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Ephesians 1:3-14

We Need Grace:
Grace is a Gift

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

What's one of the best gifts you've ever **received**? Maybe some of you are leaning into your **spouse** right now and saying, "My **husband**" or "My **wife**." Aww... That's so sweet. But chances are you had to **work** for your spouse. You had to date them, try and look attractive for them, treat them nicely. No I'm talking about an **item** or **thing** someone gave you that you really like—**pure materialism**.

On one of my favorite childhood birthdays I received **Fort Legoredo**. It was a lego fort filled with soldiers and guns and cannons and horses. You can see why I as a little boy would be super excited about this gift. I think when my parents bought the set it probably cost about **\$60**. But now since it's **retired** it sells anywhere from **\$62** to **\$952** online.

I **still have** this lego set and the original box. I have all the pieces because after I was done playing with them I would pack the pieces away in **individually marked ziplock bags** just like other **normal children**. I already have some legos ready for Elijah. When I see him putting his lego sets away in **ziplock** bags I'll say, "Son, you're ready" and I'll bring out Fort Legoredo.

Maybe some of you really like receiving gifts. On the **Five Love Languages Quiz** you score high in "Receiving Gifts." Maybe some of you **don't** like receiving gifts, so you score really **low**. Today's sermon is about a gift that I hope all of you will **want** to receive. It's the gift of God's grace. **Mercy** is **not** receiving a **punishment** we do deserve and **grace** is receiving a gift we don't deserve. **Grace is a gift**. Paul starts our **passage** and his **letter** to the Ephesians this way.

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (NIV®)

Today's text, Ephesians 1:3-14 in the original **Greek** is **one long continuous sentence** in which Paul describes the **blessings** we have in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A blessing is a gift. A blessing is anything good we receive from God. In this passage Paul explains **three gifts** we receive from God, the first of which is the **most controversial**. **Grace is a gift** and the first gift we receive is this...

1. We are chosen by the Father. (v4-6)

Ephesians 1:4-6 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (NIV®)

My three gifts (or points) are **adapted** from **Richard Coekin's Ephesians For You**.¹ The first gift we receive is that as Christians we are **chosen** by our Heavenly Father. There is probably no other gift in the history of the church that has caused more **division, disunity, distrust, and disagreement**. We're really good at **arguing** and getting **mad** over the doctrine of **election** and **predestination**.

I've been reading **George Whitefield's** biography. He was the **most famous preacher** during the **Great Awakening** in the 1740s in both **America** and **England**.² He preached on the **Boston Common** to 25,000

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

people without any microphone. The entire population of Boston was only 17,000 at the time. George Whitefield believed in the doctrine of election and predestination but his **mentor**, **Charles Wesley**, rejected it. And they very publicly **argued** about it and **condemned** each other in the **newspapers**. It caused a **huge rift** between them for years. **I don't** want that to **happen here**.

This is still a **touchy subject** today. When I was the **graduating seminary** I **interviewed** with a **church** that told me they liked my **interview** and would consider me as long as I **didn't talk** about election. I don't think I've preached much on this topic at Cornerstone, maybe because we haven't had a text that emphasized it or maybe because I didn't want to cause division. Can we **agree** on two things?

1. The church should be a **safe space** to talk about **difficult things**, like **election** and **predestination**.
2. Whether we **agree** or **disagree** let's just try and **understand what the Bible says**.

So what does the Bible say? It says we are...

a. Chosen before the creation of the world.

Have you ever gotten picked for a **team**, like for **dodgeball**, **capture the flag**, or **baseball** or **soccer**? The **best athletes** always get picked first. The athletes who have proven how good they are are chosen. But have you ever played sports with someone who chose you not because of how good you are or how athletic you look but simply because **they loved you** (like a **parent** or **aunt** or **boyfriend**)? Before you or I could do anything right or wrong, **before the world** was even created, our Heavenly Father said, "I love you. I choose you. You are mine." Grace is being picked not because you're the **strongest** or **best** or even **good at all** but simply because **God loves you**. *Grace is a gift.*

Now maybe some of you who know your **theology** know there are **two camps**, **Calvinists** and **Arminians**, who hold different understandings of election. Perhaps an **oversimplification** is that Calvinists say God elects or chooses **individuals** for salvations while Arminians say that God chooses a **group** and whoever chooses to be a part of that group is **saved**. For example, Calvinists would say that God chooses people to get on the **bus** while Arminians say God saves anyone on the bus already.³

In our text we see that **God does save a group**. This letter is written to the **church at Ephesus** and notice how Paul always seems to address a plural group of people—"who has blessed **us**" (v3), "he chose **us**" (v4), "he predestined **us**" (v5), "grace, which he has freely given **us**" (v6), "**we** have redemption" (v7), "he lavished on **us**" (v8), "made known to **us**" (v9), and "**we** were also chosen" (v11). God saves the big-C universal Church, all believers from all times and places. God saves the entire bus.

