

Ephesians 1:1-2

Read Ephesians 1:1-2. Ephesians as the most contemporary of all of Paul's letters, addressing issues that are currently being asked by and of the church. It really is a letter for today. Commentators have described Ephesians using terms such as "the crown of Saint Paul's writings" (Armitage Robinson). Ephesians presents basic Christian beliefs in an understandable way and then presents the implications or applications of those truths for everyday living.

The structure of the book is typical of most of Paul's writings. Paul begins by presenting doctrinal truth in chapters 1-3. Paul then states the way that doctrine is supposed to impact the way we live, which is covered in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians.

Read how the letter begins in Ephesians 1:1. Paul identified himself to as "**an apostle of Christ Jesus**" and "**by the will of God.**" The title "**apostle**" was used by Christians in the New Testament period in two different ways. In a general sense it described missionaries in general, like Timothy in 1 Thessalonians 2: 6 and Barnabas in Acts 14: 14. In a narrower sense, which was how Paul described himself here, it was used of those who received their commission directly from Jesus, that is one of the 12 Disciples. Paul laid claim to that title based on what he described as a direct call from Jesus. Read Galatians 1:11-12.

Paul also wrote that he was an apostle "**by the will of God.**" Paul never sought the role of apostle, but he was called by God to that ministry. Paul was convinced that God had a plan for his life. Jeremiah expressed what Paul believed according to Jeremiah 1:5. Read that passage in Jeremiah and also Gal. 1: 15.

Paul's introduction of himself as an "**apostle**" or literally a "**spokesman for Jesus**" reminds us that the message of Ephesians is from God's servant and falls under the heading of "*inspired Word of God.*" Ephesians is God's inspired Word and that means we need to take it seriously. It means that what it teaches us about God is true and should be embraced and what it tells us we should do or should not do must be obeyed completely.

Ephesians 1:1 goes on to read, "**To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:**" The translation that the NIV has made of the first part of that sentence reads. "**To God's holy people.**" The actual Greek is the word literally translated "**saints**" and many translations use that word. Many today think of the idea of a saint as an especially holy individual or even narrower, one who has been elevated after death to the level of sainthood. That narrow use was never a part of the thinking of the early church. To Christians in the 1st century every believer was considered a "**holy person**" or "**saint.**" In modern terminology it literally means everyone who by faith has invited Jesus to be their Savior and therefore could be called a genuine Christian.

Everyday Christians are "saints" in the sense that they have been made holy because of the provision of Jesus. The word technically carries the idea of being different and people are saints

when they were made different by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the transformation God brought about in them. The word described what happened in our hearts when we believed. We are holy ones living in a sinful world and saints even though we fail often in our daily walk. Christians in Ephesus were saints while going about everyday life. John Calvin put it this way, "No man is... a believer who is not also a saint; and, on the other hand, no man is a saint who is not a believer." Christians are saints because having been called by God, they responded positively to His invitation to sonship in Jesus. God has made us holy by giving us the righteousness of Jesus.

The believers are further called "**the faithful in Christ Jesus.**" The neat thing about the descriptive word "**faithful**" is that the tense in which it is written can be translated two different but equally true ways. The word can refer to someone who is a believer, that is one who has faith, or it can refer to someone who has proven himself to be faithful to his commitments to Jesus. Probably the best way to see this is to see it as saying, *"To those who have placed their faith in Jesus and are seeking to live faithfully to that commitment."*

Together the picture of a Christian as both "holy" and "faithful" presents the two sides of our relationship with God. Holiness comes from God who alone provided the possibility of it via the Cross and imparts it to believers when they make Jesus their Savior. Read Ephesians 5:25-27.

On the other hand, faithfulness is our responsibility, although even here God provides the Holy Spirit to assist us in that responsibility. Being holy speaks of our position in Jesus while faithfulness is the challenge to live consistently as those who are holy. Paul was saying that the Christians in Ephesus were practicing who they were positionally because of faith. We should be doing the same.

Unfortunately, too many in the American church want one without the other. There are many who are seeking to be faithful to the expectations of the church and what they know the Christian life should look like without ever having made a faith commitment to Jesus. They believe that in seeking to live as the church teaches, they earn eternal life by putting faithfulness before faith is impossible.

On the other hand, there are many individuals who have accepted Jesus as Savior but feel like that is all that is required. They have they have a life insurance policy for heaven and are simply living as they want until the day they need to collect on it. That is totally contrary to what the Bible teaches about the responsibility of Christians to be faithful to their commitment to Jesus.

The Christians, saints, holy ones living in Ephesus were described as having faith and being faithful. That should be the definition all of us should seek to have.

Paul noted that their faith was centered "**in Christ Jesus.**" This is how Paul pictured of our unity with Jesus. Over 30 times in Ephesians he used that phrase or one similar to it. As Christians we were united with Jesus on the Cross as He bore our sins and we were united with Him in His

resurrection to eternal life. The best definition of Christian we can give is that he is one who by faith has been united with Jesus.

Read Ephesians 1:2. Paul followed the normal practice of letter writing in his day with a blessing declared in the very beginning. He changed, however, the normal greeting to reflect the essence of his theology. The normal Greek greeting was "rejoice!", while the regular Jewish greeting was "peace" or the Hebrew shalom. Paul combined the two, and then replaced rejoice with the similar sounding but far richer word for him, that of **"grace."**

For Paul the whole Christian life was centered on God's grace. One was saved by grace and one lived each day through the grace of God that provided everything. Grace was Paul's way of noting that every aspect of the Christian life flows from the grace of God who gives us so much that is not deserved. Grace described, for Paul and for us, the undeserved favor of God.

For Paul, grace was the source of real peace. Because of the provision of Jesus, we can have peace with God and with that a daily peace in life that Paul described in Philippians (4:7) as beyond what we can understand and certainly deserve but that it where grace comes in.

The emphasis in Ephesians was on the second use of "Peace", namely the peace Christians can have in a world that knows little real peace. It was not easy being a Christian in Ephesus, just as it is not easy being one in our culture today. Christians were persecuted which made an already difficult life even more challenging. But Paul's prayer was that as they lived each day, they would know a peace that can only come from above.

If Paul were writing a letter today to each of us would he be able to call us holy and faithful? That is a challenge we should contemplate each day. In the midst of each day's activities can we legitimately say we recognize all God is graciously providing and do we rest in the peace God and God alone provides?