

“Christians: Holy and Faithful Ones

(Ephesians 1:1-2 ~ Part 2)

Introduction

➤ At the beginning of the apostle Paul’s letter (“prison epistle”) to the Ephesian church (possibly an encyclical letter to other churches as well), the apostle gave his customary, theology-packed, greeting. As we saw last week, the “salutation” (introduction) and “valediction” (conclusion) of Paul’s letters were not meaningless words. So, we must not give in to the temptation to skim or skip these verses, as we know that *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”* (2Tim.3:16).

Eph 1:1-2 ~ “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

➤ As we study these verses this morning, I want us to examine the descriptions of three specific headings: 1) The author, 2) The recipients, and 3) The blessings.

A. The Author (vs.1a)

➤ As he often did, the apostle Paul identified himself in the opening of this letter (vs.1): *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”* (vs.1a). From this we can identify two aspects of Paul’s life and ministry.

1. Paul’s calling

➤ First, Paul described himself as *“an apostle of Christ Jesus”* (vs.1). The Greek word translated *“apostle”* (*apostolos*) literally mean “sent out one” or “sent one”, and can be translated “apostle” or “messenger.” The fact that he was an apostle *“of Christ Jesus”* describes the one who sent him. Paul was literally, officially, on a mission from Jesus Christ.

2. Paul’s commission

➤ Paul did not one day decide to call himself an apostle. He was not appointed to be an apostle by some religious council or hired by a church search committee. The Lord Jesus personally called Paul to be an apostle. His apostleship was *“by the will of God”* (vs.1).

Paul was to dedicate his entire life to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While he was specifically appointed to be *“an apostle to the Gentiles”* (Rom.11:13), he proclaimed the Gospel to everyone – Jews and Gentiles, kings and peasants, the religious and the irreligious, formally and informally, publicly and personally.

B. The Recipients (vs.1b)

➤ Again, we read another brief statement that is theologically packed: *“To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus”* (vs.1b). In writing to Christians, Paul used two powerful and glorious descriptions.

1. Their holiness

➤ Notice that Paul called them *“saints”* (*hagios*; see “saints” 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18 – used over 50x in the NT). This could literally be translated “holy ones.” Let this sink in: every true Christian is a saint! If you are a true believer in, disciple of, the Lord Jesus Christ – if you have truly put your faith in Him as your only Lord and Savior – you are a saint. Such a description is not just for “super Christians” or the “spiritually elite.” This is not hyperbole or merely symbolic. Those who are truly in Christ are absolutely holy in Christ. God’s holiness is nothing that anyone can earn, and it is nothing that anyone deserves. God’s holiness is only given by God’s grace to those who receive His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Savior.

➤ To help us understand this spiritual reality, biblical theologians have made a helpful distinction between the Christian's positional holiness and their practical holiness. That is, they spiritual standing in Christ and their actual walk in Christ.

a. Positional / Perfect

➤ The Christian's positional holiness is absolutely perfect and eternally secure, for the Christian is dressed in the righteousness of Christ as Christ bore the fully penalty of all their unrighteousness and imputed to them the full measure of His righteousness. In their spiritual standing before God, because of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, every Christian stands sinless and righteous before God. The Christian's "positional holiness" occurs the very moment of genuine salvation. It is the result of "*the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*" (Tit.3:5). Once truly saved, the Christian is immediately saved from God's wrath as they are eternally a child of God. This is true of both the weakest (newest) believer and the strongest (oldest) believer. Every Christian is equally, perfectly, holy before God – washed by the blood of Christ and dressed in the righteousness of Christ!

This is true for every true follower of Jesus Christ: God treated Jesus on the cross as if He lived your life, so He could treat you as if you lived Jesus' life.

b. Practical / Progressive

➤ On the other hand, the Christian's practical holiness is deficient and progressive as they imperfectly strive to live out their holiness in Christ. The practical outworking of the believer's holiness is a lifelong, progressive, work. It is the Holy Spirit working in the life of the believer to make them more and more like – conformed to the image of – Jesus Christ (Rom.8:29; 1Jn.2:6). While our practical/progressive holiness is a work of God, it is not a work of God alone. We must yield daily to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This does not happen by osmosis or without conscious effort on the part of the believer. As Christians, we need to be constantly mortifying sin and striving for righteousness. The Christian is one who can honestly say. "I am not as sinful as I used to be, but I am not as sinless as I need/want to be."