What is the bus? The **bus is Christ**. Notice how many times our passage says "in him," or "in Christ." "He chose us in him" (v4), "In him we have redemption" (v7), "In him we have obtained an inheritance" (v11). One commentary I read said "in him" or "in Christ" of another variation occurs **eleven times**... but I could only find **ten**.⁴ The Heavenly Father **first chose Christ Jesus** and anyone who **repents** of their sins and puts their **faith**, and trust, and hope, and life "in Christ" are saved.

But... our passage also seems to highlight **God choosing individuals**. I see this in **verse 12** which says, "**we**, **who** were the first to put our hope in Christ..." Paul uses a plural "we" but then clarifies that the "we" is all the people who have put their hope in Christ. Another way we recognize God choosing **individuals** is through the theme of **adoption** in **verse 5** because adoption is always a **personal event**. You don't adopt a **group** of people but **individuals**. I suppose you could adopt **siblings**, but each is uniquely adopted into the family. *The Father chose us before the creation of the world.* We are...

b. Destined for adoption through Christ.

Verse 5 says, “he **predestined** us for **adoption** to **sonship** through Jesus Christ...” What’s the **destiny** God chose for us? **Adoption. Sonship. Before creation**, before you were born, before you could do anything good or bad God chose you to become his **child**, to become a son or daughter of the king.

In that culture **sons normally** received the inheritance (**not daughters**) so if the Bible isn’t making a statement about **gender** but about **rights**. If you know Christ, you have the rights of a son! The **ESV** says in **verse 11**, “In him we have obtained an **inheritance**.” Because of what Christ did, we get to **share** in his inheritance. What does Christ get? **Everything... Glory! Praise! Honor! Joy! Love! Relationship! Authority!** Christ gets **more** of those things since he is the **firstborn son**, but we get to share in them too.

I once watched a **documentary** of a **really rich family**. They had adopted a girl who I think was their **niece**. When they **interviewed** her she could tell you what it was like to have **nothing** and what it was like to have **everything**. We’ve been adopted by the **richest** most **kind** and **generous** and **loving** family in the **universe**. Chances are that your family, although they may be great, **isn’t perfect**. If you know Christ, the Father has adopted you into a **perfectly loving** and **good family** who wants to **spend time with you** and **know you** and **love you** forever and ever. It’s hard to imagine just how good this is and one day will be.

Monica and I got our tickets to fly out to **Colorado** for **Christmas** last week. We were last in Colorado for Christmas in **2016** and we took a **big family picture**. My **parents** and three **older brothers** and their **wives** and **kids** are all gathered around the table. I really like **this picture** because it seems to **capture** our **family**. It evokes feelings in me of **belonging** and **home** and **longing** all at the same time. **Adoption** is the promise that no matter how **good** or how **bad** your family is in this life, **you are going home for the Holidays**. You are going to spend eternity with your **father** and your **older brother Jesus** and all your **crazy diverse siblings** and it’s going to be “**drama free**.” *The Father destined us for adoption through Christ.*

The first gift of grace is that *the Father chose us before the creation of the world*. The second is this...

2. We are redeemed by the Son. (v7-10)

Ephesians 1:7-10 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (NIV®)

Richard Coekin’s *Ephesians For You* connected “redemption through his blood” back to its **Old Testament** origins, the **passover sacrifice** and **exodus**. Do you remember the story of **Israel**? They were held captive by the nation of **Egypt** for **400 years** until God sent them a leader, **Moses**, to lead them out of captivity. But **Pharaoh** didn’t want to let them go so Moses, **empowered** by God, called down **plagues** on Egypt.

The **last plague** was that every firstborn would die, **Egyptian, Israelite, human** or **animal** (Exodus 12). But God also provided for a way of **deliverance**. If the Israelites took a **lamb** “**without defect**” (v5), sacrificed it, and **wiped** its blood “on the **sides** and **tops** of the **doorframes** of the houses” (v7), when God came to Egypt to strike down the firstborns he would “**pass-over**” those families. It’s by the **blood** of the lambs the Israelite firstborns were saved. It’s by the blood of these lambs that they were redeemed from death. This **symbolism** continued in the **sacrificial system**. But are **sheep** an adequate substitute for **human lives**? No. These lambs were **pointing forward** to a final lamb to come.

Jesus is our **passover lamb**. He chose to die on the cross as a lamb “without defect.” His blood was **wiped** on the tops and sides of the cross. Because of Jesus’ death God “**passes-over**” us. And now God offers **salvation, deliverance**, and **forgiveness** as a gift. He spares us from the punishment our **sins** deserve and

then just like he led the Israelites out of **captivity** in Egypt and into the **promised land** he is leading us, his **exodus people**, into our promised land.

