

GRACE AND PEACE

Ephesians 1:1-2

Intro: The Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (and probably to other churches in the same area where Ephesus was located) has become one of the favorite books of the Bible. Believers who first received it and on down to us today, have loved it, and profited greatly from reading and studying and, in many cases, memorizing it. I have often been impressed in reading commentaries on other parts of the Bible, to see references to this epistle to the Ephesians. It is especially important because in it we have revealed a purpose which God had from before creation, but which was not revealed until after the death and resurrection of our Lord. I am speaking about the Church, the body of Christ. Paul wrote about this especially in chapter 3 of Ephesians. See the first twelve verses of that chapter. And this had to do with the extension of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile world. In fact, Paul was particularly appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles. He had been raised as a Jewish boy, trained by one of the greatest Jewish teachers of his day, Gamaliel, and became one of the most promising Pharisees of his day. He was known for his hatred of the Gospel, for his hatred of Jesus Christ, and for his hatred of Gentiles. But he was miraculously saved by the personal intervention of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ when he, then Saul of Tarsus, was on his way to Damascus with papers from the authorities in Jerusalem to bring Christians back bound, many of whom would have been put to death for their faith in Christ. We meet him first in Acts 7 when Stephen was stoned to death and we are told in verse 58 of Acts 7 that those who stoned Stephen "laid their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." The record of Saul's conversion is given to us in Acts 9, but it is not until we get to Acts 9:13 that we read that his name had been changed from Saul to Paul. Saul was his Jewish name. Some believe that Paul was his name as a Roman citizen. But the Scriptures do not clearly indicate why his name was changed, or why he changed it. Undoubtedly it had something to do with the great change that took place when he was saved and joined those whom he before had persecuted, seeing many of them imprisoned and some put to death. The fact also that his ministry after he was saved was particularly to the Gentile world, may have been another reason for his name change. Most of what we know about Paul's life comes from the Bible itself, especially from the book of Acts, but also biographical comments he made in the epistles of the NT which he wrote. The Spirit of God used Paul to give us thirteen of the books of the NT, everything from Romans to the epistle to

Philemon. Many feel that Paul also wrote the book of Hebrews, but that is by no means certain.

So, when Saul of Tarsus was saved, God reached right into the enemies' camp, called and saved one of the major opponents of the Gospel and made him one of the leading instruments in the spread of the Gospel in the first century, and maybe of all time. It was a great day in the lives of many believers when the word got out "that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" (Gal. 1:23).

There is a lot of sacred history behind the first words of the Ephesian epistle, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

We have considered his name and early history, now let us look at his title and how he got it.

I. THE WRITER OF THIS EPISTLE (Eph. 1:1a).

I think that most of you know that in the days in which the NT was written (and before and after) it was customary when writing a letter to put your own name at the beginning of the letter, along with an indication as to whom the writer was writing. Today we put our names at the end of letters we write, so when we receive a letter from anyone, if we are not familiar with the name or handwriting, we look at the end of the letter to see who it is from. I think their idea was better.

But this is the reason that Paul began his letter with his name, his title, and those to whom he was writing.

Paul became his Christian name. "An apostle of Jesus Christ" was his title. It showed his authority. If you read on to chapter 4, verse 11, you will see that the apostles were the primary leaders in the early church. But before that, in Ephesians 3, verse 11, you will see that Paul did not refer to himself as an apostle to boast about his position, because in 3:11 he said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." In his own eyes he was not the greatest of God's people, but the least of all of them. And in 1 Corinthians 15:8 and 9 when he was writing about those who saw the Lord after His resurrection, this is what he said,

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called

an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:8-9).

I believe that whenever the Apostle Paul mentioned that fact that he was a part of that group of men whom the Lord honored by making them apostles, he did it with the greatest humility. He knew that he was forgiven by God for all of the sins he had committed against the Lord and His church, yet I sure that it always humbled him to remember what he had done to the Lord's people before he became a Christian.

This ought to remind us that there is not a single one of us who deserves to be in the family of God. God didn't save any of us because we deserved to be saved. But what makes Paul's apostleship and salvation, and our salvation as well, is that he was saved, and he was an apostle, not by the vote of the people, *but "by the will of God."* This message ought to reach all of our hearts. How would you describe this? It can be described by one word, g-r-a-c-e, grace! If God had given any of us what we deserved, none of us would be here today! It was overwhelming to Paul for him to realize that he was a personal representative of Jesus Christ "by the will of God."

Jerry Bridges always reminds us that the Bible encourages, not just that we read it, but that we meditate on it. We need to stop and think where we would be today if God had not sovereignly intervene in pure grace to save us, to keep us, and to use us in whatever way He sees fit to use us. There is no place for pride in the heart of a child of God, and that applies to me and to you. Remember Ephesians 2:8-10. (Quote it.)

I was reading to Lucille one night this week a part in Charles Bridges' book on Psalm 119 where he likened meditation to the way we might shake the limbs of a fruit tree to get some fruit to fall to the ground. He encouraged us to shake verses that way to get some of the fruit out of the verse that we may not have gotten just by reading it. I've been shaking these first two verses of Ephesians this week to try to get some fruit out of them for myself, and so I would have some fruit to pass on to you. There is fruit in every verse of Scripture, but you have to shake them, to think about them, asking the Lord to give you the fruit so you can eat it. And He will give it to you.

