GOD'S GIFT OF IDENTITY

Chosen, Redeemed, and Sealed in Christ

Key Idea:

Our true identity is not found in what we achieve, acquire, or appear to be, but in being chosen by the Father, claimed by the Son, and confirmed by the Spirit, to the praise of God's glory.

Key Text:

> *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. [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. [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.*
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> **Ephesians 1:3–14 ESV**

Key Points:

Identity Is a Gift, Not an Achievement — The Christian's true identity is not found in what we achieve, acquire, or appear to be, but in being chosen by the Father, claimed by the Son, and confirmed by the Spirit, to the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:3–14). Paul's praise unfolds in three movements, one for each person of the Trinity, and each shows that who we are rests on what God has done, not on what we do.

Chosen by the Father Before the Foundation of the World — God has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, and these blessings are unpacked more specifically in vv. 4–14 (Eph 1:3). The first is that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). His choosing is out of his will alone, with no respect to what we have or have not done. The choice was made before we had any opportunity to influence the decision, which also means there is no chance we can undo it by our failures.

Holy and Blameless, in Love — We have been chosen to be holy and blameless before him. This too was decided before we took any action, so being holy and blameless is a result of God's election, not something we strive to attain on our own. Our position is secured for us by Christ and accomplished through the work and power of the Holy Spirit. Some Bibles place the phrase "in love" at the end of v. 4, and others at the beginning of v. 5. Opinion and translations are split, and either

reading is grammatically and theologically correct and fits Paul's theme. Either way, we are to be holy and blameless before God in love, not in legalism or duty, and God's love is the initiative behind his predestination.

Predestined for Adoption — Adoption is the dominant image Paul applies in this passage (Eph 1:5). Ephesus was a significant Roman city: the capital of a wealthy Roman province, one of the largest and most influential cities in the eastern Empire, and dominated by the cult of Artemis and wealthy merchants (Acts 19). Pulling away from that to follow Christ would come at great cost. Sonship was a big deal in Roman life. A biological relationship was dissolvable, but adoption under Roman law meant that the son was freely chosen by the parents, even desired; the adoption was irrevocable; the son received a new name and identity; and the old name, past, and any debts were wiped clean. An adopted son was fully united as an heir.

What Adoption Means for Us — As adopted children of God, our past is wiped away, our future is bound up with the Father, and we have new life to walk in. We are also empowered toward the goal of presenting ourselves holy and blameless before him: our position is secured in Christ, and our progress toward the goal is empowered by the Spirit. This adoption is according to the purpose of the Father's will, and it has nothing to do with our merit.

To the Praise of His Glorious Grace — All of this is done to the praise of God's glory, not ours (Eph 1:6). That roots our identity in what God has done for us, not in what we have done for ourselves or for God. This grace is extended toward us in the Beloved, which speaks of Christ. In him we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies, chosen before the foundation of the world, adopted as sons and daughters, and blessed by God's glorious grace.

Claimed by the Son: Bought with His Blood — In Christ we have redemption through his blood and forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of the Father's grace (Eph 1:7). This is a marketplace, or ransom, concept. We were not free agents able to prove our own value. We were bought and claimed with his blood as the price, and our worth is tied up in the price paid for us. We were born in a state of cosmic treason (sinners by nature) and then committed the act ourselves (sinners by choice), yet redemption and forgiveness were already ours to receive through Christ.

Grace in Overflow, Given in Wisdom — The Father caused his grace to abound toward us (Eph 1:8). The Greek word for "abound" (eperisseusen) describes granting something to someone in rich abundance or overflow, more than enough. It is the root of the word in Eph 3:20 (hyperekperissou), which speaks of hyperabundance toward someone beyond any measure. This is not reckless love or grace. It was brought to us in God's wisdom and insight, and it is divine wisdom to do this. In that same wisdom God made known to believers the mystery of his will (Eph 1:9). A mystery is not a riddle but something of great importance not yet revealed. In the syntax it is tied to the causing of God's grace to abound, so this is the way God makes his grace known, according to his purpose, set forth in Christ.

