

# **Sermon - In Christ for Highland Pres**

Ephesians 1:3-14

July 11, 2021

By a show of hands, how many of you identify as a Christian? Let me see those hands or thumbs up online. So if your identity is Christian, think about that word, you are a “Christ – IN.” Or, if you turn it around, you are IN Christ! So, friends, our real, true identity is found only IN Christ. We are only alive, vibrant, contagious, and real, when we claim our identity IN Christ. Say that together – “I am IN Christ!” I am IN Christ. Oh, we may be other things to other people. We may be a father, mother, husband, wife, daughter, sister, aunt or nephew. We may be a farmer, an accountant, an information technology guru, a teacher, a volunteer, a chef, a truck driver, a nurse, a physical therapist, a customer service representative, an Uber driver, an

Amazon worker, or a salesman, but the only identification that matters is our identity in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Christ! Your ID is “IN Christ” and my ID is IN Christ.

So, today, we’re going to examine our identity in Christ and the ramifications of that identity. If we do this well, we’ll move a little closer to our God-ordained purpose in life. So, our map for today includes, **examining identity**, then looking at **our identity in Christ** and finally, **what this means for our lives** today. Examining identity, our identity in Christ, and what it means.

**First, Identity.** Pull out your ID card and look at it and then show it to someone else. For many of you, this will be your driver’s license or your official state ID card. Who are you? It states your full name. It has a funny picture of you. It identifies your date of

birth, your sex, your height, your weight (O, funny thing – weight isn't included in a Pennsylvania driver's license, but hey, after the pandemic, is your weight accurate?), your address, whether you are an organ donor, whether you're a veteran, whether you have any medical restrictions, when it was issued, when it expires and it identifies the class of vehicles you may legally drive. So, is that you? Is that your identity? When someone asks who you are, do you whip out your ID card? Well for the State Police when you're pulled over, that's you, but is that it? It seems to fall far short, doesn't it? I mean, there's so little information about who you really are. When people ask who you are, you don't rattle off the information from this ID card do you? It doesn't have anything about your work, your interests, your relationships, your values or your character. It doesn't show your personality, unless of course, you expressed that in your photo opportunity.

Well, let's push this a little further. Six years ago, Lisa and I went on a "bucket list" trip to the Galapagos Islands. We travelled with about 92 other people whom we've never met. The most frequently asked questions during meals or in social gatherings were these: What's your name? Where are you from? What do you do? Or, if retired, what did you do? You see, it's very common and ordinary to base our identity on our given name, where we live and what we do. And that's certainly an important starting point, but it's almost like the Maryland driver's license. It doesn't reveal the true you. The real, true you is shaped, developed and molded through relationships and through your upbringing. For instance, you were all born into or adopted into a family, into a set of relationships. In that family, you were given a name, given parental guidance, given discipline, given an education, given

gifts, given advice, given opinions, and given opportunities because of your being IN a family relationship. So, you took on an identity IN the family. You were IN the Scarborough family, IN the Tharpe family, IN the Jones family, IN the Sams family, IN the Adams family, IN the Durand family, IN the Fullerton family, or IN the family with your surname. And, since you are IN a family, IN relationships with one another, embedded IN a family system, there are certain norms, values and expectations that you take on. You slowly become enculturated with similar habits, roles, language, interests, viewpoints, and expectations in life. You become programmed by being IN your family, IN relationships, IN life's interactions. You may have the same quirks or smirks as your dad. You may use the same expressions as your mom. Finally, what you become, what you do and who you are depends on who and what you are IN. Who you're

IN and what you're IN determines the shape and destiny of your life. So, you see, our identity and who we are IN is critically, vitally important to who we become and what we do. What we believe about ourselves becomes either freeing or limiting. Some of you say, "I'm strong, resilient, and capable," or "I'm good at getting things done," or "I'm always on time." But you've also heard people say about themselves, "I never remember names." Or "I'm terrible at math." Or "No one in our family goes to college." You see, this becomes part of your identity, and it shapes what you do, it shapes what you think, and it's either freeing or it creates an automatic cap on your potential. So, I say all this to say, **"Identity is critical!"** We need to carry a different, better, more accurate ID card. And that is what Paul is telling the Ephesians.

**So, let's examine this opening statement in this letter to the Ephesians.** First of all, this letter is written to “the saints in Ephesus,” the faithful IN Christ Jesus. But this letter is also written to you, the saints at Highland Presbyterian Church, the faithful lovers and followers of Christ, those IN Christ. For these verses 3 to 14 form one sentence in the Greek with over 200 words, and it's all about our identity. This, my friends, is our true identity, our new ID card. And, if you don't self-identify with this list now, my hope and prayer is that today you would realize the critical importance of having this ID card and this new identity - for its freeing, liberating, and life-giving. My hope is that from today forward we would all claim and live into our new, true identity IN Christ.

