

**Series: God's Love Changes Everything**

**Title: God's love changes our Identity**

**Text: Ephesians 1:3-14**

**Date: May 19, 2019**

**Dan Hamel**

Welcome! We are in week three of our series through Ephesians. In this series we are talking about how God's love changes everything. We have seen how **God's love changes people**, and we looked at the conversion and radical life transformation of Paul, the man who wrote this letter. Then we talked about how **God's love changes cities**, and we talked about how Ephesus was transformed by the love of God. The gospel turned the city right side up, transformed the economy and rewired very social fabric of one of the leading cities in the world. Today, as we jump into the meat of the book of Ephesians what we are going to see is that **God's love changes our identity**. If you have your bibles, turn with me to Ephesians 1. As you are turning there, thinking about identity reminds me of a tweet I saw a while back. A young man was scrolling through Twitter and got on **KFC's profile**. They took note that they were following 11 people. Those 11 people were the five spice girls and six random guys named Herb. So together they were following 11 herbs and spices, the exact amount of their recipe. To congratulate the young man who discovered that, KFC commissioned a piece of artwork with the man who made that discovery and the Kentucky colonel. **Check this out**. That's the man getting a piggyback ride from Colonel Sanders. What a reward!

Interesting fact about my family: Keren's grandfather was a food scientist. He invented many recipes. Her grandfather is the guy responsible for grape flavoring in sports drinks, for the 100 Grand candy bar, for Pop Rocks, and he is actually the man who invented KFC's original recipe. The colonel did not invent that. He paid Keren's grandfather to invent that. Unfortunately, he was only paid a one-time fee, not a royalty; otherwise we would be living on an island somewhere.

How do you get to know someone's identity? Do you look at their Twitter profile page and see what they say about themselves? Do you look at their driver's license and social security card? I think the best way to discover someone's identity is to find out who God says they are. And as we read Ephesians 1 today, that's what we are going to discover: Who God says we are. **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. 4 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. 7 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. 11 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.**

Everything we just read is only one sentence in the Greek. Twelve verses from just one sentence - 202 words. Different commentators have spoken about this one sentence and said, "This is the most monstrous sentence conglomeration ever composed in the Greek language." "A magnificent epistolary gateway." "An operatic, melodious overture." "A golden chain of many links." "Rhapsodic adoration." "A kaleidoscope of dazzling lights and shifting colors." That's the passage we get to study today. All of Scripture is from God and sacred, but this is particularly special. This is perhaps the single most theologically rich sentence in the entire Bible.

In this passage, Paul highlights **seven blessings**. These are the blessings that change our identity. And we are going to talk about each of them today. But here's what we have to know about each of these blessings before we get started: the blessings are given to us **in Christ**. This phrase, in Christ, is used nine times in this sentence. Nine times! And here is why that matters so much: All of the blessings we are going to talk about aren't just random blessings that are given to everyone in the world. These are specific blessings that are given to people who have placed their faith in Christ and find their identity in him. Short analogy: If I told you I wanted to bless you, and that I had \$100,000,000 I wanted to give you, you would be excited. And you would say, "How do I get that blessing?" I might say, "It's at my house waiting for you. All you have to do is go into my house to get it." The \$100,000,000 in my house. That is where you have to go if you want my blessing. All of the blessings that we read about here that God gives us are found in Christ. If we want to receive God's blessings, we have to come to Christ.

Let's look at the first blessing! **We are chosen**. We see this in 1:4 "**For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**" We all know what it's like to not be chosen. In fact, if you press deep enough, some of the most painful and life-shaping events in many of our lives came from not being picked or wanted....Not chosen for the basketball team, to not be chosen as class representative, to not be chosen by that girl you had a crush on, to not be chosen by that dream college you wanted to get in to, to not be chosen for that job you applied for, or for that promotion you had your sights on, to not be chosen by your dad, to not be chosen for marriage, or to be chosen, only later to be rejected. Many of the most painful experience in all of life have to do with being deemed unworthy and therefore passed over and not wanted. What does Paul say here? Before the world was even created, before the foundation of the universe was laid, God chose you. From all eternity, God saw you, knew you, and decided that he wanted you. Take a look at this--God, he chose us to be **holy and blameless** in his sight. God loves us just the way we are, but he loves us too much to keep us that way. His love is like a refining fire. As we come close to him, everything that is not pure, like dross, melts away. He not only wants to bring us into his family, he wants us to take on the family likeness. He wants to make us holy as he is holy.

