

Lifblood: The One Thing You Can't Live Without

The Gospel: Who We Are

Deric Thomas

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The Gospel: Who We Are Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise God for the gospel. Praise God for the person and for the work of Christ. Turn with me to Ephesians 1, and verses 3 through 14 is what we are going to look at. We are going to continue this series entitled Lifblood, where we are looking at the gospel and how the gospel and the person and work of Jesus Christ affects every area of our life, and what is the gospel, and what does that mean for our identity is what we are going to talk about this morning.

So, keyword, 'identity'. Identity. Who are we? Now, this is a very important topic because of the accusations that come against many truly born again, genuine Christians. Accusations by Satan about who they are or maybe what they have done. Accusations about...from foolish and ungodly men and women. Foolish and ungodly scientists like Richard Dawkins who comes to this scientific endeavor, and he brings scientific presuppositions that, basically, is a "No God" philosophy, and it is not science, and that infiltrates the textbooks that our students read. So, ungodly and foolish people like that. Ungodly and foolish people like Deepak Chopra, who is a medical doctor, and who says he wants to get rid of the historic Christianity, the historic Christ, because Jesus is more a "state of mind." Other medical doctors who foolishly and unwisely take the life of innocent children and devalue humanity and the dignity of life as a result of that.

All these things can confuse us as Christians. Who are we? What does this mean? Ungodly and foolish philosophers like the Dalai Lama who says that Jesus is just one among many gods, who says there are many paths to God, and we start hearing these things, and it confuses us about our identity. Who are we as followers of Christ? Or, maybe, it is foolish and ungodly parents. There are many godly parents. There are many wise parents. There are many godly scientists, godly historians, godly philosophers, but there are many foolish ones. Parents who might say things like, "You are not my son. You are not my daughter." Maybe not in words always, but maybe sometimes in actions.

However, the genuine born again follower of Christ who has been given a new heart, they need to understand who they are in Christ. This passage addresses that very clearly. God graciously saved me. He brought me into His family. He adopted me. I started learning things like, "I was chosen before the foundation of the world." I started learning things like, "He redeemed me. He paid the price for my sin." I started learning big words like "justification" and "sanctification" and "glorification." I have an inheritance in Christ, co-heirs with him. This is good news. This is the gospel. This is what our identity really is.

So look in Ephesians 1:3-14. Here is what I want you to notice. Notice this little phrase "*in Christ*", "*in him*", "*through him*". In fact, Paul uses this phrase almost ten times in this section alone. He uses this phrase almost forty times in the book of Ephesians. This is very important. He uses the phrase almost 160 times throughout all of his writings. This phrase "*in Christ*" is very important. Look with me, verse 3:

Blessed [or Praise] be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [In the one He loves] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses [our sins], according to the riches of his grace, which he has lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the council of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 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, who is the guarantee [or the deposit] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Did you catch the richness of that passage? In eternity past, before time began, the Father did some work for the believer. In the present, in history, Jesus did some work for the believer. Then, in the future there is an inheritance, there is a promise, that the work or the person of the Holy Spirit is a part of. You see from eternity past to eternity future, the work of the great Triune God of the Bible: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is your God, Christian. If you have been born again, if you have been brought into the family of Christ, if you have been given the Holy Spirit, then your identity is radically different from what you used to be and who you used to be.

Praise God That He Has ...

Made us rich in Christ

So, look with me in verse 3 and see that God has made us rich in Christ. Paul begins by saying, "Praise..." This is a praise report. The rest of this is a doxology. It is a worship time for Paul. This is one sentence in the original Greek language. He doesn't even stop. In these first fourteen verses, he just hammers it out.

Paul was a prosperity preacher, but not the kind that is on TV, that tells you can have anything that you want as long as you have enough faith. He was the kind of prosperity preacher that knew the truth that, in Christ, we have every single spiritual blessing that there is. Everyone, our wealth is in Christ. Our wealth is in Christ.

Notice these spiritual blessing there. They all come to us because of our union with Christ. This great doctrine, this great truth of being united with Christ: United in His life, united in His death, united in His resurrection, united in His ascension. If the believer comes to know God through Christ, everything that is true about Christ is true about them. This is great, and we have every spiritual blessing that there is.

