

God's Dear Saints

We begin a study of one of the finest letters ever drafted. John Stott said that no one can read Ephesians without it leading us to wonder and worship. John Mackay, former president of Princeton Seminary, said that Ephesians is “theology set to music.” Ephesians was John Calvin’s favorite book of the Bible. Martyn Lloyd-Jones agreed with Martin Luther that while Romans is the purest expression of the gospel, Ephesians is the most sublime. The reason is, simply, that Ephesians tells us primarily about God—His being, His grandeur, His glory—and how we as believers are to live in His presence. Even in the opening greetings, in which Paul is largely following conventional form, there is great instruction for us:

Ephesians 1:1-2

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.

In this greeting we see three traditional first century elements: the identity of the letter’s author, the identity of the letter’s recipients, and the greeting. In these three elements, Paul customizes his greetings in a specifically Christian way. Let’s examine what he is saying.

1. God speaks to us in His Word (v.1a)

Paul identifies himself by name as “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” That means that he has been personally commissioned as an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus to proclaim Him to the world. Paul says that this occurred “by the will of God”; that is, he was not elected to this office by others, nor was he a self-appointed religious authority, but God Himself called him to this task. You can read of Paul’s conversion and call to apostolic ministry in Acts 9 and Acts 26. Paul and the other apostles were aware that they were writing Scriptures on God’s behalf. It is our duty, as well, to read the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the very Word of God. God speaks to us in the Scriptures because, in His love for us, He wants us to know Him

2. God tells us who we are (v. 1b)

We often allow ourselves to be defined in many wrong ways. In our text, Paul tells us three very important things about ourselves that we must believe:

A. We are saints. The word “saint” means “one who is set apart.” We are set apart to worship and serve God. This description applies not just to the most pious believers but to every single one of us. And notice that the saints are “in Ephesus”; that is, we are meant to be holy and remain holy in a very unholy environment. Leonard Ravenhill said that God’s greatest act was taking an unholy man out of an unholy world and making him holy and putting him back in an unholy world and keeping him holy in it.

B. We are the faithful ones, which means both that we are full of faith and also that we persevere in our devotion to Christ. William Temple said that no one can believe without being holy and no one can be holy without believing.

C. We are in Christ Jesus. Paul uses the phrases “in Christ” or its equivalent 34 times in this epistle (11 times in the first 14 verses), because this is the key to the Christian life. We are in intimate relationship with Jesus. He is the Vine, we are the branches; He is the Head, we are the body; He is the Bridegroom, we are the bride.

3. God gives us all we need (v. 2)

In his greeting, Paul summarizes his entire message by simply saying “Grace to you and peace....” One can see in verses 1:9,10 the grand scheme of God: He is relentlessly bringing all things in the cosmos to full unity under the sovereign lordship of His Son Jesus. Then there will be “peace,” which means “well-being, wholeness, and completion” for all His people.

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Meanwhile, in this life, through faith in Jesus, we can experience peace with God, peace within our own souls, and peace with our fellow believers. The word “peace” is mentioned six times in this epistle. God’s peace comes to us from God’s “grace,” which means “unmerited favor.” The very source of our peace is the grace of God. Paul mentions “grace” 13 times in Ephesians. If we have God’s peace through God’s grace we have everything we really need in this life.

Discussion Questions

1. If the apostolic writings are indeed sacred Scriptures, how ought we deal with them in practical experience?
2. What are some of the lies that we sometimes believe about ourselves which inhibit and obstruct our relationship with God?
3. Why is it important for us to know and believe that we are God’s saints? For what purpose are we “set apart?”
4. How does the peace of Christ differ from the peace offered by those in this world?
5. Why does Paul want us all to know the grace of God?

Going Deeper

1. What are the lies you sometimes believe about yourself? How can you begin to see yourself as God does?
2. In what ways do you find yourself motivated by guilt, fear, and shame, rather than by your gratitude for the unmerited love and favor of God? How can you change that?