

Ephesians 1-1-2

Preamble-

Mentions elders talk (this provides a context for our pastors to help you think about the Covid-19 crisis).

I hope that many of you are enjoying our 5-5-5 bible reading plan... if you are behind, don't sweat it. jump back on the wagon.

Scripture reading-

Ephesians 1:1–2 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: **2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction-

John Mackay, a former president of Princeton Theological Seminary..., called Ephesians the “greatest ... maturest ... [and]... the most relevant” of all Paul’s writings. He goes on to say that, “This letter is pure music.”

Others have called it...

“the divinest composition of man.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“The queen of the Epistles” (William Barclay)

“The Grand Canyon of scripture”

“[t]he crown and climax of Pauline theology,”

“[t]he sublimest communication ever made to men,”

(these quotes are compiled by K. Hughes)

It was John Calvin’s favorite letter in the Bible.

Why is this letter so popular? Here is the answer of one scholar,

“This letter summarizes what it means to be a Christian better than any other book of the Bible. It clarifies the heart of the Christian faith, explores the dynamics of a personal relationship with Christ, sets forth God’s overall plan for the church, and draws out the implications of what it means to live as a Christian.” (Clinton Arnold)

In light of all of this, I’m very eager to spend the next 40 weeks in Ephesians (with a few breaks here and there). If this seems like too many sermons, consider that Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, one of the greatest preachers of the 20th century, spend 232 weeks in Ephesians.

To understand the message of this glorious letter, we need to understand the backstory. To do this we are going to look at the author, the audience, and the activity of God.

These are the three main headings this morning. (repeat)

The author

The audience

First, the author

We learn two things about the author from verse 1.

The author was Paul!

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...

Paul was the author of Ephesians. Yet, he had a complicated relationship with Ephesus. You can read about it in Acts 19-20.

When he arrived in Ephesus in 52 AD, one of the first things he did was find the local synagogue and proclaim that Jesus was the Christ. He did this for three months. Unfortunately, the pushback was so strong that he was forced to leave the synagogue and move to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. We pick up the story in Acts 19.

Acts 19:10-12 (ESV) — 10 This (preaching in the hall of Tyrannus) continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. 11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

God did amazing things through Paul in Ephesus.

Paul left Ephesus around 55 A.D., right after his limbs were almost torn off in a riot. More on that in a moment. Roughly 6-7 years later, around 61-62 AD, Paul wrote to the Ephesians under house arrest in Rome.

Unlike many of his other letters, Paul is not writing to address a specific situation. This makes it easier for every church from every generation to pull timeless truths from this letter, hence the sermon series title.

What else do we know about the author???

The author was Paul!

The author was an apostle!

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Several years before Paul wrote this letter, an uneducated man named Stephen preached a bold sermon before a crowd of angry Jews in Jerusalem. What Stephen said about Jesus Christ made them so mad, that they tackled him after the sermon and dragged him outside of the city throwing him to the ground.

They all took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a man named Saul. Why? They probably did not want to get blood on them. Each man picked up a large stone and threw it at Stephen's head. Why? They wanted him dead. You have to really hate someone to crush their skull with a rock.

While the rocks rained down on Stephen, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." According to Acts 7, Saul looked on approvingly.

After Stephen was murdered, this man named Saul went from house to house, dragging Christians into prison for the crime of believing in the Christ.

Acts 9:1–6 (ESV) — **1** But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and 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. **3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4** And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” **5** And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

Clearly Paul did not choose Christ.
Clearly Paul did not choose to be an apostle.

Paul wanted to kill Christians. God wanted to save Paul.

Which is why **Ephesians 1:1** says, “**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,**”

“the will of God” concerning salvation is mentioned four times in the next 11 verses. (1,5,9,11)

It was God’s will to convert Paul and call him to be an apostle.

Application:

Just like Paul, we are Christians by the will of God.

Paul never lost sight of this. As a result, he was constantly amazed by grace (Eph. 3:8).

We are not Christians because we are smarter, wiser, or more spiritually in tune than others. We are Christians because God chose us in him before the foundation of the world (more on this in the coming weeks).

This means that we have no right to look down on others who are less spiritual than ourselves, especially non-Christians.

Furthermore, if God can convert Saul, God can convert anyone. Right now, in your circle of friends and acquaintances, who seems too hostile to Christianity to ever be converted? Paul reminds us that anyone can be converted, if it is God’s will.

