

Introduction to Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1-3

On January 17, 2009 Marvin Schur's neighbors become concerned about him and went to his house to check on his well being. They had noticed that the lights hadn't been on for a few days and that the windows of the house had seemed ice over from the inside. They also hadn't seen Marvin looking out the large picture window as he did so frequently. When they entered the house they realized the power was not on, they found a heating pad on his favorite chair and they saw that the oven door was open. On the floor lay Marvin's lifeless body, frozen to death in the bitter cold temperatures of a Michigan winter.

On January 13th a worker for the city owned utility company installed a "limiter" on Schur's electric meter after four months of unpaid bills. This limiter restricted the amount of power Mr. Schur could use and then it cuts off the power if the usage goes past a certain level. Authorities said at some point the device tripped and cut off power to the home and was never reset. This action ultimately led to the death of the 93 year old WWII veteran.

Now, our natural reaction to such a news story is outrage...how could an electric company be so heartless and cruel to a man that must have been struggling financially. However, I assure you that I have not yet told you the most tragic part of the story. The tragic part of the story is the fact that this story didn't even have to happen. You see, Marvin Schur did not have financial problems. As a matter of fact, it's estimated that he had over \$600,000.00 in the bank when he died. When the neighbors and the police searched his home they found more than enough cash lying around to cover his outstanding bills. Marvin was living like a pauper even though he had considerable wealth at his disposal.

We've heard stories like this before. Several years ago the Los Angeles Times reported the story of an elderly man and his wife who were found dead in their home. Autopsies revealed that both had died of severe malnutrition, although investigators found a total of \$40,000.00 stored in paper bags in a closet.

Then there is the story of Hetty Green...America's greatest miser. When she died in 1916, she left an estate valued at \$100 million dollars, an especially vast fortune for that day. However, she was so miserly that she ate cold oatmeal in order to save the expense of heating the water. When her son had a severe leg injury, she took so long trying to find a free clinic to treat him that this leg had to be amputated because of advanced infection. It has been said that she hastened her own death by bringing on a fit of apoplexy while arguing the merits of skim milk because it was cheaper than whole milk.

Now, what do all three of these stories have in common? All three examples listed people who had access to the resources they needed, yet they lived...and died as paupers.

The book of Ephesians is written to believers who might be living as spiritual paupers, never realizing the vast resources that are available to them in Christ. Perhaps there is someone here today that is trying to live the Christian life. You're trying to do and say the right things, look and feel the right way, yet you always find that you come up short. It's not because you're not putting forth the effort, you just seem to run out of "gas". Maybe you've been asking "what's

wrong with me?” “Why do other people make the Christian life look so easy?” The answer could very well be, you don’t know the resources...the treasures that are available to you IN CHRIST.

John MacArthur points out that Ephesians has been given such titles as “the believer’s bank”, “the Christian’s checkbook” and “the treasure house of the Bible.” It’s been given these names because it tells the believer of our great riches, inheritances and our fullness in Jesus Christ. It tells us what we possess and how we can claim and enjoy our possessions.

Today we are beginning our verse by verse study of the book of Ephesians. As we study this book I hope you will understand that no believer in Christ has any reason to be spiritually deprived, malnourished or impoverished because we are immeasurably rich in the things God has provided us in Christ.

Listen as I read the first three verses of this great letter to the 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.**
- 3 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,**

Now just like when you read any kind of book, its important to take a little bit of time and go over the introduction. It’s important because the introduction usually lays a historical and contextual foundation. In order to interpret any book of the Bible properly, it’s important that we understand who wrote the book, who it was written to, and why it was written.

Who Wrote Ephesians? **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God** (1:1). Most of us who have been Christians very long are familiar with Paul, this former persecutor of Christians who met Jesus on the road to Damascus. The Lord called him, transformed him, and used him as one of the greatest Christian missionaries the world has ever known.

