



# Community Group Discussion Guide

March 3, 2024

Ephesians 1:3-14 | Reformed Theology

## MOTIVATE

---

Starter Question:

- ⇒ *What is something you've recently elected to do? Why did you elect to do this?*
- ⇒ *What is something special you've inherited from a family member or friend? What made this inheritance so special?*

## DISCUSS

---

*Leader's Note:* In our *First Things First* sermon series we have sorted "First, Second, and Third Level" theological issues with trained minds and humble hearts. Here is a review:

- First Level: Theological absolutes that include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith and salvation of the believer. These are doctrinal truths that must be held in order to profess the Christian faith.
- Second Level: Theological doctrines distinguished from First Level by the fact that Christians may disagree on these beliefs to such a degree it creates significant boundaries between believers. While not matters of salvation, these are doctrinal matters that will likely determine where you worship and which local church you choose.
- Third Level: Theological convictions over which Christians may disagree yet can still remain in close and loving fellowship, even within local congregations. These are also not matters of salvation.

The ability to discern the relative importance of theological beliefs is vital for effective Christian life and ministry. The spiritual leadership at Henderson Hills places Reformed Theology in the theological category of the Third Level. Today's lesson describes the work of the church through a Reformed Theological point of view.

Reformed Theology encompasses several teachings that came out of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was in response to various false teachings permeating the church at that time. The crux of Reformed Theology is centered around the idea of "constantly reforming" to Scripture.

The teachings generally encompassed by Reformed Theology include the authority and sufficiency of Scripture ("sola scriptura"), the sovereignty of God (especially as it relates to predestination), salvation by grace through Christ, and the necessity of evangelism. Other teachings sometimes encompassed within Reformed Theology include the sacraments (Lord's Supper) and worship.

⇒ ***What is the importance of acknowledging the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, especially when looking at topics such as the sovereignty of God, salvation by grace alone, and the necessity of evangelism?***

When the topic of Reformed Theology is brought up today, many people jump to the familiar acronym "TULIP," which stands for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irrresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. While these are key concepts of Reformed Theology, they don't encompass the entirety of the subject, as is evident from the breadth of the topic discussed above.

The teachings of Reformed Theology can be found throughout the Bible, but two of the primary passages in Scripture that address many elements of the topic include Romans 9 and Ephesians 1:3-14. The focus of this discussion guide is Ephesians 1:3-14 and how it speaks to many elements of Reformed Theology.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is sometimes referred to as "the greatest sentence ever written." In the original Greek, these twelve verses were one continuous sentence written by Paul, with a heavy emphasis on the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in salvation. These verses should lead us to worship and praise the triune God.

⇒ ***Have you ever heard of the topic of "Reformed Theology?" If so, what have you learned or studied about the topic?***

**Ephesians 1:3-6** *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 to himself 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.*

Paul opened this long sentence with a statement of worship and praise to God the Father ("Blessed"). Three times in these twelve verses Paul mentioned "to the praise of his glory." Paul's purpose in his teachings throughout these verses is meant to point us to worshipping and praising God. Paul then mentioned that God the Father has "blessed us in Christ." Several times throughout this long sentence Paul mentions "in Christ." This is a Christocentric passage, emphasizing the importance of God the Son's work in salvation.

Paul continued by stating that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world." God the Father's choosing of Christians took place in eternity past, and that salvation totally depends on God. God is the only one who has existed from eternity past, and He chose us in that eternity past before any good or evil was done by humanity. He chose us so that we would "be holy and blameless before him." The purpose of God's election of His people is to make us pure and free from the guilt of sin.