Don’t stop praying, don’t stop loving, anyone can be converted “by the will of God.”

Paul is an apostle by “the will of God.”

Why does Paul mention his apostleship?

This enhances his authority with the Ephesians. As an apostle Paul was directly commissioned by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel and write letters to Christians. (Gal. 1:1; Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1; Acts 9:1-30; 22:1-21; 26:1-23)

This means that the words of Paul in the 13 letters of Paul are the very words of God. How? Organic inspiration (explain). This means that the views of this letter are not merely the views of a dead guy named Paul

who lived a long time ago. The words of this letter are the very words of God. Therefore, they must be obeyed!!!

We must remember this as we work through this letter, since Paul will say things that may offend us (this letter is full of controversial topics).

We have looked at the author of this letter. What about the audience? This brings us to the second point.

First, the author

Second, the audience

We learn two things about the audience.

The audience was Ephesian!

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

The ancient city of Ephesus was a spectacular port city, located on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. Centuries after Paul, the city was abandoned due to a silted up harbor and a devastating earthquake.

By the time Paul arrived in 52 AD it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (only Rome and Alexandria were larger) and at least 500 years old.

It was known as the leading city of the richest region of the Roman Empire filled with wealth, culture, diversity, and pride.

Ephesus boasted the largest of all Greek open-air theaters holding twenty-five thousand spectators. There was also stadium for chariot races and fights with animals. (J. Boice)

During the time of Paul, it had a population of roughly 200,000 people with a Jewish population of 10-20,000.

The pride and joy of the city was the temple of the goddess Artemis (also called Diana). Artemis was the goddess of fertility. As a result, her temple housed hundreds of temple prostitutes.

The temple to Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, boasting 60-foot columns. Twice a week, every week, a parade marched throughout the entire city in honor of Artemis.

One commentator writes,

“The influence of this goddess and the cult attached to her permeated every area of life for those who lived in this city. The temple was the major banking center for the city, her image adorned the coinage, a month of the year was named after her, Olympic-style games were held in her honor (called the Artemisia), and she was trusted as the guardian and protector of the city.” (Arnold)

This explains what happened in Acts 19.

Illustration:

Do you remember this story?

Paul's preaching was so effective that scores of people abandoned their pagan roots and stopped buying little silver statues of Artemis. All the converts built a huge bonfire and burned their sorcery books. The value of these books was 50,000 silver pieces according to Acts 19:19 (ten million dollars in today wages).

One man named Demetrius, a silver smith who made silver shrines of Artemis, was furious. He gathered together all the local silversmiths. And said,

"Guys, this guy named Paul is destroying our business and dishonoring our goddess Artemis. We need to stop him." When they heard this, Acts 19 says, "they were enraged." (all the pot shops and porn shops in town)

They enraged mob tracked down Paul's companions and dragged them into the open-air theatre (that sat 25,000 people) and shouted for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

The text says, the whole city was involved!!! Imagine the Spokane arena (but twice as big) filled with 25,000 crazy worshippers of Artemis crying out for your blood.

Paul's friends begged him not to go into the theater to rescue his coworkers because they feared that the mob would tear him to pieces, literally.

This gives you a feel for the religious zeal of the Ephesians.

The audience was Ephesian. In addition...

The audience were saints.

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Paul refers to the Christians in the churches in Ephesus as "the saints." In light of what I just said about the Ephesians this was amazing. This would be like someone saying today...

The saints in North Korea.

The saints in Las Vegas.

The saints working for HBO.

What is a saint?

Illustration:

"In the Roman Catholic Church, a saint is a particularly holy person who is... nominated for the position. Then a trial is held in which one advocate pleads the virtues of the nominee (showing among other things that he or she was responsible for at least one miracle) and another advocate, called "the Devil's Advocate," tries to tear the person down. When the person's worthiness is properly established, he or she is officially declared a saint. (J. Boice)

But when Paul calls his audience saints, he is not referring to an elite group of special forces Christians. You know the people who read their Bibles every day, give all their stuff away, and are constantly talking about Jesus.

He is talking about all Christians. Every Christian is a saint. Paul frequently uses the terms saint as a synonym for a Christian (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2).

This means that every Christian is a saint and every saint is a Christian.

The word saint means to be set apart, holy, or consecrated. Every Single Christian is holy, set apart, or consecrated to God.

How? Let's go back to verse 1.

