

“Who do we think we are?”

Part 1 – Ephesians 1:1-2

Roper and Imelda - Philippines

This letter is one of the most contemporary books in the Bible. Apart from a few terms and the treatment of slavery, Ephesians could have been written to a 21st Century church.

It is about us. It describes human beings, their predicament, sin, and delusion, but much more it describes God’s reaching out to people to recreate and transform them into a new society.

2 Subjects - Power and Identity

It describes the power God’s Spirit gives for living.

It shows who we really are without Christ and who we become both individually and corporately with Christ. It is about how we understand ourselves and how we can get along with each other and God.

Modern society is in a mess. For all the good things we enjoy, we seem to have lost all sense of definition and direction. **Who are we really, and what holds us together?**

We all have a need to belong, but to what?

Is there anything that merits our commitment? Life is a challenge. Our society’s moral guidelines have been erased. Are there boundaries and values that function as legitimate guides? What is a human life for anyway?

The church is supposed to have answers to such questions, but in our day it has often lost both its direction and its voice. The lives of professed Christians have been too often very little different from the lives of non-Christians. The gospel has been diluted.

The Western church, including the Australian church, is often not the — or even a — New Testament church.

We need nothing less than a new reformation, and Ephesians is the blueprint to bring it about.

This short little letter is a surprisingly comprehensive statement

- About God;
- His work and His church;
- About Christ and the gospel;
- About life with God’s Spirit; and
- About the way to live in Him...

So as a result the main...

Purpose of the Letter...

Ephesians has as its main purpose identity formation – the individuals and the church.

It seeks to shape believers by reminding them how wonderful God’s work in Christ is, how significant their unity with Christ is, and what living for Christ looks like. It is a letter of definition and encouragement.

On Thursday evening in Korea, Jay & Jan (Buddhist, free thinking family) in tears at the realisation of how acceptable we are in Christ...

Paul sought to ground, shape, and challenge his readers so that they might live their faith.

KEY VERSES for our Theme are...

Ephesians 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesus...

- Pagan
- Trading centre,
- The capital of Asia Minor
- Religious Centre...the great Temple to Artemis.. one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient world. The main acts of worship were sexual in nature.
- It had a 50,000 seat open air Theatre.
- It was a centre of occult practices.
- In Acts 19...Paul preached for 2 years there... they had a great bonfire of occult goods and idols worth today \$5-6Million.

Let's pray...

Ephesians 1:1-2 (NIV) ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul described himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" and his readers as holy (NIV, "**saints**") and "faithful in Christ Jesus."

An apostle of Christ. Paul's identification of himself as an apostle appointed by God is his customary way of beginning his letters. (Cf. the exact parallels in 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1.)

The term *apostle* carried several connotations in the early church, all of which were true of Paul.

It referred to...

- Someone who had seen the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1)
- Someone sent out or called out by the church with a missionary task, and
- More broadly Someone who functioned as an agent or representative.

The will of God is an important theme in Ephesians, appearing more frequently here than in any other letter.

The concern is not about Christians finding the will of God; rather, the emphasis is on God's *purpose* with his actions for humanity. The point here is that Paul was an apostle because God wanted him to be.

The identification of the recipients as "**saints**" (lit., "the holy ones") is Paul's usual description of Christians.

Paul's first intent was not that these people lived especially holy lives — he described the Corinthian Christians the same way (1 Cor. 1:2), and yet he had no illusions about the sanctity of their lives.

Rather, his primary concern was to emphasize that just as he had been appointed by God to be an apostle, they too had been separated to God (separation is the key idea in the word "holy").

The focus is entirely on God's action and the reference is to God's saving work.

The recipients of this letter are also described as "faithful in Christ Jesus" (cf. Col. 1:2). "Faithful" can refer either to someone who has proven *to be faithful* or to someone who is a believer, someone who *has faith*. The latter seems the better choice here (cf. John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor. 6:15).

With the expression "in Christ Jesus" we encounter one of the most significant and difficult points in Paul's writings. Paul is not merely saying these people believed in Christ; rather, they were *in* Christ **positionally**.

Paul's concept of being in Christ is one of — if not *the*— most important parts of Paul's theology, for this is the centre from which he understood and explained salvation. The thirteen Pauline letters use "in Christ," "in the Lord," "in him," or some similar expression **164** times to express a variety of ideas.

Ephesians focuses more on union with Christ and on being *in Christ* than any other letter (36 times).

The Greeting

The wording in this verse is paralleled exactly in seven other Pauline letters. "Grace and peace" are important themes throughout Ephesians:

Both are key words that describe God's initial salvation, and both describe God's continuing work among his people.

As we will see in 1:3 – 14, "grace" is one of the most important words in Paul's theology.

- **Grace** is the undeserved favour of God – the receiving of what we don't deserve...

And instead of using the standard word "greeting" [*chairein*], through a play on words Paul changed his greeting to read "grace [*charis*] and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Anyone who has a great understanding of this wants to serve the Lord.

Roper and Imelda or Jay and Jan?

- **Peace** has 2 dimensions – Peace with God and the peace of God...

Not by accident, Paul **begins and ends** every letter with "grace," as if to emphasize that all of life is lived in the parameters of grace. Though not used as frequently, "peace" too has a foundational role in Paul's theology. God alone is the one who conveys grace and peace, and Paul wants his readers to experience this.

"God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" are together the source of grace (Ephesians 2:8-10) and peace (Ephesians 2:14-22)

Application

What are the implications of living as a Holy one? (a saint!)

Can your life be described as 'faithful'? (cf. Colossians 1:2). "Faithful" can refer either to someone who has proven *to be faithful* or to someone who is a believer, someone who *has faith*. The latter seems the better choice here (cf. John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor. 6:15).

What does it mean for '**you**' personally to be in Christ?

Have you experienced and received God's grace? (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Are you at peace with God? (Ephesians 2:14-22)

Are you enjoying and experiencing the peace of God?