

Main Idea: We should praise God for what the Holy Spirit has done for us, namely two things mentioned in Ephesians 1:13-14.

Ephesians 1:3-14: A Call for Trinitarian Praise at Christmas...

1. We should praise God for what the Father has done for us (3-6).
 - a. He blessed us in Christ (3).
 - b. He chose us in Christ (4).
 - c. He predestined us to be His children through Christ (5).
2. We should praise God for what the Son has done for us (7-12).
 - a. In Him we have redemption (7-8).
 - b. In Him we have revelation (9-10).
 - c. In Him we have a rich inheritance (11-12).
3. We should praise God for what the Holy Spirit has done for us (13-14).

I. The Holy Spirit sealed us in the past (13).

- A. If you are in Christ, you have the Spirit.
 1. It's not a second work of grace.
 2. It's not a result of emotional stirring.
- B. If you have the Spirit, it's because you heard and believed the gospel.

--"Feelings are never meant to take the first place; they are never meant to be central. If you put them there you are of necessity doomed to be unhappy, because you are not following the order that God himself has ordained. Feelings are always the result of something else." --D. Martin Lloyd-Jones (*Spiritual Depression*, 114)

--"Your business and mine is not to stir up our feelings, it is to believe. We are never told anywhere in Scripture that we are saved by our feelings; we are told that we are saved by believing." --D. Martin Lloyd-Jones (*Spiritual Depression*, 117)

- C. If you have put your trust in the gospel, you are secure.

II. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee for the future (14).

- A. He is like an engagement ring.
- B. He makes it clear that our inheritance is sure to come.

Response: Let's take inventory this Christmas...

1. Have you received the gifts of the Triune God?
2. Are you living for the praise of His glory?

One of most unique Christmas gifts I've ever received is sitting on the cabinet in my study. A lot of people ask me about it when they first come to see me. It's a wooden tractor about twelve inches long and six inches high. I always enjoy telling folks about it. My friend Bill gave it to me about ten years ago, but when he gave it to me it was in pieces in about fifty pieces in a plastic bag. That's because it was a wooden puzzle of sorts that he designed and made. It's actually a scaled down replica of a tractor that was sitting in his barn. He made the whole thing, and I mean the *whole* thing, from cutting down the tree, to planing the wood, to drawing up the plans, to cutting the wood into the right size of pieces so that the pieces fit together perfectly in the shape of his tractor.

When you look at a gift, there's often a story behind it. If you don't know the story, you won't appreciate the gift nearly as much. It's true. If I had received the tractor that's sitting in my office and didn't know the story behind it, it wouldn't mean nearly as much to me. I'm thankful Bill not only gave it to me but told me the story, too.

The same can be said for Christmas. If you don't know the story behind Christmas, you won't appreciate as you ought the gift that God gave the world so many years ago. Thankfully, the Giver of the gift gave us the story behind the gift. It's a story that takes us back before time began.

I want to make sure you know the story. I want you to celebrate Christmas this year in light of the wonderful story designed by the One who gave the gift.

Let me put it this way. Yes, God gave the world an amazing gift, His own beloved Son. But most people don't realize there's a whole lot more to Christmas, a lot more giving than at first meets the eye. I'm talking about *Trinitarian giving*. If we're going to appreciate the greatness of the gift of the Christ-child, we need to understand the story behind the story.

In reality, far too often our view of Christmas is too small, too narrow in its focus. Our movie lens is zeroed in on

the baby in the manger, but we would appreciate that amazing baby more fully if we would pull back the camera and take a panoramic view of the Christmas scene. Yes, there's a baby there, but where did He come from, and why?

To that end Ephesians 1:3-14 serves us well. In this wonderful passage we see Christmas in the panoramic view. But we don't just see it. We're called to do something with what we see, for Ephesians 1:3-14 calls us to engage in Trinitarian praise.

Ephesians 1:3-14: A Call for Trinitarian Praise at Christmas...

It's actually one long sentence in the Greek text, over two hundred words long. Paul begins his letter to the first century church in Ephesus with a doxology. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he says in verse 3. Did you notice that Paul doesn't have a generic, one size fits all God in mind? The God who deserves our praise is a Triune God, that is, He is one in essence, but He exists as three persons. If you don't know that, you won't appreciate that baby in Bethlehem as you should.

