

Ephesians 1:1-2

To the Faithful

Main idea: Strive to be faithful, but don't trust in your faithfulness. Trust in God.

Last week, I finished preaching through Ecclesiastes, and we ended with the command to remember God.¹ This means not only that we need to acknowledge God as the Lord, but also that we need to orient our lives to clearly show that God is the Lord.² So the final assessment and command in Ecclesiastes is this:

When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

And we talked about how this command is for all people, all humanity, because there is only one God, and He is Lord of all.³

But I want to begin this morning by pointing out how impossible it is to obey this.⁴ We should strive to do it, we should not excuse ourselves from doing it, and yet it's impossible for any of us. Because of our sin, we've all shown that we have not perfectly feared God or kept His commands. We've all fallen short of the glory of God.⁵ In fact, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes said that clearly earlier in his book when he wrote:

There is certainly no one righteous on the earth who does good and never sins. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

And, of course, this is something that we find again and again in the Bible. It says in Psalm 14:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalms 14:2-3)

And when Joshua commissioned the people of Israel to obey God as they were settling into the Promised Land, and they committed themselves to worshiping only God, Joshua told them:

You will not be able to worship the Lord, because he is a holy God. (Joshua 24:19a)

Even Jesus said the same thing. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

And just before that, Jesus also said:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

So if the standard for pleasing God and entering heaven is being perfectly faithful, and none of us have been perfectly faithful, how can any of us have hope of eternal life?

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:1

² Luke 6:46

³ Acts 10:36

⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵ Romans 3:23

The answer, of course, is Jesus. We trust in His life, death, and resurrection, and we are raised to walk a new life in Him.⁶

This morning, I'm going to begin preaching through the book of Ephesians in a series of sermon serieses, and it's going to be all about who we are in Christ. I began studying Ephesians during my sabbatical because it says a lot about what a healthy Christian and what a healthy church ought to look like.⁷ In fact, Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is unique in that it doesn't appear to be written in response to a problem.

When Paul wrote Galatians to the church in Galatia, it was in response to a problem in the church. Some of them had come to believe that Gentiles were required to obey the Jewish law in order to be saved, so Paul wrote to them to correct this. Galatians 3:11 says:

**Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith.
(Galatians 3:11)**

In the same way, when Paul wrote Philippians to the church in Philippi, it was in response to a problem. They were becoming greatly discouraged because of the persecution that they were facing due to their faith in Christ. So Paul wrote them in Philippians 4:4-5:

**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your graciousness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near. (Philippians 4:4-5)**

And when Paul wrote First and Second Corinthians to the church in Corinth, there were so many problems in the church, that he had to write them at least 2 letters!⁸

But Ephesians doesn't seem to be written in response to any problems in the church. In the letter, Paul doesn't call out any false teachers in the church, and he doesn't reprimand the church for any particular sin. Paul simply reminds them of good, solid, biblical truth,⁹ and encourages them to continue living according to that truth.¹⁰

So the first series of messages that I'll be preaching at the beginning of Ephesians, I'm calling "Every Blessing." In Christ, we have every good and godly blessing we could possibly dream of.¹¹ But we often fail to see them because we're focused on the wrong things in life.¹² So Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians by reminding them of all the blessings that they have in Christ.

This morning, we're going to read just the first two verses of chapter 1. They say this:

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

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

⁷ Ephesians 2

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:10, 3:3, 5:1, etc. 2 Corinthians was mostly written to encourage them (2:1-4), but still addressed many ongoing issues in the church (6:1, 6:14, 11:3, etc.)

⁹ Chapters 1-3

¹⁰ Chapters 4-6

¹¹ Ephesians 1:3, 2 Peter 1:3

¹² 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 John 2:16

Father, as we reflect on Jesus and who we are in Jesus, help us never to become conceited, but rather to be humble and give You all the glory for what You've done for us and what You are doing in us. Help us to rejoice in Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.

So, like in all of Paul's letters, Paul begins by introducing himself.¹³ This was the standard way of writing a letter at the time, but really Paul needed no introduction. By this time, Paul was well-known to all the churches, because Paul went on more missionary journeys than anyone.¹⁴ And the Ephesian church knew Paul quite well, because Paul was instrumental to the forming of the church in Ephesus, which you can read about in Acts 19.

Nevertheless, Paul introduces himself as an apostle.

[Greek word apostolos]

Strong's Concordance

apostolos: a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle
Original Word: ἀπόστολος, ου, ὁ
Part of Speech: Noun, Masculine
Transliteration: apostolos
Phonetic Spelling: (ap-os'-tol-os)
Definition: a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle
Usage: a messenger, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel; an apostle.

