

# “To the Faithful Saints in Christ Jesus”

(The book of Ephesians ~ Part 1)

## Introduction

➤ We know that the book of Ephesians” was written by the apostle Paul: *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus”* (Eph.1:1). It is believed that Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus during his first Roman imprisonment (c. 60-62 A.D.), along with the other “prison epistles” of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

**Acts 28:16-20** ~ “And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. <sup>17</sup>After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, ‘Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. <sup>18</sup>When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. <sup>19</sup>But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – though I had no charge to bring against my nation. <sup>20</sup>For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” ...

**Acts 28:23-24** ~ “When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. <sup>24</sup>And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.” ...

**Acts 28:30-31** ~ “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup>proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

➤ Here we see the mindset of the apostle Paul as he wrote the “prison epistles”, specifically as we look at the book of Ephesians. While nearing the end of his life, Paul the apostle was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel of Christ. How did he respond? Did he pout? Did he grow angry at God? Did he question his faith? Not hardly. He continued to boldly preach the Gospel (while in prison), and he wrote letters to encourage the churches that he planted. Paul directly mentioned his imprisonment three different times in his letter to the Ephesians.

**Eph 3:1** ~ “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner [*desmios*] for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles”

**Eph 4:1** ~ “I therefore, a prisoner [*desmios*] for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”

**Eph 6:19-20** ~ “and [pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains [*presbeuō en halysis*], that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

It would only be a few years later (c. 65 A.D., at approx. 60 years old) that – according to the early church writings of Eusebius – Paul was martyred (i.e., beheaded) under the authority of the Roman Emperor Nero.

✓ **Illust:** “The great apostle of the Gentiles, was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, and before his conversion was called Saul. After suffering various persecutions at Jerusalem, Iconium, Lystra, Phillipi and Thessalonica, he was carried prisoner to Rome, where he continued for two years, and was then released. He afterwards visited the churches of Greece and Rome, and preached the gospel in Spain and France, but returning to Rome, he was apprehended by order of Nero, and beheaded” (Foxye, John; *Fox's Book of Martyrs*; p.18).

➤ The church at Ephesus was likely planted by the apostle Paul during his second missionary journey (c. 53-54 A.D.; see Acts 19) [although some believe it was first planted by Priscilla and Aquila, and later established by the apostle on his third missionary journey]. Although laying in ruins today, in the first century, the capital city of Ephesus was a prominent and important port city on the coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). While commercially and politically thriving, the city of Ephesus was awash with idolatry and immorality.

✓ 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 B.C. 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. The Ephesians were proud of their religious heritage and its accompanying legends (Acts 19:35)”

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

➤ Despite this spiritual darkness, many of the inhabitants of Ephesus (and surrounding province) came to faith in Christ through the faithful Gospel-preaching of the apostle Paul – “... *for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 19:6). The apostle Paul pastored the church in Ephesus for two to three years, and after him Timothy pastored for another year and a half.

➤ Almost ten years after the church in Ephesus was planted, and several years after he had pastored there, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church from a prisoner in Rome. The central theme of the book of Ephesians is the Christian’s union with Christ – as Christians, we are “in Christ” and Christ is “in us.” Variations of the phrase “*in Christ*” are used over 30 (as many as 38) times in this letter [“*in Christ*” (13x), “*in Him*” (10x), “*in the Lord*” (7x), “*in whom*” (2x), “*in Jesus*” (1x), “*in the Beloved*” (1x); e.g., 1:1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, etc.].

To be “*in Christ*” is to be completely forgiven of all sin, and gloriously dressed in the righteousness of Christ. To be “*in Christ*” is to be eternally secure in your salvation, chosen by God before the foundation of the world. To be “*in Christ*” is to be loved by God with a sovereign and sacred and everlasting love. To be “*in Christ*” is to be adopted into the family of God, forever identified as a child of God. To be “*in Christ*” is to be a new creation, created to worship God alone and to love Him above all. To be “*in Christ*” is to be in a living, sacred, union with the one and only Son of God! This is both an awesome reality, and a profound mystery.

To be a Christian is much more than merely saying you are a Christian; it is much more than merely ascribing to “Christian” values and virtues; it is much more than attending church; it is much more than being religious or knowing the Bible. To be a Christian is to be spiritually and eternally united to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior – your “old self” is crucified and you now walk in the newness of Christ (see Rom.6:1-14).

