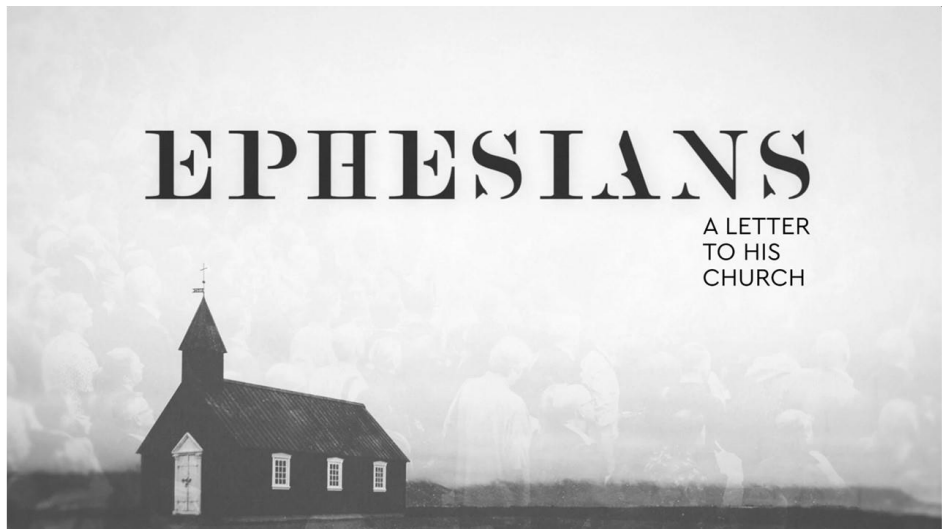


“Ephesians: A Letter to His Church”

- Ephesians 1 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
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Ephesians 1 - Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Ephesus had a population of **more than 250,000** in the 1st century BC, which made it the second largest city in the world. The city was famous for many things, not the least being the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. That false temple was destroyed in 401 AD by a mob led by St. John Chrysostom, a very righteous man who is said to have had a great preaching gift and seriously held the line to biblical teaching.

The first Christian community in Ephesus was established by the apostle John but grew to power under the ministry of Paul. Paul came in to the city and stayed for about three and a half years. Acts gives us the account of the jeweler Demetrius and others who earned a living by selling and making silver statues of Mother Goddess Artemis, who became quite distressed at the spread of Christianity in what they saw as their turf. Demetrius and his colleagues provoked thousands of people and met with them in the Ephesus theatre... a huge stadium that could hold 25,000, and started chanting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” Paul wanted to face the crowd but disciples would not let him. Finally, the city clerk announced that the courts were open for people who had a complaint and dispersed the crowd.

In the time of Paul, Ephesus was already a powerful and influential city. Within its realm lay all of the wonder as well as the sin that one would find in a major city today. It contained some of the finest arts and literature of its time, yet replete with all the fleshly indulgencies that trail behind prosperity and self-glorification. The occult and magic were big there, and there was a thirst for the supernatural and a longing for deity and religion, albeit like today, only one that fits within man’s parameters.

Still, Ephesus was a very “spiritual” city. But the search and the plethora of practice led to a multitude of religious spectrum. Indeed, it seemed everyone was religious in Ephesus. Ephesus’ “top god” was the goddess Diana. Diana was the false goddess of sex and fertility, which led to great sexual perversion. Throughout Ephesus you could find the multi-breasted statues of Diana (or “Artimus”) the “goddess of sex.”

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians begins from the presupposition that all true believers are in a spiritual battle every day of their lives until they are taken home. We use various vernacular phrases to encompass that scenario...spiritual warfare, trials, testing, and the like. But it all boils down to one overwhelming principle; we can never quit, never rest, never let down our guard. Indeed, in this matter...as well as the atmosphere in Ephesus overall, we can receive this letter to be as current today as the day it was written!

