

January 12, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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TO SAINTS WHO ARE FAITHFUL IN CHRIST JESUS Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians is one of my favorite books in the Bible. I have appealed to this book many times for my own teaching, for evidence, and for arguments in two particular areas. The first area regards the sovereign work of God in choosing sinners to receive the astonishing benefits of eternal salvation. The second area regards the outworking of God's grace in the universal Church and local church as it comes to bear in the lives of the redeemed.

The letter is short compared to many of the books in the Bible. But it is one of the most sublime explanations of God and His plan of salvation. Within its few pages we find three concurrent themes. The most important and most obvious theme is God Himself. The letter begins with God, is saturated with statements about God's will, and ends with a plea for God's peace and grace to be given to our fellow Christians.

The second theme is the great mystery. Other than Jesus using the Greek word *musteirion* once (Mark 4:11; Matthew 13:11), and John using it four times in the Revelation, Paul is the only Bible writer to employ the word, which he does 21 times. Six of those uses are in this letter where Paul revels in the wonderful truth about God opening salvation through Christ to the Gentiles.

Salvation for the Gentiles is the story about the Church. Some Bible students are of the opinion that the description or explanation of the Church is the only theme in Ephesians. It is indeed an important theme. The Church, this great plan that God created in eternity, is the will of God.

B. F. Westcott determined that there are no less than 27 doctrines taught in this book. Surprisingly, none of those doctrines

are unique to Ephesians. They are all found in other New Testament writings. They are just basic Christian truths, and as we will discover, they are Christianity in action by the Church. The letter is easily divided almost exactly in half. The first three chapters tell the astonishing story of God's eternal plan for the Church. The last three chapters tell the sobering expectations of how we the Church ought to conduct ourselves because of the astonishing blessings God has given us.

The Author and His Setting

The letter opens with a greeting that would have been rather common in Paul's day. *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (v. 1a)*. We would assume from this introduction that the writer was Paul. That would probably be a good assumption based on the fact that no ancient Greek manuscript in existence does not begin with this statement about the author.

We also know from Bible history that this Paul was the new God-given name for Saul of Tarsus. Saul had been highly educated in the humanities, and then excelled in the best Jewish seminary of the day – Gamaliel's school (Acts 22:3). He was very likely a member of the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, that had condemned Jesus to death. He was destined for great heights in the Jewish religion as a Pharisee. Therefore, Saul hated the “sect” of Christ because it eroded the firm grip Judaism had on the people. But God showed grace and mercy to the devout and religious rebel, interrupted his life, gave him faith unto the new birth, and made him a choice servant for the benefit of the Church.

In spite of Paul's name appearing on the missive, there are some folks over the years who have argued against Pauline authorship. They argue that this letter is so much like Colossians (which it is) and wonder why Paul would write two letters so similar. A sensible response to that argument is that Paul wrote both letters at about the same time and sent them to two different destinations and groups of recipients. He desired for folks in both (or all) destinations to have the same doctrinal truth. Others argue that Paul was not the author because this letter contains 100 different words that are not found in Paul's other letters. That is true. But it could be that because of the

nature of this letter dealing with themes he did not present in other letters (especially the believer's incredible privileges, 1:3-3:21), Paul would be expected to use different terminology.

Ultimately, though, God is the author. We rejoice in the affirmation of this in Peter's second letter. *And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).*

This text teaches us that God set Paul aside for His own work (the meaning of the word *holy*) and sent these words to him through the Holy Spirit. Because that is true, we really cannot imagine how much weight and authority the very words of this letter carry. When we study the sovereign work of God in salvation (1:3-3:21), we must humbly accept them as God's plan and submit to them even when we cannot fully comprehend the astonishing plan of God. Likewise, the instruction of God regarding His plan for the Church universal and church local (4:1-32) is not negotiable.

Because God is the first source, the original author of this letter, we must learn from it what God requires. Then, knowing what God requires, we must submit our hearts to God's requirements. We must learn how to put His requirements into practice in our age. There is no room for equivocation on this because it is God's word. That same principle applies to God's instruction regarding our relationships with other people (5:1-6:24). The principles and instructions in this letter are not vague or cryptic. They are stated clearly, simply, and with a lot of imperatives. God gave us this information through Paul for our good.