**Gal 2:20** ~ “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.”

➤ The book of Ephesians elaborates on both the theological realities of that union, and the practical realities from that union. In fact, with our added numbering system, the book is perfectly divided between “The Christian’s Position” (ch.1-3) and “The Christian’s Practice” (ch.4-6). While there are no imperatives in the first three chapters, there are as many as thirty-five directives in the final three chapters. This is a great illustration as to why we need to rightly understand biblical doctrine (orthodoxy) before we can rightly apply the Bible (orthopraxy). Belief determines behavior! Far too many Christians ignore “theology” in pursuit of that which they deem to be more practical. The truth is, Christian doctrine is what informs and guides our Christian practice. Unbiblical thinking leads to unbiblical living.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS		
Reference	1:1 – 3:21	4:1 – 6:24
Focus	The Christian's position	The Christian's practice
Key verses	<i>"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"</i> (1:4) <i>"by grace you have been saved through faith ... this is not your own doing"</i> (2:8) <i>"that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"</i> (3:19)	<i>"walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called"</i> (4:1) <i>"walk in love"</i> , <i>"Walk as children of light"</i> , <i>"walk ... as wise"</i> (5:2, 8, 15) <i>"put on the whole armor of God"</i> (6:11)
Topic	Belief Doctrine The blessings of the Christian	Behavior Duty The responsibilities of the Christian
Author	The apostle Paul	
Location	While in prison in Rome	
Time	A.D. 60 – 62	
Recipients	To Christians living in the city of Ephesus	

➤ To preach the whole book of Ephesians, and to hear the whole book of Ephesians preached, as one sermon, is a difficult task (hence, the two-part message). To put this into perspective, the great Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) preached through the book of Ephesians in 232 sermons (today you can purchase his commentary on Ephesians as an eight-volume, over 3,000-page, book set)! The book of Ephesians absolutely warrants such a lengthy treatment.

Lord willing, in the coming months (and years) we will be going through this divinely inspired book verse-by-verse. For this morning, however, I want us to see the bird's-eye view of Ephesians (the forest) before we see the worm's-eye view (the trees). My hope and prayer is that this message will not only inform, convict and encourage us but also excite us for the study ahead.

➤ To preach the book of Ephesians in one sermon could essentially be a two-point message. It is a book of halves. The first half (ch.1-3) is doctrine (what we believe), and the second half (ch.4-6) is duty (how we ought to behave).

### **A. Doctrine: Our STANDING in Christ (1:3-3:21)**

➤ As Christians, our standing in Christ is neither superficial nor merely symbolic. Because of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, and His subsequent burial and resurrection, Christians spiritually stand before God as holy and righteous – as Christ bore the full penalty of their sin and imputed the full measure of His righteousness for all who would ever believe (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21). Through the crucifixion, God treated Jesus as if He lived your life so that, through the resurrection, God could treat you as if you lived His life. Through Christ's atoning blood, shed on the cross, everyone who truly receives Him as Lord and Savior stands before God as *"saints"* (1:1). This is referred to as "Positional Holiness" (or positional sanctification).

✓ Illust: "You stand before God as if you were Christ, because Christ stood before God as if He were you" (C.H. Spurgeon; sermon: "Justification by Faith"; April 28th, 1867).

➤ From the first moment of genuine conversion, the Christian stands before God dressed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you are "in Christ" you receive what Christ can give: complete forgiveness, absolute righteousness, and eternal salvation. If you are "in sin" you receive what sin can give: utter hopelessness, absolute unrighteousness, and eternal condemnation.

Those who are truly “in Christ” – that is, those who are truly Christians – are blessed beyond merit and beyond measure. In just the first few chapters of the book of Ephesians, the apostle (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God; 2Tim.3:15-17; 2Pet.1:21) elaborates on several spiritual realities that affect every true believer in Christ.

### 1. The spiritual **BLESSINGS** in Christ (1:3-22)

➤ This first spiritual reality is gloriously mysterious and comprehensive.

**Eph 1:3** ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”

➤ Through Christ, and the Holy Spirit of God, God has blessed every Christians with “*every spiritual blessing*” (1:3). While the ultimate meaning of this is incomprehensible to us, we know for sure that God has not withheld any spiritual blessing from His children (“*every*”). We also know that these blessings are “*spiritual*”, not physical (i.e., material possessions, wealth, good health, etc.). Lastly, we know that these blessings are not earthly but are “*in the heavenly places*” (i.e., not relegated or limited to the things on earth).

Furthermore, in the rest of the chapter, Paul identified several of these spiritual blessings (this is not an exhaustive list, but it is certainly a glorious list):

- a. Our predestination and election in Christ (1:3-6a)
- b. Our salvation (redemption) in Christ (1:6b-10)
- c. Our inheritance in Christ (1:11-12)
- d. Our security in Christ (1:13-14)
- e. Our hope in Christ (1:15-22)

➤ To put it another way, the blessings that God has lavished upon His children – those whom He has saved – begins with their salvation (“*[chosen] in Him before the foundation of the world*”; 1:4) and culminates in their eternal glorification. In essence, Ephesians chapter one gives us the past, present, and future realities of God’s salvific plan.

**Rom 8:28-30** ~ “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

### 2. The spiritual **LIFE** in Christ (2:1-10)

➤ Only God can give spiritual life to the spiritually dead (the dead cannot revive themselves). Everyone is spiritually dead, and eternally condemned, apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ. No one deserves salvation; no one is worthy of salvation; no one can repay God for His salvation. For everyone has “*sinned and [fallen] short of the glory of God*” (Rom.3:23; see Rom.3:10-12).