It is important for us to know that God has not just left us to struggle in the quagmire of this issue, but has “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...” (2 Peter 1:3). All that we need to “walk in the Spirit” every day and continually grow in maturity, and minister for the gospel and kingdom. The tools for success’ have been given to us, but we must be willing to step forward and ‘put on the armor’ God has provided for us, and then move out of our ‘realm of comfort’ and go to war! Christ Himself declared in the text of John 16:33 that “...in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

For everyone that is passionate for Jesus *and His Kingdom*, this letter is to you. Because if we are committed to Him we will...before anything else, seek to serve and minister to a lost world and to a brotherhood of community. We must realize that God wants to do great things in and through each one of us...not just some special elite corp of clergy. Paul will remind us in this letter that “*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”

I wonder though how many of us are even now still ‘foggy’ as to the spiritual resources that are available to us as children of the light? How many of us are comfortable in our religious church lives and have reached a perceived state of spiritual retirement from forward motion? Perhaps our understanding ceased at the concept of “life eternal,” and we never fully took hold of Christ’s desire that we also “live abundantly.” How many more took the idea of “abundantly” as the embrace of worldly pleasures and possessions, instead of the grand manifest of that which we have corporately and individually been called to by Christ?

John 10:10 reminds us that “Jesus came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” This is what we would call “living large.” But we must not misunderstand this. It doesn’t say we will **receive** abundantly...that is the grave and catastrophic false doctrine of much of the western church today. A doctrine that believes God wants us as reborn children to bask in the influence and affluence of this world as some sort of bonus or ‘reward’ for giving up the road of death and eternal hell. What God is calling us to involves much more than living in comfort and having plentiful cash and possessions!

All born again believers today live in the beginning phase of our eternal life, but so many of us fail to ever come to experience the abundant life that God wants for us because we are waiting for it to be delivered effortlessly to us by an Amazon delivery truck. We just frankly don’t know this “life abundantly.” We are plagued by marital struggles, familial disarray, emotional distress, physical woes due to our western prosperity, financial debt, etc. All in all, such joy and purpose remain elusive to us. What we know instead is a life of struggle.

Colossians 2:6... “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” A person becomes an **eternal life believer** as he places his faith in Christ to redeem Him from sin and its penalty. But we gain **abundant life** as we exercise that same faith in the simplicity and practice of our everyday living. Abundant life has to do with the way we live out our lives after our salvation. Eternal life is based on the finished work of Christ that was completed through the cross and resurrection, but our **abundant** life is based on the present work of Christ through the Holy Spirit operating in that same believer’s life.

Both salvation’s eternal life and the subsequent abundant life are “**lived** by faith.” We must forever remember that faith is an **active** word...something that is actually **lived out** not just **believed**. How we respond to Christ...how we live out the reception and obedience to our new salvation will determine the level of “abundance” in our individual lives.

The book of Ephesians addresses this “abundant life” that is available to all those who are born again. This letter therefore, from the very beginning is addressed to the “saints”...to those who are “faithful in Christ Jesus.” Just where exactly we stand as to that label is addressed by Paul in the first three chapters of this letter.

The central tenant of this letter is the two words “in Christ.” 90 times it occurs in this letter. The idea is therefore overwhelming presented herein: *all that we are, all that have, all that can be as a believer, is found in Him.* This premise does not speak of head knowledge or works and effort on our part, but rather a focus and center upon living and breathing in the manifest presence of Christ.

This is wholly accomplished through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. However, we often grasp the principle of Him *living in us*, but fail miserably in the embrace of us *living in Him*. That is all about what John 15 calls the “abiding life.” John 15:4-5 says: “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*”

* It is understood that Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian church member while imprisoned in Rome. It is known as the first of his “prison epistles.” It is crucial to our grasp of this letter to understand that Paul is not writing from a luxurious villa on the Italian coastline. He was in *prison*, and in far worse conditions than any prison situation here in America. Despite such, his letter is all about abundant living in Christ! We cannot ignore that fact! It would not be a situation that **we** would readily consider “abundant living.” But that is because we fail to understand so often what that really means; for we think only in worldly and earthly terms.

Paul was in love. He was in love with Christ, and love changes everything in our understanding. My hope and prayer is that we all come to know such a love in our own lives. Paul uses the word “grace” 12 times in this letter. A fitting echo to the our previous book of study Galatians. Ephesians is the “reply” to Galatians...the *application* of God’s grace in our lives every day. Ephesians leaves the realm of the cerebral and enters the practical. The idea that if we are indeed covered by God’s grace in salvation *as well as in our living*, then how does it play out in real life; the everyday of our lives?

* When Paul planted the church in Ephesus, he spent three years there doing so. Pastors always think their community is “tough plowing” spiritually speaking. But few if any of us can compare to the worldly environment that was present in Ephesus. Yet there clearly was...*against all human odds*, a great spiritual awakening there. Many *of us*, can relate on some level when it comes to our own stories...corporate and individual; how God planted and grew a great spiritual movement here around us, and graciously let each one of us have a taste. It all was so inexplicable. How did this happen?