True Christians are "*saints*" – holy ones – this is who they are, and this is how they are to live.

2. Their FAITHFULNESS

➤ The second glorious description Paul used to describe Christians is faithfulness: "*... To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus*" (vs.1b). Here we see that translations slightly vary. For example:

Eph 1:1 ~ "to the ... the faithful in Christ Jesus." (NET)

Eph 1:1 ~ "To the ... believers in Christ Jesus at Ephesus" (HCSB)

Eph 1:1 ~ "... to them which believe on Jesus Christ" (TYNDALE)

➤ This is because the Greek word (adj.) translated "*faithful*" (*pistos*) is closely related to the word for "belief." In fact, the word can be translated "trustworthy", "faithful", "true", "reliable", "confidence", "believing", and "believers." Here are just a few, more well-known, examples:

John 20:27 ~ "Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve [*apistos*], but believe [*pistos*].'"

1 Cor 10:13 ~ "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful [*pistos*], and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

1 Tim 1:15 ~ "The saying is trustworthy [*pistos*] and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

Jude 3 ~ “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith [*pistis*, n.] that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

➤ Biblically, “faith” and “faithfulness” are “two sides of the same coin.” You really cannot have one without the other. True faith leads to faithfulness, and faithfulness originates from truth faith. They are distinct, but inseparable.

A person cannot truly have faith in Christ if he does not truly believe in Christ. Similarly, an unbeliever cannot be faithful to Christ. Those who truly believe in Christ are faithful to Christ, and those who are truly faithful to Christ believe in Christ. A person who does not live according to what they believe, can rightly be described as having little/weak faith or being faithless or unfaithful.

➤ Therefore, when Paul referred to the “*faithful*” (vs.1) Christians in Ephesus, he was referring to 1) their faith in Christ and 2) their faithfulness to Christ. To put it another way, they were true to the Christian doctrine and true to their Christian duty. Both are essential for a Christian to truly be “*faithful in Christ Jesus*” (vs.1).

a. Doctrine / Conviction

➤ The first aspect of being “*faithful in Christ*” is our faith in Christ. This involves our intellect as well as our emotions as we ardently believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ – i.e., the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, or sound doctrine of Scripture. Christians do not believe in nothing, nor do they believe in everything. Christians are distinct in their core beliefs about Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

John 11:25-27 ~ “Jesus said to [Martha], ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’²⁷ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.’”

Matt 16:15-16 ~ “[Jesus] said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

John 6:66-69 ~ “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”

John 20:30-31 ~ “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

➤ I love the saying, “A belief is something you hold onto, and a conviction is something that holds onto you.” To truly believe in Christ, or to put your faith in Christ, is more than sentiment or good intentions. And it is much more than loosely held opinions or thoughts. The Christian’s faith in Christ is non-negotiable, and does not ebb-n-flow with the tides of political correctness or cultural values. It is a doctrine that you seek to live out, and a doctrine for which you will die.

✓ Illust: Polycarp (69-155 A.D.), known as the Bishop of Smyrna, was a godly and devout Christian Bishop. Consequently, he became the focal point of the hatred of Christians in Smyrna. A multitude gathered to execute him (burn him alive) if he would not deny Christ and swear by Caesar.

Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, “Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ.” Polycarp declared, “Eighty and six years have I served [Christ], and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, “Swear by the fortune of Caesar,” Polycarp answered, “Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Caesar,

and pretendest not to know who and what I am, Here me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day and thou shalt hear them' ... But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consume by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

Then the proconsul sent word that it should be proclaimed aloud to the crowd three times, "Polycarp hath confessed himself to be a Christian." And Polycarp was that day martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ.

b. Duty / Devotion

- The second aspect of being "*faithful in Christ*" (vs.1) is our faithfulness to Christ. Whereas our faith in Christ refers to our conviction, our faithfulness to Christ refers to our devotion. That is, our loyalty or commitment to Christ. This moves beyond the emotional and the intellectual, and onto the volitional.