I was setting up our olive wood nativity scene a couple of weeks ago and ran into a problem. It's a problem I've had every year since I bought the set from a fellow named Bagdadi in Jerusalem in 1980. I can't tell which statue is Joseph. I can't tell because to me Joseph looks just like the wise men in the set (who weren't at the first Christmas, but that's another story!). And the reason I can't tell is because I can't ask the person who made the nativity set about the identity of the figures in it.

I'm thankful that's not the case with the real nativity. We *know* who the characters are, and we know it because the One who designed the set has told us in His Word. But He didn't just tell us about the shepherds and the animals and the wise men. He told us about His own involvement in the Christmas story, and He told us so we would praise Him. Two weeks ago we learned...

1. *We should praise God for what the Father has done for us (3-6).* And what did the Father do? Our text mentions three things...

- a. **He blessed us in Christ (3).**
- b. **He chose us in Christ (4).**
- c. **He predestined us to be His children through Christ (5).**

To put it plainly, Christmas was the Father's idea. He designed it as a part of His plan to form a people for His eternal praise. What kind of people did the Father have in mind? People who would reject Him. But to put His grace on display, God the Father purposed to bless a people, a people He personally selected in eternity past and predestined to become His adopted sons and daughters. And He did it for His Son's sake and on the merit of what His Son would accomplish.

To what end did the Father do this for us? Verse 6—"To the praise of His glorious grace." Last week as we moved into verses 7-12 we learned that...

2. *We should praise God for what the Son has done for us (7-12).* It's on the basis of the Son's work that we who have believed in Him have received the Father's blessings. What did the Son do? He left heaven, came to earth robed in human flesh, was born of a virgin, grew up in Nazareth, lived a perfect life, preached, healed the sick, and performed a host of miracles to attest to His divine identity. Then He headed for Jerusalem, the destination the Father gave to Him in eternity past, where He gave Himself as a sacrifice for sinners on a Roman cross. Three days later He left His tomb in triumph, forty days later He returned to His Father's side in heaven, and one day will return to live with His people forever! To put it simply, in Christ we have three things...

a. **In Him we have redemption (7-8).** That means we who were once slaves to sin have been set free by the ransom price He paid.

b. **In Him we have revelation (9-10).** He made known to us "the mystery of His will," says verse 9. We know the plan and purpose of God. We know where this world is heading, that the day is coming when God will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head," as verse 10 declares. We know it because in Christ we've received revelation of this amazing reality.

c. **In Him we have a rich inheritance (11-12).** We were chosen to receive this inheritance, says verse 11, where Paul uses a different word for "chosen" than the one he used in verse 4. God the Father not only chose us, but He chose to include us in His inheritance (more about that in verse 14 and verse 18).

And for what purpose did the Father choose to give us this redemption, revelation, and rich inheritance in His Son? That we might be, says verse 12, "for the praise of His glory."

I saw a Christmas connection this week between Luke 2 and Ephesians 1. Did you realize that the heavenly host in Luke 2 did precisely what Ephesians 1 is exhorting us to do? Listen to Luke 2:13-14, "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, *praising God* and saying, '*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace*

to men on whom his favor rests.””

But there’s more. Not only should we praise God for what the Father and the Son have done in our behalf, but...

3. *We should praise God for what the Holy Spirit has done for us (13-14).* And what has He done for us? Paul puts the spotlight on two things in verses 13-14, one from the past, and the other that pertains to the future. Let’s ponder them carefully.

I. The Holy Spirit sealed us in the past (13).

Verse 13 “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

And you also. A switch just occurred. In verses 3-12 Paul has been using first person pronouns. He chose *us* before the creation of the world (4). He predestined *us* (5). In him *we* have redemption (7). He made known to *us* the mystery of his will (9). In him *we* were also chosen (11), in order that *we*, who were the first to hope in Christ (12). That last phrase tells us who the “*we*” is. Who were the first people to put their hope in Christ? Jewish believers, including Paul. For the first several years of its existence, the church was primarily comprised of saved Jews (see Acts 1-7). But that changed in Acts 8 when God began to bring non-Jews to Himself.

And you also were included in Christ, says Paul, addressing the believers in Ephesus, the majority of whom were Gentiles. You’re included, too, Paul emphasized. You, just like your Jewish brothers who paved the way, are now in God’s family and are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is not a force, but a person, indeed the third person in the Triune Godhead. Notice that Paul uses His full name here, the *Holy Spirit*, indeed, *the promised Holy Spirit*. He’s the *Holy Spirit* not only because He is holy and separate from sin, but because His primary aim is to produce holiness in the people the Father has chosen. As we saw in verse 4, the Father chose a people *to be holy and blameless*. The Son makes that holiness possible. The Spirit has come to make that holiness a reality.