As we saw a couple weeks ago Paul had spent between two and three years in Ephesus, the longest he ever stayed in any one place. While he was there the gospel message went out to the whole region of Asia Minor. Many were saved and the whole culture was being transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now it has been a few years since Paul was in Ephesus. He is now in Rome, under house arrest. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel of Jesus and had eventually appealed his case to Ceasar. Now he is imprisoned in Rome awaiting his hearing before the Roman Emperor. Three times in this letter Paul reminds his readers that he is imprisoned (3:1, 4:1, 6:20).

While in prison there Paul wrote at least four letters that we have in our New Testament: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. So these four letters are usually called the prison epistles.

Now if you read Ephesians and Colossians together, you will notice that these two letters are very similar. They have many of the same teachings and even the same wording in many places. That is probably because they were written by

Paul at about the same time and the same man, Tychicus, carried both letters from Rome back to Asia Minor along with Onesimus, a former runaway slave from Colosse whom Paul was sending back to his master, Philemon.

Paul calls himself **an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God** (1:1). The word apostle literally means "one who is set apart and sent out." The apostles originally were the twelve that Jesus chose, commissioned, and sent out with the message of the gospel. In chapter 2 of Ephesians Paul will write that Jesus used the apostles and prophets as the foundation for building his church. Paul was an apostle that God chose to be one through whom the word of God would be spread and written. God called him and sent him not only to Jews, but also to Gentiles to bring the two together in one body, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says he is an apostle **"by the will of God."** He knew his authority was not a function of his upbringing or his education. He knew that his authority came directly from Jesus Christ. He knew that God had gifted, called and sent him out to take the gospel to a lost and dying world.

Who is Ephesians written to? To the **saints** who are in Ephesus, and **faithful** in Christ Jesus. Who are "**saints**?" They are not just a few pious people. They are not icons or statues. They are not necessarily a football team from Louisiana! "**Saints**" are people whose lives have been changed by Jesus Christ. Everyone who is born again is a saint. The word means "holy" or "set apart." When you were saved, God set you apart for salvation and service and declared you holy because of the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf.

Paul will show in Ephesians that saints are not just set apart, made holy, for salvation, but also for service. Paul is going to make that point over and over again in Ephesians. Every believer is set apart to serve God. It's our goal here at New Covenant Baptist Church that every one of our members be involved in ministry in some way. Some of those ministries, like teaching and preaching may be more visible than others, but they are no more important or valuable than those who work in the nursery, or make coffee on Sunday mornings, or serve as greeters, or ushers and all those who serve behind the scenes. And serving God goes far beyond what we do within the church. God also wants us to serve Him as we live out our lives every day.

The key thing is for each of you to find someplace that God can use your talents, gifts, abilities and passions to serve Him here. And if you need some help finding a place to get plugged in talk to me I'll be happy to help you find a place to serve.

Paul describes the "**saints**" as "**faithful**." True believers, "**saints**" are people who can be characterized as "**faithful**." We are not saved because we are "**faithful**," rather, we are "**faithful**" because we are truly saved!

We need to note a very special phrase at the end of v.2, "**in Christ Jesus**." The phrases in Christ, in Him, or the equivalent occur nine times just in Ephesians chapter 1. You will find it 164 times in all Paul's writings. To be "**in Christ Jesus**" means being joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of Him is also true for us. This is a difficult concept, and the Bible uses several images to teach it to us: the union of a man and woman in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33), the union of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17), the wholeness of a spiritual temple in which Christ is the foundation and we the individual stones

(Ephesians 2:20; 2:21; 2:22), the union of the head and other members of the body in one organism (1Cor 12:12-27).

William Barclay wrote that when Paul spoke of the Christian being in Christ, he meant that the Christian lives in Christ as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, the roots of a tree in the soil. What makes the Christian different is that he is always and everywhere conscious of the encircling presence of Jesus Christ. We are in Jesus Christ and He is in us.

Paul then gives his customary greeting in verse 2, **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. The greeting of "grace" was a common greeting among Gentile Christians. It reminds us of God's undeserved goodness in our lives. We deserve nothing, especially the privilege of being "in Christ." Grace will be a major theme of this letter.

