



EPHESIANS 1:1-3

IN HIM
I AM

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Know: Read Ephesians 1:1-3

Note: Read slowly, carefully marking keywords

- In Him, In Christ
- Saints
- Faithful
- Grace
- God, Father, Jesus Christ
- Blessed

Observation: Study notes below for context.

What: When you think of blessings, what comes to mind? Do you feel blessed or feel like you are lacking something you need?

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...” Ephesians 1:1-3

Saints

Paul called his audience “saints.” In the introduction, I told you that Paul did not write this letter to the church in Ephesus directly. While in prison, he wrote to all the “saints” in the area, intending this letter be sent in a circuit to all the churches in the area.

Scholars believe Paul wrote this letter after he had written to the church in Colossae. When he wrote to the Colossians, his letter was fierier, addressing the heresy the church was dealing with: Judaism and Greek Gnosticism. This mixture was akin to the modern New Age mixed with Religious Orthodoxy. What was being produced was an obsession with the spirit realm, demons, and manifestations combined with strict religious observations such as fasting from food and pleasures to climb spiritual heights and get closer to God.

In his letters, Paul proclaims that Christ is the head of *all* principalities and powers and that He forgave us of sin at the cross and saved us from the dominion of darkness. On the heels of his letter to the Colossians, he opens the letter of Ephesians with our union with God, paints the larger picture of what happened on a cosmic level, and addresses it to every believer. It was a

death blow to the idea of separation between God and man and the working to attain from God what He provided through the death of His Son.

The word “saint” means “holy.” Paul did not address them as “sinners” or “sinners saved by grace.” Paul did not remind them of who they were before they believed or pointed out mistakes they might have made. Paul had enough confidence in God for every person reading his letter to address them as saints.

Considering the political and cultural climate of the times, it is safe to say that the believers had either been involved in pagan idol worship, going as far as to perform animal sacrifices, human sacrifices, and gross sexual rituals, or they were Jews who adhered to strict spiritual practices such as the Mosaic law taught. Imagine Paul, a former Pharisee, confidently assuring these new converts that the God of the universe considered them holy, pure, and righteous.

Often, when counseling someone, I find them sitting across from me because there is an area of their lives they are ashamed of and cannot find the peace that comes from knowing they are forgiven. They have convinced themselves that they are a sinner beyond the scope of forgiveness. I will say, “God thinks you are a saint, even if you don’t.”

If abstaining from every sin imaginable, observing every religious holiday, and never having a single wrong thought to cross our mind could make us holy, the most obedient Jew would have had a shot at holiness. Paul said he kept the law perfectly and called himself the worst sinner. Jesus came because we were separated from God in every way.

The idea of separation began when Eve believed the lie the serpent in the garden told her. “You will be like God, knowing good from evil.” Eve was already like God, made in his image and enjoying friendship. When sin entered the world, separation from God was the result. God made a way for us to return to our relationship with Him, but it wasn’t complete until Jesus became sin, trading places with us, His righteousness for our sin. He died our death and was buried as us- as our sinful selves, and then was resurrected to new life- as us. He brought us into His heart and sealed us, fully united with Him, with the Holy Spirit. You are safe in Him. Nothing can separate you from that love. No act of sin could do so, for God cannot lose His own. If we say it is, we believe sin has more power than His love and forgiveness.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, a very messy bunch, he said, “And that is what some of you were (sinners). But you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

You might have done unimaginable things, but He has made you holy in Christ, not because of your ability to make yourselves holy. It is because of Christ’s holiness that you are saints.

Faithfull

Paul also addressed his readers as “faithful” in Christ Jesus. He did not say “Faithful to Christ Jesus.”

A question we might ask is “How do I become faithful?” The answer is that you already are if you are in Christ because it’s the faith of God in you. In Galatians 2:20, Paul said this:

“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith IN the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

However, the words in the original Greek text say it like this:

“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith OF the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Your faithfulness is the faith of Jesus. As Jesus is, so are you in this world. You live by His faith.

Blessings

When Christ lives His life through us, we live by HIS faith, not our own. Jesus believed that when He went to the cross for us, He removed our sin and purchased every spiritual blessing.

We don’t have to ask God for blessings when we come to the throneroom of grace. We come to the courts of heaven confident that we are heirs and beneficiaries of the Kingdom.

Under the Old Covenant of law, there were good or bad consequences for adherence to the law. The system of blessing and curses was enacted when the contract of the law was made after the Israelis were rescued from Egyptian slavery.