Paul has a lot to say about the Holy Spirit in Ephesians. He calls Him “the Spirit of wisdom” in 1:17. He lives in us according to 2:22. He revealed truth to the apostles and prophets according to 3:5. He strengthens our inner man according to 3:16. He is the source of unity in the church according to 4:3. He can be grieved according to 4:30. He produces the fruit of Christlike character in our lives according to 5:9 (compare with Gal. 5:22-23). He fills believers, says 5:18, in ways that affect their speech, attitudes, and relationships according to 5:19-21. His sword is the Word of God, says 6:17. He helps us pray rightly, says 6:18.

I want you to notice three facts regarding the Holy Spirit from verse 13.

A. **If you are in Christ, you have the Spirit.** Notice the phrase “in Christ” at the beginning of verse 13 and the phrase “in him” towards the end. To whom is “him” referring? It’s Christ, right? We’ve seen the phrase six times already in chapter one, and will see it another dozen times in the first three chapters. So let’s put the word Christ in place of “him” so that it reads, “You were marked in *Christ* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

So what does that say to us? It says that if you are *in Christ*, you have received the sealing of the Holy Spirit. It’s past tense for you. The filling of the Spirit is a present tense need, as Paul will indicate in 5:18, but His sealing is a never changing reality if you are in Christ.

Let me give you a couple of implications of this truth. First, contrary to the teaching of some...

1. *It’s not a second work of grace.* Some teach that receiving the Holy Spirit is an event that takes place *after* a person receives Christ as Savior. They say it’s a second work of grace. Some say that this subsequent reception of the Spirit is evidenced by speaking in tongues. But is that what the Bible says? Paul clearly says that those who are *in Christ* were marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. It’s not a second work of grace. If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit.

Here’s another common misunderstanding, often associated with the first. The first? The sealing of the Holy Spirit not a second work of grace. What’s more...

2. *It’s not a result of emotional stirring.* “You have to prime the pump if you want the Spirit to come!” say some. And so they try to prime it, with emotion-stirring music and stories and dramatic presentations and so on. But their practice is built on a faulty understanding of the God-given role of emotions. What is the place of emotions in a church? We’ll talk about that in a moment, but for now let’s not miss the obvious. Emotions are *not* the key to receiving the Holy Spirit. If you are in Christ, you have the Spirit and in fact have been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Which brings us to fact #2...

B. **If you have the Spirit, it’s because you heard and believed the gospel.** Look carefully again at verse 13, “And you also were included in Christ when.” Stop there. When did Paul say the Christians in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit? “...when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in

him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

In the original text the words “heard” and “believed” are both participles that modify the verb “sealed.” A literal reading goes like this. “Having *heard* the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and having *believed*, you were *sealed* by the Holy Spirit.” What are the prerequisites to being sealed by the Holy Spirit? Tongues? An emotional stirring? No. Hearing and believing the good news about Christ. That’s it. So if you have the Spirit, it’s because you heard and believed the gospel. And if you don’t have the Holy Spirit but desire Him, you must hear and believe the gospel. It’s that simple.

Not everyone believes that. Some people say that there are multiple ways to God. For instance, some believe that the native in the Congo who has never heard of Christ will go to heaven if he is sincere in responding to the revelation he does possess. Is that true? No, aside from the fact that depraved sinners do not respond sincerely to God’s revelation but instead repress it, notice Paul’s point here. The apostle makes it clear that a person must *hear* the gospel, the good news of concerning Christ and His death, burial and resurrection, and not only hear it, but *believe* it (and the Greek text specifies believe “in *Him*”). So it’s *hear the gospel of your salvation* and *believe in Christ*. Those who do hear the truth and believe in Christ are placed in Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and granted eternal life. Those who don’t hear and believe remain in their sins, without Christ and without His Spirit, and in that state will perish forever.

And how will they hear? There must be a preacher, says Romans 10:14. How will your neighbor hear that he might believe? He needs someone to tell him. So does that lost native in the Congo. Does that fact grip your soul?