He also offers the greeting of "peace." The Jewish people would usually greet each other with the word peace, shalom. If "grace" is the fountain, "peace" is the stream. We have "peace" with God and from God. In the New Testament these two words, grace and peace, always come in this same order. First grace, then peace. You cannot have true peace until you experience the grace of God when He saves you.

Why was Ephesians written? **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,**

One of the unique things about Paul's letter to the Ephesians is that unlike most of Paul's letters he did not write it to address a particular problem in a particular church. Some of you will have noticed that your Bible may have a foot note that says that some of the early manuscripts of this letter do not have the words, **in Ephesus**. And it is strange that if this letter were addressed solely to the church at Ephesus, that unlike most of Paul's letters, he does not greet any of his friends in Ephesus personally. Paul surely knew the Ephesians better than he knew any of the other churches to whom he wrote because he stayed there longer than he did anywhere else.

Probably the best explanation of this oddity is that Paul probably wrote this letter as a circular letter that was to be passed from church to church in the area of Asia Minor. In fact, Ephesians may be the letter that Paul calls the "**letter from Laodicea**" in Colossians 4:16, "**Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.**" Paul intended this letter to be passed around and read by all the churches. It probably eventually became associated with Ephesus because it was the major city and the home church in that area.

So Paul did not write this letter to deal with any heresy or problem in the church, but to expand the horizons of his readers so that they would better understand God's eternal purpose for the church in Christ Jesus.

This letter is easily divided into two sections, chapters 1-3 tells us who we are in Christ, and chapters 4-6 tell us how to live in Christ. The two key verses in these sections are found at the start of each of the sections. Ephesians 1:3, "**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.**" The key verse for

the second section is found Ephesians 4:1, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”**

So Paul discusses in the first 3 chapters all that we are in Christ, all that we have in Christ, every spiritual blessing we have inherited through the blood of Christ. Then, in chapter 4 he says, “Now that you know who you are and Whose you are, ‘Walk worthy of your vocation and calling.’”

Chapters 1-3 describe our spiritual wealth, chapters 4-6 our spiritual walk. The first half shows the position of the believer in Christ, the second shows the practice of the believer in Christ. We have our Christian blessings, and our Christian behavior. One shows our heavenly standing, the other our earthly walk. One majors on doctrine, the other on duty.

A reoccurring theme you find in the book of Ephesians is that Paul is speaking of mysteries. Chapter 1 vs. 11 we see a *mystery concerning the will of God*. In chapter 2 and 3 there is the *mystery of the church* – how God joined both Jew and Gentile alike into Christ’s body, the church. Chapter 3 vs. 4 we see a *mystery of Christ*, the mystery of His person, of His being, and His duty presently in heaven. Chapter 4 we read about the *mystery of the unity of the Body of Christ*. Chapter 5 we find the *mystery of Christ’s love for the church*. Chapter 6 we see the *mystery of the Gospel*, about how it will be proclaimed with boldness, even if the one proclaiming it is a prisoner.

A mystery in the Bible is not something that cannot be known or figured out. It is something that was not revealed in the past, but God has now made known, as Paul says in Colossians 1:26, **“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”**

The great theme of Ephesians is that in Christ God is bringing all things together in heaven and on earth (1:10). And the church is God’s fulfillment of that purpose, and you are the church. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ, you are saved to bring glory to God by walking worthy of the calling you have received.

Our Father who is infinitely wealthy, our heavenly Father who has riches untold has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, all spiritual blessings.

On Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, we see the lifestyles and the mansions in which they live and we hear about the incredible wealth. We read in the Fortune 500 the richest people in the world, yet we know by the news and we know by the stories, that many of those people are incredibly unhappy. Many of those people have no peace in their life. Many of those people go through unbelievable loneliness looking for something they’ve never found.

The real riches in life are not material, they are spiritual in nature. I want to tell you how you can tell how rich you are today. GIVE YOURSELF THIS TEST. You just figure up all the things you have that money cannot buy, and the things you have that death cannot take away, and you’ll know just exactly how rich you are. You can be unbelievably rich in Jesus.

If you are in Christ, you have every spiritual blessing. You are incredibly rich. Is that how you are living?