

“Christians: Holy and Faithful Ones

(Ephesians 1:1-2 ~ Part 1)

Introduction

➤ We know that the apostle Paul – in the middle of the first century A.D. – visited the city of Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-21), and pastored at the church there for two years during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). We believe that Paul wrote the letter of “Ephesians” during his first Roman imprisonment (Eph.3:1; 4:1; 6:20) – along with the other “prison epistles” of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon – and was martyred (beheaded) during his second Roman imprisonment.

As we have seen, among the many great themes found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians, it seems the overarching them is the Christian’s union “*in Christ*” (variations of this used over 30 times in this letter). This is one of the greatest descriptions of what it means to be a true Christians. Christians belong to Christ and are one with Christ – Christ in them and they are in Christ. Christians have died to self and live for Christ.

Scripture teaches us that Christians are saved by Christ, sanctified in Christ, filled with Christ, chosen in Christ, clothed with Christ, crucified with Christ, baptized into Christ, co-heirs with Christ, hidden in Christ, free in Christ, slaves of Christ, loved by Christ, united with Christ, have the mind of Christ – and will one day reign with Christ in heaven for all eternity.

To be a Christian is much more than occasionally or capriciously following the “religion” of Christianity, or professing Christ when it’s convenient or beneficial. To be a Christian is to be brought into a spiritual union and sacred communion with the one and only Son of God! It involves a radical transformation out of sin and into the Savior. This is the heart of Paul’s letter to the Christians in the city of Ephesus.

➤ The opening verses, or introduction, of Paul’s letters are often filled with great theological truths.

While we may be tempted to skim over these verses – to get to “the good stuff” – we must resist that temptation and remember that “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*” (2Tim.3:16).

This is blatantly true with the first couple verses of the book of Ephesians.

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). But he did not write, “Hi, this is Paul.” Rather, he gave a brief and profound description of his identity in Christ: “*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). He called himself a “tentmaker” (which he was), he never called himself a pastor (which he was), and he never called himself a “missionary” (which he was). He often referred to himself as “*an apostle*” (see Rom.1:1; 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:1; 1Tim.1:1; Tit.1:1). 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.

The title of apostle is reserved to the New Testament era. There are no true apostles today. To be an apostle, one had to be personally commissioned by Jesus Christ. This was obviously true of the Twelve apostles who walked with Jesus, learned from Jesus, witnessed the miracles of Jesus, and were deputized and empowered by Jesus.

The question naturally arises: “Since Paul was not a part of the Twelve, how can he consider himself to be an apostle of Jesus Christ?” Good question. Scripture reveals that Paul indeed had a personal encounter with, and calling from, Jesus Christ – the risen and glorified Jesus Christ!

Acts 9:1-9 ~ “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁵And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

Acts 22:6-11 ~ [Paul before the Jewish people]: “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.”

Acts 26:13-18 ~ [Paul before King Agrippa]: “At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

➤ Paul’s Christian testimony included him hearing an audible voice from, and being literally blinded by, the risen and glorified Jesus Christ (three days later Paul was healed of his blindness by a disciple named Ananias; Acts 9:9; 22:13). This is certainly unusual. What we read in Acts 9 is Paul’s official calling to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 9:10-19 ~ “Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ ¹¹And the Lord said to him, ‘Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he

might regain his sight.’ ¹³But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.’ ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’ ¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened.”

- The maxim is, “Every apostle is a disciple but not every disciple is an apostle.” To be an apostle of Christ was an incredibly unique and specific calling. It was not so much “a badge of honor” but a divine calling. An apostle was to surrender his whole life in service to the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition, the apostles were especially chosen and called by Christ Himself.

Acts 9:15 ~ “But the Lord said to [Ananias], ‘Go, for [Saul/Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

Acts 20:24 ~ [to the Ephesian elders]: “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

Rom 1:1 ~ “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God”

- Though not apostles, every disciple of Christ has been called by God to serve Christ, to live for Christ, and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While this is not every Christian’s vocation, is it every Christian’s (salvific) calling.

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

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).

Gal 1:1 ~ “Paul, an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead”

- Furthermore, Paul did nothing to earn or achieve such a calling. In fact, we could (Paul would) argue quite the opposite for he – by his own admission – was a persecutor of Christians and blasphemer of Christ.

Gal 1:13 ~ “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.”

1 Cor 15:9 ~ “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

1 Tim 1:12-13 ~ “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. ...”

➤ Paul really had no say in the matter. To be an apostle of Christ was not in Paul's plans for his life. It was not his vocational goal, or his "dream job." In fact, Paul's calling to be an apostle preceded his birth!

Gal 1:15 ~ "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace" (cf. Is.49:1; Jer.1:5; Lk.1:15)

➤ 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.

