

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Queen of the epistles, the greatest, most mature and for our time the most relevant of all Paul's writings. This letter is pure music; it is the grand canyon of Scripture. All these descriptions have been used to describe this book of Ephesians that we are starting to look at in this series. This book presents basic Christian truth in a very clear and concise way.

You will not find anything new in this book what is taught here is found elsewhere in the Scriptures, subjects like the trinity, the will of God, creation, angels, evil spirits and the devil. The sacraments and the Christian ministry are all subjects that you will find in this book.

The appeal of this book and the reason why we are going to study it is because it presents the basic doctrines of Christianity comprehensively, clearly, practically and winsomely. This book tells us as God's people just who we are; how we came to be as we are; what shall we be and what we must do in the light of that destiny.

1. TO WHOM IS IT ADDRESSED

Now the Letter is addressed to the church in Ephesus. But if you look carefully at your translation you will probably be guided to the footnote, which will tell you that some early manuscripts do not have the words 'in Ephesus.'

Now obviously the way manuscripts work is that the earlier manuscripts are taken as more reliable so the fact that we have some very early manuscripts that do not have the words 'in Ephesus' at least ought to have us looking for an explanation in order to resolve this problem if it can be solved. Well it is difficult to be absolutely sure but it is possible that this letter was not written to any specific church but was a general circular letter that was to be read to all the churches in Asia Minor.

However because Ephesus was the main centre and capital of Asia Minor it received the letter first and its name became attached to it as a result. It is possible that the name of the city was left blank and the person who carried the letter wrote the name of the city he was visiting in it. This is possible but unlikely, as we have no textual evidence of any other name appearing on this letter. I personally think the circular letter is the most probable explanation and this is supported by the fact that the letter carries very little personal information about the church that Paul is writing to.

It seems that Paul is deliberately leaving the letter general so that it could be read to more than one church in one city. However certainly as Ephesus was a major city this letter was intended to have an impact in the church there. Originally Ephesus was a Greek colony, but at this time it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

It was a busy commercial port and it was also the headquarters of the goddess Diana (or Artemis) whose temple after being destroyed in the middle of the fourth Century BC had gradually been rebuilt to become one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In fact the success of Paul's mission in Ephesus had so threatened the sale of silver models of goddess that the silversmiths had stirred up a public outcry (Acts 19:23-41).

Through Paul's ministry God was pleased to establish his church in this city, and to the church that lived in the midst of utter paganism and immorality this letter would have been like water in the desert. But who are these people that make up the church at Ephesus? Well Paul describes them as 'saints' and as 'faithful' and as being 'in Christ.' But who are saints?

a) Christians are saints. The biblical meaning of this word is very different from what the church or even general secular society thinks of this word. In the Roman Catholic Church a saint is a particularly holy person who is exalted to be a saint by ecclesiastical procedure. The person is nominated for the position then a trial is held in which an advocate pleads the virtue of the nominee they have to show at the very least that the person among other things was responsible for at least one miracle. When the person's worthiness is properly established he or she is officially declared a saint. The world however uses the word to refer to someone who is particularly good, you are a 'real saint' is what we say.

But those ideas are worlds apart from the true biblical meaning of the word. The word means to be 'set apart.' It is something that God does to a person and it has nothing to do with human merit or worth. God makes us saints when he comes to our lives and regenerates us and saves us and brings us into his family the church of Jesus Christ.

This he does because of the work that his Son did on the cross on our behalf. Once we are saved we are set apart for God we belong to him and to his church and are set apart for his service. The church is made up of saints, every Christian is a saint, we are separated from the world, in the sense that we do not belong to it and we are set apart with a new nature, and new loyalties which show that we now belong to God.

The result of being a saint is that we will increasingly be desirous of being more like Christ and will be increasingly showing something of Christ character in our lives. The great problem with the church of Jesus Christ today is that although we are saints because God has set us apart in Christ we do not live like saints. Someone said, "they might call themselves saints but they live like little devils."

That is the challenge to the church today, if we are hoping to make an impact within our modern world then the church of Jesus Christ needs to start living up to its name, we all need to start living like saints like people who are set apart for God. Is it obvious to our neighbours and to our work colleagues that we are saints, is it clearly seen that we belong to God and not this world? Is our devotion and commitment to Christ such that it is clear that we belong to him rather than the world?

But not only are Christians called saints here but they are called faithful. So we can say that:

b) Christians are faithful – Now when Paul uses the word 'faithful' he probably has two things in mind here. The first and **primary** meaning of the word is 'to exercise faith.' That is a Christian is one who having heard the gospel of Jesus Christ exercises faith in that gospel by believing in Jesus Christ. This faith has three

elements; there is an intellectual element. Faith involves content for faith to be exercised there must be a clear proclamation of the truth and a clear understanding of the message. Then there is an emotional element to faith for once the gospel is heard and clearly understood and by understanding I mean understanding in the sense of agreeing to it then it draws from us a loving response to God for this truth warms our hearts.

