

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (17-9-1995 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 1:1-2
Author, Readers, Greetings

Introduction

Beginning series on Epistle to the Ephesians. Wonderfully concise summary of Christian message. No one can read this epistle without being moved to wonder and worship and be challenged to consistency of life. Many readers have been brought to faith through it, others have had minds opened to greatness of God and immensity of His purposes. Others still have been stirred up to good works while still others have been stimulated to appropriate the resources available in Christ Jesus.

It was John Calvin's favourite letter. Others have described it as "The Queen of Epistles", or the "crown and climax of Paul's writings", "most sparkling gem in midst of jewels". Very contemporary message to church in days of disintegration and social collapse. Book which brings us face to face with God – who He is and what He has done. Glory and greatness of God. Puts us in our place. Humbles us. Yet makes clear the wonder of belonging to Him, being taken hold of by Him and enriched with His endless resources in Christ Jesus.

Written towards end of the apostle's life, aged 61 or 62, when Paul was shut up in prison in Rome, the centre of the Empire, with his future unknown and very uncertain. Two halves – doctrine and ethics. Right belief and right behaviour. What we are and how we should live.

Today only dealing with introduction of verses 1 & 2. We get very impatient with introductions, think they are unimportant, we want to get into the middle of the book, to rush the preliminaries to get to the meat. This is a profound mistake. Opening words are important, set the scene and indicate significance of what is to follow.

Paul takes up the usual style of letter writing in classical times. Does not begin with the address, date, and "Dear so & so.." But instead he starts by naming the author, readers, and with "Grace and peace..." or similar statement, wishing people well. Paul takes this common style but baptizes it into Christ. Gives introduction in Christian terms and Christian emphasis. Conventional greeting is lifted up and transformed into Christian benediction.

The Author of the Epistle

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God (Ephesians 1:1a). Specially chosen messenger, called and sent to preach message of God with His authority. Directly called by Christ, having seen Him after resurrection, and sent as His representative. In a unique sense, Paul's writings and message were at the foundation of the Christian church. He had not volunteered. Not chosen the job out of a dozen he could have done. A church committee did not appoint him. He was there because God chose him, intervened in his life. **God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me that I might preach him** (Galatians 1:15,16).

Christian salvation, Christian ministry, Christian service - always begin with God, and have roots in His eternal purposes, God's choosing, God's calling, God's enabling. This should lead us to worship and thank Him, and confess our ignorance, smallness and frailty.

So when we read this epistle, we listen with attention and humility. Not Paul's opinion, not a man ventilating his ideas or opinions, or even just a great teacher dropping pearls of wisdom. But an apostle by the will of God, with Christ's authority, Christ's truth. It is God who is speaking here.

This does not just apply to Ephesians, but to whole of New Testament. All were written by apostles or men from the apostolic circle. Unique authority of 27 books in New Testament canon. Written under special inspiration of Holy Spirit. Along with the Old Testament, they provide sufficient rule for all matters of faith and conduct. This is where we part company from many others, e.g. Roman Catholicism, which says that the tradition of the church is of equal authority with the Bible; the Mormons who believe God spoke through Joseph Smith in 1823, and who put the Book of Mormon on a level with the Bible.

Our faith is based on apostolic writings which came into being by the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Faith once delivered to saints in New Testament, and it is sufficient and once for all given. Apostolic office was unique and confined to first century. No successors to give us new truths in addition to Scripture. We have a "Sufficient" Saviour in Christ, and a "Sufficient" guide in the Scriptures.

So we receive their teaching, **not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God which is at work in you who believe** (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The Readers of the Epistle

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1b). Some early manuscripts do not contain "in Ephesus". Normal explanation – this letter was to Ephesus but also a circular letter to a number of other Christian churches in Asia. The "in Ephesus" may have been added since Ephesus was the main Asian city. The main concern is that the readers are described as "saints" and "faithful". This letter is being sent to believers. It is wrong to take these words and apply them to everyone. This epistle, with all its wonderful blessings, is only for certain people.

No word in the New Testament has been more misunderstood than "saints". Some think it applies to special group of people with special holiness, different from everyone else. They are depicted in church stained glass windows with pasty faces, thin hands and halos. They have "St." before their name. This whole theory was given classic expression in Roman Catholicism. This outlook has been very influential, and even those from Protestant backgrounds have been confused by the meaning.

