
The Glory of Christ Centered Grace

Ephesians 1:3-14

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We believe that the Bible is Christ-centered. Ultimately the Bible was written to point us to Christ, to love Him, to understand Him, to submit to Him, to serve Him, to be among His people and to worship and praise Him.

We believe that God is Christ-centered. We often think of God being God centered. But the New Testament highlights a Christ-centeredness even in the Trinity.

We believe that everything that God is doing is to praise the glory of Jesus. Everything was designed so we cannot boast in anything except Jesus Christ, our Lord.

No text in the Bible highlights that more than the opening paragraphs of Ephesians 1.

It would be helpful for you to see how this text is constructed. You might mark in your Bibles these words that will help structure the text. Here is how this text is framed.

In Him (Christ) (v. 4, 7, 9, 10, 13)

This gives us the indicators of thought breaks. It also means that this whole text is centered in Christ.

Praise... glory... grace... (v. 6, 12, 14)

These is the opposite bracket of the *in Him*.

Active voice subject/verbs

Notice, *who blessed* (v.3), *He choose* (v.4), *He predestined* (v.5), *He bestowed* (v.6). Here is clearly what God is doing. He is active and initiating the work.

We have (v. 7, 9, 11)

Here is what we have as a result of God's work.

We do (v. 13)

what God's work accomplishes for us.

Paul opens his book with this marvelous, Christ-centered painting of God's grace. Through these paragraphs, Paul also begins to open his themes and topics.

What God Did

(v.3-6)

We begin with what God did. Beginning with *in Him* (v.3) to the praise of the glory of His grace (v.6). God honoring praise focuses on the person and work of God. We see both of these here. Our praise of God recognizes the Trinity, in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us

in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Here are the blessings from God, the Father...

He has blessed us

It is the Father who has blessed us. All through this section, let us not forget that it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us. He is the ultimate source of these spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.

Also note here that we have one step in the proof of the Trinity.

There is only one God, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

There is a Father who is God; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 1:3).

There is a Son who is God; "But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom." (Hebrews 1:8).

There is a Spirit who is God, "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to man but to God." (Acts 5:3-4).

All the good that God has purposed for us rests in Christ in heaven. This is a way of saying that every spiritual blessing we will receive comes through Jesus. He is seated in heaven as the resurrected Lord whose redemptive work is completed. The flow of spiritual good to us comes to us from heaven through the risen, ascended and enthroned Christ. The Father's blessing for us as His people is because we are in Christ. Sometimes this is a little difficult to grasp. Paul often uses "in Christ" as his way of saying, "Christian". But it is more than that.

In Christ is an important way of thinking about what God has done for us and who we are. It means exactly what it says in English - in the Greek it is a locus of sphere. It is a spiritual reality. One of the difficulties sometimes is that invisible spiritual realities are being described in visual words and physical images. This is both helpful and limited.

The Spirit places us in Christ at our conversion. There is a real spiritual union that takes place when the Spirit makes us alive. We are united to Christ by being placed into Christ with the result that we are united to one another. We are all in Christ.

All spiritual blessings, the good things, that the Father has intended for His people are first given to and possessed by Christ. All of them. When we are placed in Christ, we also then become recipients and participants in those blessings. For example, being joint heirs with Christ is another way of saying the same truth, of describing the same reality.

It is only in Christ that we have the work of the cross and resurrection applied to us. Romans 6 most clearly speaks of this. The application of the death and resurrection comes through our union with Christ. That we have been crucified with Christ and have been raised with Him are a part of the grand treasure trove of our blessings in Christ.

He has chosen us

These blessings come to those who have been chosen by God. We were chosen in Christ before the world was created. I am going to take much time to walk slowly through the phrases of this text. It teaches the doctrine of election. This is an important truth in the Bible. It is often denied and denounced. But anyone denying cannot merely make objections from one or two other verses. They have to deal with words and phrases and sentences here.