Then there is a volitional element to faith that is having perceived and understood the gospel and having been affected by it we then make a personal commitment to the Christ who died for us. Every Christian is faithful in this sense we all exercise faith in order to be saved. We have heard and rightly understood the gospel. It has warmed our hearts and drew from us a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ who died for us.

It is only people who have done this that belong to God's church and we know from chapter 2:8-9 that God grants even this faith to us; it is his gift to us to enable us to turn to God. No one who has not turned to Jesus Christ in faith can be a Christian. If you do not agree with the message of the gospel about sin and Christ Jesus as Saviour and if that truth does not move your heart and will so that you turn to God in repentance and in faith commit your life to him then you are not a Christian and you do not belong to God or to his church no matter what you might think.

However there is another meaning of the word 'faithful' that Paul has in mind here. It means to continue in faith or as we might say to keep the faith. It involves perseverance in the Christian life, enduring right to the end through all the trials and difficulties of life (Matthew 10:22). Of course no Christian can persevere on his or her own, No! We can do so only because God is with us helping us and enabling us to persevere.

But this does not remove our responsibility anymore than faith being God's gift removes our responsibility to believe. No! We must be disciplined to persevere, we must be the ones who take the time to read the bible, to pray, we must be the ones who take sin seriously and are faithful in our church attendance and in attending to all the means of grace that God provides for his people to enable us to persevere.

The truth is that any one who claims to be a Christian but is not preserving in the faith then they have no right to call themselves Christians even though they can point to a profession of faith. The only evidence of a genuine profession of faith is preserving in that faith because Christians are faithful. Backsliders can no longer call themselves Christians only after they turn back to God will they be able to say that they were backslidden now that God has drawn them back. Unless we emphasize this we will have people who have made a profession of faith thinking they are Christians when they show no evidence whatsoever of it. Paul is clear, Christians are faithful, they persevere in the faith let us pray for one another and let us encourage one another so that we will be found to be faithful.

c) Christians are in Christ Jesus – This is Paul most popular way of describing a Christian. Paul uses it about 164 times in his writings therefore we should try to understand what he means by it or by similar phrases. The phrase basically means being joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of Him is true of all

who are joined to him by faith. In this letter Paul says that he raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in heavenly realms (2:6).

Now I will confess that this is a difficult concept and the bible uses numerous images to teach this truth to us. The union of a man and wife in marriage or the union of the vine and the branches or the union of the head and the other members of the body are all used to teach us that we are united to Christ that we are in Christ Jesus. What this means is that when Christ was crucified we were crucified with him when he died we died with him, when he was buried so were we, when he rose again we rose with him and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms. This is a tremendous and staggering truth I am in Christ I belong to him I am a member of his body I am not my own I have been bought with a price. All the blessings that come to us as Christians come to us because we are in Christ. Therefore as Christians we cannot be separated from Christ we are related to him and all that we do and say will be reflected upon him.

You know when one of our children does something wrong we know that it will reflect upon us as parents. We did not do the wrong but because our children are related to us it reflects upon us as parents. Well in a much greater way our lives reflect upon Christ because we are not only related to him but we are in Him. Once we begin to grasp this teaching then we will begin to think about where we go what we do and what we say for we will know that our actions attitude and behaviour will reflect upon our Saviour.

Once we identify ourselves with Christ then others will watch us and see how our relationship with Christ affects our lives. Does it change us for the better? The answer to that question will either reflect badly on Christ or it will glorify Christ. Therefore we constantly need to be asking for God's grace so that we live out this truth of being in Christ so that our lives will bring glory upon him.

This union with Christ assures us that our futures are certain. We are where Christ is because we are united with him. Therefore although we live here on this planet earth from God's perspective we are in the heavenly realms with Christ. One day when we die or when Jesus comes back there will be no doubt where we will go. We will go to Christ, we will be in heaven with Jesus Christ and the reason for this is that we are considered to be in Christ.

There is no chance of a mistake being made, no chance of ending up in the wrong place, for if we are united to Christ we will spend all eternity experiencing the reality of that truth. This is why in the bible eternal life is not only a quantity thing but also a quality thing. We have eternal life now, for we experience everyday our union with Christ.

We have communion with Jesus everyday and although we don't experience eternal life in all its fullness here and now we experience a foretaste, we experience enough to wet our appetite. So if you are a Christian and perhaps still having some fears that when you die you will not end up in heaven. Have no fears for you are in Christ now, you are considered to be in heavenly places now and one day you will enjoy the full blessing of being in Christ Jesus.

But of course our union with Christ came about not because of anything that we have done or could do but because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. Therefore none of us can boast except in Jesus Christ and none of us gets the credit but Jesus gets all the glory for our salvation is ours only because of him. Therefore let us rejoice in Christ, let us proclaim this great truth and let us give him all the praise and all the glory forever and ever

Amen