**So, what's our identity IN Christ?** What are our characteristics as sisters and brothers IN Christ?

First of all, we're blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ! Let's say that together, **"I'm blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ."**

We may not be rich or famous or powerful by the world's standards, but we have eternal, spiritual, everlasting blessings in Christ. It's like having safety, security, everlasting love and eternal assurance of life, that, like the commercials used to say is, "priceless!" Priceless! In fact, we really should be using that as our real identity. When someone asks you who you are, we should say, "I'm blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Or, we could have that as our tag line in our emails. "Blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Secondly, we're chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in God's sight. Do you know what this means? Before the skies, the seas, the earth, the birds, or the bees were created, you and I were chosen to be holy and blameless.

That's incredible! Chosen to be holy and blameless. The famous preacher Charles Spurgeon said, **“I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.”**

Friends, when that fact sinks in, when we really get it, when we internalize the fact that we've been chosen before this world was created, it changes our lives and changes everything. It makes us unique, different, valued in a way that the world can never duplicate or satisfy. We are uniquely loved, chosen and adopted into the family of God. We are sisters and brothers **IN Christ. IN Christ**, that's our identity. Thirdly, IN Christ, we have been redeemed by His

blood, bought with a staggeringly high price, forgiven of our every sin, washed clean of our every wrong, set free from the evil that we've done. You see, when God, our Heavenly Father looks at us who are IN Christ, He only sees His Son. We are hidden behind Christ. We are hidden IN Christ. We are clothed by His robes of righteousness. When our identity is IN Christ, our stains, our sins, our marred records are not visible to God. They are covered by Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be IN Christ. Fourthly, we have been given the mystery of God's Will. For, this mystery is that all who are IN Christ become one by virtue of belief, acceptance, acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is Lord.

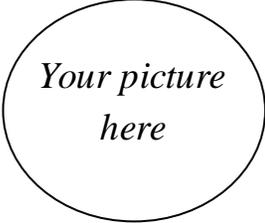
**So, what is our response?** What is our duty, our role, our responsibility as those who are IN Christ? If we are carrying the new ID card that gives a better description of who we really are, what do we do?

First of all, we live with far more hope, far more confidence, far more boldness, far more happiness because of our new identity. Our identity IN Christ is far, far, far more important than any other of our identities. It's more important than our birth family. It's more important than our work. It's more important than what we do. It's more important than our hobbies, our golfing, skiing, or collecting stamps. It's more important than our savings account. It's more important than our retirement account. It's more important than how we perform in life. A few years ago, the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Assoc tournament) was in Lancaster, PA at the Lancaster Country Club. There was an article in the newspaper that noted that "far too often, these professional golfers tie their self-worth to their scores." In other words, who they are, their identity rises and falls on how they perform on the golf course. And you know what? That's so often true

about you and me. But the article highlighted the pro, Haley Italia, whose identity is first and foremost IN Christ. She said in that article, “Faith is something where I find hope. On a good day or a bad day, I’m still winning because I’m walking with Christ.” Did you hear that? “On a good day or a bad day, I’m still winning because I’m walking with Christ.” Friends, when that’s our identity. When our ID is IN Christ, it reminds us that no matter who we are, no matter how we feel, no matter what people do, no matter what happens, we, who have our identity in Christ, trust God. We trust God and we win. Secondly, with our identity IN Christ, we are part of an eternal relationship. And, in that relationship, we naturally want to develop and deepen that relationship. This is done in the ole fashion way of “spending time.” Spending time in God’s Word. Spending time in devotions. Spending time in prayer. Spending time in worship. Spending

time with one another. Spending time serving others. And spending our tithes and treasures building up the body of Christ. You see, as people IN Christ, we are chosen and designed to give ourselves totally and completely to the one, most important relationship ever – loving Almighty God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and that takes our time. And, out of that, as people IN Christ, we're called to love our neighbors just as much as we love ourselves. That's what it means to be IN Christ.

So, in your bulletin is a new ID card for you. Our challenge is to carry these ID cards with our driver's license, place them on our refrigerators, and internalize our true identity IN Christ, so we know who we really are. Let us pray. Amen

<b>My True Identification Card</b>	
<b>I.D. Card</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><i>Your picture here</i></p> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p><b>Issued:</b> Before creation  <b>Expires:</b> Never            Heavenly Blessings!            Holy and Blameless            Adopted in love</p> </div> </div> <p>Redeemed in Christ's blood            Sins forgiven. God's Grace lavished on me            Given mystery of His will. Chosen!            Predestined! First to hope in Christ!            I Believe! Sealed with Holy Spirit!            Guaranteed inheritance!</p>