In the New Testament, all Christians are "saints", not just a special rarefied few, not a special elite group. $\alpha\gamma\iota\omicron\varsigma$ means "separated to God". Belonging to God. Set apart for His use. $\alpha\gamma\iota\alpha\zeta\omega$ means "sanctify". Set apart for God, to fulfil His purpose and to reflect His character. Segregated and taken out of the world to be the Lord's. The

Christian is in one sense like all other men, looks like any other human being, has a house like others, a job like others, but he is different. Not just “good living” or church goes, but he is essentially different – he belongs to the Lord, is cleansed from sin, enjoys fellowship with God. Outlook is entirely different from the world’s. Conversation and interests are all different.

Worth remembering that Ephesus and neighbourhood was thoroughly pagan, and full of everything opposed to God. But Gospel took root. Church was planted, lives were changed, cleansed and dedicated to God. Why? Because the Gospel is not human teaching or religious ideas, but **the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes** (Romans 1:16).

Never despair of a relative ever being converted. If the Gospel could touch and change lives in Ephesus and Corinth, it can take hold of the most hopeless case and turn him into a saint.

Then “faithful” – full of faith. Very definite ideas about the Lord Jesus Christ, and having committed lives and surrendered their very beings to Him to be saved. Then there is, apart from this active form of word, a passive meaning – because they were committed to Christ, they were reliable, dependable, could be trusted, totally loyal, not swayed. The active and the passive go together – full of faith in Christ, and totally loyal to Him.

The believers in Ephesus and elsewhere in the district belonged to the Lord, were separated unto Him, different from rest of people where they lived, full of faith in Christ and totally reliable to Him and in their daily lives. All this was possible because they were “in Christ Jesus”. This phrase used 35 times in Ephesians – more than in any other Epistle. In vital union, branches in the vine, members in His body, part of Christ, belonging to Christ, in union with Christ.

Questions must arise from this passage. Am I a “saint”? Am I “faithful”? Am I “In Christ Jesus”?

Greetings of the Epistle

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:2). Wishes these people to enjoy grace and peace. How easily these words trip off tongue, but if we pause and think of them, how powerful, significant and explosive they are.

God’s “grace” is referred to 12 times in the epistle. God’s utterly undeserved mercy in saving them, enabling them to live Christian life and empowering them for service. The hymn writer says

*“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me”*

Not till we see that how wretched we are, that we understand grace and how amazing it is. Unconverted man stands in middle of his life and talks about what God owes him – health, prosperity, heaven when he dies. In actual fact, God owes us nothing – except damnation. We are condemned rebels, deserving nothing. God’s treatment of us is totally undeserved and unmerited. By giving the Lord Jesus to die on the Cross,

working in our lives to bring us to Him, sustaining us through trials and temptations of life, enabling us to service, bringing us safely to heaven – all by grace. **In accordance with the riches of God's grace** (Ephesians 1:7), **The incomparable riches of his grace** (Ephesians 2:7) – he gives generously – not just the barest amount.

If grace is the beginning, peace is the end. If grace is the source, peace is the estuary. When grace touches and sustains lives, we then have peace. Man or woman at odds with God – rebelling, hating, knowing inner conflict. Grace brings peace with God, then leads to inner peace within soul. When self rules in the life, there is confusion and disharmony. But this confusion gives way to peace when grace rules the life and we are subdued by it. Head of a large mental hospital once said, “I could discharge one half of my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness of sins”.

We need grace and peace more than anything else. The unsaved need grace that leads to peace with God. The saved need more grace to know a deepening growing peace of God.

Only one source of these blessings – God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, his coequal and coeternal Son. Find these enormous blessings in no other place. Grace which saves, cleanses and empowers, and peace which passes all understanding and which guards the heart is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. If you do not know them and are not in a relationship with them, you have yet to know grace and peace.

Conclusion

We are impatient with introductions, but it is a pity if we are impatient here. Paul draws attention to wonderful and life-changing truths – God is calling men and revealing truth to men. Cleansing from defilement, renewing life, imparting priceless gift of peace. Attention to relationships with Him: “Saint” – separated unto Him; Faithful – full of faith in Christ and totally loyal to Him.

This should cause us to search our spiritual state. Do we react and resist? Or is this a dimension to life I know nothing about? The first step is to give self to Him.