

Ephesians 1 (1-14) – Finding Your Worth in Christ

Is this world so bad that the Christian life is supposed to be a never-ending downer? Are Christians supposed to be so aware of sin and pride that they can never hold their head up? Is it a sin to be confident, or to think about your self-image or self-worth?

The answer to all those questions is no. The truth is that God wants you to be confident, successful, and have a positive and healthy self-image. God wants you to understand who you are in Christ, and he wants you to live like you are significant, sufficient, and secure in Christ. That is what God calls a success. And that is when you become truly satisfied, when you find your worth in Christ.

However, some see (and some seem to teach) Christianity as a perpetual guilt-trip and a negative self-image. Instead of being free from bondage and having a joyful life, they are always downtrodden, as if this is humility. They are always apologizing, or hiding out, living under the weight of impossible expectations. They are suffering under the strain of a constant critical judgment, and an ever-present sense of “I should-have-done-better” or “I have-to-try-harder”. They have a negative self-worth and they live in a perpetual identity crisis.

This is not what God intends for you. Certainly, believers need to feel the weight of conviction when they are just playing around with sin, and not trying to overcome it. Yes, you must be serious about sin. You must not treat grace as a license to sin or as a means for pride. What you do matters, and sin has an effect on you and others. And struggling with sin is a constant battle and a humbling thing. You can make great strides in this life, but you will never fully overcome sin in this life. Still, your experience of struggling with sin shouldn't define how you view your identity and how you think God thinks about you. Your failures do not define you, your faith does. And God sees who you really are, which is who he created you to be, and who he is changing you to be. That real you will one day be perfect in character just like your Lord Jesus Christ. That's your true identity.

It is true that all people in their natural state are spiritually dead in their sin and found guilty before a holy God. But if you are a Christian, you can still have a healthy self-image while acknowledging your sin. If you are a Christian, you have been born again with a new nature. You will still have struggles, and you may have periods of sinful patterns. But that doesn't define who you are. You should never talk about yourself as if you are essentially wretched. Don't see your sin as bigger than your Jesus. He says you are on your way out of your sin. You should believe him.

You are not destined to stay stuck in a sinful muck. You are designed to rise up out of the mire and stand on a solid rock. Just as you have to continually battle sin in this life, so too you are continually coming out from sin in this life. Yes, you have to battle with sin, but sin has to battle with you, the real you, the you that has Jesus in your soul. Keep your mind armed with that truth. Even as you are dealing with sin, Jesus wants to continually change you, and he does so as you look at who he is and renew your mind about what he wants you to be. How you're designed is how you're defined. And through the cross of Christ, God has designed you to be significant, sufficient, and secure. That's who you are as a child of God.

This life cannot and will not give you all that eternity will. This world can never fully satisfy the longings of your soul. But God does want you to be as satisfied and successful as a believer ought

to be, giving God the glory now while waiting on the glory to come. To do that, God needs to become the lens through which you see everything else. And that is the issue for many people. They see God through the lens of their life instead of seeing their life through the lens of God. If you really want things to turn around for you that is where you need to turn it around first.

If you're truly a born-again Christian, God wants you to have a positive self-image. Not because you are better than other people. Not because you do everything right. No because you try harder. Not because you sin less than you used to. But because God has made you alive, forgiven all of your sins, adopted you into his family, and dwells in you by the Holy Spirit.

You may be going through tough times. You may have to face very difficult things. You may be beaten, burdened, bare and broke. But this isn't who you are at your core. Other people may say that you stink, and you may smell your own stinking sin. But God smells the aroma of Christ on you, and what God smells is what truly defines the flavor of your soul.

We sing the hymn, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow", and it's true. But look in your bulletin at the quote there – "Because he lives, I can face the past." That's true too. And let me tell you what is also just as true. Because he lives, I can face each day as it comes. I can live full out, right now, no matter what is going on, because I am a child of God. I am the house of God. And because I have Jesus, and he has me, I have something money can't buy, poverty can't lose, no one can steal, death can't stop, the devil can't touch, and I can't mess up.

Oh, I can seem to mess it up in the moment, but I can't stop the movement. I will be brought fully into the kingdom of God. I might act like a baby, all kicking and screaming and tossing and turning and crying and clawing and spitting up and messing its diaper. But just as that baby will still be picked up and brought into its loving mother's arms, so too will my loving Heavenly Father pick me up and put his everlasting arms around me. That mother will watch as her child learns to crawl, learns to walk, learns to bike, learns to drive, and learns to live. But her arms will always be available for her child. Your Heavenly Father will watch you grow but he will never let you go from his loving care. And he has made you to live forever in his love.

