

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS
(LESSON TWO)
“A PROFOUND GREETING”

EPHESIANS 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul highlights and celebrates the amazing, life-transforming power of the gospel. In the first half of the letter (chapters 1-3), he informs the Ephesian Christians about what God accomplished for them in Christ, and as a result, all that they had become in Christ, as well as the resources that He had placed at their disposal to help them live victorious Christian lives.

In the second half of the letter (chapters 4-6), Paul exhorts the saints living in Ephesus to conduct their lives in a manner which would demonstrate that they understood and appreciated all that God had done for them in Christ, all that they had become in Christ, and all the spiritual resources that were now at our disposal.

Brothers and sisters, **doctrine must always come before exhortation.** Until a person has been thoroughly exposed to *“the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24), it is unreasonable and even cruel to expect them to live victoriously. Persons must first know who they are in Christ before they are told what they ought to do for Christ. It is in doctrine that the saints are informed about their exalted position in Christ which alone makes the exhortation to live holy lives a reasonable one. It is in doctrine that the saints become aware of all the resources of grace that they possess which alone can enable them to obey the exhortation. Unfortunately, in many organizations before new converts are exposed to the gospel and to the doctrines of grace, they are informed as to what they need to stop doing and what they need to start doing in order to please God.

In verse **one**, Paul identifies himself as *“an apostle of Jesus Christ.”* The word *“apostle”* is the translation of a Greek word which refers to a person who is commissioned and sent to represent someone else. The word was used in an official capacity to refer to an ambassador or a special envoy. Paul considered himself an official envoy or ambassador of Christ Jesus. The word is in a construction in the Greek which indicates that Paul considered himself as honored in being chosen as the representative of Christ Jesus. The reference to his apostleship was for the purpose of giving this letter an official character. He became an apostle, he says, through *“the will of God.”* These words emphasize the fact that his apostleship was by divine appointment.

Paul addresses his letter to *“the saints.”* The word *“saints”* is a translation of the Greek word **hagios**. It is one of the great doctrinal words in this epistle. Paul borrowed this word from the terminology of the pagan Greek religions. He had to. There were no other terms available to him so long as he was confined to the Greek language. In the pagan Greek religions, the word **hagios** meant *“devoted to the gods.”* For instance, a Greek worshipper would bring an offering to one of the pagan gods as a gift. He devoted the gift to that particular god. Or, the Greeks would build a magnificent temple and devote it to a certain god. The building was thereby set apart from any secular use, and separated for a religious purpose. It was consecrated to the worship of that particular Greek god. The building was therefore, holy. It was not holy in a Christian sense of the term, for the Greek temples were filled with immoral practices that were part of their religious worship. It is said that 3000 “sacred” prostitutes served in the temple at Corinth. But the temple and the prostitutes were considered to be holy in the sense of being non-secular, and therefore, religious in nature, set apart for the worship of the Greek gods.

The apostle Paul, took that Greek word **hagios** and poured into it a new meaning. The word “*saint*,” as it is used in the New Testament means “to be set apart for God,” and refers to the act of the Holy Spirit setting apart the sinner who has been elected to salvation, for God. The Holy Spirit takes that person out of the first Adam and places him or her in the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul refers to this act in **Colossians 1:12-13**: “*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*” This is **positional** sanctification. It is an act performed once for all the moment the sinner places his or her faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour. That person is called a **hagios** person, a person set apart for God, a consecrated person. He or she has been set apart for God, for His worship and for His service. Such a person is a “*saint*” **positionally**.

This is followed by **progressive** sanctification which is not an act but a process. It is a process that goes on all through the earthly life of the Christian, in which that person is being gradually conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. It is very important for us to understand and appreciate that the set apart **position** of the saint demands a set apart **life** in the **experience** of the saint. The saint must be separate from everything that would interfere in the least with the worship and service which is due to the God who brought about the separation and to whom the saint is set apart. This is a “*saint*” in the Bible sense of the term.

One of the reasons for our failure to be effective as Christians is because we do not know who we are. That is why the saints need to hear the gospel. The gospel informs them of their true identity. According to the New Testament, every genuine Christian is a saint. Every genuine Christian has had the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them. They possess an alien righteousness. They are righteous, not because they are personally righteous but because God has declared them to be righteous!

In the framework of a works-based, externally regulated system of “Christianity,” persons are manipulated to think that their salvation and their standing before God is dependent on how well they perform. These persons are responding to another gospel, which is not another. Rather it is a perversion of the gospel. Religion is always about how well persons do; Christianity is always about the wonder of what Jesus Christ has done for persons! A genuine Christian is always amazed about the amazing grace that saved a wretch like him or her.

Paul describes these saints as being “*the faithful in Christ Jesus.*” The word translated “*faithful*” is the Greek word **pistos**, which is another important word which must be considered. Paul and Silas used the word **pistos** in their directions to the Philippian jailer who asked them what he needed to do to be saved: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (**Acts 16:31**). The word “*believe*” is a translation of the same Greek word **pistos**. Paul and Silas urged the jailer to consider the Lord Jesus Christ worthy of trust as to His character and motives. They exhorted him to place his confidence in the Lord’s ability to do just what He says He will do. They encouraged him to entrust the salvation of his soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus. They told him to commit the work of saving his soul to the care of the Lord. That means a definite taking of one’s self out of one’s own keeping and entrusting one’s self into the keeping of the Lord Jesus. That is what is meant by “*believing in*” the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to further illustrate this point, let us consider the case of Thomas recorded in **John 20:24-29**:

24 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.*

25 *The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

26 *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*

27 *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but **believing**.*

28 *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God.*

29 *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

In verse **27** our Lord says to Thomas, *“Be not faithless, but believing.”* The Greek word translated *“believing”* is **pistos**, the same word that is translated as *“faithful”* in **Ephesians 1:1**. The point that Paul is trying to make is that a person is a Christian, because he or she believes in Jesus Christ and therefore entrusts his or her life to Him.