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

We don't become saints by doing a bunch of things (elaborate). We become saints the moment we believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes, **"To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus"**

The Greek word for faithful (*pistos*) has a large semantic range and can mean believer or faithful. Most scholars agree that "believers in Christ Jesus" makes the most sense. Why?

First, in the rest of Paul's writings being faithful is not the basis for being a saint, faith in Christ is!

Second, it is hard to know what it means to be "faithful in Christ Jesus." But it is very clear what it means to believe in Christ.

Third, the word *pistos* is translated as believers/believing in many other places in the NT... 2 Cor. 6:15, 1 Tim. 4:10, 12; 5:16; 6:2; Tit. 1:6; John 20:27.

"Then he 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, but believe." (John 20:27, ESV)

Application:

What is the point?

We become saints by believing in Jesus Christ.

According to Martyn Lloyd Jones, believing in Jesus Christ is the most fundamental aspect of being a Christian.

We are not Christians because we are nice, decent, upstanding citizens (some of us aren't). We are Christians first and foremost because we believe certain things about Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, if you are a Christian you are just as saintly as Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Jesus Christ himself.

Why? When you believe in Jesus Christ you are wrapped in his robes of perfect spotless righteousness. From that moment on you are as saintly as Jesus Christ himself.

Sure, you may struggle with anxiety, depression, pride, greed, and lust, but you are still a saint since you are united to Christ.

Here is the bottom line, the Ephesian Christians were saints because of God's activity, not theirs. This brings us to the last point.

The author

The audience

Third, the activity of God

We learn two things about the activity of God from verse 2.

How does God act???

God acts by extending grace!

Ephesians 1:2 (ESV) — 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul prays for God to extend grace to the Ephesians.

Paul loves grace. The word grace appears 95 times in Paul's letters. Grace is the heart and soul of Christianity.

In Ephesians we learn that-

We are saved to display the glory of God's grace (Eph. 1:6, Eph. 2:7)

We are redeemed by the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7, 2:5)

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8)

Paul was made a minister of the gospel by grace (Eph. 3:7-8)

Paul begins and ends this letter with a word of grace.

Ephesians 1:2 (ESV) — 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 6:24 (ESV) — 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Paul was obsessed with grace. We should be too!!!

Grace makes Christianity utterly unique among world religions.

Illustration:

“During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. **Incarnation**? Other religions had different versions of gods' appearing in human form. **Resurrection**? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "**What's the rumpus about?**" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "**Oh, that's easy. It's grace.**"

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree... The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law -- each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional." (Yancey, what is so amazing about grace, p. 45)

What is grace? Grace is God's favor freely given to those who deserve God's judgment. (freely is the key word)

We can't earn God's love.
We can't earn God's acceptance.
We can't earn God's forgiveness.

He gives it to us freely, when we repentant and believe. This is grace!!!

God acts by extending grace! How else does God act?

God acts by extending peace!

Ephesians 1:2 (ESV) — 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God provides objective and subjective peace. What do I mean?

Objective peace...

According to Ephesians chapter 2, all non-Christians are considered enemies of God, making them objects of God's righteous wrath. Instead of peace between God and unredeemed man there is hostility. Why? Our sin separates us from God. When we sin, we dishonor his name.

God the father did not like being unreconciled to sinful humanity so he sent his own son to die in their place so that their sins could be removed, so that he could restore relationship with us.

God the father has made peace with humanity through the death of his own son.

Romans 5:1 (ESV) — 1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know this peace? This is objective peace.

God also provides subjective peace. Paul writes about this peace in Philippians.

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV) — 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Are you anxious about money, your job, your health, our nation, the economy, your marriage, schooling your children, etc...

Jesus Christ is the prince of peace. He can bring subjective inner peace when the world around us is raging.

H. P. Spafford, experienced this peace when personal tragedy struck his family. First, he lost all of his wealth in the great Chicago fire. Then, his four-year-old son died tragically. To make things worse, a short

while later, his four young daughters drowned in the Atlantic Ocean when their ship sank on the way to London. Despite all of that, he wrote these famous words.

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Conclusion:

God wants to extend grace and peace to you. In one sense these two words sum up the entire message of the letter to the Ephesians. God has saved us by his grace and Jesus has made peace between God and man. We will spend the next 40 weeks unpacking the implications of these great truths.

Have you experienced God’s grace and God’s peace? You can. To experience these things, you need to start by admitting that you need His grace and you need His peace. Will you do that this morning? Let’s pray together.