**Eph 2:1-3** ~ “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

➤ Contrary to popular opinion, the unbeliever (non-Christian) is not basically or inherently good. The unbeliever is spiritually dead, with no way to make themselves alive (2:1). They are under the control of the devil (2:2) and enslaved by their own sinful passions and desires (2:3). Worst of all, and consequently, they are destined to face the just and eternal wrath of God (2:3).

**John 3:18** ~ “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

**John 3:36** ~ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

➤ The unbeliever (the unrepentant sinner) is absolutely unable to save him/herself. We all are desperately dependent on divine intervention. Thankfully, out of the richness of His mercy and greatness of His love, God determined to save us – to make us spiritually alive – in Christ.

**Eph 2:4-5a** ~ “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ...”

**Rom 5:8** ~ “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

**Rom 6:23** ~ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

➤ Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ – His sinless life, His substitutionary/sacrificial death, and His supernatural resurrection – no one could be saved; we all would remain spiritually dead, justly and eternally condemned.

**Eph 2:5b-9** ~ “... by grace you have been saved ... <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (see Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:5).

➤ This spiritual life – salvation in Christ – comes not earned nor is it deserved. It is the gracious (getting what we do not deserve) and merciful (not getting what we do deserve) gift of God through His Son Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that a person can be raised to spiritual life unto salvation, and spared the just judgment of eternal death.

✓ Illust: “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary” (attributed to Jonathan Edwards).

### 3. The spiritual UNION in Christ (2:11-22)

➤ Not only are Christians one with Christ (“in Christ”), they are also one with each other. For in Christ, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal.3:28). This was an important truth for the Jews to hear (a truth that many of the Jewish leaders rejected), but also an important truth for all Gentiles to hear. Salvation is not just for the Jews but offered to everyone no matter their ethnicity, race, class, or gender.

**Eph 2:12-13** ~ “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

**Gal 3:26-29** ~ “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ... <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

➤ By God’s sovereign plan, salvation would come through the Jews but would not be only for the Jews. (Rom.1:16; 9:24; 11:11). Through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross, God fulfilled His divine promise to save all who would come to Him in faith. All true Christians are adopted into the eternal family of God – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Eph.3:6; Rom.8:16-17; Gal.3:29; 4:4-7).



**Eph 2:18-19** ~ “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (see Phil.3:20-21)

- A person can only be saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Furthermore, anyone can be saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – no matter how sinful they used to be!

#### 4. The unsearchable **RICHES** of Christ (3:1-21)

- The “*riches*” (*ploutos*; abundance) that Christians have in Christ are as mysterious as they are abundant. In the opening three chapters Paul wrote about

**Eph 1:7-8** ~ “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches [*ploutos*] of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight”

**Eph 1:18-19** ~ “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches [*ploutos*] of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”

**Eph 2:7** ~ “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches [*ploutos*] of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

**Eph 3:8** ~ “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches [*ploutos*] of Christ”

**Eph 3:14-16** ~ “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches [*ploutos*] of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being”

- The riches of Christ are too numerous and too great to fully comprehend. As Christians, we must never think of God as withholding or oppressive; we must never think that God has wronged or deprived us; we must never think that God has been anything but good and kind, gracious and merciful, loving and generous. For He has lavished on us all good things – good things that we did not deserve and could not attain on our own.

Satan wants you to view God as stingy and uncaring. Satan has been doing this from the beginning: “*He said to the woman [Eve], ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’*” (Gen.3:1). *What God said was, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat”*” (Gen.2:16-17). In His gracious generosity, God gave Adam and Eve every tree in the Garden. Satan, however, ever the liar, tried to portray God as anything but good and kind and loving. He tried to get Adam and Eve to see the Paradise there were in as a prison. And it worked. This is the same deceitful scheme that Satan uses today. And, unfortunately, like Adam and Eve, many people are falling for it (thinking of God as demanding, harsh, stingy, unloving, withholding).

- The book of Ephesians is a great – and much needed – reminder of rich blessings we have in Christ. One of Paul’s prayer for the Christians in Ephesus is that they would further grasp the unsearchable riches of Christ:

**Eph 3:14-19** ~ “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

**Phil 3:8** ~ “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”

➤ Notice that *“the love of Christ ... surpasses knowledge”* (Eph.3:19), and yet we are to ever-pursue such knowledge. We must never be indolent in such pursuits, and we must never be arrogant to think we do not need to pursue such knowledge. Only in heaven will we truly comprehend the fullness of God and His love for us (1Cor.13:12), but in this life we are to earnestly pursue such knowledge. We must never tire of growing in our knowledge of God and the things of God; to understand more of that which surpasses knowledge, to comprehend more of that which is ultimately incomprehensible, to know God more and more.

For this is all to the praise of God as He is glorified through the lives of those who truly seek and serve Him.

**Eph 3:20-21** ~ “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

## **Conclusion**

➤ All these glorious doctrinal truths concerning our union in Christ have immediate and visible implications on our lives. The one who is truly in Christ is compelled to love Christ, to please Christ, to glorify Christ. The evidence of being in Christ is living for Christ.

This we find in the second half of the book of Ephesians, which, Lord willing, we will see next Lord’s Day.