Eph 3:7-9 ~ "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (see Acts 22:21; 26:17, 20, 23; Gal.1:16; 2:8; Col.1:27; 1Tim.2:7)

➤ Paul is a great illustration of what it means to live out your commission from God. For every Christian has been given a commission by Jesus Christ. We often call it "The Great Commission." Before His ascension, Jesus commanded all His disciples by saying:

Matt 28:18-20 ~ "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go [vb., part.] therefore and make disciples [*mathēteuō*; 2nd per., pl.; imperative] of all nations, baptizing [vb., part.] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching [vb., part.] them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

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). It is important to note that since the phrase "*who are in Ephesus*" is not in many of the early manuscripts, some scholars believe this letter was to be circulated among the churches in Asia Minor (which would undoubtedly include Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis, as well as Ephesus). Since this letter is historically regarded as a letter to the Ephesians, it is likely that if it was encyclical, it began with the church in Ephesus.

➤ In writing to Christians, Paul used two powerful and glorious descriptions.

1. Their HOLINESS

➤ This is easy for us to miss if we read this verse too casually or quickly. 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 the same word (*hagios*) to describe the holy prophets; the same word to describe the holy apostles; the same word to describe the holy scriptures; the same word used to describe the Holy Spirit of God; the same word used to describe the Holy Son of God; and the same word used to describe the Holy God!

Some of you may be thinking, "Pastor, if you really knew me (or knew my past) you would not call me a saint." But I am not calling you a saint, God is! That is, if you are truly a Christian.

- While this is ultimately incomprehensible to us, we must grapple with and bask in its glorious truth! 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 as their Lord and Savior.

Eph 1:4 ~ "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ..."

- 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.

2 Cor 5:21 ~ "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (see Is.53:4-6; 1Pet.3:18)

1 Cor 6:11 ~ "... But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Heb 10:10 ~ "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

- The Christian's positional holiness is the result of Christ's single, and all-sufficient, sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross in which He completely satisfied God's wrath for, and imputed His righteousness to, all who would ever believe. This means, among other things, that the Christian's status before God cannot change – it cannot be lost, nor can it be improved upon. For it is not the result of our goodness or good works – or even the strength or depth of our faith – but solely on what God has done for us in 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.

✓ **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).

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."

Eph 5:3 ~ “But sexual immorality [*porneia*] and all impurity [*akatharsia*] or covetousness [*pleonexia*] must not even be named among you [*mēde onomazō*], as is proper among saints.”

Eph 5:3 ~ “But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints.” (HCSB)

Eph 5:3 ~ “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.” (NIV)

➤ Christians should not live like the world, they should not live as they did before they put their faith in Jesus Christ. Christians are to be in the world but not of the world (Rom.12:1-2). We must not rationalize sinful behavior, or ignore sinful thoughts. We must not tolerate sin of any kind or degree. We cannot afford to have “pet sins” or allow “small “sins” in our lives. For sin is like a cancer, it spreads and ultimately kills. As Jonathan Owen famously said: “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”

✓ **Illust:** “Justification is the act of God about us and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God within us and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men” (J.C. Ryle; *Holiness*; “Sanctification”).

Heb 10:14 ~ “For by a single offering he has perfected [*teleioō*] for all time those who are being sanctified [*hagiazō*].”

Heb 12:14 ~ “Strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Phil 3:12 ~ “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

James 3:2 ~ “For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.”

1 John 1:8-10 ~ “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

➤ As Christians, our task is to strive to live out what we are in Christ – to be holy as we are holy. We are called to pursue holiness. But we can only achieve true personal holiness through the power of God working in our lives. We are holy (positionally) by the redemptive power of God’s grace in Christ the very moment we genuinely receive Him as our Lord and Savior, and we become holy (practically) as we genuinely submit to God’s sanctifying power in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. No one can attain any degree of holiness apart from God’s redemptive and sanctifying work in their life. However, God commands that we faithfully pursue Him in order to grow in holiness. Christians stand before God holy in Christ Jesus, and pursue the holiness of God through Christ Jesus.

✓ **Illust:** “Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace” (Jerry Bridges; *The Discipline of Grace*, p.19).

Conclusion

➤ I want to conclude this message with a sobering exhortation. We have to fight to live holy lives! We must be ever-aware of our absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit, to live out the holiness we have in Christ. Holy living does not come without a conscious and faithful fight.

✓ **Illust:** “You can drift into sin, but not into righteousness” (Leon Morris).

➤ This, I believe, is more true for us today than it used to be. In America today, we can no longer depend on our culture to be a positive influence on us. We can no longer expect society to push morality and ethics. We can no longer presume that our nation supports Christian values and virtues. To whatever degree this used to be true, it certainly does not seem to be true anymore. Whatever moral “peer-pressure” our culture once afforded is seemingly all but gone.

Behaviors that were once seen as immoral and perverse, are now paraded as normal and acceptable. What was once deemed corrupt and depraved, is now tolerated, promoted, and celebrated. Conversely, things that were commonly viewed as good and moral are not vilified and rejected. Today, many professing Christians unashamedly condone and participate in sexual sins and other impurities. Rather than be separate from the world they have embraced worldliness (see Jn.15:18-25; 16:1-4; 17:14; Rom.12:1-2; Jms.4:4).

1 Peter 1:14-16 ~ “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

➤ True Christians are “*saints*” – holy ones – and are to think and behave as saints.