The word "apostle" simply means a "delegate" or a "messenger."¹⁵ I still often see pastors and theologians debate whether the term "apostle" is a position of authority over the churches, or more like a missionary and servant to the churches.¹⁶ We're going to talk about that a bit more when we get to chapter three,¹⁷ but for now, I just want to point out that Paul only had any authority among the churches because he was a servant of Christ and of the churches.¹⁸

Paul wrote this letter from a Roman prison. So I just want you to get a really clear picture of this.

[Picture of a Roman prison]



¹³ Hebrews would be the only exception, if it was written by Paul (which we don't know).

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:23

¹⁵ See Strong's #G652 (ἀπόστολος)

¹⁶ Jesus Himself was also called The Apostle (Hebrews 3:1).

¹⁷ Ephesians 3:1-5

¹⁸ Romans 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5

Roman prisons at that time were small rooms underground. They were dark, damp, and filthy. And while Paul spent much of his time awaiting trial on house arrest in better circumstances than this,¹⁹ he did spend some of his time in prison in a place just like this, and likely where he wrote at least some of his letters.²⁰

You see, Paul had given his life so much to the preaching of the gospel and to establishing churches that whole cities and synagogues were getting sick of him, and persecuting him.²¹ But he continued to devote his life to seeing unbelievers come to faith in Christ, and seeing those new Christians begin to grow in Christ.²² Paul saw it as his mission to spread the good news of Jesus to all the world, and he dedicated his life to fulfilling that mission.

And he did this not to point to himself, but to point to the Savior.²³ He described himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus. He saw himself as a delegate, or messenger of Christ Jesus. That means that all the things that he wrote, and all the things that he preached in person weren't to elevate his personal brand, or to sell his books, or to point to himself, but he did all the things he did in order to point to Jesus.²⁴

Jesus is the significant One. 1 John 4:14 says:

We have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world's Savior. (1 John 4:14)

Therefore, Jesus is worth all our devotion and all of our lives,²⁵ because Jesus is the Son of God, sent by God the Father to save us from our sins,²⁶ so that we might receive Him and become part of the family of God.²⁷ So our job is to lift up Jesus in all that we do.²⁸

When I preach, I'm to point to Jesus.²⁹ Far more than giving an inspiring talk or life application, I'm to point to Jesus. As you work, you're to point to Jesus.³⁰ Far more than making a paycheck or finding fulfillment in your work, you're to point to Jesus. Our lives are significant not because we make a name for ourselves, or when we achieve something great for ourselves, but because ultimately, whether we like it or not, our lives point to Jesus as the all-sufficient, all good, completely righteous and just Savior who is the point of all our lives and all of history.³¹ He is Jesus, the Christ.

[Greek word Christos]

Strong's Concordance

Christos: the Anointed One, Messiah, Christ
Original Word: Χριστός, οὐ, ὁ
Part of Speech: Noun, Masculine
Transliteration: Christos
Phonetic Spelling: (khris-tos')
Definition: the Anointed One, Messiah, Christ
Usage: Anointed One; the Messiah, the Christ.

¹⁹ Acts 28:16, 30

²⁰ Acts 16:23-30

²¹ 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

²² Acts 19:8, 28:31

²³ Philippians 2:3-4

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:31

²⁵ Revelation 5:12

²⁶ John 3:16

²⁷ John 1:12

²⁸ John 12:32

²⁹ John 3:30

³⁰ Colossians 3:23

³¹ Luke 24:27

That word “Christ” is a title. “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah” which means “Anointed One.” And this is a title that we see over and over in the Old Testament. Jesus came as the fulfillment of the hundreds of prophecies in the Hebrew Bible concerning the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.³² So every time we call Jesus the “Christ,” we’re not only acknowledging that Jesus had a special role with a special purpose, but we’re also acknowledging that all of this happened according to all the promises God gave to His people throughout a period of hundreds of years. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

So Paul saw himself as an apostle, or delegate of Jesus the Christ, as he writes, by God’s will. In other words, Paul didn’t take this upon himself, but he recognized that God wanted him to do this.

You’ve maybe heard many pastors talk about surrendering to the call of ministry. They describe the struggle they had when they felt like God was calling them into the ministry, but how they didn’t really want to go into the ministry, so they wrestled with the call they felt like God had given them, but eventually, they surrendered to the call and entered into the ministry.

Well, I didn’t have that when I first entered the ministry.

[Picture of Pastor Chris at 17 years old]



That’s what I looked like back then. Just a nerdy kid.