It reminds me of a story of a man, an old country man who lived in Oklahoma in the early 1900s. True story. He lived in a little shack, he and his wife, and he didn't have much

money at all. He lived at pretty much the poverty level. A group of men came to him one day and said, "Hey, our research says that there might be some oil below your house and could we take a look in the ground?" He said, "Well sure, you can look under my ground." So, he tells them that they can, and so, they look and find out...get this...the largest oil reservoir in the history of the United States of America up to that point under this guy's house, and he became a millionaire overnight. However, think about this: He was a millionaire the night before. He just didn't know it.

Listen, your identity in Christ is spiritual billionaire, whether you recognize that or not, before you came in here. That is good news. Praise God for the fact that He has made you wealthy in Christ. You have everything that you need to live to face the enemy of God, to overcome the flesh. The flesh is still there, but the Spirit of God is in you, and you have every spiritual blessing in Christ. That is good news. Praise God that we have every single spiritual blessing that there is; that God has given us everything in Christ because of our union with Him.

Chosen us in Christ

The next truth I want you to see is in verse 4, and this is a deep one. God has chosen us in Christ. Look at verse 4. Before Adam and Eve, before Genesis 1:1, before the creation of the world, God...you, genuine Christian, believer...He chose you. He chose you. You didn't so much choose Him as He chose you before you were ever born. The Father in eternity past, He chose you. He chose you. This is a deep truth that should not cause debate. It should cause delight. This is a truth that should not cause division. It should cause doxology which is what Paul was doing here. This great truth of election, of God's choice, which is used over fifty times in the Bible, this truth should not cause denominational wars, but worship. God has chosen you, Christian.

Let me tell a little story to help you understand this just a little bit. Children love for parents to tell them stories at bedtime. We tell them Bible stories and stories about our family. It goes like this. Once upon a time there was a man named Deric and a woman named Heather. They loved each other, and you know God brought them together in marriage, and they just loved each other, and they could not wait to have a child, especially Heather. She could not wait to have a child. Deric really wanted a child, too. However, they used to talk about the child that they would have. They would think about what they would name this child.

One day, God gave them a child, and before that child was born, we loved him. We set our affections on him. Before they were born, like when he was a zygote, we did. I don't tell him zygote though. I learned all those big terms. You know, guys like when you get married, and you are young, you learn all those terms from a book called *What to Expect When You are Expecting*. You learn all those terms like zygote.

So, it's told to him, before you were ever born, your parents loved you. They set their affections on you. Now, listen. That is a glimpse of this rich truth. This truth that is too much for us to understand. We don't understand the fullness of this. No theologian in this world can reconcile God's sovereignty in salvation. God does it, and man's responsibility to repent, to turn from sin, to trust in Jesus. Look, I don't know, but that is okay, because Deuteronomy 29:29 says this. Think about this in relationship to God's election. "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God.*" Okay, God has got some secrets and here is one of them. "I am not telling you how these things go together, all right?" He is not telling us.

Now, that makes me mad, especially, when I am really prideful. I want to know everything. I want to know what is going over here in Britney Spears' life over here. When I see the

tabloids, I want to know. Listen, your pride and your selfishness wants to know everything, but God says there are some secret things that belong to Him alone. However, He says, "*The things that have been revealed belong to us and to our children.*" That is good. If He reveals it, it is for us. It is for our children. If He doesn't, don't try to philosophize too far. He has revealed this about you, Christian. He chose you before you had ever done anything good or bad, before the foundations of the world. That should radically change your identity.

We are holy and blameless positionally, and we should be progressively. When you placed your trust in Christ, you were united with Him. When that happened, your position changed completely. You were justified. You were declared right before God, not on the basis of your righteousness, not on the basis of your good deeds, not on the basis of your holiness, but on the basis of the righteousness, the holiness, the perfection of Jesus. When you trusted Him, what was true of Him became true of you positionally.

However, then progressively, as a result of Christ living in you, as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit, you will grow progressively in your sanctification, in your walk with God. You will. It is automatic. If the Holy Spirit lives in you, you will begin to live a holy life. You will begin to live a holy life. We are holy and blameless positionally, and we should be progressively if we have been justified. Your identity in Christ is right before Him. You are righteous. When He sees you, He sees Christ. You are free to be holy.