The words, *“the faithful in Christ Jesus,”* do **not** refer in this context to the fact that the saints at Ephesus were faithful in the sense of being true to the Lord Jesus in their lives. Rather, it refers to the fact that they were those who had placed their trust in Him. They were believers as contrasted to unbelievers. Paul is writing to the saints. He identifies these saints as believing ones in Christ Jesus. There were two kinds of saints (**hagios**) in Ephesus, those who were devoted to a god of the pagan religions, and those who were devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is important for us to recognize that Christians have two homes. Paul writes to *“the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”* The saints live in Ephesus but they are also *“in Christ Jesus.”* These are two contemporary realities. We today are in the same situation. We are in Kingston, Jamaica and we are *“in Christ Jesus.”* We are now seated in the **Scout Association of Jamaica**, 20 Camp Road, Kingston 5, St. Andrew, Jamaica, but we are also now *“seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (**Ephesians 2:6**). In chapters **1-3** of the epistle, Paul highlights the wonder of what it means for an individual to be *“in Christ Jesus.”* In chapters **4-6**, he highlights what it means for an individual to be in Christ Jesus **in Ephesus**.

Paul greets the saints with the greeting that was common to the early Christians: *“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

We take the liberty to say that the mind of God has in no word uttered itself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in the word grace. The word *“grace,”* is a translation of the Greek word **charis**.

In the ethical terminology of the Greek schools, **charis** always implied a favour that was freely done, without expectation of return. In defining the word **charis**, Aristotle stressed this very point, that it is conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the kindness and generosity of the giver. **Charis** was also used to describe an act that was beyond the ordinary course of what might be expected, and was therefore commendable.

The writers of the New Testament took over this Greek word **charis** and invested it with a richer, deeper meaning than it ever had in classical Greek. In classical Greek as we have seen, **charis** referred to a favour conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the kindness and generosity of the giver. But this favour was always done for a friend, never for an enemy. At Calvary however, God stepped down from His judgment seat and took upon Himself on the Cross, the guilt and penalty of human sin, thus satisfying His justice and making possible the bestowal of His mercy. And this He did, not for those who were His friends, but for His bitter enemies, degenerate sinners, vile and wretched. All the human race could expect in view of its sin, was the righteous wrath of a holy God, and eternal banishment from His glorious presence. But God demonstrated a love and favour towards His enemies that would have been unthinkable for the Greeks.

This is what John is speaking of in **1 John 3:1**: *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”* The words *“what manner of”* are from a Greek word which means *“what foreign kind of.”* The love of God, demonstrated by Jesus Christ on the Cross is foreign to the human race! Human beings simply do not act that way. In **Romans 5:6-10**, Paul emphasizes this point forcefully:

6 *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*

7 *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.*

8 *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

9 *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Paul is clearly arguing that God's action at the Cross in dying for lost humanity is an action beyond the ordinary course of what might be expected and is therefore commendable.

The word **charis** comes to its highest and most exalted content of meaning in the New Testament. It refers to God's offer of salvation with all that that offer implies. This salvation was wrought on Calvary's Cross with all the personal sacrifice which that included. It was offered to those who were His bitter enemies, and who are not only undeserving of salvation but deserved punishment for their sins. It was offered without any expectation of return, but given out of the kindness and generosity of God. This means that there is no room for good works on the part of sinners as a means whereby they can earn their salvation, or retain it.

The grace of God is unlimited in its resources. In **Romans 5:20** Paul writes, *"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* The word *"abound"* is a translation of a different Greek word than the one which is translated *"abounded."* It is a compound word made up of a verb which means "to exist in superabundance," and a prefixed preposition which means "above." The translation could read, "grace existed in superabundance and then more grace added to this superabundance."

The word *"peace"* is another word rich in meaning. It is a translation of the Greek word **eirene** (**i-ray'nay**). The distinguished theologian and Greek Scholar **Hermann Cremer** defined the word as "a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being." It is used in contrast to strife, and to denote the absence or end of strife. According to **Colossians 1:20**, our Lord *"made peace through the blood of His cross."* By His death, He satisfied the just demands of the law which we broke, thus, making it possible for a righteous and holy God to bestow mercy upon a believing sinner and do so without violating His justice. Our Lord, thus, united the believing sinner and God, thus, making peace. There is therefore, a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being for the sinner who places his faith in the Saviour. The Law has nothing against him, and he can look up into God's face unafraid and unashamed. The saints of God should be living in a state of untroubled, undisturbed tranquility and well-being produced in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. The more we yield to the Holy Spirit and are dependent upon His ministry for us, is the more we will be conscious of this tranquilizing peace.

The security that the gospel guarantees is based on the fact that God grants peace through grace. It is not possible for a person to have peace if he or she does not fully embrace the grace of God. It is only when we understand the amazing grace of God and embrace it that we are able to be at peace even when our hearts condemn us. The more we learn about the grace of God, is the more we marvel at the fact that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestinated us unto the adoption of sons. The more we learn about the grace of God is the more we are astounded that He drew us to Christ and presented us to Him as gifts of love. The more we learn about the grace of God is the more we wonder at the declaration in **John 17:23** that God loves us as much as He loves Jesus! The more we learn about the grace of God is the more we are astonished that *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."*

Grace is the source from which salvation flows. It is grace and grace alone, that assures our hearts and gives us peace with God and each other.