By the way, John Stott said it well. “Let no one say,” he writes, “that the doctrine of election by the sovereign will and mercy of God, mysterious as it is, makes either evangelism or faith unnecessary. The opposite is the case. It is only because of God’s gracious will to save that evangelism has any hope of success and faith becomes possible. The preaching of the gospel is the very means that God has appointed by which he delivers from blindness and bondage those whom he chose in Christ.”^[1]

Let me repeat. If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. And if you have the Holy Spirit, it’s because you heard and believed the gospel.

So what place do our emotions have in this? There’s a lot of confusion about the role our feelings should have in relationship to the Spirit’s ministry. Many people equate the Holy Spirit’s work with their feelings. “The Spirit was really working in church today!” they tell you. “How do you know?” you ask them. “I could *feel* His presence,” they insist. Conversely, “Well that church sure doesn’t have the Spirit!” they suggest. “How do you know?” you ask. “Because it put me to sleep. I didn’t feel a thing the whole service!”

Beloved, I am not against emotions, and I believe that emotions should have an important place in our lives, including our church life. But the question is, what is that place?

To answer that, I’d like to read from an excellent chapter in D. Martin Lloyd-Jones’s book, *Spiritual Depression*. He writes, “Feelings are never meant to take the first place; they are never meant to be central. If you put them there you are of necessity doomed to be unhappy, because you are not following the order that God himself has ordained. Feelings are always the result of something else.”^[2]

That last line is critical. Feelings are always *the result of something else*. If you live your life with a focus to feel good, you will be unhappy for you are violating the order of Scripture. So what is the order of Scripture? Look at your Bible. Go ahead, look at it. What did God give us when He gave us the Bible? He gave us *truth*, right, truth in the form of words and sentences and books? So if you want to experience God, you must exercise your mind to understand those words, sentences, and books, that *truth*.

In our text Paul here refers to “the word of truth.” He says the Ephesians received the Holy Spirit because they heard and believed *the word of truth*. So if you want to “feel the Spirit,” you’ve got to do something first with your mind.

Lloyd-Jones puts it this way (in a quote that’s not in your outline), “What we have in the Bible is Truth; it is not an emotional stimulus, it is not something primarily concerned to give us a joyful experience. It is primarily Truth, and Truth is addressed to the mind, God’s supreme gift to man; and it is as we apprehend and submit ourselves to the truth that the feelings follow. I must never ask myself in the first instance: What do I feel about this? The first question is, Do I believe it? Do I accept it, has it gripped me?... Do not spend too much time feeling your own pulse taking your own spiritual temperature, do not spend too much time analyzing your feelings. That is the high road to morbidity.”^[3]

The Bible is not anti-feelings, nor am I. We were created by God as emotional beings. But if we desire God-honoring emotions, then we need to learn to desire truth, not good feelings. That’s because, by God’s design, good feelings are a by-product and not a goal.

We need to come to church seeking truth, not a feeling, and if we hear and respond rightly to the truth, wonderful

feelings will come in God's time. Did you ever wonder why we do so much teaching in our services? It's because we want you to *feel* something, and the way to rightly transform feelings is through hearing and believing truth.

Oh, I could stir up your emotions right now through a sentimental story, or a mood-altering song, or a touching movie clip, but would it last? I'm not saying there isn't a place for stories, songs, and movie clips, for there is. But if we want to transform the whole person (mind, heart, and will), then we need to begin with teaching the truth.

Let me take that a step further. As we live our lives, we need to learn to *speak truth to ourselves* and especially when we're feeling poorly. That's what the psalmist did in Psalm 42. "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" he asks himself in verse 5 and again in verse 11. He's feeling poorly. So what does he do? Does he look for a feelings-fix somewhere? No, *he tells himself the truth* in the very next statement, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." God is my Savior, the psalmist affirms. He may not feel it, but he affirms it. And he resolves to live in light of that truth when he says, "I will yet praise Him!"

So what do you do when you don't feel like coming to church? May I urge you to speak truth to yourself rather than listen to yourself? Don't try to rouse your feelings. That never works. Do what the psalmist did. Speak the truth to yourself, "Okay, it's true. I don't feel like going to church today, but that's not the issue according to God's Word. God is my Savior, and His Word says He desires and He deserves my praise, as well as my attention to His preached Word, and my contribution to the fellowship of my church. So I'm going to believe His Word and act on it, by His grace, regardless how I feel. I am going to church today to the praise of His glory!"