As Christians, we do not merely believe truths about Jesus, we also seek to live Christlike lives – lives that are pleasing and glorifying to Jesus Christ (1Cor.10:31; Eph.5:10; Col.1:10). We do not just mentally affirm Christian doctrine, we strive to walk as Jesus Christ – to follow His example and to be obedient to His commands (see Matt.7:21-27; Jn.14:15; 1Jn.2:6).

- It is important to note that the assurance of our faithful to Christ comes when our faith in Christ is tested. An untested faith is an unproven faith. Anyone can say the "believe in Jesus", just as anyone can claim to be a Christian. A Christianity without trials, without suffering, without sacrifice is a weak faith at best, and at worst a false faith.

Paul had first-hand knowledge that the Ephesians' faith was tried and tested. They did not profess Christ in order to become healthy and wealthy; they did not profess Christ to fit in with the culture or to become popular; they were not Christians only when it was convenient, safe, easy, or beneficial. For the culture surrounding them was opposed and hostile to Christianity – both the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Christ and the Gentiles who were steeped in idolatry.

Ephesus was an epicenter of pagan religion. Most notably was their worship of the Greek goddess Artemas (or "Diana").

- ✓ Illust: "Ephesus was known for its amphitheater, the largest in the world, designed to hold up to 50,000 spectators. Ephesus was also the location of the great temple of Artemis, or Diana, built in 550 BC. This temple, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was '425 ft. long and 220 ft. wide; each of its 127 pillars which supported the roof of its colonnade was 60 ft. high' (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). Much Ephesian industry was related to this temple. Craftsmen sold shrines and household images of the goddess that worshipers could take with them on long journeys"

(<https://www.gotquestions.org/Ephesus-in-the-Bible.html>).

- In the book of Acts, Luke recorded the spiritual state of Ephesus in Paul's day:

Acts 19:23-27 ~ "About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.'" (see 1Kngs.18:27-29)

Paul's preaching and his miracles were having a massive impact in the city of Ephesus – idolaters were becoming Christians.

Acts 19:17-20 ~ "... And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.

¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.

¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily."

This caused a revolt among those who rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their idols of money and false gods were being exposed and threatened, and they were not about to surrender their idolatries. Their response was neither quiet nor passive – sound familiar?

Acts 19:28-34 ~ "When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. ³⁰But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. ³¹And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. ³²Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ³³Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. ³⁴But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Demetrius had lathered ("*enraged*"; vs.28, *pleres thumos*, lit. filled with wrath) all his fellow idolaters into a frenzy. They created such a hostile hysteria and riotous commotion within the city, that everyone was "*filled with the confusion*" (vs.29). Possessed with a raging senseless mob-mentality, they rushed into the theater dragging some of Paul's companions with them. It was so dangerous, so volatile, the disciples would not let Paul go into the theater. This chaotic and hostile "protest" lasted "*for about two hours*" (vs.34), as they clamored for their goddess and tried to shout down the preaching of the apostle Paul.

Eventually Paul, and his companions, were able to escape the wrath of these idolaters and continue with their ministry. But this scene serves as a striking illustration of the godlessness that existed in the city of Ephesus. To be a faithful Christian the city of Ephesus – the epicenter of the worship of Artemis, with the conspicuously massive temple, which drove much the city's economy – was no small feat or easy task.

- To be faithful to Christ is being obedient to Christ and to persevere in Christ. Our faithfulness to Christ demands that we continue in, or keep, the faith (Matt.10:22; 13:18-23; Jms.1:4).

C. The Blessings (vs.2)

- The third heading in this passage is the blessings. Paul concluded this short, but theology-packed, greeting with a two-fold blessing: "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (vs.2). This short benediction was a common way for Paul to encourage his readers (see Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 1Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Phil.1:2; Col.1:2; etc.).

1. God's GRACE

- The first part of this blessing is for God's grace to be granted to these Christians: "*Grace to you ... from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (vs.2). Since he was writing to Christians ("*saints*"), we know that Paul was not asking for God's saving grace to be upon them. Christians are saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In general terms, God's "*grace*" (*charis*) is His unmerited favor.

