

Introducing Ephesians: “Grace and Peace”

Ephesians 1:1-2

This past Friday I received a book from Amazon. I opened it and read the first paragraph and I didn't put it down until 5 hours later.

In the opening paragraph, a man washes up on the western shore of Scotland near the Outer Hebrides and he is immediately aware that he does not know who he is. His identity is completely lost to himself. As the book progresses, it becomes apparent that others know who he is, but who they think he is isn't even who he really is.

It struck me as I read that this isn't unlike our own identity in Christ. We don't know who we are in Christ and we have fairly well hidden who we are in Christ to the others around us.

Who are you?

You might respond with your name. From there you might tell me your occupation or your education. You might tell me about your family, your husband or your wife, your parents or your grandparents. You might show me your driver license and tell me where you live and for how long and what you like about where you live and what you don't like about where you live.

“*Who are you?*” gets right to the heart of our identity.

If you are a believer in Jesus, you have an identity in Christ. Many of us struggle to identify with our identity in Christ.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians helps us better understand our identity in Christ.

The Powerful Influence of Ephesians

John MacKay: Third President of Princeton Theological Seminary. Reading Ephesians as a 14 year old boy in Scotland. “I experienced a boyish rapture in the Highland Hills and as a result made a passionate protestation to Jesus Christ among the rocks in the starlight. I saw a new world; everything was new. I had a new outlook, new experiences, a new attitude to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything. I had been quickened. I was truly alive. To this book I owe my life.”

At the 1948 Croall Lectures in Edinburgh University. In them he referred to Ephesians as the ‘greatest’, the ‘maturest’ and ‘for our time the most relevant’ of all Paul's works. For here is ‘the distilled essence of the Christian religion, the most authoritative and most consummate compendium of our holy Christian faith’. Again, ‘this letter is pure music... What we read here is truth that sings, doctrine set to music’.

John Stott: “The whole letter is a magnificent combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, Christian faith and Christian life, what God has done through Christ and what we must be and do in consequence.”

The six chapters of the Letter to the Ephesians divide quite nicely into two sections:

Chapters 1 – 3: *All that God has done for us in Christ*

Chapters 4 – 6: *All we now do and become because of what God has done for us in Christ*

Doctrine/Duty
Belief/Behavior
Indicatives/Imperatives

This is what separates the Christian faith from every other religion or spirituality: It isn't what *we do* that makes us acceptable to God. It is *what God has done* for us in Christ that makes us acceptable to God.

Have you found yourself frustrated with the Christian life, attempting to live the imperative commands *to do* and failing at every turn? Your mistake was running right past **the indicatives** of chapters 1 - 3 straight into **the imperatives** of chapters 4 – 6.

And that's just like us humans. Our self-sufficiency drives us right past what God has done straight into the danger zone of all we feel we must do.

All of the indicatives are the action and initiative of God on our behalf:

Blessed us, chosen us, predestinated us, made us accepted in the beloved, abounded toward us in wisdom, made known unto us the mystery of his will, quickened us, raised us, seated us

All of the imperatives are accomplished by us only because of what God has done for us in Christ:

Walk worthy, be no more children, speak the truth, walk not as other Gentiles walk, put off, put on, don't steal, no corrupt communication out of your mouth, grieve not the holy Spirit, be kind one to another, walk in love, walk as children of light, speak to yourselves in Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, give thanks, submit yourselves, wives submit, husbands love, children obey, fathers provoke not, servants obey, put on the whole armour of God, stand, equip yourselves, pray.

We are **powerless** to do anything acceptable to God outside of all that God has done for us in Christ.

God's power, not ours, is Paul's emphasis in his letter: 1:19; 3:7; 3:20; 6:10

This power works through two improbable virtues: *Grace and Peace*

The letter begins with grace and peace and ends with peace and grace.

Grace: 1:2; 1:6; 1:7; 2:5; 2:7; 2:8; 3:2; 3:7; 3:8; 4:7; 4:29; 6:24

Peace: 1:2; 2:14; 2:15; 2:17; 4:3; 6:15; 6:23

We humans are not naturally oriented toward grace. We prefer works. The American spirit especially is bent toward independence and self-sufficiency, making it on our own without anyone else's help.

This is a recipe for futility and frustration in the Christian life.

The Christian life depends entirely on grace.

Your identity in Christ isn't dependent upon what you do. It is dependent upon all that God has done for you in Christ through his sinless life, death in your place, and his resurrection.

Alistair Begg: "The security of the gospel is in this, that God grants peace through grace. It is in our understanding of the amazing grace of God that we can rest content even when our hearts condemn us."

It is futile to attempt to live by the precepts of Christianity outside of the grace of God that comes to us through all that God has done for us in Christ.

Who are you? If you have believed on the name of Jesus, you are a recipient of the grace of God, living by that grace every day, showing the grace of God to others by doing all that God has empowered me to do in Christ. That's my identity in Christ.