⇒ ***How does knowing that God chose you "before the foundation of the world" encourage you to worship and praise Him?***

Paul then built upon this by stating that God predestined Christians in love. Predestination is the firm election, from eternity past, of God calling and choosing people to a saving faith in His Kingdom. While this can be a difficult concept to grasp and wrestle with, we can rejoice in the election God has made to save His chosen people, and also know that those who have been passed over God greatly laments (Ezekiel 33:11). It is God's sovereign choice to choose and call people to Himself (Acts 13:48) and to act favorably toward them in love and mercy (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

⇒ ***What aspects of predestination and election do you struggle to comprehend?***

⇒ ***How it is helpful to remember God's sovereignty when thinking about election and predestination (God is God, and we are not)?***

Paul then reminded Christians that this predestination, or election, is "for adoption" as sons. The idea Paul is communicating is one of being "heirs" that will inherit blessings from God. Romans 8:16-17 reminds us that "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." Just as an adopted child receives the privileges and advantages of being a part of the family that they are adopted into, so we, as adopted children of God, receive the privileges and advantages of being part of God's family. All of this, Paul wrote, is "according to the purpose of his will." God's purposes will not be thwarted, and those He has chosen to call to Himself will be secure in their salvation for eternity.

⇒ ***Read Galatians 4:4-7. How does this further emphasize the beauty of God adopting us as His children?***

⇒ ***Why is it important for us to deeply understand the doctrine of adoption? What practical benefits might this understanding have for us?***

**Ephesians 1:7-10** *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.*

Paul continued this long sentence by reminding believers that we have redemption and forgiveness in Christ. Redemption, especially in the Old Testament, denotes the idea of ransoming someone from captivity or slavery. With this background in mind, redemption in verse 8 refers to the ransoming made by God through the death of His Son to obtain and reconcile His people back to Himself. Paul explained that the nature of this redemption is "the forgiveness of our trespasses." Through redemption, Christians are forgiven and freed from the slavery to sin and guilt and have eternal life with God.

Paul then reminded us that all of this is according to God's grace, not our own doing, and that it is a mystery He has revealed to us. Because God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world," the redemption that we have is purely out of God's goodness toward us, and from nothing we have done to earn it.

⇒ ***What does it mean that Christ accomplished our redemption?***

**Ephesians 1:11-12** *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.*

With a continued emphasis on God's working in salvation ("in him"), Paul reminded Christians that "we have obtained an inheritance." An inheritance means to take possession of something. Christians have taken possession of God's gift of redemption and eternal life. Again, Paul reminded us that God predestined this; it has been planned from eternity past.

This predestination is according to God's purpose and God "works all things according to the counsel of his will." Because this choosing is God's purpose, it cannot be circumvented as God will see it through. This should be a comfort to Christians, knowing that evil will not triumph and that God's plans for His people will be fulfilled.

⇒ ***What is the inheritance that God has given us? How should this lead us to praise Him?***

⇒ ***How does knowing that God works all things according to the counsel of His will affect you? Why do we need to reflect on this truth?***

**Ephesians 1:13-14** *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.*

Paul closed out this long sentence by pointing to the Holy Spirit's work in salvation. He stated that our salvation is "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will protect and preserve the salvation of Christians until we take hold of our full inheritance.

Paul declared that the Holy Spirit, sent to believers, "is the guarantee of our inheritance." To guarantee something, in this context, means to put a down payment on something. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers is the down payment, or promise, that God will redeem His possession.

⇒ ***Explain the importance of "when you believed" in verse 13, in light of the context of verses 3-14.***

⇒ ***How is it encouraging to you to know that God has given us the Holy Spirit as a "guarantee of our inheritance?"***

- ⇒ *In what ways does this passage contribute to your understanding of the Trinity? How do you see the Trinity at work in the salvation of believers through this passage?*

## TRANSFORM

---

**1. Make personal application:** The reality that God has chosen us from eternity past to be adopted into His family should lead us to worship and praise Him. Also, knowing that God has given us this inheritance should lead us to have hope in all circumstances. God is in control and is working “all things according to the counsel of his will.”

- ⇒ *What does this passage say about worship? How does it move you to praise God?*  
 ⇒ *Why should this passage give us hope?*

**2. Pray:** Praise God for His “glorious grace.” Thank Him for saving us, not because of anything we have done, but because of His loving kindness toward us. Ask God to continue to use us, His church, to share the good news of salvation with those around us.

## STUDY

---

### Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2262-2263.
- *NIV Life Application Study Bible*, page 1980.
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pages 29-30, 476-478, 587-588, 758, 799-800, 1294-1296, and 1339.
- *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, by Tony Merida, pages 19-32.
- *Bible Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem, pages 95-96, 285, 288, 336, 338, and 380.