You see, my true self-worth is all wrapped up in what God has placed in me. The ultimate greatness in the universe is the ultimate destiny of me. And that destiny is Jesus himself. And I'm going to live like he lives in me. *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Galatians 2:20). That's the truth that I'm going to live in.

Satan cannot steal your salvation, but he can steal your sense of identity. He distracts you, deceives you, and destroys your joy and peace in life, by convincing you that you are still just as wicked as you ever were, that God has left you alone because he can't stand you, and that he barely even tolerates you. Oh, he says, you may be in the heaven line, but you're at the back of the line, and God isn't really interested in you. You're just too messed up. That's what the Devil says.

But God says something different... If people would understand what God is saying to them in the first fourteen verses of the first chapter of Ephesians, it would solve the identity crisis in the church. Paul bases the rest of the book on the fact that in Christ you are significant, sufficient, and secure.

First, in Christ you are significant. Ephesians 1:1 says that you are a saint. Think about that. Not just a sinner saved by grace, but much more. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that you are the righteousness of God in Christ. If the clothes make the man, then you have it made, because you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (cf. Jeremiah 23:6). Nothing can make you less or more holy than you are in God's eyes right now. Yes, you can live more or less righteously, but your standing with God is not based on you it is based on him.

You need to hear the truth about your obedience. Your obedience is not a condition of God's love; but it is the sphere in which you more fully enjoy God's love. You can go all the way back to the Ten Commandments to see this truth. The Ten Commandments didn't root God's love in obedience. The Ten Commandments are rooted in God's saving acts. The Lord makes this point in Exodus 19:4-6, before he gives the law in Exodus 20. God doesn't bring Israel out of Egypt *because* they obeyed him but *to* obey him.

You are a saint because God says so, because he has set you apart, forgiven your sins, adopted you into his family, given you the Holy Spirit. God will be transforming you throughout your life, and you will be made perfect when you enter eternity. You are a saint. You are significant. And you can live like it. You matter to God. 1 Peter 2:9 says you are part of a royal priesthood. That sounds important to me. Revelation 1:5-6 says that Jesus has made you a king and a priest in the Kingdom of God. In the only kingdom that really matters, you are a player, you are significant.

You are significant, you matter to other believers. 1 Corinthians 12:14-24 says that you cannot function properly without one another. Ephesians 4:16 says the body of Christ, that's us, must come together, using all of its parts. You are just as important to the body as me, and you are just as important as anybody else for that matter. Everyone counts in the Kingdom of God. You are significant in the eyes of the most significant person in the universe. That's who you are.

So how do you live out that truth? You do it by praying as if you have God's ear, because you do. Hebrews 4:16 says that you are to come boldly to the throne of God. Ephesians 3:12 says that you are to have boldness and access with confidence because of him. Amen. Your prayers are like prophecy, you make a withdrawal on your heavenly and inexhaustible account. 1 Peter 4:10 says there are many graces in God. You have been given grace, and you have something to give. You are significant. The Apostle Paul makes this very point with his body analogy in 1 Corinthians 12. Your gifts are just as good and significant and needed as anyone else's. You are significant. Don't put yourself down, lift Jesus up.

Next, in Christ you are sufficient. Ephesians 1:3 says that he has blessed you with all spiritual blessings. It's not that he will bless you, but that he has blessed you. It's a done deal. Colossians 2:10 says that you are complete in Christ. Complete is even more than sufficient, isn't it? Complete means lacking nothing, sufficient for anything. You have got what it takes, no matter what it takes. 1 John 2:27 says you have an anointing, and that God will teach you by the Holy Spirit himself. You are sufficient; you are anointed. Romans 5:2 says you have been given grace which gives you peace with God, enough grace to stand in any circumstance.

So how do you live out that truth? You do it by preaching the truth to yourself, counting on what he has already deposited in you, and then you act on it, and live like you're changing. In 2 Peter

1:1-8, Peter says that because of what God has done for you that you can live the Jesus life. In vs.1-4 Peter says that you have the divine power enabling you, the divine nature indwelling you, and the divine promises to lead and inspire you. And then in vs.5-7, he describes the character of Christ. He says that if you believe vs.1-4, then you can walk like Jesus in vs.5-7.

As you do that, you have an experiential knowledge of Jesus; you see who he is because he is living in your life, developing his character in you. You will realize that he has made you sufficient. And then grace and peace are multiplied in your life, and you will be effective, fruitful, and hopeful in your relationship with God. You can stay on the path of vs.5-7 as you believe vs.1-4. Preach it to yourself. You can do it. God has given you what it takes to grow. You are sufficient.

Finally, in Christ you are secure. Ephesians 1:4-9 says that you are chosen, holy, blameless, predestined, adopted, accepted, redeemed and forgiven. You know his wisdom, insight, and his will. It says that this was a pleasure to God; it makes God feel good that you are in Christ. It says this gives him glory. I ask you, does this sound like you are secure? Would you throw someone out of your house that made you feel good, and who praised you and brought you nothing but glory? Would you give them all these things if they weren't secure with you?