Listen to Lloyd-Jones once more, "Your business and mine is not to stir up our feelings, it is to believe. We are never told anywhere in Scripture that we are saved by our feelings; we are told that we are saved by believing."^[4]

Is that true? Look again at verse 13. Let me read it from the *ESV*, "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 has been sealed by the Holy Spirit? Is it those who went to a church service and got their emotions stirred up into a frenzy? No. It's those who *heard* the truth and *believed* in Christ. Fact #3...

C. If you have put your trust in the gospel, you are secure. "You were marked in Christ with a seal," says Paul. What is a seal? A seal is an identification mark which signifies ownership and authenticity.^[5] In the first century owners would brand their cattle, even their slaves, with a seal to make it clear whose possession they were. Likewise, says our text, we have been sealed. God branded us with the seal of His Spirit to signify that we belong to Him.

I hope you see your security in this. If you are in Christ, you belong to God and He wants you to know it. He not only gave you His Son at Christmas, but He gave you His Spirit to indicate that you are His eternally, signed, sealed, and ready to be delivered! And that brings us to our second point. Not only has the Holy Spirit sealed us in our past, but...

II. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee for the future (14).

"Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

Have you ever bought an expensive item, like a house, or maybe a car, and given the seller a *deposit*? What'd you do that? When you give someone a *deposit*, you are expressing your intent to that person that you want the item and that you will provide the rest at a later time. In a sense, that's what God has done with us. The word used here ("deposit," Greek *arrabon*) speaks of a *first installment* and indicates the rest will come in time. I like how commentator William Hendriksen puts it, "When God deposited the Spirit in the hearts of his children he obligated himself to bestow upon them subsequently the full remainder of all the blessings of salvation merited for them by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The *first installment* is, accordingly, a *pledge* or *guarantee* of glory to come."^[6]

What's true of the Holy Spirit? He was given to us as a *deposit*, as the first installment of our inheritance in Christ. Now plug in what Galatians 5 says, for this is what the fruit of the Spirit is. When you see love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and so forth being produced in your life, you are seeing the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in making you holy and blameless. But you're also seeing a foretaste of what's coming. You're tasting the first-fruits of what eternity holds for you and all the redeemed.

But there's something else here, something quite beautiful. I mentioned that the Greek word for "deposit" is *arrabon*. In modern Greek, *arrabon* is the word for an engagement ring. What's an engagement ring? It's what a man gives to a woman he loves to express his commitment to her and his desire to spend his life with her. That's exactly what Jesus Christ gave to His bride in the person of the Holy Spirit.

A. He is like an engagement ring. Being engaged is a wonderful thing. I enjoyed being engaged. Those were thrilling days when Sherry and I planned and dreamed of our life together. I enjoyed seeing her with that diamond

ring on her finger. But I couldn't wait to give her the other ring, and I'm so thankful that day finally came when I slipped that wedding band on her hand and we entered married life together!

It's coming, beloved. Right now we have the engagement ring, and His presence guarantees that the big day is going to come. But not just the big day, for...

B. He makes it clear that our inheritance is sure to come. The Blessed Holy Spirit is the ring on the finger of the bride of Christ who guarantees that all who are in Christ will receive the inheritance that belongs to Christ. It's sure to come!

And how should we respond to the amazing gift of God the Holy Spirit? The same way we should respond to the gift of God the Father and the gift of God the Son. *To the praise of His glory*, says verse 14.

Let that sink in. Why does God save sinners like you and me? Why did God the Father design our salvation in eternity past, and God the Son accomplish it by going to Bethlehem and later to the cross, and why did God the Holy Spirit apply that salvation to our lives by opening our eyes to the truth of the gospel, granting us faith to believe it, and then sealing us so we're eternally secure? Why? It wasn't just to rescue us from hell. It's because He desires and deserves our praise!

That's what Christmas is all about, *glory to God in the highest!*

Response: Let's take inventory this Christmas...with two questions.

1. *Have you received the gifts of the Triune God?* There's so much more to Christmas than first meets the eye. As you celebrate this week with your family and others, remember the Father's gift, and the Son's, and the Holy Spirit's. Give thanks to the Triune God for His matchless gifts!

2. *Are you living for the praise of His glory?* It's all about Him, brothers and sisters. Is that true of your life? Are you living for His honor and glory? Let's resolve to put His grace on display this week and every week He grants us life.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] John Stott, p. 48.

[2] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 114.

[3] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, pp. 114-5.

[4] D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 117.

[5] Helpful observation by John Stott, p. 48.

[6] William Hendriksen, p. 92.