When did Paul write the letter, from where, and what were his circumstances? Those are suitable questions for an introduction to any book in the Bible. We can be quite sure Paul was in prison at the time based on a couple of statements within the letter itself. He wrote, *For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – (Ephesians 3:1).* In a similar way he wrote, *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the*

calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1). Of course, someone could argue that this is figurative language by which Paul expressed his opinion that he was not just a slave to Christ but a prisoner whom Christ had captured.

However, there is also a verse in this letter in which Paul clearly made reference to chains. He was speaking of the gospel *for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:20).* That reference to chains should cause us to interpret "prisoner" literally.

Assuming then that Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter, we can also conclude that it is likely that he was in prison in Rome. We know from Luke's history in Acts 28:30 that Paul spent some time under house arrest in Rome. In that situation, he was free to meet with friends, share the gospel, and write letters. We have statements in three other letters that fit well with a "prisoner" kind of setting. For example, in Philippians 1:13; 4:22, Paul spoke of the palace guard and emperor's household. In the same letter (Philippians 1:19-26), Paul made passing references to the possibility of execution. Then in Colossians 4:10, Paul referred to a guy named Aristarchus who was a fellow prisoner. Also, in Philemon 1:10, Paul mentioned Onesimus who was in prison with him.

If Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, we can pretty well narrow down the date when he wrote the letter. We know that he was probably imprisoned in Rome from early AD 63 – 64. That would have been after Paul had ministered to the Christians in Ephesus for two years (Acts 19:10). Also, this was after Paul had met with the Ephesian elders and warned them about wolves rising up in the church *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:30).* No wonder Paul admonished everyone with tears (Acts 20:31).

The Recipients

The opening words clearly identify the recipients as *the saints who are in Ephesus (v. 1b)*. The term *saints* refer to people who are born again. The saints are *hagios*. The Greek word means "the holy ones." The same word speaks of the characteristics of God. Therefore,

people and things that are holy are quite simply something or someone separated unto God. Paul pictures the idea well. He was once living for himself, but one day God captured and set him apart for Christ's work because that was God's will.

So, too, every believer is captured out of sin by God's grace and set apart unto God. Religious people are not set apart by God and for God. Religious people fit in pretty well with their religion and the world at the same time. Saints are unique and distinct and, therefore, obvious. The "setting apart" event is the miracle of regeneration when God applies His grace to our sinful selves and "saves" us from ourselves.

The saints who were in Ephesus lived in the world. The word Ephesus is not in the three oldest Greek manuscripts. Some conclude that the letter was actually intended to be a circular letter to be read to all of the seven churches of Asia. Those were churches in Ephesus, Laodicea, Philadelphia, Smyrna, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum. Among those churches, Ephesus would have probably been the chief because of the nature of the city.

Ephesus was the capital of proconsular Asia, the political and commercial center of a prosperous area of the Roman Empire. Its port was large, famous, and home to much commerce. It was a communication link between Rome and the East. It was home to some of the largest stadiums and theaters in the empire. Ephesus was the guardian of Diana's temple.

In many ways, the environment for those early Christians was very much like our own materialistic, humanistic, pleasure mad, "it's all about me" culture. Because they were set apart for Christ's glory, they would have stood out against a pagan culture. When they put into practice the "walk worthy of your calling" instruction, it is unlikely that their former friends who were given to lives of drunkenness, unbridled sex, and hedonism would appreciate their company. The saint's testimony would affirm the truth of God's word as Paul gave it to them.

The recipients were set apart people who were also *faithful in Christ Jesus (v.1c)*. The word *faithful* is an adjective connected with the present tense verb "being" (translated *are* earlier in the verse). Saints are characterized by faith (*pistos*). God gives us the gift of faith that leads to salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). And then we live according

to **the** faith in Christ. *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).*

Living by depending on the faith in Christ makes us dependable, trustworthy, faithful servants of the Lord. That is a fitting description because the saints are faithful in Christ Jesus. This statement teaches that by grace through faith God literally places us in Christ. "In Christ" is not so much a location as a condition. We are rooted and grounded in Him (Colossians 2:7). We are being built on Him (1 Corinthians 3:11-12). We are attached to Him and draw life from Him (John 15). We are abiding in Him (1 John 2:6).