Acts 19 tells us how that small early church was baptized in the Holy Spirit and how the people gathered and publicly burnt their “how to” books on black magic. Paul said that after two years that no one in Asia had not heard the gospel. The church in Ephesus had ‘exploded onto the scene.’ Yet despite this incredible beginning, Paul some years later would tell the Ephesian elders that “fierce wolves would rise up...*even from amongst their very ranks*,” and would try to destroy them and this great move of the spirit that was going on there.

Later, Timothy...a latter pastor in the Ephesian church, was warned by Paul to “*watch your doctrine...preach the word...don’t veer from the path.*” Paul felt even compelled to warn this church that... “*I have preached the whole gospel to you and I have not flinched from any of it. I am innocent of any blood that will be shed.*” And then finally we read in Revelation of this same church in Ephesus...a church that Jesus says had “left its first love.”

According to Revelation, this Ephesian church eventually and essentially died! Why? Because the cross was not sufficient to hold them? Or was it because they failed...like so many who have followed, to grab hold of actually living out a faithful life...they failed to carry on...failed to pass on the passion to a new generation... failed to grasp the concept of “living abundantly in Christ every day...”

Ultimately it seemed they failed to recognize that they were at war, and that there would be those out there who would seek...sometimes while waving a religious banner, to steal their joy, and stumble their walk! They stopped being careful...they stopped growing and going forward...they stopped being faithful, and they went down in flames.

Chapter 1

1:1

The evidence of God’s profound grace begins in Paul’s first word of his first sentence. Because the overflowing grace of God is poured out even in the stark reality of Paul’s very name... a man once known as “Saul.” When he was Saul, he persecuted the church. He hunted down and jailed believers, and was party even to their murder. The world would not have given him such forgiveness and grace. The world does not forgive or forget such atrocities.

But for God, no sin is so great to overpower the cross. God not only forgave him, but moreover went on to call him to the front lines to serve as a messenger of that same grace...specifically to a people that he at one time had no time for, **the gentiles**.

Once redeemed, his name was changed to “Paul.” That name means “little” and Paul wore it and all of its subsequent humility as if it was the very mantle of forgiveness that God bestowed upon him. He was never ‘Saul’ again...*that* ‘old man’ was dead, and the new man ‘Paul’ was reborn in his place.

Furthermore, as inexplicable as it might seem, **Paul was an apostle**. Peter once declared “make your calling and your election sure.” It seemed that Paul understood that concept whole-heartedly. Indeed God’s hands were all over him. Paul *was* sure.

From his earliest days he knew he had a religious mission, albeit he at first attempted to follow that call without Jesus and without the Holy Spirit. What a mess. The embodiment of ‘zeal without knowledge.’ A ‘goal’ without clear directions from above. Sadly, lots of people are still trying that route and make the same mess. They may not be literally *killing* Christians as Paul did, but spiritually there are bodies lying all over the place anyway like a religious slaughter. He may have been “on a mission” but one without being “in Christ.” **Now** he was truly out there “by the will of God.”

He wrote that day not only to the believers in Ephesus, but as we have already established, he has written to us...or at least those who are ‘the faithful.’ Are you part of the faithful? Again the words leap out at us right off the bat...to those who are “in Christ Jesus?”

Paul was writing, just as sure as he was an apostle, *because God said so*. Often, when an individual expresses a desire to serve God in the fulltime ministry, we tell him that if he can do anything else in this life, he should do that instead. Because unless such is truly the case...unless you are simply compelled by God, and cannot... despite all your effort, to do anything else, you will not last...you will not make it. Because every day you will be presented with plenty of reasons to walk away. And if you can, *you will*.

On my desk there is a small piece of paper that reminds me daily of such a calling: “*There is no special honor in preaching, there is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors. And like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest. To preach, to really preach is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.*”

1:2

Paul, throughout all of his writings, commonly links grace and peace. Because...*and we know it gang...*without grace, there is no peace. Not just the existence of peace in our lives, but the embracing of such. Again, that calls for real action on our part...it calls us to actually “**walk** in our faith.”

God calls us to receive, retain, and live in his grace and his peace! Not just the **saving** grace of God, (we, and those in Ephesus, were already saved) but moreover the grace manifested **to and through** the believer **after** salvation...grace for daily living. (2 Cor 9:8).