This contract stated, “If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 28:1)

The blessings included property, generations, and personal health and gain.

However, the consequences of disobedience were extreme.

For example, “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long; and there shall be no strength in your hand. Your sons and daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long, and there shall be no strength in your hand.” (Deuteronomy 28:32)

When Jesus died, a new and better covenant was enacted. The curse for disobedience to the law was put on Jesus. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")." (Galatians 3:13)

No longer would disobedience bring the curse of the law. However, because we have been brought into union with God, we get to participate in the benefits of sonship.

"And giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:12-14)

Now, only the blessings remain, including the blessing of Abraham. God promised Abraham that his children would be forever blessed from generation to generation.

"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

That promise never went away. As sons of God, we have been included in that blessing.

"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

Because of Christ, our blessing isn't based on our obedience. It is a result of sonship. Now, we can rest knowing that we are blessed, and our children are blessed.

If our children have been "sold" into the "slavery" of this world, we can claim the promise of Abraham over them and declare that they will inherit salvation!

We can confidently pray, "Your sons and your daughters shall be heirs of the Kingdom, and your eyes shall look and be strengthened with joy for them all day long; and there shall be strength in your hand. Your sons and daughters shall be blessed, your eyes shall look with comfort all day long, and there shall be strength in your hand." (Deuteronomy 28:32- curses removed)

Grace

I will so often hear people describe grace as God's unmerited favor. Or say grace is how we treat people or how one feels when not judged for what we've done.

Sometimes, I will talk to people who try to explain grace and begin with "we are sinners," transition to "but God," move into behavior being the proof of that belief, and end with Judgement Day. I will usually be given a long list of things grace is *not* with an emphasis on our behavior.

"Paul said grace is not permission to engage in sinful conduct."

“Jesus tells the woman to go and sin no more.”

“Jesus said if we love him, we will do His commandments.” etc.

Yes, the Bible does say this, but each one of those statements was given within a particular context. Let’s take the woman caught in the act of adultery, for example. Before Jesus said, “Go and sin no more.” He said, “*Neither do I condemn you*; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Jesus removed the condemnation to empower her to sin no more. *That* is grace.

Many Christians schooled in religion are afraid of grace because they think it leads to sloppy Christianity, and so they miss the forest for the trees. If we can put aside our fear of believing something we may have been taught is sloppy and step up to the threshold of the door of grace, we might discover a beauty we didn’t know existed.

As Dr. Paul Ellis puts it:

Grace captures the goodwill, lovingkindness, and favor of God that is freely given to us so that we may partake in his divine life. Grace is God’s divine aid that supernaturally empowers you to be who he made you to be.

The Biblical noun for grace (charis) means favor or kindness, and is related to a word (chairō) which means to rejoice, be cheerful and well off. The grace of God leaves us cheerful and rejoicing. It leaves us better than it found us.

Grace is...

Grace is what the unconditional love of God looks like from our side. God is love and love that stoops is called grace. Grace is the love of God reaching down and gathering you in his arms.

Grace is God’s loving-kindness towards you. Grace is God blessing you with himself for no other reason than it pleases Him to do so.

Grace is the confident assurance that with God on your side, you can’t lose. Grace is his strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Grace is freedom from sin, guilt, and condemnation. Grace is freedom from the need to prove yourself. Grace is divine permission to be who God made you to be.

Grace is heaven’s cure for the world’s woes. Grace is the power of God that turns sinners into saints, haters into lovers, and orphans into sons.

Grace is being adopted into the family of God. Grace is realizing you are a dearly-loved child, the apple of your Father's eye, and a co-heir with Christ.

Grace is God honoring us with his presence. Grace is God with us. Grace is the adventure of life shared with Christ.

Flavors of grace

Grace is favor, freedom, forgiveness and a million other blessings besides. Grace is God's divine acceptance, his salvation and sanctification.

Grace is power, healing and prosperity.

Grace is God blessing you for no other reason than he loves you. Grace is divine power to live abundantly in union with the One who loves you and calls you by name.

What does God's grace really mean?

Grace isn't a doctrine, or bunch of rules for you to keep, and grace is not God's lubricant for greasing the cogs of self-effort. Grace is a Person living his life through you. Living under grace is like being married, only more so.

In a word, grace is Jesus.

Grace is not one of God's blessings but all of them wrapped up together in the One who is full of grace. Grace is the Gift of all gifts from the Giver of all givers.