



Welcome to Grace Communion International

January 3, 2021

SERMON

To the Praise of God's Glory



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SCRIPTURE READING

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)

Kenneth Woodworth



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“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 through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)



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“6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

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”

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)



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“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.

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)



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"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."

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)



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"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." (Eph 1:13-14 ESV)

Ephesians 1:3-14 (ESV)



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THESE ARE THE ENCOURAGING WORDS OF GOD

THANK YOU, FATHER FOR REVEALING YOUR PLAN OF
SALVATION TO YOUR CHURCH. WE ARE FOREVER GRATEFUL!

AMEN



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These verses are filled with great hope not only for us but for all of humanity, for all those who will accept and receive what God is telling us in these verses. God the Father has delegated to Jesus great responsibilities towards us in his love, which Jesus graciously accepted in love because he is a member of the one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The following is a quote from a GCI article (Next slide)

You may know that one of GCI's mottos is "You're included." But do you know what that means to me? It means that we seek to love one another the way the Trinity loves – to care for one another in a way that celebrates our created difference while still coming together. The Trinity is a perfect model of love. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy perfect unity, while remaining distinct divine persons. As Athanasius put it, "Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity." The love expressed within the Trinity teaches us the significance of loving relationships within God's kingdom.

(Theology as a Framework for Life and Ministry | GCI Archive)



In these verses, the apostle Paul is not addressing the whole world. He is addressing those who are called by God the Father and who are given the gift of hearing the voice of our great Shepherd Jesus Christ.

In the original Greek, this section is one long, elegant sentence. Paul shows that the triune God initiated and accomplished cosmic reconciliation and redemption for the praise of his glory. ("Taken from the ESV® Study Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.")

Those are not yet given the revelation of who Jesus is and what He came to do are like men who are both blind and deaf. They have been rescued by God from darkness but do not know it yet. **"for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8 ESV).**

Today, as we read these verses, we will consider what the apostle Paul is saying to the church, to the called out ones, what he is saying to us. As we read and consider these verses, we are not to forget that in Jesus, God the Father reconciled the whole world to himself as we read in 2 Corinthians 5. Because we have been given the

underserved grace to understand, this leads to humility and not arrogance. The difference between us and they is that, by God's grace, this revelation has been given to God's people. The sacrifice paid for both us and they is the same. Consequently, we have no bragging right.

We are not to forget what the apostle Paul said in Romans 5. (Next slide)

“18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

19 For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:18-19 (ESV)



In other words, what God has done for us and for all men does not depend on us. It all originates with God in eternity before we were ever created.

This is very important to understand because when we understand this truth, it will change our perception of both people in the church and people outside the church.

The same sacrifice that was paid for me was also paid for everyone who has lived, lives and who will live in the future.

Karl Barth says it well. Later, these biblical truth were also expounded by Thomas and James Torrance and many others. This is what Karl Barth wrote. (next slide)

“But all this is not a private arrangement between Him and us. He is not merely our Lord and Representative. As He takes our own place He takes also that of our fellows and brothers. The relevance of His being and action is for ours, but also for that of others who are beside and around us in likeness with us. They no less than we are determined by him. The knowledge of the man Jesus includes the knowledge and enclosure of our own and every other human existence is His.”

(From Church Dogmatics volume IV.2 The Doctrine of Reconciliation by Karl Barth pages 519-521)



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The important point, as we read this passage in Ephesians, is to realize that we all need the sacrifice of Jesus because like the rest of the world, we are also sinners in need of the salvation of Jesus the Christ.

So let us plunge into the word of God found in Ephesians 1:3-14. We realize we are like scuba divers who have been given the revealed knowledge of a treasure. We do not yet see its complete beauty because we are still like scuba divers seeing this wonderful treasure in murky, muddy waters. **For now we see in a mirror dimly,** 1 Cor. 13:12 (next slide)

“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”

Ephesians 1:3-4 ESV



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What does this verse tell us?

The apostle Paul is telling the Ephesian Christians who were both of Gentile and Jewish background that God the Father has blessed us in Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. This means that God has not withheld anything from us. The apostle Peter tells us the same thing in different words.

“3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” (2Pe 1:3-4 ESV)

All the blessings that the apostle Paul is talking about is the very precious gift that we are partakers/participant of the divine nature through Jesus of Nazareth, the perfect man in heaven representing all of us.

That word partaker has to do with being a participant and one who belongs and shares fellowship with God himself through the man Jesus. I don't know about you but this explodes my imagination. I or any man could have come up with such a lofty

future for us. This is a God-thing, as the expression goes.

Think about it for a moment, we will participate in the eternal relationship of the one who freely created everything that exist out of nothing including this incredibly vast universe the pinnacle of which is man who is created in his very image!