All Things United in Christ — This purpose was planned for the appointed, or right, time, when the Father will unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). Verse 10 is the centerpiece of the passage. Christ has been granted all authority under heaven and earth (Matt 28:18), and this unity was achieved at the cross (Col 1:20). At the right time the plan to resolve all things was revealed. It has been achieved, and it will be consummated in full when he comes.

An Inheritance and the Firstfruits — In Christ we have an inheritance, a continuation of the sonship imagery. We were predestined to that inheritance (Eph 1:5), and this predestination stems

from God's purpose. God works through his purposes for his reasons, and all things operate within his will (Eph 1:11). The purpose is to bring forth fruit (Eph 1:12). The first to trust in Christ are the firstfruits of redemption, and they, like all who follow, are to be to the praise of his glory. The firstfruits were always to be given to God (Lev 23:9–14).

Confirmed by the Spirit: Sealed at the Moment of Belief — How do we know that all of this applies to us? Because the third person of the Trinity promises it. Through those who came before, we heard the word of truth, the good news of salvation (Col 1:5–6). Our eyes were opened and we believed (Ps 119:18; Acts 26:18), and the Holy Spirit, who was promised to believers (John 14:26), sealed us at the moment of belief (Eph 1:13).

The Seal and the Guarantee — The Spirit's seal is the guarantee of our inheritance (Eph 1:14). The seal is a royal concept: a signet ring pressed into wax made a mark uniquely identifiable to prove ownership, and God has stamped his name on you. The guarantee is a banking or mortgage concept: earnest money initiates the possession process and is the first installment toward the very thing itself. Unlike a housing contract, there are no contingencies with God. Once sealed, it is irrevocable. The Spirit will do his work (sanctification), and God will not lose any that are his (perseverance). God will redeem his possession, because God does not just give us an inheritance; he views us as his inheritance.

Everyday Life Is Worship — The plan of redemption is trinitarian. All three persons of the Godhead have distinct roles, accomplish unique purposes, and bring glory to God. Knowing that we were chosen by the Father before time began, claimed by the Son through his blood at the cross, and confirmed by the Spirit when we heard and believed should produce a response of praise to God for his goodness. Whatever we do and whoever we are, our identity is in what God purposed and accomplished, adopting and redeeming us to himself as an inheritance (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). Everyday life is worship once we truly understand that God defines our identity, and not ourselves. When that truth moves from head to heart, it changes how we respond to God.

Discussion Questions:

The teaching proposed that our true identity is not found in what we achieve, acquire, or appear to be, but in being chosen by the Father, claimed by the Son, and confirmed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:3–14). Which of those three (achieving, acquiring, or appearing) most often shapes how you see yourself? Where do you feel the pull to define yourself by something other than what God has said about you?

Paul says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, out of his will alone, before we had any opportunity to influence the decision (Ephesians 1:4). How does it change your sense of standing with God to know that the choice was made before you did anything, good or bad? Why might that truth be both humbling and deeply comforting?

The teaching explained that being holy and blameless is the result of God's election, not something we strive to attain on our own, and that "in love" points to God's love as the initiative behind it, not legalism or duty (Ephesians 1:4–5). Where are you tempted to treat holiness as a duty to perform rather than the fruit of being loved and chosen? What might change if you pursued holiness from that starting point?

In Roman life, adoption meant that a son was freely chosen, even desired; the adoption was irrevocable; the son received a new name and identity; and the old name, past, and any debts were wiped clean (Ephesians 1:5). Which of these features stands out most to you, and why? In what area do you still live as though your old name, past, or debts define you?

The teaching also noted that Ephesus was dominated by the cult of Artemis and wealthy merchants, so turning to Christ would come at great cost (Acts 19). What are the "Artemis and wealthy merchants" of our own culture, the competing sources of identity and security? What does it cost to root your identity in Christ, and what do you gain?