Please then, note several things about this elective work:

It is God who chooses

Make no mistake: God is the subject of the verb choose and we are the objects. He is choosing whom to bless, to place in Christ and to be the objects of His love and mercy. I know there are people who deny this. But this is simply what the Bible says. God the Father chose us [to be] in Christ.

It is personal and individual

God choose us. God is choosing people. He is choosing individuals. It is not a general choice of a group of people. It is not merely the choice of Jewish people or Israel as a nation. It is not a choice related to ministry or service in the church. These are all the ways people try to avoid the doctrine of election. No, this is God the Father's choice of individuals in Christ.

It was before creation

This act of God the Father to choose us in Christ happened before the foundation of the world. It happened before creation. This is important. God loved us. God chose us to be saved. God wrote our names in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). The Book of Life is the roll, the register, of all those who will be saved by Jesus the Lamb (Philippians 4:3) and will not be thrown into hell (Revelation 20:12, 15) but will enter the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:17). So, before God made anything, He knew all people He would create and chose some to be saved and put their names in the Book of Life.

It has been completed

This means that this act of choosing is not going on now. It is a completed act of God that is moving forward in redemptive history. There are two errors that are commonly given to object to this great truth.

The first error is that God is choosing now as we choose Him. This makes God's choosing of us a response to our choosing of Him. This exactly reverses what the Bible teaches. Our response in faith and repentance is our response to His choice in eternity past which identifies who will be regenerated and given the gifts of faith and repentance.

The second error is that God is not time bound (which He isn't) and God can see all of time from outside time (yes, He inhabits eternity) therefore He knows who will choose Him and in turn, chooses them. There are many variations of this error. The answer is simple and right in the text. It says, "Before the foundation of the world..." This is a time word and a chronological statement. Otherwise it is meaningless. "Before" in this text is meant to locate God's choosing in reference to time, not outside of time.

What is happening in time with God's people being saved is a result of God's initiative, of God's choosing us before He made the world, before "the foundation of the world."

It is purposeful

God has chosen the individuals whom He will make holy and blameless. God has an objective as well as objects of His electing love. God does not act in an arbitrary fashion. Sometimes it may seem like it from our perspective. But the Bible talks about the vast, unimaginable complexity and comprehensiveness of God's purposes and plans. This is true of God's choosing us. Part of His purpose, part of His plan, was that the people He chose would be holy and blameless *in Christ*. So, there is a trajectory to purposes of the Father's plan and purpose to save people. That is, that we would be holy and blameless though being placed into and connected to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is clearly teaching the core truths of the doctrine of election. He does so with delight and joy, not dour hardness. This truth is meant to be a part of our amazement, our humility, our wondering praise of our Father, who chose us in Christ. Please understand: if you reject the truth of election as it is set forth in Ephesians, you may be cutting the ground out from under your enjoying the blessings that come through these truths.

He has predestined us

The third act of God the Father is in the phrase, "In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..."

The phrase "in love" has been a bit difficult. Does it belong with "He chose us... in love?" Or does it belong with, "In love He predestined us...?" Most good translations (not all mind you) have made it a part of the "He predestined us." This makes good sense because of the rest of the phrase. So, we will treat it that way.

The word *predestined* simply means that God is working in redemptive history to accomplish His eternal purpose and plan. It means that God will accomplish what he has purposed. This is not just theory, but a reality being lived out in each passing moment of time. There is a sense then that we can speak of "our destiny."

Also, this word makes all that God is doing a surety for His chosen people. Jesus' death and resurrection did not procure a "possibility", a blank check for anyone to sign their name to. Those who were chosen will have an absolutely sure destiny because God will ensure that His purposed outcome actually happens.

