

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Grace and Peace

Ephesians 1:1-2

Intro: Paul's letter to the Ephesians has been heralded by commentators and theologians for some time now, and rightly so. It has been called "the queen of the Epistles," "the divinest composition of man," "the crown of Paulinism," the "Epistle of the Ascension" and even "the Grand Canyon of Scripture." One scholar has dubbed it the "Waterloo of commentators." All of these rightly identify the value of this letter and as such are rightly earned. As Paul weaves through the various doctrines of Christianity, he plumbs the deepest depths and scales the highest peaks in a seemingly effortless treatise on the reality of the Christian experience. But this letter wasn't meant to be upheld as an untouchable divine artifact or a masterpiece to be viewed behind glass; it was meant to be read, understood and incorporated into each believer's life. As wonderful and profound as the Book of Ephesians is, it is also a practical guide to Christian living as it exists and is experienced within the setting of the church.

For all its accolades, this letter is better explained and understood as a miniature doctrine of the church, a short course in what theologians call ecclesiology, and there's rarely been a greater need for a sound doctrine on the church than today. There's mass confusion about what the church is supposed to be in our time, especially among so-called evangelical Christians. The problem's not with biblical terminology. Evangelicals know that the church is "the body of Christ," "the bride of Christ," a "temple not made with hands," a "fellowship," and such things. But for many people those are just slogans. The important questions have to do with how the church comes into being what the church is for. Does the church just exist to reach others with the gospel? Does it exist only to make us happy? Or is there some other, greater plan involved; something even the angels desire to look into ([Eph 3:10-11](#)).

In our modern church environment when so much emphasis is placed on spiritual experience or meeting the "felt needs" of "seekers" and adjusting the programs, purposes and public proclamations of the church to focus on these things, we seem to have lost our way from the biblical purpose of the church. Not to put too fine a point on it but looking at modern church life, at

least in the Western World, it seems our problem is that we are too man-centered. We tend to think of the church as being created by us and managed by us and for our needs, rather than seeing it as being created by God - for the glory of God.

This is what makes the Book of Ephesians so valuable. Ephesians is about the church. But the place it begins is with the work of the divine Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—bringing it into being. This is what the 1st chapter is about. It reveals the Father's work in choosing and predestining individuals to become His sons and daughters through the work of Christ, and this before the foundation of the world. It tells of the Son's work of redeeming these elect ones by His death on the cross, by which they receive forgiveness of sins. It also tells of the Spirit's work in drawing these elect people to Christ and sealing them as a guarantee of their ultimate deliverance from sin's power. All to the praise of God's glory! Ch1 ends with a prayer that the church might achieve its full potential in glorifying Christ. (22-23).

That is good biblical ecclesiology, a doctrine of the church that begins with God and his work and ends, as all things eventually will end, with God's glory. After this **ch2** deals with the formation of the church from the perspective of the individual, who was dead in transgressions and sins but who's been made spiritually alive by God and brought into the new community with others who have been similarly regenerated. So even in **ch2**, though Paul's now dealing with the church from man's viewpoint, the emphasis is still on God and His work. It's God who calls us to faith, God who regenerates, and God who glorifies. This theme carries on through the rest of the letter as Paul explores how the church is to function, how Christians are to live, and how believers are to fight in spiritual warfare. Nothing is as helpful for correcting the abuses in today's church and enabling believers to recover the church's self-understanding and sense of direction as a careful study of this letter.

As profound as it is, we must not miss the simple clarity of this letter. Ephesians is profound, not because of the mysterious nature of its unfathomable deep secrets, but for the clear way it presents the most basic Christian truths. There's nothing in Ephesians that's not taught elsewhere. One scholar has identified 27 distinct doctrines in this book and not one of them is unique to Ephesians. They're just basic Christianity. The great

appeal of the book is that it presents the basic doctrines of Christianity comprehensively and clearly in a way that both challenges and uplifts the reader at the same time. In other words, it's practical! In it we're told who we are, how we came to be as we are, what we shall be, and what we must do now in light of that destiny. John R. W. Stott said, "The whole letter is thus a magnificent combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, Christian faith and Christian life, what God has done through Christ and what we must be and do in consequence."

