with the easiest(?) one first and move progressively backward to the sharpest sticking point.

Credit Deaconess Sara Nordling's husband, John, with the idea of starting with slaves (6:5-9) and working backwards. That's not just a matter of his pet research on Philemon; it's because the jury is no longer out on slavery. Bad practice (although—ask Dr. Nordling—first century slaves really didn't have it so bad). At any rate, a slave is the slaveholder's property—*his*—not free to do whatever he wishes. Now no one is endorsing slavery here, but does Paul issue an emancipation proclamation? Can anyone in the group summarize Paul's message to Philemon about Onesimus? (And see also 1 Corinthians 7:20-22.) **Gaining freedom is good when possible, but Paul didn't demand Philemon to free Onesimus. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon to serve him . . . but with the expectation that Philemon would receive him graciously because Christ, through Paul, had given Philemon (and Onesimus) eternal life. Hmm. This isn't so easy after all!** Again, we wouldn't say it's the “will of God” for someone to be a slave, but if someone is a slave—or in whatever vocation—what is God's will for her or him? (6:5-6). **Serve willingly.** What wholesome purpose could possibly come from that? **Powerful witnesses to our faith come from those are willingly accepting disadvantage.** How could a slave ever obey his master “with a sincere heart,” “with a good will”? **By knowing that our true Master has perfect joy in store for us—and by loving the earthly master enough to want him to share in it.** This master isn't the slave's *only* His, is he!

Speaking of emancipation, who else can be granted emancipation? (6:1-4). For what sorts of situations these days? **Children can be granted partial emancipation for “medical decisions”, including contraception and abortions, at much younger ages (14? younger?) than traditional emancipation to enter legal contracts, etc. Is this coming for pre-adolescent children to choose puberty blockers for sex changes?** What is the Fourth Commandment really about? **It is to delegate God's authority to parents (and other earthly masters) for certain areas of responsibility. God is still always in authority over all things.** What, ultimately, is the role of parents, especially fathers? (Might we state that in a way that's even more comprehensive than Proverbs 22:6? Hard to picture it more beautifully, though, than Deuteronomy 6:4-7.) **Those to whom he delegates certain areas are to model His authority. We are always still His (God's) while also being theirs (belong to our parents and masters).** Talk about the blessings of being *theirs* (that is, of belonging to your parents). *By the way, think about how much more difficult this one is for children if dads aren't doing their job!*

Now the guy who supposedly holds all the cards, who just gets to sit around in his La-Z-Boy and his tank top undershirt (Do you know the horrible term?), drinking beer and watching football. *Is his job really so easy?* (5:25-33).

Many wives wonderfully fulfill their Ephesians 5 duties, but every husband, even every Christian husband, fails to love his wife “as Christ loved the Church.” Notice the past tense, “loved” (aorist in Greek). That doesn’t mean Christ stopped loving the Church, right? To what does it refer? **The cross.** Love (*agapē*) is action, not a feeling. **I always like to emphasize this in premarital counseling.**

“Gave Himself up” is rich atonement language (from *paradidōmi*, “to hand over; to give or deliver up”): 5:2; Galatians 1:3-4; 2:20; Matthew 20:28; Romans 8:32; even Matthew 26:21 (“betray”). Marriage really does get back to that essence of the Gospel (remember The Hands), doesn’t it! **Our close relationships of love (*that near!*) are possible because Christ has forgiven us by sacrificing Himself. Christ’s relationship with us came first, from eternity. Then our Christian marriages picture back or reflect His relationship with us.** What opportunities do Christian husbands have to do such things for their wives? **So many preferences a husband can give up for his wife!**

Whose are we once He’s given Himself up for us—and sanctified us in Baptism? **His, Christ’s! He presents the Church “to Himself.”** How good do we look to Him? **No spot, wrinkle, etc.** Do you like looking that good?

By the way, whose is a husband also? (1 Corinthians 7:4). **The wife has authority over her husband’s body.**

Who gets “the deal” in this mystery? **The Church gets the way better end of the deal, just receiving while Christ does all the sacrificing.** When does a man’s wife get such a great deal? **When her husband loves (imperfectly!) as Christ loves, a wife has a most delightful calling!**

So what if you happen to be not only *His*, but *his*? (5:22-24). *There’s no getting around how difficult these verses can be to hear*—for two reasons . . . but both of them are bad. *Who* is the first reason? *Who* is the second reason? **In either order: every wife is sinful, selfish, wants to be in charge (the essence of the fallen nature is wanting to be God); every husband is equally sinful, wants to get out of marriage what pleases him, makes it difficult to submit to him.** There’s only one answer to the difficulty. *Who* is that? **Christ, of course!—because He is the only solution to sin.**

You are a new woman in Christ!—one of those spotless, wrinkleless women. Discuss ways that you submit to him/Him whose you are. Consider the pressure points where this clashes with our views of women’s roles today. **For example, the world today can hardly**

imagine a woman giving up a paying career with titles and subordinates and advancement, etc. to be a mom of kids.

Talk about submitting to your husband if he models Christ to you.

If your husband falls short of being the Perfect Husband, how will you carry out your very difficult duties? Talk about that, too.

“Whose Are We?”

HIS . . . NOT HIS

Ephesians 6:10-6:24

We’re convinced that we are His, God’s—not only because Ephesians and the whole of Scripture teach it so clearly, but also because every person has a natural knowledge of God (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). So who’s behind all the confusion? We know that, too! Long before Marvin Miller and Curt Flood and Andy Messersmith (look ’em up in Wikipedia) lobbied persuasively for free agency, Satan “won” that “right” for mankind. And the war to own us has been raging ever since (6:10-17). (Miller was first president of the Major League Baseball Players Association; Flood brought the lawsuit that decided teams don’t have the rights to their players for life; Messersmith was first to sign a major free agent contract.)

Of course, none of those the devil seduced into free agency are really free. They are his. Look at the list of our foes (6:12). If these are various ranks of fallen angels, we can’t distinguish among them. Nevertheless, how do you picture these legions? Might any of them ever be visible? **Demonic possession is real and can happen today. But Satan’s activities are mostly evident in the evil workings of people.**

When is “the evil day”? (6:13). Is our day any more evil than other days . . . or, just evil enough? **Every age is plenty evil, certainly including our own. People may have opinions as to whether it’s truly worse today than at other times. Bad enough in any case!** What are some of the battles we see all those satanic forces fighting today? **Besides abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, divorce, sex outside of marriage, media glorifying sinful sex, public education often promoting such, domestic violence, school shootings, etc., etc., etc., I also see hateful spirit prevailing in politics and public discussion, and certainly the prospect of persecution of Christians is real.**

How many times does Paul make clear whose armor we’re wearing? **“Strong in the Lord,” “His might” (6:10), “armor of God” (6:11, 13), “Word of God” (6:11, 17).** Plus each piece has a title attached that describes God’s actions. Which pieces of the panoply does God most want us to have? **Every piece is needed (“full armor”); it comes as a set.**

Without the full armor of God, we haven’t got a prayer. But we do pray (6:18-20). For whom? **For all the saints (6:18) and for Paul (6:19).** See, we’re never really free agents to do only what we want . . . but we’re also never alone to make our own way! Already back two thousand years ago, those Ephesians were praying for us! **Quite cool: when Paul asked the 1st century**

Ephesians to pray for all the saints, he was asking them to pray for us—which undoubtedly they did.

So in the war matching all those terrifying forces of the devil—*his*—against the full armor of God—*His*—how do you see it coming out? No contest! “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

“Peace be to the brothers [including all the sisters!], and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (6:23-24) through whom we are His!