

Ephesians 3:2 If indeed you have heard of the stewardship [οἰκονομία (oikonomía)³] of God's grace that was given to me for you.

14. The Church Age is the dispensation that characterizes the divine administration of the royal family of God. It is based on the principle of antecedent grace or prevenient grace which is the preemptive work of God in eternity past.

Antecedent Grace:

1. The word “antecedent” refers to a preceding event, condition, or cause. A synonym of antecedent is the adjective, “prevenient.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides important details:
2. First we note the verb form, “prēvēne”: “to come before, precede, anticipate. To take action before or in anticipation of.”
3. Prevenient is derived from the Latin and defined as “coming before, preceding, previous, antecedent”:

Prevenient grace in Theology, the grace of God which precedes repentance and conversion, predisposing the heart to seek God.⁴

4. This word is a compound from the Latin *prae* “before” plus *venio* “come”: “to come before.”
5. This doctrine is discussed in detail from this excerpt:

Prevenient grace is grace which comes first. It precedes all human decision and endeavor. Grace always means that it is God who takes the initiative and implies the priority of God's action on behalf of needy sinners. That is the whole point of grace; it does not start with us, it starts with God; it is not earned or merited by us. It is freely and lovingly given to us who have no resources or deservings of our own. “In this is love,” John declares, “not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”; consequently, “we love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:10, 19). God took action, moreover, when we were helpless (Romans 5:6), without any ability to help ourselves or to make any contribution toward our salvation. The sinner's state is one of spiritual death, that is to say, of total inability, and his only hope is the miracle of new birth from above (John 3:3).

³ “A manager of a household. The responsibility of an administration, as of a house or of property; a spiritual dispensation, management, or economy. The ‘dispensation of God’ means the administration of divine grace” (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “οἰκονομία,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993], 1031–32). See Ephesians 3:2, “If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God” (KJV).

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “prevenient.”

That is why the apostle reminds the Ephesian believers that salvation came to them when they were “dead” in sins, from which there follows only one conclusion, namely, that it is by grace that they were saved. Both now and for all eternity the Christian will be indebted to “the immeasurable riches” of God’s grace displayed in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. But for the prevenience, or priority, of divine grace, all would be lost.⁵

6. Antecedent or prevenient grace refers to that which precedes human history and continues throughout time. This grace applies to post-salvation grace as much as to pre-salvation grace.
7. Antecedent or prevenient grace is the divine initiative in the exercise of God’s grace policy to establish a relationship with mankind totally apart from human merit, human works, or human resources.
8. Antecedent or prevenient grace is also the divine initiative in providing grace blessings from God to mankind, dating back to eternity past as illustrated by the believer’s escrow blessings for time and eternity.
9. Divine omniscience was able to perceive each individual’s moment of salvation by grace through faith. Knowing this, God provided an escrow account for each person in eternity past.

Ephesians 1:3 Worthy of praise and glorification is God [Grantor] even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who has blessed us [aorist active participle of the verb εὐλογέω (*eulogéō*): precedes the action of the main verb, ἐκλέγω (*eklégō*), in v. 4] with every spiritual blessing [escrow account] in heavenly places [escrow deposit is in the third heaven] in Christ [escrow Officer].

⁵ Philip E. Hughes, “Prevenient Grace,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 480–81.

Ephesians 1:4 even as He has chosen us [constative aorist middle indicative of the main verb ἐκλέγω (*eklégō*): election; we were granted escrow blessing before we were elected] for Himself in Him [positional truth; every believer is “in union with Christ”] before the beginning of the world [these are entries into the divine decree in eternity past] for the purpose that we keep on being set apart to God even unblemished and blameless before His presence. (EXT)

10. God knew of His anointed in eternity past and has provided for every believer “far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:20*b*).
11. In eternity past, the omniscience of God recognized those who would place their personal faith in Jesus Christ and for them He created an eternal escrow account for each Church Age believer.
12. The divine decree also recognized the salvation and spiritual growth, or lack of it, of every believer. However, he allowed the free will of man to determine his own spiritual advance.
13. This principle is made clear in the definition of the decree:
The decree of God is His eternal, holy (perfect integrity), wise (omniscience applied to the creation of the universe), and sovereign purpose, comprehending simultaneously (omniscience with regard to human history) all things that ever were or will be in their causes (free will decisions), conditions (status: divine good, human good, evil), successions (interpersonal relationships that lead to decisions), relations (primary, secondary, tertiary, etc.), and determining their certain futurity. [Principle: “Whatever will be, will be.”]
14. This phrase is the English translation of a song title whose performance by Doris Day became a hit in in 1956. *Que Será Será* was introduced in the movie, *The Man Who Knew too Much*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and starred Day and James Stewart.
15. The song won the Academy Award for Best Song at the 1957 Oscars® ceremony. It became a signature hit for Day and it appeared in the soundtracks of two subsequent movies in which she starred, *Please, Don't Eat the Daisies* in 1960 and *Glass Bottom Boat* in 1966.