

Ephesians 1:3-14
January 3, 2010

Hampton Baptist
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Corey Chance's Baptism and First Communion

"All by Yourself"

Dear Corey,

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to churches and to special people; many of those letters are included in our New Testament. What I read a moment ago was addressed to a group of people who lived in Ephesus and was probably shared with other people in that area.

Just as Paul wrote letters to people and churches, I am writing to you about this special day and what it means.

Once a year, I offer a class for children who are interested in becoming Christians or for those who have already made that important decision. You attended that class back in the fall of 2008. In the class, I asked questions about the difference between *becoming* a Christian and *being* a Christian. In the first class, we played "Charles Says" (like Simon Says) and talked about following my instructions and how that someone who is a Christian will follow Jesus' instructions.

In the second class, I asked everyone to remove their shoes; I asked you to close your eyes while I put a shoe behind my back and then you guessed whose shoe I was hiding. I then placed the "secret" shoes in front of you and asked you to put them on your feet; another person's shoes don't always fit. I talked about what a unique and individual decision it is to *become* a Christian and asked numerous questions trying to make the point of what *makes* a person a Christian. Reading the Bible, or doing good deeds, or being friendly, or even being baptized does not *make* a person a Christian. The only way someone can *become* a Christian is to ask Jesus to come into his heart.

I talked about a math formula: God's grace + our belief (or faith) = salvation. God's grace is *always* first. Paul was deliberate in the passage I read from Ephesians in discussing the wonderful grace of God. We can have an opportunity to believe because of God's grace. God has *already* done the work in giving us Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Now, all we have to do is believe, to trust, to have faith that God has already done it. When we sit on a chair, we trust that it will not break; we believe that it will hold us up or else we don't sit on it. We have faith that the chair will do what we expect it to do.

God's grace is *always* there; Jesus died for everyone, including you and me. Once we have faith that God will do what we expect God to do, once we believe that God has already done the work in giving us Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, *then* we have salvation. At that point, we begin a personal relationship with Jesus.

Corey, today is a day of blessing for you. Your baptism and your first communion indicate that you are now a Christian, and because of that decision, you will be blessed with eternal life. The verses I read from Ephesians describe the spiritual blessings we all have; Paul listed seven blessings. God chose us long before we were even born (v.4). God wants us to be God's children (v.5). God will forgive us of our sins (v.7). God's purpose in creating us was for us to know God (v.9). God works things out so we can know God (v.11). Because of God, we can have hope (v.12). We can know the presence of the Holy Spirit which proves that God is always with us (v.13). While you are being blessed with a lot of attention today, the verses from Ephesians remind us that we are *all* blessed.

Last summer, you and your brothers attended numerous Sports Camps provided by the Peninsula Baptist Association. At the end of the summer, you told your parents that you were ready to make a public decision to follow Christ as your Savior and be baptized. Your Dad told me about those conversations; that is when I arranged to take you to the McDonalds in Poquoson so we could talk about it. You said that during the summer, Mike Haywood had encouraged the kids to ask Jesus to come into their hearts. So, you did; becoming a Christian is that simple. When you asked Jesus to come into your heart, he came there to stay.

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You told me that you knew what to do. We had talked about it in our class; you had heard in Sunday School how to become a Christian; at Sports Camp, you and the other kids were told the same thing: all you have to do is ask Jesus to come into your heart.

I was thrilled to learn that you did this all by yourself. While I thought that one day, I would meet with you individually after the class was over and talk to you personally about asking Jesus to come into your heart, you did this all by yourself. You didn't need anyone to pray this prayer for you; you didn't need a preacher standing there beside you. You didn't have to be urged to obey a parent's command to accept Jesus as your Savior. On your own timetable, you made this all-important decision all by yourself. You have been waiting a long time for this special day.

Making a personal decision to be one of Jesus' disciples was *your* decision, not anyone else's. While your choice to become a Christian made many people happy, that was not the reason that you did it. Making someone else feel good is not why anyone should become a Christian. Instead, you are important enough to God to have your *own* relationship with God. The service today has been designed for you to communicate with these gathered friends and family what is important to you. Through the Litany of Baptism *and* your baptism you have declared your commitment to Jesus to be one of his disciples; during your First Communion, you will show your commitment to Jesus through servant discipleship.

Your baptism tells the story that you have become a Christian. When we receive the bread and the cup, we are celebrating the great love of Jesus Christ and remembering his death on the cross. But there is a difference between *becoming* and *being* a Christian. *Being* a Christian is when we *act* like Jesus; that is called discipleship. As Jesus' disciples, we are all called to serve one another. Just as you made the decision to *become* a Christian all by yourself, you also are called to make the daily decision to *be* a Christian.

I am very excited that you made the decision to become a Christian on your own; that shows me that you understand what you were doing. I pray that you will continue to make the decision to *be* a Christian, to act like Jesus, all by yourself.

Love,

Charles

Ephesians 1:3-14 (New Century Version)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. 4 That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people -- people without blame before him. 5 Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, 6 and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. 7 In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace, 8 which he has given to us so fully and freely. God, with full wisdom and understanding, 9 let us know his secret purpose. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through Christ. 10 His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head. 11 In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. 12 We are the

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first people who hoped in Christ, and we were chosen so that we would bring praise to God's glory. 13 So it is with you. When you heard the true teaching -- the Good News about your salvation -- you believed in Christ. And in Christ, God put his special mark of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit that he had promised. 14 That Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive what God promised for his people until God gives full freedom to those who are his -- to bring praise to God's glory.