The teaching distinguished between our position, which is secured in Christ, and our progress toward being holy and blameless, which is empowered by the Spirit. Why is it important to keep these two distinct? Where are you most tempted to confuse them, either by doubting your position when you fail or by assuming your progress will take care of itself?

Paul repeats the refrain "to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:6; Ephesians 1:12; Ephesians 1:14). The teaching said this roots our identity in what God has done for us, not in what we have done for ourselves or for God. How do you tend to measure your worth? What would it look like to let "what God has done" answer that question instead?

Redemption is a marketplace, or ransom, concept: we were not free agents able to prove our own value, but were bought with his blood, and our worth is tied up in the price paid (Ephesians 1:7). What does it mean to you that your worth is measured by the price paid and not by your performance? How does remembering that we were sinners both by nature and by choice deepen your gratitude for this grace?

The Greek word for "abound" describes grace given in rich overflow, more than enough, and the teaching noted that this grace is given in wisdom and insight, not recklessly (Ephesians 1:8; Ephesians 3:20). Where do you need to believe that God's grace toward you is more than enough? Why does it matter that this grace flows from divine wisdom and not from carelessness?

Verse 10 is the centerpiece of the passage: the Father will unite all things in Christ, a plan achieved at the cross and to be consummated when he comes (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20). How does knowing that God's plan is to unite all things in Christ shape the way you view the brokenness in the world and in your own life? Where do you most need to remember that Christ holds all authority (Matthew 28:18)?

The Spirit's seal is a royal image, like a signet ring stamping God's name on us, and the guarantee is like earnest money with no contingencies; the teaching added that God views us as his inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14). Which image, the seal or the guarantee, speaks most to you right now? What does it do to your heart to hear that you are God's own inheritance?

The teaching closed by saying that knowing we are chosen, claimed, and confirmed should lead to praise, and that everyday life is worship when God defines our identity (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). Where in your ordinary week could you consciously live "to the praise of his glory"? What helps this truth move from your head to your heart?

For Further Study:

Read Ephesians 1:3–14 slowly several times this week. Notice how often Paul says “in Christ,” “in him,” or “in the Beloved,” and how the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit appears in turn. Mark each time the refrain “to the praise of his glory” appears. What does the repetition tell you about the purpose of everything in this passage?

Read Acts 19 for the background of the city of Ephesus. What do you learn about the place of Artemis and the merchants there, and about the cost of following Christ? How does that background make Paul’s language of being chosen and adopted land with more weight?

Study Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 4:4–7 alongside Ephesians 1:5. Note what each passage says about adoption, the Spirit, and being an heir. How do these passages deepen your understanding of what it means to be an adopted child of God?

Read Ephesians 1:10, Matthew 28:18, and Colossians 1:19–20 together. How do these verses describe the unity of all things in Christ? What has already been achieved at the cross, and what awaits his coming?

Read 1 Peter 1:18–19 alongside Ephesians 1:7. What do these verses say about the price paid for you? Write down how this changes the way you think about your worth.

Study 2 Corinthians 1:21–22 and Ephesians 4:30 together with Ephesians 1:13–14. What do these passages say about the Spirit as seal and guarantee? How does the Spirit’s seal give you confidence in God’s hold on you?

This week, do a simple identity audit. List the places you look for identity: what you achieve, what you acquire, and how you appear to others. Next to each, write what Ephesians 1:3–14 says is true of you in Christ. Choose ONE truth (chosen, claimed, or confirmed) to pray over and memorize.

Choose one ordinary part of your week, such as work, a meal, or time with family. Using 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Colossians 3:17, plan one specific way to do it to the praise of God’s glory. Share what you learn with someone in your group or a friend.

Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by series, by Scripture, or by topic for deeper study of the Christian life and sanctification.