You are secure. Romans 8:29 says you are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Romans 8:35-39 says that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ. Somebody say "nothing." You are secure no matter who is against you, and no matter what happens. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says you have hope, that even when you die, you have a reception in glory, a resurrection of your body, and a reunion with the saints. These promises tell you that you are as secure as secure gets.

So how do you live out that truth? First, you realize that you are free to fly, and you are free to fail. You can and should have great goals and attempt great things. But even if and when you fall down you can still get up. And you can be called a charlatan, a hypocrite, an imposter, or illegitimate. But someone's opinion of you won't become your reality. And no one can hurt your feelings unless you give them permission. God is your reality. So, you can continue to shoot for the moon and miss a million times, but failure is merely God refining you or pointing you in a better direction.

Second, you live out that truth by staying in close fellowship with God no matter what. 1 John 1:9 says that when you sin, you can go to God and ask for forgiveness. And God will forgive you, not only because he is faithful, but because he is just in doing so. It is the right thing to do, to restore your fellowship with him. He longs to be in close communion with you. James 4:8 says that if you draw close to him, he will draw close to you.

In Christ you are secure. Your relationship cannot end because it is based on the Father's own relationship with his perfect Son, Jesus, and you are in him. You have an eternal, legal forgiveness. Because you trust in the sinless life and atoning death of Jesus to pay for your sins, God forgives your sin and counts you as righteous. Justice has been served, and you are justified in God's sight.

You might feel uneasy about your God-given identity in Christ because you're scared that if you convince yourself of it, you'll get careless about sin. But the exact opposite is true: the more you know who you are in Christ, the more you will hate all that does not conform to your true identity.

Think about it. If your suit is top of the line, you won't want to wear dirty socks and scuffed up shoes. If your dress is ready for the red carpet, you won't be wearing costume jewelry. You won't find the most expensive meals served on paper plates with soiled napkins. Because of Jesus, you're significant, sufficient, and secure. And when you really believe that you'll really want to be more like Jesus. People who think grace is a license to sin or means of pride don't really know Jesus.

If you are trusting Jesus, there is nothing you can do for God to love you more. There is also nothing you can do for God to love you less. God doesn't change you so that he can love you. He loves you in order to change you. It is his love that changes you.

In Christ you are significant. In Christ you are sufficient. In Christ you are secure. You can say it another way. In Christ you are righteous. In Christ you are rich. In Christ you are received. You are a saint, so learn to realize your righteousness. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing, so learn to rely on your resources. You are accepted in the Beloved, so learn to rest in your relationship. You have the Holy Spirit, so live in the power of success.

This isn't some self-made self-help confidence game. Real, lasting confidence comes only when you are able to free yourself from the world's measures and realize that you have God-given value and worth not affected by the size of your clothes or the size of your bank account. Because I have Jesus, and he has me, I have something money can't buy, poverty can't lose, no one can steal, death can't stop, the devil can't touch, and I can't mess up.

Your past history and your self-perception does not define you. Your gender, your age, your color, your nationality, your income, your social status, your education level, your job, or your family history doesn't define you. Your past triumphs or mistakes, your popularity or infamy, your fame or obscurity, your fortune or poverty, your health or your sickness, your criminal record or your sterling resume, your good reputation or not so good reputation, none of this truly defines you. None of that has to stop you from being a success. What people may say about you doesn't define you. What God says about you defines you. And he says that you are significant, sufficient, and secure. God wants you to have a healthy self-image and God wants you to be a success. That doesn't mean that there aren't consequences for wrongdoing, or necessary boundaries because of your sins. But it does mean that you can serve God with confidence. And he will find a place for you as you find your place in him. You don't have to stay stuck. You're built on a solid rock.

Godliness is true success. Godliness is the opposite of worldliness, its ideas, philosophies, goals, and a worldly approach to improving your life. Godliness is a God focused life, where your relationship with God is the engine that drives your life, and it's the filter through which you see life. Godliness is when your desire is to live for the glory of God, and so your thoughts and actions reflect that. Godliness means a life that places God at the center of all it does. It is a worshipful life that is looking for the rewards only God can give even as it makes the most out of this life now. That's success as God defines it. And that's who God has designed you to be.

God sees the real you. And the real you is beautiful, like Jesus. That's how you need to see yourself. That's how you need to see your brothers and sisters in Christ. None of us are perfect yet. But we are on our way there. God has designed us to be changed from glory to glory. So, go in God's grace, and be a success. Find your worth in Christ. And let people see the Jesus life through you.