

# “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? 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? Discuss how that noun expresses possession? Maybe even pray it!

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)? Contemplate that! Talk about what it means that God “chose us”?

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!

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

What about Arminianism (election as taught by Jacobus Arminius)?

Now remember we’re talking here about whose we are. Describe the Father to whom we belong in a Calvinist understanding of predestination.

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?

Luther addressed this issue earlier than either Calvin or Arminius. What did he say about why some are saved and not others?

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? 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?

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? 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?

Are you aware of any problems that arise from not belonging to a father? Are any of these problems documented?

**“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. 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. Say them! God is distant from us no more! (2:6).

“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?

What happened? What did that do (that is, to our relationship with God—and others)?

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”.)

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!

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? And as always, where does the horizontal relationship among Christians meet? (2:16, 18, 19, 22). 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). What, precisely, is this mystery? (3:6). In what sense was it kept hidden? For what day of the church year do you suppose this is the Epistle lesson? 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? (Do you see that key “in” phrase repeated here?) When, then, did Gentiles like the Ephesians become God’s? Was it just in the New Testament age? (3:11).

When, though, was the mystery revealed? How was it revealed? Even notice this: To whom, perhaps quite unexpected, does Paul specify the mystery being revealed? (3:10; cf 6:12; Colossians 2:15). Why them?

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

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. 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). 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).

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? 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?

Read (just one person this time) 4:11-16. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—whose are they to give? (4:11). What, in these verses, is their purpose? What will mark the job well done? What is the bond that joins the body together?

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). Whom does the old self seek to please? Whom does his behavior impact? Only himself? Whose is the new self? (4:24). Compare how well this new self plays with others?

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 marketed and sloganized for today's social agenda? Is God's love "what's best for me"?

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?

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).

**“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.) *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). What wholesome purpose could possibly come from that? How could a slave ever obey his master “with a sincere heart,” “with a good will”? 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? What is the Fourth Commandment really about? 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.) 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? Love (*agapē*) is action, not a feeling.

“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! What opportunities do Christian husbands have to do such things for their wives?

Whose are we once He’s given Himself up for us—and sanctified us in Baptism? How good do we look to Him? Do you like looking that good?

By the way, whose is a husband also? (1 Corinthians 7:4).

Who gets “the deal” in this mystery? When does a man’s wife get such a great deal?

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? There’s only one answer to the difficulty. *Who* is that?

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.

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).

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?

When is “the evil day”? (6:13). Is our day any more evil than other days . . . or, just evil enough? What are some of the battles we see all those satanic forces fighting today?

How many times does Paul make clear whose armor we’re wearing? Which pieces of the panoply does God most want us to have?

Without the full armor of God, we haven’t got a prayer. But we do pray (6:18-20). For whom? 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!

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!

“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!