There is no greater blessing than being able to participate in this divine relationship not as God but as perfected men and women in the man Jesus.

Before everything was created, we were already in God's mind and plans that we should be perfect as he is, that is holy and blameless before him.

There is an awesome plan and miracle that God does because in my presence physical state, I know that I am not blameless, holy and righteous. In my present state, I cannot reach that height of perfection unless God gives it to me and to all other human beings who will accept it in faith. To attain that level of righteousness, God has to create in us a new heart, a new self. This is the grand miracle he has given to his people, the believing church.

That is exactly God's plan. That is why it is all of him and none of us. Everything was initiated by him and will be completed by him. We are the beneficiaries of this awesome grace.

Any human analogies cannot capture the fullness of this reality. One may think of a very poor child being adopted in a royal family where he would be considered as a son with all the privilege of royalty. There is nothing that child could have done to merit such a physical blessing. This pales into insignificance what God has prepared for us, as we accept this precious gift in faith. It blows the mind!

As we live everyday life in the reality of this present world with its suffering, deaths, injustices, complexities, human relationships, some pleasant some not so pleasant, it is good to be reminded that the end of our life's journey in Jesus, with its up and down, will end in glory beyond imagination to the praise of God.

In love,

“5 he predestined us for adoption 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.”

Ephesians 1:5-6 (ESV)



This is a description of the work and intent of God the Father for us which is being worked out in Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus descended from heaven to earth.

“How far did Jesus go to save us? Where did he have to journey in order to gather us from the farthest reaches of our separation from his Father? Simply, he went farther than most of us have dared imagine. Jesus entered our mortal frailty and made his way faithfully through this world not only with us, but as one of us. He engaged the dire effects of our sin in his healing work as he undid the ravages of illness, judgement and demonic oppression. But more, Jesus undertook to receive in himself the fatal wounds of our betrayals, the cruel punishment of the cross and the horrifying cry of God-forsakenness. He went to the farthest extreme of human existence. All that he did on our behalf. Jesus came down in order to bring us up. He lived, and died, fully as a man in order to reconcile humanity entirely to God. Every time we proclaim the gospel, this is at the heart of the story we tell. One man gave his life for the many. Jesus descended fully into our death in order to raise us fully into life.” (RAISING ADAM, Why Jesus Descended into Hell, by Gerrit Dawson, page 13.)

How blessed we are in the Beloved eternal son of the Father, Jesus.

What is it that we have in Jesus, in the Beloved? (Next slide)

“In him we have

1. redemption through his blood,
2. the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his
grace,” (Eph 1:7 ESV)

- “which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight” (Eph 1:8 ESV)

3. “making known to us the
mystery of his will, according
to his purpose, which he set
forth in Christ” (Eph 1:9 ESV)
“as a plan for the fullness of time,

4. to unite all things in him,
things in heaven and things on
earth.” (Eph 1:10 ESV)

Ephesians 1:7-10 (ESV)



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1- There are stories of human redemption but they do not compare to what Jesus has done for us.

Back in 2000, 23-year-old Cornealious Anderson III, nicknamed Mike, was arrested for robbing a Burger King at gunpoint. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison, released on bail, and told to await orders on when to show up to serve his time. The orders never came. Due to a clerical error, Anderson never went to prison. But instead of using his freedom to commit more crimes, Anderson started his own construction business, became a youth football coach, and volunteered at his local church. He also got married, had three children, and became a well-liked member of his community. Thirteen years later, the state discovered their error and put Anderson behind bars for nearly one year. As the case received international coverage, an online petition for his release gained more than 35,000 signatures. After a court hearing that lasted a mere 10 minutes, the judge conceded that Anderson was a changed man and granted him credit for the years he should have been in prison. A teary-eyed Anderson walked out of the courthouse with his wife and daughter, telling reporters that he was grateful to God. (from [10 Incredible Real-Life Stories Of Redemption – Listverse](#))

Mike redeemed his past by a change in behaviour and by the clemency of a judge.

Mike, by the clemency of the judge, could not be given a life that would last into eternity. Only God through Jesus can give us this gift.

In the computer world, some corrupt individuals use ransomware to take over computer information valuable to companies. The companies are threatened that if they do not pay, they will lose all their valuable information. They have to pay a ransom, or money in exchange. Kidnappers and pirates use these techniques to extort money from their victims also.

To rescue us from the captivity of sin, Jesus gave himself, gave his life for us so that we could be rescued. The consequence or the cost of sin is death. Jesus accepted this consequence for all of us. What an awesome act of love this is.