Predestined us in love through Christ.

Next truth. Look at verses 4 through 6. The last half of verse 4 and see the truth that arises that we are predestined. He has predestined us in love through Christ. This word, "predestination" happens five times in the New Testament. It is not a bad word. It is a good word. It is there. It is right there, and I don't understand all the fullness of it. Nobody does, but here is what you need to know about it. Before you were born, God destined you to be adopted into His family, Christian, despite who you were, despite your sin, despite your rebellion against Him, despite your imperfections. He predestined to say to you, sir, and to you ma'am, "I am coming to get you, and I am going to take you home, and you are going to be a part of my family." That radically changes your identity Christian. You are in the family of God. Not because you were lovable.

It is a story like I was reminded of with young man who came to talk with me last week, and he started telling me about his own adoption, about the fact that his parents came to get him when he was less than a year old, and how they came to him, and he had a bloated stomach because he had a parasite that was eating away at his insides, and he had explosive diarrhea, he says. He had to come back home to the states and had extensive medical treatment as a result of that. His face with filled with sunspots, but that loving, godly family who had a plan for his life, who had a room waiting for him, who had a name picked out, said, "Hey, we love you." Predestined us in love. "We love you son. You are our son now. You get our inheritance, our identity. What is true of us is now true of you. Come home with us." This kid is a high school student now who loves Jesus and who loves his parents.

That is a glimpse of this truth of predestination through Christ. We are predestined to be adopted. We are now children of the Heavenly Father, co-heirs with Christ, our identity is child of God and, since the Father loves the Son, He also loves us.

Redeemed us in Christ

Next truth, verses 7 through 8: We have been redeemed in Christ. We have been redeemed in Christ. "*In Him,*" it says, "*we have*"...past tense... "*redemption.*" Redemption is having the price of something paid. A ransom was paid to buy someone or something back.

Someone or something was in bondage, and somebody came along and paid a price to buy that person back from bondage.

That is what you see in the book of Exodus. We watch it all the time on Veggie Tales. It is called *Mo and the Big Exit*. Maybe you have to get that one. Moses leads the people of Israel out, but he does so after God tells them to take a lamb and to put the blood of that lamb over the doorpost, so that, when the death angel comes through, he is going to pass over your house when he sees the blood. It had to be a price, the blood of this lamb, and it had to be paid and as a result, God freed His people. He led them out of bondage from Egypt.

We need to be freed from the bondage of our sin. We need to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. If you are in Christ, you have been. Because, the price, the atonement was paid. Jesus lived the perfect life that you couldn't. He died the perfect death that you could not. He didn't deserve it, but He died as a substitute...substitutionary atonement in your place. He was the Lamb of God that all the other lambs would cry and point to. Jesus, the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of His people. That is redemption, and now, as a result of that, you have been set free, Christian. Your identity is "free one." Your identity is "free one." We were redeemed in Christ. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. We are free from bondage. Our identity is free man, free woman. You are not longer in Egypt. You are no longer in sin, and you are free in Christ.

Not only that, but we have been...we have been forgiven through the blood of Christ. We have been forgiven through the blood of Christ. There is a clean slate. It reminds me of my days back in elementary school. I hope none of my teachers are in here. I grew up in Homewood. I went to Edgewood. I hope none of the teachers are here because there were oftentimes when you know everybody else got to go play on the playground, and I had to stay inside. You know what happened when you got in trouble, right? Clean the board. Some of you guys remember that. Don't act like you don't. When you get in trouble you would have to stay in while everybody else played and clean the board.

I did a lot of board cleaning in my life, and I want to go back and say, "Yeah, I sinned. I was disobedient. Yes, you know I should have done more than clean the board." However, you know what? God has cleaned my slate. He has washed my board. My sins have been forgiven. That is good news. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, my identity has been changed.