That sets the stage for the second blessing. We aren't just chosen, **we are predestined for adoption**. We see this in 1:5 **In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ**. God not only chose us, he **adopted** us. God choosing us is not like an owner of a

company hiring an employee saying “I want you to join my team.” It’s like a Father choosing a little boy or girl and saying, “I want to make you part of my family.” In Paul’s day, the most famous example of adoption was of **Julius Caesar**, who did not have a male heir so he decided to adopt **Octavian**. The moment this adoption took place, what happened? Octavian was set to become the most powerful man in the history of the world and inherit the entire Roman Empire. Status, wealth and privilege beyond imagination, all because this man wanted to make him part of his family. In writing about adoption to people who lived in the Roman Empire Paul is saying, “You think being adopted by Julius Caesar is good; you think inheriting the empire is awesome. How about being adopted by the God himself! You’re being called a son or daughter by the one who created and rules over the universe! You’re not simply inheriting an empire for 30 or 40 years; you are inheriting the galaxies for all eternity. How about that for an adoption?! And here’s the thing - this was not a last-minute adoption planned out of need. Caesar adopted Octavian because he didn’t have any sons to inherit his empire. Adoption was his plan B. Not our adoption. This is something that God **predestined**. He had it in mind from the beginning of time.

I love the story of **Bobby Fischer**. Any chess players in the room? When Bobby Fischer was a young boy, around the age of 12, he believed in his heart he would one day become the greatest chess player in the world. And he developed strategies and signature moves. He always started his games out with the same few opening plays. Everyone he played against studied his moves and tried to plan accordingly. When he was 29, he was playing in the Soviet Union in the height of the cold war. The Russian Team had been studying his moves for years and thought they had the perfect plan to beat him. He does this, then we’ll do this. He makes that move; we’ll make this move. He gets over there and in his first match he played his normal style and lost, which was brilliantly a part of his strategy. In the next matches, out of nowhere, when it actually mattered, he deployed an opening sequence no one had ever seen him use before...a move he had been saving since he was 12 years old. His new opening moves rendered all the preparation the Russians did not only pointless but counterproductive. Bobby Fischer won the tournament and became the number one player in the world. What kind of strategy is that? A 12-year-old boy comes up with a move and holds it tight for 17 years in order to become a world championship. Now that’s a long game. Think about God’s long game. From all eternity God not only knew that you would exist, he decided to bring you into his family and predestined to make you like Jesus. We are chosen and predestined for adoption.

Third, **we are redeemed**. We see this in 1:7 “**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.**” Now this word **redemption** comes from the Greek word *apolutrosis* and it means to be purchased or bought at a price. One of the most frequent uses for this word was associated with the slave trade. Now, of course our country was marred with the stain and sin of slavery for hundreds of years. It is an unspeakable evil. That is why one of the most important moments in our nation’s history was on January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the **Emancipation Proclamation**. It was an executive order where he declared, by virtue of his authority as president of the United States, that 3.5 million slaves held in the southern states were now free citizens. The moment the president signed this order, they were free. But how did a slave receive freedom before the Emancipation Proclamation? Instead of the president signing a new law, someone would come and pay the price for that slave. That slave is worth \$50,000; that slave is worth \$200,000 dollars. Whatever the price may have been, someone would have to pay

the price, and then that person could be free. Paul says that Jesus has redeemed us from our sins. And what was the price for our redemption? Our freedom? **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”** You and I were slaves. We were held captive to the power of sin. Jesus paid the price to set us free. He redeemed us. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says “It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ.” His blood shed on the cross. His sacrifice brings forgiveness from every mistake we’ve ever made!

So we are chosen, predestined for adoption, redeemed, and fourth, **we are given grace.** Look at what the rest of 1:7 and 1:8 says: **“In accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.”** What is **grace**? The Greek word is *charis* and it simply means an undeserved gift. Grace is an expression of kindness and favor that we have done nothing to earn. Here’s a simple analogy. A few weeks ago, I was back in Kentucky to meet my new nephew who was born. Cute little guy named Silas. I was driving around town; I was driving behind somebody who I assumed was going the speed limit. But I guess I was wrong because a police officer pulled me over and told me I was going 17 miles an hour over the limit. Hudson is in the back seat, screaming his head off because he’s hungry. I tried my best to convince the police officer that it was an honest mistake, that I didn’t deserve a ticket. I was from out of town, I was just following behind someone, He wasn’t having any of it. He handed me a \$245 ticket.

I broke the law, I deserved the ticket, and I asked for mercy, but the officer didn’t think I deserved it. Mercy is when you deserve to be punished but you are pardoned instead. You are supposed to pay the ticket but you no longer have to. Grace is different than mercy. Grace is what happens when instead of simply not being punished as you deserved, instead of not getting a ticket, you are given a gift. As Jack Cottrell has put it, **“Grace is favor bestowed when wrath was owed.”** Grace would be like that police officersaying, “Instead of me handing you a ticket for \$24, here’s a check from the state of Kentucky for \$245. Have a great night.” Now we all know police officers don’t do things like that. God does. God not only redeems us from our sins and sets us free, he graciously gives us more blessings than we could describe. He gives us eternal life; he gives us love, joy and peace; he gives us hope; he gives us his presence; he gives us his promises. That’s why Paul says, “He lavished grace upon us.”