"5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." (1Ti 2:5-6 ESV)

2- The forgiveness of our trespasses

The good news is that we were forgiven before we ever asked for forgiveness. God has taken care of our sins before the foundation of the world, as we were predestined to be holy and blameless before him. We are all forgiven in Christ whether we know it or not. Our responsibility is to accept this forgiveness in faith.

When we become aware of our sinfulness, we are to acknowledge our sins before God. It is for our benefit because God the Father in his beloved Son has already taking care of our sins. Consequently, there is no need for false guilt as God sees us as blameless and guiltless in Jesus Christ.

Because we are guiltless and forgiven, we are called to live in the new life Jesus has given us. We are to participate and live as adopted children of our great God. Our adoption has changed everything about our lifestyle as we now live to please our heavenly Father. There is no better way to live and no better freedom than to live in the obedience of faith, in the obedience of the commandments of God. Because we have been forgiven, we are to extend that grace to others.

3- "making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ"

Again, this is a great privilege for people in the church to know the mysterious plan of God, his will for us and for all those who would come to faith in him. It is a mystery that we can only be received by having our minds open by the Holy Spirit to this

wonderful truth.

We have been given eyes to see and ears to hear. Knowing our destiny helps us to navigate the daily walk of life. We have been given knowledge of where our dying world is destined for as God has already ransomed it. He is presently working to transform all human beings who accept this wonderful mystery in faith.

As we walk as sojourners and pilgrims in this life, knowing that our real citizenship is not of this world but in the Kingdom of God where lies our hope, we positively and constructively contribute to this world as we walk and live in hope knowing that God's plan is magnificent and will not be thwarted.

4- to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph 1:10 ESV)

We have examples of how things can become beautiful when working in unison. We can take the example of a full an orchestra. A standard orchestra generally has four sections:

woodwinds, brass, percussion and strings. There may also be a piano, which is sometimes included as a keyboard section, though generally there is just one piano with an orchestra...

The instruments are usually grouped together in their sections, usually in proportion to one another. (from [How Many Instruments Make Up a Full Orchestra? \(ourpastimes.com\)](http://ourpastimes.com))

(Next slide – orchestra)

ORCHESTRA



As an orchestra where different artists and their instrument play in unison, it produces a beautiful sound.

When we add a choir, it can become even more beautiful as the voices mix with the beautiful music coming from the orchestra.

It is beautiful because there is unison and no division.

Sin divides.

At the right time, sin will be no more. The triune God and human beings will be in complete unison. Divisions will no longer exist between human beings. We will be united by perfect love, perfect respect, perfect gentleness, perfect joy, perfect kindness, etc..

The troubles we may be going through now are nothing compared to the future that is awaiting us. Jesus will bring all things together, meaning that the whole of the universe will also be in harmony. Creation will no longer decay. It will no longer be in travail.

That is why Paul said in Romans 8:20-21 **“20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”.** (Ro 8:20-21 ESV)

MORE BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

5. "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." (Eph 1:11-12 ESV)

6. "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." (Eph 1:13-14 ESV)



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5- In him we have obtained an inheritance

It is interesting and encouraging to read that we have already obtained this inheritance as we live in the "now" "but not yet".

As George Ladd titles one of his book, "**PRESENCE OF THE FUTURE**". This title captures well what the apostle Paul is saying in this verse.

As difficult as this life sometimes appear and is, we need to live with assurance as God has already given us what he promised in Christ. Will see the full realization of this wonderful truth at his return to this earth.

6- 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."

Christ has already paved the way for us all. This objective truth found in Christ becomes reality for us when God awakens our faith in him and we accept this truth.

Accepting this truth in faith implies repentance, a complete change of mind, where

our trust for the present and the future lies in Christ rather than in ourselves or in what this world can provide.

Right now, we do not have the fullness of this promise but we have the assured guarantee of God that we are sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of this possession.

When we placed our trust in the Father's promise in his Beloved, Jesus Christ we were sealed.

This word means, **"Sealing" in the ancient world served as a "legal signature" which guaranteed the promise (contents) of what was sealed.** (From Bible hub.com)

We can see why the apostle Paul was so excited in writing Ephesians 1:3-14 as one sentence. What God has done, is doing and will do in Christ is absolutely mind-boggling. It blows human reasonableness apart, it explodes it and the choice we are given is to accept this wonderful purpose of God for all of humanity in faith to his praise.

7- God the Father greatest gift to us. (Next slide)

7 - God the Father Greatest Gift



- “16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (Joh 3:16-17 ESV)



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Jesus is the greatest gift to humanity. God made flesh for us. In Him are all the promises and fulfilment of God's promises! This is to the praise of God's glory for which are forever thankful!

Let us pray!