It reminds me of how, when we were living in Miami, my wife and I got to go to the beach a pretty good bit. We got to walk on the white, sandy beaches there in Miami. I can remember looking back after we had walked a while and seeing our footprints in the sand. It was a great picture when one of those waves would come in and crash on the shore, and it would pull back, and our footprints were gone. They had been washed away completely. It was cool. Like, where we had come from was gone, and where we were heading was yet to come. Man, what a picture of forgiveness, right? That your past, no matter if it was really big size twelve sins...like, I wear size twelve, okay? Really big size twelve sins in the past or whether it was little bitty sixes, the blood of Christ has washed it away. Praise God that you have been redeemed. You have been forgiven. That changes your identity.

Revealed to us His will in Christ

Next point, verses 9 through 10. Praise God that He has revealed to us His will in Christ. Old Testament saints didn't understand what Paul was about to teach in these verses. There is, in the will of God from the very beginning, God...he teaches in the book of Ephesians, in chapter 2, chapter 4, you read it when you get home. God is uniting Jew and Gentile together as one in his body, and this has been God's plan from the very beginning.

Let me show you. Adam and Eve put in the Garden in the image and likeness of God, right? What color were Adam and Eve? We don't know. They could have been red, yellow, black or white. It doesn't say anything. It is insignificant. Humanity fell from the favor of God. They fell into sin. As a result of that, God said, "I am going to send a baby. I am going to send the seed of the woman." That's Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman is going to crush the head of the serpent, the enemy of God. "I am going to redeem my people."

Then, He comes to Abraham, and He says, "Abraham, I am going to make you a great nation." The nation is going to end up being Israel. However, the plans and the purposes of God were way bigger than Israel because God told Abraham in Genesis 12, "I am going to bless you Abraham, and here is why: Because, in you, in your seed, all the nations of the world will be blessed." In the seed of Abraham...the seed of Abraham, the Messiah, the Promised One, the Christ, the One who would come to bring together Jew, Gentile, people from every tribe and every tongue and every nation. God would unite them, Ephesians 1 tells us, as does all of Scripture. He was going to unite them.

Jesus Christ is the King of kings, and He is the Lord of lords! This radically changes our identity. We, as Christians, as Christ-followers, are no longer black. We are no longer, first and foremost, white. We are no longer, first and foremost, identified by what college that we went to or did not go to. We are no longer identified by what denominational organization we are a part of. We are defined by this: "In Christ." Stamped. That is who we are. We are in Christ. Christ will rule over a united people forever, and He, the prayer of Jesus in John 17 will be fulfilled. They will be perfectly...perfectly one.

When the church recognizes, when the people of God recognize who they really are, their true identity, they will be one. In the story of God, He...from the very beginning, it has way bigger than black or white. It is people from every tribe and tongue and nation. He is bringing them together in Christ. That is who you are.

Given us an inheritance in Christ

He has revealed to us His will in Christ, and He has given us an inheritance in Christ. Some of you never thought about inheritance because you might not get one this side of heaven, but listen, you have got an inheritance in Christ.

Your inheritance is ultimately this: That you get God; you know God. You have been reconciled to God and to His people. You get Christ. You know Him. He knows you, and one day, you will be with Him face to face. That is the inheritance, ultimately, and the blessings that flow from that.

It reminds me of the story of a family that was going from America to Europe, and they were flying over the Atlantic Ocean, and the mom is looking out the window of the plane, and she sees how beautiful it is. She says, "This is a great view. This is beautiful." She looks at her six year old daughter, and she says "Sarah, this is a lot like heaven." Sarah looks out the window with a great puzzled look on her face. She says, kind of disappointed, "Mommy, where is Jesus?" That is what makes heaven so glorious.

The new heaven, the new earth, the city whose architect and builder is God, the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven, and it will be a literal place. His people will be there from every tribe and tongue and nation. They will worship Him together, united as one. We can see a glimpse of that now, already, and not yet. Heaven, and our inheritance is God, is Christ. We know Him, and He knows us.

Sealed us in Christ

We have been sealed in Christ. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit, this un-removable impression. Kind of like, you know parents, the ring pops...that your little kids...those little suckers, the ring pops. Maybe some of you have some in your pocket right now. The ring pops, and when your kids are playing, and they go, and they bump up against the couch and it leaves a permanent impression from the ring pop, like a little cherry circle that stays there no matter how hard you scrub. If you are in Christ, if you are a believer, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and it is not going away. Like, that cherry stain is not going away. Your inheritance is sure.