So, in love for us, God has destined that each of those whom he chose will reach their full standing as sons (adoption). Since this already long, I am not going to elaborate much on the word "adoption" here. In this text it is referring to our being fully recognized as sons and joint heirs with Christ. In Paul's thinking, this has at its culmination the receiving of our glorified, new creation bodies in the new heavens and earth (Romans 8:18-30). God the Father has destined us to receive all that He promised Jesus. We will receive it. There is no question. There is no doubt. From before the world, through the history of the world, until the new creation of new world, God will accomplish what He has told us He intends to do.

What God has done is motivated by the pleasure (kind intention) He takes in the praising and prizing of the bright glory of His grace. Freely giving this grace magnifies the

worth of Christ by displaying God's great love for His Son. In what God the Father has done in all His good for us, it was designed from beginning to end to glorify Jesus.

What We Have

(v.7-12)

From *in Him* (v.7) to *the praise of the glory of His grace* (v.12), God honoring praise focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Here are the blessings in Jesus Christ, the beloved Son...

Our Redemption in Christ

(v.7-10)

Grace lavished upon us provides a trespass forgiving and blood bought redemption.

Our redemption is through the outpoured life of Jesus. This is symbolized in the references to His blood. The Old Testament taught us to think of sacrificial blood in terms of a sacrificed life. We want to be careful to think of the physical human liquid flowing through Jesus' human veins as being what redeems us. Blood is representative of life. To pour out blood is to pour out life. So the redemption we have is through the outpoured life of Christ symbolized by blood and celebrated in the cup of the Lord's Table

The aspect of that redemption that Paul focuses on here is the forgiveness of sins. Our sins have been forgiven because Jesus has poured out His life for us. Forgiveness is not simply the dismissal of the charge and guilt of our sins. Forgiveness is based on the fact that what was required was satisfied. The legal charges against us no longer exist because Jesus' death satisfied and expunged or removed them from the record against us. This will be important because forgiving one another will be an important theme in this letter.

The emphasis is on the lavishness of God's grace that actually deals with our sin. Notice the language does not speak of potentiality but reality. It is not that we might or may have redemption; rather, we do have. It is an emphatic statement of our present possession because of the lavishness of God's grace.

God has shown us what has been hidden in the past about His will. The will of God that is now being revealed is what it pleased Him to purpose to accomplish in Christ. God has disclosed to us that it pleases Him to make Christ the center of all His purposes. This truth is not just theory, but it is "wisdom and insight."

The Old Covenant was shaped by the cross; The New Covenant is shaped by the crown. In both, the way each age is administered is framed and determined by God's purpose in Jesus.

The mystery that was revealed is the single, unified purpose of God. This was something that was in the Old Testament texts but was not uncovered and explained until after the death and resurrection of Christ and the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Therefore, there is no dual purpose in redemptive history: one for Jews and one for Gentiles.

The very purpose of this text is to counter that from early Jewish believers. What is now revealed is that God's original intention that is now clearly revealed is that He has chosen, has destined and has redeemed people from all people groups. Further, they will be one so that the old distinction between Jew and Gentile is now, in Christ, removed. This will be essential to understand Ephesians 2. We are all chosen. We are all redeemed. We are all forgiven. Everyone who is in Christ, without distinction.

The present ordering of the household (the church) is shaped by the future. The purpose of God in the fullness of time is to make Christ the supreme sum and substance all life. Here is the satisfying supremacy of Christ. That which God will do in that future time powerfully shapes the realities and practical living of today.

Our Inheritance with Christ

(v.11-12)

God is working in time and history to carry out his purpose to give to His people a share in Christ's inheritance. The idea of an inheritance for the saints fills the New Covenant. Consider:

Ephesians 5:5, For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Colossians 1:12, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Colossians 3:24, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-4, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

Once again Paul is teaching that God is working out His will so that His ordained end will be reached. What an amazing thing this is: God will make sure that Jesus will be praised in those who have hoped in Him, especially those who were the first to hope in Him, that is, early Jewish Christians.

What Comes from It

(v.13-14)

From *in Him* (v.13) to the *praise of His glory* (v.14), God honoring praise focuses on work of the Holy Spirit in and for us.