People like this, and only people like this, are the recipients of this letter. The wonderful truths we find here apply in a primary way only to those who have experienced the miracle of regeneration. We err to expect unbelievers to rejoice in or live by or be characterized by these principles.

Theme and Purpose.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.2). Those words express the goal Paul and God have for this letter to achieve in the lives of God's faithful servants. The work of Christ for us is stated in chapters 1-3. One statement in 1:7 gives us the essence of this wonderful truth. We are forgiven according to the riches of God's grace. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7).*

Here we learn that in the blood of Christ alone is redemption made possible. To redeem is to buy back, buy out. God, in Christ, paid the price to buy His chosen people out of the slave market of sin. And now the saints are having this redemption. God has already applied the price to us. The transaction will be completed at our glorification. But God's promise on the matter is so certain that we are right now living in the redeemed state, having been bought out of the slave market of sin already.

We are enjoying the blessings of redemption according to the riches of God's grace in Christ. Those blessings include amazing

truths like the riches of God's grace which are highlighted (but not exhaustively) in 1:3-23. Truths like: God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (v.3), God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (v.4), that in love God predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (v.5), God has blessed us in the Beloved (v.6), God has lavished His grace upon us in all wisdom and insight (v.8), God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (v.9), so that, *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 (v.11)*. Therefore, in Him we have hope in Christ (v.12).

All of these blessings are **according to** the riches of God's grace, not out of those riches. If you receive a financial gift out of the riches of Jeff Bezos, you might receive \$10 out of his treasure of \$118 billion. But if you receive a gift according to the \$118 billion level, you are going to be a very wealthy person (with passing stuff).

The second group of blessings is represented by the truth that we are saved by grace through faith. Most Christians are very familiar with the teaching, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)*.

It is only because God lavishes His grace on us that we are saved from the power and penalty of sin. Grace by nature is undeserved. In other words, I did not deserve to believe in Jesus, but through His grace, God gave me that gift of faith. Neither I nor anyone who is truly born again has one reason to boast about that new birth. How foolish it would be for a braggart to say, "Well, I wanted to be born into wealth and luxury, so I picked out a wealthy family (by my wisdom), and I conceived myself in my mother's womb." So, too, no one is born again through his own work, feelings, or desires.

Born again people, people who have received God's grace are then ministers according to God's grace. Paul confessed, *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power (Ephesians 3:7)*. Because God has lavished His grace upon us through multiplied blessings in Christ, and because God has saved us by His grace, He

has also made us His servants to know and tell the amazingly good news about His power of salvation.

The second purpose of this letter is to teach us about our work for Christ (chapters 4-6). God addressed that work in the Church. *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-15)*.

Some of the most important, foundational truth about the purpose and work of the Church universal is found in this text. And even more instructive is that these truths are foundational for the purpose and operation of the local church. When we lose sight of these foundational principles, the local assembly will resort to all kinds of gimmicks and foolishness patterned after the folly of Wall Street and Hollywood.

God also taught that our worthy walk is demonstrated in the family (5:1-6:4). In this text, we will learn critical principles for managing our families in a way that reflects God's grace at work in our lives. I am convinced that the few truths we find in this passage (plus 4:25-32 which applies to the church setting and family setting) will solve nearly all problems that plague our families.

Finally, we will learn how these principles apply to our relationships in the world (6:5-23). If God has actually showered His grace on us to make us saints, we ought to manifest that to the world in which we live. What will that look like?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians will be a very useful and practical study. We will rejoice and glory in learning or being reminded of all the amazing blessings God has poured out on us. We will be challenged and sometimes cringe to be reminded about what the "worthy walk" looks like. By the time we have finished this book, if we are still alive on earth, we will be more conformed to the standard of Christ who is our head (4:15-16).