The will of God will be accomplished this verse says. You have great hope because God has given you the Spirit, which is the down payment of the inheritance that you will receive. He has sealed you. Our possession of the Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance. It guarantees our unity and our growth in holiness. This is so important. Listen to me. We, as Christ followers, have a guaranteed inheritance.

However, the question arises, when I look at this passage, how can a person know if they have the Holy Spirit or not? Last week, we looked at Matthew 7, and we learned that there will be many on the day of judgment who will stand before God and say "Lord, Lord. Did I not do this, that or the other in your name?" Jesus will look at them, and He will say, "Depart from me for I never knew you." You mean you can actually be deceived? I think so.

How can you know if you really have the Holy Spirit? I am glad you asked. The book of 1 John talks about that. The book of 1 John says in 1 John 5:13 that these things are written so "*that you may know that you have eternal life.*" You can have assurance and here is how you can know that you have assurance. How you can know that you have the Holy Spirit? Are you ready?

Number one: 1 John 4:20-21: You will love the church. You will love God's people. You will. 1 John 4:20, "*If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*" So, hypothetically speaking, let's say that in the late 1800s on a plantation here in America, there was a group of people who met together in worship and to sing songs about how much they loved God and to pray to the God that they loved. Then, they left that meeting, and they had hatred and anger against genuine born-again Christians because they didn't look like them or smell like them.

Do you think it is possible that you can come in and say, "I love God" and hate your brothers and sisters in Christ who are being persecuted overseas? Your brothers and sisters in Christ in this very city who may not look like you? Do you think that it is possible that Satan could have deceived you? You grew up in church your whole life, and you think you have been born again, and you think you have the Holy Spirit, you think you are a Christian, you think you are saved, and you say, "God, I love you", but you hate people? You hate His people. You are deceived. Either you are deceived, or you are just an outright liar. Stop pretending. You don't have to stay that way. Turn from your sin. Put your trust in Christ, Christ alone that all of human history is about. God, open the eyes of those who hate their brothers and sisters and who are deceived.

The second way that you can know whether or not you have eternal life, if the Holy Spirit really lives in you, is if you live a holy life to some degree. Because, positionally, you were made right and holy, not on the basis of your works when you were truly saved, justified, but you will progressively grow as God makes you more like Jesus as you grow, because He

who began the good work in you will complete it, and you progressively grow in that. So, holiness is one sign.

1 John 3:10: *"By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."* 1 John 3:10. 1 John 1:5-6 says the same thing in a different way. *"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."* He is holy. *"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."*

Did you get that? Here is how you can know whether you have the Holy Spirit. Is there a measure of holiness in your life and are you progressively growing in that way? Oh, you can come to church and say, "Lord, Lord". You could have grown up here and tithed and done a lot of things like that, but if you have been born again, if the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, there will be a difference in your life. If you claim to be in the light, and yet, you live habitually day by day in darkness, you are a liar, or you are greatly deceived. However, you don't have to stay that way. Turn from your sin. Put your trust in Jesus today, and He will redeem you. He will save you. You can come into His family and everything can change.

Two ways you can know that you have the Holy Spirit: Love and holiness. However, if you have the Holy Spirit, your identity, sir, your identity, ma'am, is secure in Christ.

Praise God That All Of This Is ...

So, in conclusion. Praise God that is by grace alone. You don't deserve it. You don't earn it. This passage is full of this word "grace", that God has lavished His grace. It is by grace alone. It is through faith alone. It is through faith alone. Trust Him. Embrace Him. Lean on Him. Keep trusting. Keep embracing. Keep leaning. It is in Christ alone. Christ is the only way. It is His story bringing together people from every tribe and tongue and nation. There is no other name under heaven by which you must be saved, regardless of what the Dali Lama says. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through His atoning, sacrificial death on their behalf. So that they can be made right before God, holy before God, blameless before God, not on the basis of what they have done, but on the basis of what Christ has done. Praise God that this is not for us alone. This is for the nations. We ought to go to the nations. We ought to go to Birmingham, to the people who don't look like us, and to the Bedouins. Praise God that this is for His glory alone. There is no boasting on our part. This is by the grace of God, and church, praise God that our true identity is in Christ. You must respond to this.

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