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Here are the blessings by **the Holy Spirit**...

Core sentence: "You also... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit"

Those who receive it

The Spirit applies the work of Christ to those who were chosen and destined to be God's own people. That happened to those who heard and believed. The result of God's choice of us is an active response.

To be saved, it is necessary to hear the true words of the gospel. There is an objective message that is to be believed. God has ordained both the ends and the means to those ends. We will be saved. But to be saved, we must hear and believe the word of truth.

There are many implications of this that the New Testament works out:

This is the framework for the gospel. We must tell the truth and leave the results up to God. No part of truth should be hidden from people so as to elicit a positive response. We must tell the truth and when asked, we must be ready to explain as much as we can.

This is the foundation for evangelism. We must tell so that people can hear. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17). The Word of God must be heard. And the Word of God causes the ability to hear with faith.

This is the focus for going into all the world. God has chosen people from every people group. They must hear to be saved. Therefore, we send people to preach the gospel to unreached people groups. Where the gospel has gone and God has saved His people, they there are now responsible to the spread of gospel among their own people.

Those who receive this work of the Spirit are those who have heard and believed the word of truth.

What is done

The Holy Spirit seals us. This is the promised Holy Spirit. In Paul's theology this is first the promise of blessing to Abraham for all the world. The Spirit is a part of the fulfillment of that promise as seen in Galatians 3:14, "... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." But also, it is a reference to Jesus' own promise of the Spirit which is also connected to the Abrahamic promise.

In this use of the word *seal*, the Spirit is placing on us God's mark of ownership. In Paul's day, a scroll that was an important letter or document had a blob of wax dribbled on it. Into the soft wax the owner would imprint his crest to show the letter or the document was official. The Spirit Himself is that mark that we are owned by God. The presence of the Spirit in a person who has heard the truth and believed it, is a mark of their having been chosen by God.

Secondly, the Spirit is placed in us as the down payment guaranteeing that we will receive our inheritance. In Christ, God has purposed, promised and predestined us to receive the inheritance He has given to Jesus. The living third person of the Godhead indwelling in us guarantees that God will complete the saving work that He started. His sealing and guaranteeing work has the actual buying back of those who belonged to God.

Why was done

Why was this done this way? It is all *to the praise of God's glory*. We are so used to hearing phrases like this that we sometimes don't really actually look at the words themselves. This is not just a slogan or a line in a worship song. There is something profound in this purpose of God.

Listen to it again. All this is *to the praise of God's glory*. Not stop. What is being praised here? God? Is that what it says? It is more than that. All of this is meant to draw forth the praise of the glory of God. God has chosen us, predestined us, redeemed us, given us an inheritance and guaranteed it by the seal of the Spirit all so that His brightness, His weightiness, His largeness, His Son – Jesus Christ will be praised.

Reflect and Respond

There are no direct commands in this text. But that does not mean there are no imperatives. Here is what you must respond to from this massive theological, Christ-exalting text.

You must believe in the doctrine of election.

I know some of you are not there yet. I understand. Many people are taught sophisticated systems designed to diminish or deny this truth. But it is a truth. It is the plain truth. But you are going to have to wrestle with why you do not agree with, do believe these words in this text.

The doctrine of election is meant to exalt Jesus and humble us. Don't be surprised if your experience of this begins with humbling yourself so that you can exalt Jesus.

The doctrine of election is meant to give hope, assurance and confidence in God. The response to this great truth is to hear the word and believe. How will you know if you have been chosen? When you believe and are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

We can and ought to praise God with truth. We can praise God through accepting and affirming truth. Truths like this ought to well up in our hearts and overflow with gratitude and praise.

It is clear that the Scriptures that God chose people to be saved. Those that God chose to be saved will believe, will become holy, will receive their inheritance so that Jesus Christ is magnified and the glory of His grace praised.

We will join with God the Father to magnify the satisfying supremacy of Jesus Christ.