

THROUGH JESUS...

We receive identity, *Ephesians 2:1-10*

Luke's gospel opens with an extended narrative announcing Jesus' birth and its significance. His description includes the familiar scene of angels praising God for the privilege of delivering "good news of great joy," the birth announcement "of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (*Luke 2:9-14*). While many people today know that story because of its connection to the Christmas season, Luke presents it as the triumphant conclusion to the Hebrew Bible's focus on God's promise to bless the world through Abraham and his descendants (*cf. Genesis 12:1-3*).

The apostle Paul, a contemporary of Luke, also wrote about the "good news" connected to Jesus. For example, Paul opens his letter to the Christians in Ephesus by praising God for the spiritual blessings He gives through Jesus. The phrase "in him" repeats throughout Paul's letter, emphasizing Jesus' position as the one through whom God extends His love-motivated blessings (*Ephesians 1:3-10*). This lesson begins a series exploring the things Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God gives through Jesus. By developing our understanding of what God does through Jesus, we will deepen our appreciation of the significance of Jesus' birth, extending it beyond the Christmas holiday to encompass every day of our lives. We continue by considering the following:

God gives us identity through Jesus.

God "has made us alive together with Christ"¹

Appreciating the identity God gives to us through Jesus begins by recognizing who we were before Jesus – **we "were dead...following the prince of the power of the air"** (*Ephesians 2:1-2*).

- Paul, in Ephesians, repeatedly mentions evil spiritual powers that work in the world (*Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12*). They form the powers against which we fight and who rule over "this present darkness" that grips our world (*Ephesians 6:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:14-20; Deuteronomy 32:17*).
- Those powers give the impression of freedom by permitting us to "live in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind" (*Ephesians 2:3*).
- However, that 'freedom' proves to be a living death (*Ephesians 2:2; cf. Romans 7:21-25*).
- We must not dismiss the influence wielded by "the prince of the power of the air;" even though he delivers only enslavement and death, the world readily gives its allegiance to him (*John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19*).

¹ Ephesians 2:5. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



God, through Jesus, makes us “alive together with Christ” (*Ephesians 2:4-6*).

- God commissioned Jesus to “put all his enemies under his feet,” including death, “the last enemy to be destroyed” (*1 Corinthians 15:25-26*).
- Jesus broke death’s power through the most unlikely means – he allowed it to exercise its power and crucify him. By allowing it to take his life, Jesus’ resurrection stripped death of its victory (*1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 55-56*).
- Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our resurrection and breaks sin and death’s tyrannical power over our lives (*1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 50-56; Romans 7:7-25*).
- Baptism, our symbolic reenactment of Jesus’ death and resurrection, reinvigorates us in the present by assuring us of our place with Jesus in the life after this life (*Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 2:12; 3:1*).

In freeing and reinvigorating us, **God also elevates us – He sits us with Jesus in the heavenly places** (*Ephesians 2:6*).

- Baptism not only “makes us alive together with Christ,” but it also allows us to share in his identity (*Galatians 3:26-28*).
- By sharing in his identity, we also share in his rule (*Ephesians 2:6; cf. Daniel 7:9-13, 18, 26-27; Revelation 22:1-5*).
- Through Jesus, God restores us to the role He created us to fill – we join Him in ruling all He made (*Genesis 1:26-28; Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 22:1-5*).
- It is through Jesus that God restores our royal identity.

Applications

Everyone searches for an identity that gives meaning and purpose to their lives. In our culture, that search too often centers on ‘discovering’ one’s unique, personal identity. God takes a different path to identity. Consider:

- God locates our identity in Jesus rather than in our individual personalities.
- God’s grace empowers us rather than our individual abilities.
- Because of the empowered identity God gives to us through Jesus, we should be motivated to do the “good works” He has prepared for us to perform (*Ephesians 2:10*).
- However, we should not underestimate the allure possessed by the “prince of the power of the air” (*Ephesians 2:1-2*). He exerts a more significant influence on our world and in our lives than we probably realize.

May God help us take hold of the identity He gives to us through Jesus, and may He empower us to live faithfully to it.