Verse 10 tells us this redemption isn't just for me. God's purpose is "to bring **unity** to **all things** in heaven and on earth under Christ." His redemption can **heal** and **deliver** me **spiritually**, but it can also heal and deliver us **Cornerstone**, us **church**, us **churches** all around the world, my **neighbor** and **me** (frontline), my **gym**, this **world**, this **creation**, all things. Jesus' blood can even bring unity to **Calvinists** and **Arminians**. *We (all who know Christ) are redeemed by the Son.* That's the second gift. The third is this...

3. We are sealed by the Spirit. (v11-14)

Ephesians 1:11-14 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (NIV®)

What does it mean in **verse 13**, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit"? One **commentary** said, "**Seals** were used widely in the ancient world as the primary way of **indicating ownership**."⁵ A person sealed or marked important things that belonged to them, like livestock (branding). We've been marked with the Holy Spirit that we **belong** to God (Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 9:2). Anyone **chosen** by the **Father** and **redeemed** by the **Son** also receives the **Holy Spirit**. **John 3** tells us the Holy Spirit is like the wind (John 3:8). He goes where he wants to go so if you receive the Spirit it's a gift.

Maybe some of you are sitting here and asking yourself, "**Am I chosen** by God? Am I one of the elect? Has Jesus really redeemed me?" One of the ways we know is if we **have the Holy Spirit in us**. How can we sense if we have the Holy Spirit? It's **more than a feeling**.

- The Holy Spirit **convicts** us of our sins and **liberates** us from their power (John 16:7-11; 2 Cor 3:17).
- The Holy Spirit **comforts** our hearts in trouble (Acts 9:31).
- The Holy Spirit gives **gifts** and **talents** that we can use to **serve the church** (Hebrews 2:4).
- The Holy Spirit **transforms** and **sanctifies** us, making us more like Jesus (2 Cor 3:18; 2 Thess 2:13).
- The Holy Spirit gives **unity** to people from different **races** and **social-economic status** (1 Cor 12:13).
- The Holy Spirit gives us **faith** in **Christ Jesus** (John 3:5-8; 16; Acts 13:48, Titus 3:5).
- The Holy Spirit **dwells within** all who believe (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

A pastor who served during the **Great Awakening**, **Jonathan Edwards**, wrote a book called *The Religious Affections* to try and explain who was truly saved because a lot of people were **acting** like they were saved. At the end of the day, the best way to tell was a **longterm commitment to Christ** that **bore fruit**.⁶ If you're committed to Christ and are bearing fruits like the ones I just mentioned you don't need to be afraid.

God doesn't invite us to **worry** about our **election** or our **predestination**, he invites us to simply **receive** the gifts he wants to give us—to receive the blessings. What are the **three gifts of grace**? 1. *We are chosen by the Father* (v4-6). 2. *We are redeemed by the Son.* (v7-10) 3. *We are sealed by the Spirit.* (v11-14)

Grace is a gift.

One year **one of my brothers** visited his **girlfriend's family** for **Christmas**. He gave her a **really big Christmas gift**. It was all wrapped up beautifully, but when she opened it she found a **smaller box wrapped inside**. And when she unwrapped that gift she found **another gift** wrapped inside that one. And the box that had started out big got **smaller** and smaller; and by the time she got to the last box my brother was on his **knee proposing**. The **ring** was in the last box.

Grace is like that. Grace is a **gift within a gift within a gift**. When we open up grace we discover our **Heavenly Father chose us** before the creation of the world to be a child of God, a son, and to share in the **inheritance**. But we find another gift, and when we unwrap that we find we are **redeemed** by the **Son**. That Jesus has won our **freedom** and has **forgiven** us by his **blood** apart from anything we've done. But there's another gift, and when you unwrap this one we find that we are **sealed** and **marked** and **in-dwelt** by the **Holy Spirit**. It's a gift within a gift within a gift with a **diamond called grace** at the **center**. *Grace is a gift.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

¹ Coekin, Richard. *Ephesians For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading* (God's Word For You) (Kindle Locations 151-153). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

² Kidd, Thomas S. *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. Yale University Press. New Haven & London. 2014. Page 199.

³ Mike Erre talked about getting on an airline flight in Episode 314 of the Holy Post Podcast. "Predestination Isn't What You Think w/ Mike Erre." Published August 22, 2018. Listened to August 28, 2018.

⁴ Clinton E. Arnold. *Ephesians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament series Book 10) (Kindle Locations 1812-1815). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Weima, Jeffrey A.D.. *Romans to Philemon: Volume Three* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 3) (Kindle Locations 10078-10084). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Kidd, Thomas S. Page 129.