There's an interesting feature of Ephesians that the earliest manuscripts of the letter don't have the word "Ephesus" in the first verse. This may be because Ephesians was a circular letter that Paul wrote to a number of churches in Asia Minor and the various copies of the letter would have had names of different cities as their destinations: Smyrna, Pergamon, Laodicea, and so on. This empty space universalizes the letter and provides a helpful exercise. Before we begin our study of Ephesians, insert the name of our church in the empty space in **v1** and read everything in the letter as the explicit word of God to us and our church. If so, our understanding of the work of God in us and our church will be greatly strengthened and we will be moved to seek God's glory as our chief end in life and not just our own well-being or happiness.

The letter is addressed to the Ephesians and we know from the record of Paul's travels in Acts that he spent 2 years in Ephesus on his 3rd missionary journey (**Acts 19:10**). This letter was written from prison, presumably from Rome, and was originally intended as a circular letter for all the 7 churches of Asia established by Paul or his followers during the time of his ministry in Ephesus. It's likely that Ephesus became identified with this epistle because it was the chief city in that region.

What was Ephesus like? The city was the capital of proconsular Asia and was the political and commercial center of a large and prosperous region. That's why Paul spent so much time there. Because of its large port, the city became the chief communication and commercial link between Rome and the East. Merchants flocked to it. It was a melting pot of nations and ethnic groups. In Paul's day Ephesus played a role not unlike that of Venice in the Middle Ages or New York City today.

Ephesus boasted the largest of all Greek open-air theaters (held 25K). It

also had a stadium for chariot races. But, the main attraction in Ephesus was the great temple to Diana. It was considered 1 of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was 4 times the size of the Parthenon in Athens and housed the statue of Diana, believed to have come down from heaven. This temple was a depository for huge amounts of treasure and was, in effect, the bank of Asia. It was served by hundreds of the priestesses of Diana, who were temple prostitutes. To this city the apostle Paul came to preach. In this city God was pleased to establish a faithful church. To the Christians of this city, attempting to live for God in the midst of utter paganism, the apostle directs this letter.

1 – If Paul was writing this letter during his imprisonment in Rome then he had already achieved a great deal in his ministry for Christ's kingdom. He could've begun this letter by listing his many accomplishments or by reminding them of what he had personally endured to bring the gospel of Christ to Asia. Paul doesn't do this. Instead, he introduces himself simply as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

An apostle was one appointed by the Lord to be a recipient and authenticator of the NT revelation. As Paul said his 1st letter to the Corinthians, he was one who spoke "not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (**1 Cor 2:13**). This is important because it means that this book written by Paul is not to be regarded as other books authored by mere men or women but as God's own revelation. It's from God. Thus it's all true; it speaks with authority.

But, we should take note that Paul's emphasis here doesn't lie so much on the fact that he was an apostle, as wonderful as that was, but on how he became one. It wasn't by his own will but by the will of God. Indeed, if it had not been for God's sovereign and effective will, Paul wouldn't only have not been an apostle, he wouldn't even have been a Christian. Left to himself apart from the grace of God, he fought against God and tried to destroy His church.

But this is true of all of us. The gospel is a wonderful thing. It's the message of life in Christ. But however wonderful the gospel may be, we would never have responded to it or have become a part of the marvelous new creation of the church if God hadn't first called us from sin to Christ, just as Jesus called dead Lazarus from the tomb. If we're going to discuss the basics of

the gospel, as Ephesians does, we must start at this point relate everything in our study to God. God called Paul. He called the Christians at Ephesus. He calls us, if we are truly Christians. The message of the Bible is designed to bring us back to God, to humble us before God, and to enable us to see our true relationship to Him and this is the great theme of this epistle. It's also the theme of the 2nd half of v1

Paul turns now to his readers, identifying them as the saints in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus. This phrase provides 3 definitions of believers, what's been called the irreducible minimum of what constitutes a Christian.

1) Christians are saints. No word in the NT has suffered more abuse in the modern vernacular than this word has. To the vast majority of "religious" people, all saints are dead people who have achieved such spiritual eminence that they've been given the special title of saint. Even the dictionary defines a saint as a "person officially recognized for holiness of life." Who makes this official recognition? Usually some religious body and the process by which a person becomes a saint is referred to as canonization. The deceased person's life is carefully examined to see whether they qualify for sainthood. If their character and conduct are found to be above reproach and if they've worked at least 2 miracles then they're qualified to be made a saint.

