



Grace to Know God

Ephesians 1:3-14

Gregg Caruso

I. INTRO

- A. Based on being here since Sept and interacting regularly with staff and elders, as well as the unpacking the content of the VitalChurch report I do think it would be worthwhile to spend time examining and reexamining the doctrine of grace.
 - 1. Our culture tends to view grace as overlooking the faults of another (and sometimes this woefully incomplete perspective leaks into the church), but grace is not just **pardon**—it is also **power**.
 - 2. So, today we will be in Ephesians 1:3-14 (p. 977)...
- B. Two points of context before we read the text...
 - 1. If we had to pick a 1-word summary of the whole book of Ephesians, the word would be **identity**. In Ephesians we learn about who God is and we learn about who we are “*in Him*.”
 - 2. Additionally, there is **something VERY, VERY distinctive** about this passage that will help us to understand and apply it more appropriately.
 - a. After a brief and somewhat typical greeting (1:1-2), Paul begins one of the loftiest sentences of the NT. In the original Greek language, vs. 3-14 are one single, glorious, run-on sentence of 202 words.
 - b. One commentator says Paul is writing in a state of **controlled ecstasy**.¹

¹ Frederick M. Thompson. *Devotions from the Epistles of Galatians & Ephesians*, AuthorHouse 2013:140.

- c. Now, Paul is a very educated guy and he knew better, so what is Paul communicating with his worshipful, exuberant, and emotional outburst?
 - d. This is what is happening in this passage: **We experience Paul experiencing God!** (Similar to Peter’s doxology in 1 Pet 1:3-9 or John’s in 1 John 3.)
- C. With those two introductory thoughts, let’s read Eph 1:3-14.: [can I invite you to stand out of respect for God’s word? And notice all the times the word IN is used...]

*³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus **Christ**, who has **bles**sed us **in Christ** with every spiritual **bles**sing 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 [if you think this is sexist, it’s just the opposite...] through Jesus Christ, according to the **purpose** of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious **grace**, with which he has **bles**sed 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** [predetermined] 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.**”*

II. BODY

- A. This passage contains some of the richest theology in the whole Bible—and it comes to us in the form of a 202-word run-on sentence—the overflow of a worshiping heart that loves both God and the people of God.
- B. We must ask the question, how can we come to know God in this way?
 - 1. Paul is (literally) showing us that experiencing God is when the truth overflows out of the mind – and then to all the rest of us.

- a. When the truth **about** God, or the truth **about our identity** as a follower of Jesus becomes real to us—it surges out into every other part of our lives. → Think of lightning striking a lightning rod...
 - b. **Knowing God is when the truth moves from something we understand to something we stand under. –Tim Keller**
 - c. Keller goes on to say, it's like going from *knowing* to *beholding* (which is John's language in 1 Jn 3).
2. Think of a father taking his son to his freshman year at college. They unpack the car into the dorm room and the son walks his dad to the car. When they get to the car the father hugs his son, kisses him on the cheek, and says to him, "I love you and I will do anything necessary, even die, to make sure you have everything you need." And the boy weeps...²
- a. What's going on here? This is not new information. The son knew already that his father loved him. It's not a new idea—but the idea becomes new. **He doesn't get new information, but the information becomes new.** He experiences his father's love in a new and profound way.
 - b. To know God means that we experience His sweet embrace—and the truth becomes radioactive IN and THROUGH our lives.
- C. Maybe this has happened to you and maybe it hasn't. I think this needs to happen over and over and over again. This is what I want for every person who calls CCC their home church.
- D. Here's what we need to know about experiencing God in this way: it's all grace.
1. God is sovereign, which means He does what He wants when He wants. ***"God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."* –Psalm 115:3.**
 - a. Sometimes this grace to know comes into our lives as an answer to prayer. It could be your prayer, your spouse's prayer, but it's probably your Grandmother's prayer ☺.

² Adapted from Keller, which is adapted from Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), an English Puritan theologian and preacher.

- b. Sometimes God just knocks people off their horse—like Paul.
- 2. A good question is: Is there anything that you and I can do to position ourselves to receive this grace? I'd say the answer is yes...
 - a. We can **humbly and persistently** ask for it. As Paul is closing his letter to the Ephesians he says: *“Pray with unceasing prayer and entreaty on every fitting occasion in the Spirit and be always on the alert to seize opportunities for doing so, with unwearied persistence and entreaty on behalf of all God's people.”* -- Ephesians 6:18.
 - b. I think staying humble and tenderhearted is quite helpful in positioning ourselves. Thinking back to our study of the Beatitudes last Oct. Remember, there's an emptying and then a filling. We acknowledge that we are poor in spirit, we mourn, and then we become humble learners (meek), which takes us to a place of being hungry for God.
 - c. Here's some advice from C.S. Lewis: *“Your real, new self [i.e., our true identity]...will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him.”*³
- E. I have two quick points I'd like to make as I begin to land the plane... Let's look at Eph 1:7-8 again: *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...*
 - 1. The first two words of v. 7 point us to one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith: **Union with Christ**. Simply stated it is *that connection enjoyed by believers, individually and corporately, with the Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - a. Paul uses the language of *“in Christ”* or *“in him”* roughly 40 times in Ephesians (11-times in this passage alone—and it's used about 140 times throughout the NT).
 - b. Here's a quick overview of what Union with Christ accomplishes:
 - 1) **We are treated by God as if we had lived the perfect life that Jesus lived.**

³ “First and Second Things” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Ed. Walter Hooper, Eerdmans 1970: 280.

- 2) We are given a place at the table that Jesus “earned” through His perfect obedience.
- 3) We have the same access to the Father that Jesus does.
- 4) This comes not from us doing anything (i.e., works), but on the basis of faith.
- 5) In God’s eyes Jesus’ perfect record is credited to the believer. All that is true of Christ is now true of you. [What if 2020 were a year where we really began to believe this??]

2. Finally, we can extrapolate a **definition of grace** from this passage...

- a. In our contemporary culture the word “grace” is one of those words that has lost its meaning. Our culture thinks of grace as “overlooking the faults of another.”
- b. Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned or overlooking sin. Grace is a force, a power that initially awakens us to God and the gospel.
- c. Yes, it’s true that grace pardons us, but grace is not just pardon, it is power.
- d. Again, let’s look at vs. 7-8: *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*
- e. **Grace: “All that God is lavishly poured into us.”**

III. CONCLUSION

A. A woman named Hetty Green died in 1916 and left an estate valued at about \$100 million. (She was born in New Bedford MA!)

1. She was known as the Witch of Wall St and went down in history as, "America's Greatest Miser." It was said she ate cold oatmeal to save the cost of cooking it. Her son had to eventually have his leg amputated, because she was too cheap to pay for medical care.
2. Hetty Green was wealthiest woman in the world, yet she chose to live like a pauper. Her life becomes an excellent illustration of the way many Christians live today...

3. We have unlimited spiritual wealth at our disposal, and yet we often live in spiritual poverty.
- B. What is our 20/20 Vision? Let's begin to ask God to show us (individually and corporately) who we are IN HIM.