Well, let's do a little more shaking as we go on to see:

II. THOSE TO WHOM PAUL WAS WRITING.

He said, “To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

How many of you have ever seen a saint? What is a saint? A saint is a Christian. You can't become a Christian without being a saint. It is more Biblical to speak of ourselves and each other as saints, rather than Christians. Now there were many people in Ephesus who were not saints. Probably most of them were idolaters. But the fact that there were saints, any saints, in Ephesus, was a testimony to the grace of God and to the power of God. As saints we are people that God has set apart for Himself, people who have been chosen by God, called by God, kept by God, a people in whom God is working to make them holy.

Have you notice in reading Ephesians that there are several times when the Apostle Paul goes back to speak about what we used to be and how we used to live, and then he goes on to speak of what we are now because we are “in Christ Jesus.” The first few verses of chapter 2 are an illustration of that. If you wait until you die before you seek to be a saint, you will never be a saint. God is calling people every day to Himself, and He is making them saints. If you are trusting in Christ for your salvation, you are a saint right now. You may need to be more saintly, as I do, but we are saints now, today, at this very moment, and we have been saints since we were first saved. God chose us and called us and saved us to be saints.

I hope you remember the quotation that I read to you last week from John Calvin. He said that this epistle was not just for the saints in Ephesus, but they were for all of the people of God down to the present day. So we would not do any violence to Scripture if we said, along with “to the saints which are at Ephesus,” we could say it is *to the saints in Portland, or Vancouver, or Beaverton, or Brush Prairie, or wherever it is that you live.* The Epistle which was sent originally to the saints in Ephesus, was meant for the saints wherever they are. If you live out in the country, it was meant for you.

But there is another word that the Apostle Paul used here to describe the saints, the holy ones. It is “the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Dr. Lloyd Jones who is now in heaven went to great lengths to point out in his sermon on this verse that “faithful” has a special meaning which is not always what we think about when we speak of being “faithful.” It in the original text of Ephesians a word which is linked with the Greek word for faith. It speaks of a people who are trusting God. This is not a different group

from the saints; this is just another way of speaking about saints. We were saved by faith, faith which is a gift of God, but faith doesn't end there. We live by faith. We are to be characterized not as people who trust in themselves, but as people who continue to trust God for everything!

Do we ever fail to trust God as we should? Yes, I'm afraid that we do. But God is teaching us to trust Him, isn't He? In our hearts we know that we are not self-sufficient, but, like Paul said about himself, "our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). It used to be the idea that the only people who could really live by faith were missionaries who don't have a regular income. But that is not true! We all live by faith. We trust God to provide for us in every way. In Ephesus, before people were saved, they lived without any idea that it was God who was meeting their needs. But after they were saved, they learned that God is the One Who takes care of all of us. What is a Christian? He is one whom God has set apart from the world, set apart for Himself, to make him holy. And He is also a person who trusts in God in all of the circumstances of life.

So when we shake verse 1 of this epistle, we find that there is plenty of fruit, don't we? But now what about verse 2? Here we come to:

III. PAUL'S GREETING AND PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS (Eph. 1:2).

I wonder how many of us have shaken this verse to see if there is any fruit here for us to eat.

Do you remember what the prophet Jeremiah said about feeding on the Words? Listen, and I will tell you in case you may have forgotten what he said. Here it is:

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts (Jer. 15:16).

Would you say that verse 2 of Ephesians 1 that is a verse we pass over when we read this epistle without hardly giving any thought to it at all? I know I have treated it that way, but I don't treat it that way any more. In fact, this verse qualifies as one of the most important verses in all of the Bible. Why do I say that? I say that because to my knowledge of the Bible, no verse, or one just like this, is repeated more than this one is.

First, let me read this verse, Ephesians 1:2:

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father,
and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now turn with me to Romans 1:7. Next turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:3. Let us go now to 2 Corinthians 1:2. From here the next epistle is Galatians 1:3. And then we come to Ephesians 2:1. After this we can go to Philippians, to Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and then to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Philemon where Paul added “mercy” to “grace and peace.” And then you find “grace” and “peace” again in Philemon. This is the greeting in 1 and 2 Peter, also in 2 John where John adds “mercy” to the other words. In Jude we read “Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ we have a grand statement from the Apostle John to the seven churches, and to our church too:

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;
5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. . .
(Rev. 1:4-5a).

Concl: I hope we will all learn a lot about “grace” and “peace” as we go through this wonderful epistle. Remember among all that grace means it basically means that God does not give me what I deserve to get, but He gives me what I could never deserve. Paul never knew about grace, the gift of God, in Judaism because there it was you work for what you get, and what you don’t work for, you don’t get. There was no forgiveness, no peace, no rest, such as we enjoy in the Lord, and which we are promised in the midst of our troubles. There is not a day, nor any moment in any day, that we do not need the grace of God and the peace of God which always come from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ through the Spirit and by the Word.

How thankful we can be that the supply of God’s grace and God’s peace have not been exhausted, and that they are readily available every day from God and from our Lord Jesus Christ.