So we are chosen, predestined for adoption, redeemed, given grace, and fifth **We discover God’s will.** And this discovery does not come from our ingenuity, it comes because God decides to let us in on it! 1:9-10 **With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure...** Everyone knows what it’s like when you are in conversation with a friend and all of a sudden they say, “Do you want to know a secret? No one else knows this yet, I wanted to share it with you first.” Our ears perk up. We move to the edge of our seat. We lean into it. Everyone wants to be in the know. God has a plan for the world. He knows what’s going to happen, and what he’s going to do. And he lets us in on the secret. And here it is: **to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.** So right now, our world is divided, not united. We have so many different leaders, different world views, different ideas of what the good life consists of. All of our differences result in division. God has a plan that will bring unity to everything! He will take all things in heaven and on earth and bring them under Christ. For ages and generations, it was a secret. No one knew what God was going to do. The angels didn’t even know. But God has let us in on the mystery of his will.

So we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, given grace, told the secret of God's will, and sixth, **We receive the Holy Spirit**. We see this in 1:13-14 **When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance**. What Paul is saying here is that everyone who believes in Jesus is given the Holy Spirit, which is God's personal, empowering presence that comes to live inside of us. I want you to realize how profound this is, and how this sets the Christian faith apart from all the other religions in the world, especially the ancient world. In every other religion in Paul's day, where did God reside? In temples built by human hands, like this one in the center of Ephesus. Let's build a big, beautiful building, God will live there. The reality is that God doesn't want to live in a temple built by people. We want to live inside people and make them his temple. This sixth blessing is God coming to live inside of you. And when he does, we are told that two things happen: The Holy Spirit is a **seal**. This is the same word in Greek (sphragis) that was used to describe a brand that was placed on a cow. Which meant that this cow belongs to this rancher. It is no one else's. God is taking his name and placing it upon you and saying, "This one is mine." The Holy Spirit is also a **deposit**. A deposit is a first installment of a payment which signals your intention to pay for something completely. Most people, when they buy a house, don't have all the money in cash. So what do we do? Depending on your season of life you put down a 3% or 10% or 20% deposit, indicating your personal investment and your intention to pay off the rest of the house. That's what God does by giving us the Holy Spirit. He plans to give us eternal life, he plans to live with us forever. He is making those intentions clear by giving you the Holy Spirit today, a guarantee of what's to come, a foretaste of our inheritance.

So we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, given grace, told the secret of God's will, receive the Holy Spirit, and then, this last one, and this may be my favorite one of all...**we become God's treasure**. This is so incredible-we are called "**those who are God's possession**." in Ephesians 1:14, and in the next paragraph Paul elaborates on that and says this in 1:18 "**The riches of God's glorious inheritance in his holy people**." Now we don't oftentimes hear about this in church, but this is a biblical truth that I think is paradigm altering. This is one of the most profound, beautiful teachings in all the Bible. Of everything in the entire universe that God could call his very own, he wants us to be his possession, and he has made us his inheritance. Think about that. Some people come from families with a lot of money. I know some people who, when their parents pass away, are set to inherit seven figures. Others eight figures. That's a lot of money. When they get their inheritance, they will become incredibly wealthy. Do you realize that God is waiting to receive an inheritance, too? And what is it that the God who created everything is waiting to inherit? You. At some point in history, everyone who believes in Jesus is going to inherit eternal life in heaven...and God is going to inherit us. We are his treasure; we are what he wants more than anything in all the galaxies.

Are you sold out on this passage yet? Do you see why this is not only one of the greatest sentences in the entire bible, but perhaps all literature? God's love changes everything. And it changes our identity. We need that. Because this world is trying so hard to determine our identity for us. This world tells us our identity consists of these things:

**I am what I have.**

**I am what I do.**

## **I am what others think about me.**

As we go through this world, as we go through life, people put labels on us. You're from a broken home. You're not as good as your older sister. You're valuable because you are good in school. You're valuable because you are good at sports. You're the person everyone wants to date. You're the person no one wants to date. You're a leader. You're a follower. You've been incredibly successful. You haven't lived up to expectations. We carry so many labels that testify to our supposed identity. But God comes and places a different identity on us.

A few weeks ago. I was watching the NCAA national championship game between Virginia and Texas Tech. All the elders from our church were over at my house. We grilled out steaks, spent time in prayer, and then watched the game. Kansas City Chief's quarterback **Patrick Mahomes** went to Texas Tech, so he wanted to be there to watch the game in person, and of course he wanted to wear a Texas Tech shirt, but there was a problem. Anyone know what it is? Sponsorship. He is signed by Adidas. All Texas Tech shirts have an Under Armour label on them. So what did he do? He wrote Adidas on a name tag and covered it up!

For the sake of sponsorship, that's clever. But when it comes to identity, do you realize how profound that is?! No matter what label or brand you might be wearing today, no matter what the world might say about you, God puts a new name tag on your chest and says, "I don't care what anyone else says, this one belongs to me." That is your identity. You are chosen, adopted, redeemed, given grace, told the secret of God's will, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and of all the things in the entire universe and beyond, God wants you as his very own. That is who you are. God's love changes our identity!