This is certainly true of our salvation, but it is also true in our sanctification. We need God's unmerited favor – His patience, love, mercy, kindness, goodness, wisdom, enablement – each and every moment of each and every day.

➤ Every good thing within a Christian, and every good thing that comes from a Christian, is due to the grace of God. The Christian life begins by God's saving grace (Eph.2:5, 8-10), continues by God's sanctifying and persevering grace (Rom.5:17; 2Cor12:9; 2Tim.2:1), and finds its ultimate/eternal fulfillment in God's glorifying grace (2Thess.2:16; Rom.8:28-30).

Every facet of this grace comes to us *"from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (vs.2). In other words, we receive all of God's grace – saving grace, sanctifying grace, persevering grace, and glorifying grace – only by receiving His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior. Apart from this, there is no grace from God.

John 14:6 ~ "Jesus said ... 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

2. God's PEACE

➤ The second part of Paul's blessing is for God's peace to be granted to these Christians: *"... peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (vs.2). God's peace is the natural/supernatural result of God's grace. It is because of God's grace that we can receive God's peace. Or, to say it another way, if it were not for God's grace, we would never have God's peace.

Peace refers to the absent of conflict, anxiety, fear or chaos. The peace that we have from God is two-fold. First, it refers to the fact that because we are forgiven, loved and saved by God, we are no longer hostile to Him or at enmity with Him. That is, we are at peace with God. By God's grace, Christians are able to live in harmony with God because Christ signed out peace-treaty with His own blood.

Rom 5:1 ~ "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph.1:7; Col.1:20)

➤ Secondly, this peace refers to the tranquility of our soul because we are saved ("It is well, with my soul"). That is, we have the peace of God. This peace comes from the confidence we have to know that God is sovereign, and has promised to redeem us in Christ for all eternity. We can be assured that God is in control, and that He will one day work out everything in conformity to His perfect will.

Phil 4:6-7 ~ "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Jn.14:27; 16:33; Col.3:15)

➤ It can be said that grace is the source of our salvation, and peace is the result of it. Both *"grace"* and *"peace"* come *"from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (vs.2). This expression is truly awesome! Not only does it affirm the truth that salvation is from both God the Father and Jesus Christ, but it also underscores the reality that Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord – the one and only Son of God.

John 10:30 ~ "I and the Father are one" (see Jn.1:1-3, 14; 5:17-18; 8:58; 17:21-22; 1Jn.5:20).

Conclusion

➤ Let me close by sharing this true and gripping account of a young Christian martyr named Sanctus:
"I am a Christian." The young man said nothing else as he stood before the Roman governor, his life hanging in the balance. His accusers pressed him again, hoping to trip him up or force him to recant. But once more he answered with the same short phrase. 'I am a Christian.'

It was the middle of the second century, during the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius. Christianity was illegal, and believers throughout the Roman Empire faced the threat of imprisonment, torture, or death. Persecution was especially intense in southern Europe, where Sanctus, a deacon from Vienna, had been arrested and brought to trial. The young man was

repeatedly told to renounce the faith he professed. But his resolve was undeterred. ‘I am a Christian.’

No matter what question he was asked, he always gave the same unchanging answer. ... When at last it became obvious that he would say nothing else, he was condemned to severe torture and a public death in the amphitheater. On the day of his execution, he was forced to run the gauntlet, subjected to wild beasts, and fastened to a chair of burning iron. Throughout all of it, his accusers kept trying to break him, convinced that his resistance would crack under the pain of torment. ... Eusebius [the ancient church historian] recounted, ‘Even thus they did not hear a word from Sanctus except the confession which he had uttered from the beginning.’ His dying words told of an undying commitment. His rallying cry remained constant throughout his entire trial. ‘I am a Christian.’

For Sanctus, his whole identity – including his name, citizenship, and social status – was found in Jesus Christ. Hence, no better answer could have been given to the questions he was asked. He was a *Christian*, and that designation defined everything about him” (*Slave: the hidden truth about your identity in Christ*, by John MacArthur; p.7-8).

➤ This is what it means to be a Christian. This is what it means to be “*in Christ*.” This is what it truly means to be holy and faithful – to be “*saints who are ... faithful in Christ Jesus*” (vs.1)