As official and technical as this procedure sounds, we don't find it authorized anywhere in the Bible and yet, 9 times in this brief letter, Paul addresses his readers as saints. Clearly, these saints are alive – though they had previously been dead in trespasses and sins (2:1). It's also clear that they had never performed any miracles, though they had all experienced the miracle of new birth by trusting in Christ as their Savior.

In the Bible to be a saint means to be set apart. It's something God does quite apart from human merit. We see this meaning of the word in Exodus where Moses was instructed to sanctify the laver and the altar of the tabernacle. He was to make saints of them. This doesn't mean that in some miraculous way Moses changed the nature of the material that made up the laver or the stones that made up the altar. They didn't become holier. It only means that he set them apart for a special, sacred use in the tabernacle service. In the same way, a Christian is set apart when God reaches down through the person and power of the Holy Spirit, regenerates them and

draws them into the company of God's church.

Every Christian is a saint, and every saint is a Christian. Also, every true Christian is in some sense separated from the world. Not taken out of the world. That's not how God operates. It means we're removed from it in the sense of not really belonging to the world any longer. The believer is in the world physically but not of the world spiritually. Like a scuba diver, they exist in an alien environment because they possess special equipment – the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. It's through the Spirit's power that the Christian is able to function in this world. If we are truly Christ's, we have a new nature, a new set of loyalties, and a new agenda. We belong to a different kingdom.

2) Christians are faithful. In using this term, Paul has 2 ideas in mind. The first and primary meaning of faithful is exercising faith. Meaning, a Christian is one who's heard the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ and has then exercised faith in that gospel or believed it. This faith has 3 elements. 1st, there's an intellectual element. Faith involves content. For faith to exist, that content must be proclaimed and understood. 2nd, there's an emotional element. The content that's understood, if it's understood rightly, isn't something that can be simply passed off as interesting but of little importance. It involves the death of the very Son of God for me, a sinner. Faith at this level warms the heart and draws forth a loving response to God, who has revealed himself in Christ. 3rd, there's a volitional element. Having perceived and understood the gospel and having been affected by it, the true Christian now makes a personal commitment to Christ who died for him.

The second meaning of faithful is "to continue in faith" or "to keep the faith." It involves the idea of perseverance in the Christian life, enduring to the end. Usually, when Christians talk about the perseverance of the saints, they mean the perseverance of God with His saints. They say the only reason why any of us are ever able to stand firm to the end is that God is faithful to us. That is true! But it's also true that exactly because God perseveres with us, we also must persevere. We must be faithful. Thus, it's also accurate to say that a Christian is one who's characterized by a full faith to the very end of their life.

3) Christians are in Christ. The phrases in Christ, in Him, or the equivalent

occur 9 times just in 1:3-23. They occur 164 times in all Paul's writings. The phrases mean more than just believing on Christ or being saved by His atonement. They mean being joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of Him is also true for us. On this basis Paul goes so far as to say that God has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6). This is a difficult concept, and the Bible uses several images to teach it to us: the union of man and wife in marriage (5:22-33), the union of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17), the completeness of a spiritual temple in which Christ is the foundation and we the individual stones (2:20-22), the union of the head and other members of the body in one organism (1 Cor 12:12-27).

Whether we understand it or not, union with Christ is in one sense the very essence of salvation. Apart from Christ our condition is absolutely hopeless but in Christ our condition is glorious to the extreme.

2 – These last words of Paul's introduction can be applied to what we've already said in this way. This letter was clearly directed to the Christians at Ephesus, which means these faithful saints, who were on the one hand in Christ, were nevertheless also in the world—in Ephesus—and were obligated to live for Christ there. In the same way we must live for Christ in our city, neighborhood, school, workplace or wherever God has planted us. And our world is just like Ephesus! Was Ephesus crassly commercial and materialistic? So is our town. Was it pagan, preoccupied with sex, superstitious? So is ours. What can keep Christian people faithful to God in such environments? What can enable them to be saintly continually?

There's just 1 answer; what Paul speaks of here: grace and peace, and particularly grace from God the Father. As the book goes on we're going to learn what we should be in this world. But from the very start there's no mystery about how we are to be it—by the will and strength of God, Who alone can help us. As the believer is in Christ they are able to draw on Christ for their own daily living. We have no other strength, but by His grace we can triumph. 😊