But I loved to quote 1 Timothy 3:1, where Paul instructed Timothy that if anyone desired to be an overseer, that he should be tested. When I felt like God was calling me to be a pastor, I desired to be a pastor. I didn’t struggle with God’s call on my life, and I didn’t feel like I needed to surrender to the call, I just eagerly pursued the calling that I felt like God had given me.

And that feeling lasted a long time. But at some point a few years back, I just grew more and more discouraged. I didn’t know how I could continue. So at that time, I prayed, “God, do you want me to continue to be a pastor?” And I felt like God told me at that time, “Do what you want. If you want to continue being a pastor, do that, but if you don’t, you’re released.” So I was really happy about that, and I was content to continue as a pastor because I felt like I was continuing to choose to be a pastor.

But then, after a few more years of ministry, I started becoming discontent again, so I prayed again, “God, do you want me to continue to be a pastor?” And this time I felt like God told me, “Yes.” So I was confused. So I prayed, “So why did You tell me before to do what I wanted?” And I felt like God told me, “Because your heart was hard.” You see, after many years as a pastor, I wasn’t ready to hear that God actually wanted me to be a

³² 1 Samuel 2:35, Psalm 2:2, Psalm 84:9, Psalm 132:17, Daniel 9:25-26

pastor. In some way, it was comforting to think it was my choice, and I could stay or leave according to my desires.

But at that point, I finally wrestled with my calling, and surrendered to the call to be a pastor, and it made a huge difference in terms of how excited I am to be here. Because my ministry here isn't about me or what I can accomplish, it's all about God and what He's accomplished through Jesus, and what He wants to accomplish in us as we trust in Him.

Now, I share all that not so you'll think I hear from God more than any other Christian, because honestly, I don't know if that was God really speaking to me, or just my own understanding of where God has led me.

But I share all that just to point out that we minister according to the will of God, not for man's praise, and not according to our own agenda, but to glorify Jesus.³³

Is that the driving force in your life? Do you see God's will as the most important reason that you live, and work, and go about the things that you do?

After introducing himself, Paul wrote to whom he was writing: "To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus." In calling them "faithful saints," Paul was not saying that they were perfect because of their works, but rather that they were perfect because of Christ's work. Because Jesus died and rose again, we are made to be faithful saints in Him.³⁴

And yet, there is certainly an invitation and command in the Bible to be faithful saints. We're called to be faithful to God, just as He's been faithful to us. We're called to obey Him, and cherish Him, and find our purpose in living for Him.³⁵

I recently ran across a chart that compared faithful Christianity with what is often said to be Christianity, but actually isn't.³⁶

[Chart of faithful Christianity vs false Christianity]

	Depersonalized Christianity	Personalized Christianity
<i>Faith</i>	Accepting contractual propositions	Committing one's self to a person
<i>Christian Life</i>	Keeping contractual obligations	Pleasing the Lord, a Person
<i>Sin</i>	Violating a contract rule	Betraying a relationship
<i>Repentance</i>	Change based on contractual obligations	Change based on sorrow for personal betrayal
<i>Forgiveness</i>	Canceling contractual consequences	Renewing and restoring fellowship

*Adapted and modified from James Sire, The Universe Next Door.
InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2009, p. 135.*

³³ Galatians 1:10

³⁴ 1 Peter 3:18

³⁵ Matthew 6:21, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 1:21

³⁶ <https://www.bburgchurchofchrist.org/resources/2012/06/17/the-ephesian-struggle>

So a huge issue that many confessing Christians run into is often that they accept certain truths in their heads, but don't come to fully trust Jesus in their hearts.³⁷ Christianity is far more than a contractual obligation.³⁸ We don't simply make an agreement with God so that He forgives us because we've decided to obey Him, as if our forgiveness depends on us. No! God calls us to faithfulness to a relationship.³⁹

It would be like if a wife were to say to her husband, "Why don't you love me anymore?" And the husband responds, "What are you talking about? I work long hours, I provide for you and the family, I'm never unkind to you, and I've never cheated on you once. What do you mean I don't love you?" And his wife may rightly respond, "I don't want to seem ungrateful for all those things, but what I really want is for you to spend time with me and tell me you love me."

You see, being a faithful Christian has less to do with how righteous we make ourselves, and everything to do with resting in the righteousness that we have from God.⁴⁰ Jesus died on the cross for our sins, not so that we would then have to prove ourselves worthy of His forgiveness, or even prove that we love Him, but so that we would be forgiven by grace through faith in Him.⁴¹ And as we rest in Jesus's love for us, we begin to love God from our hearts.⁴²

And then out of that relationship, we are called saints, because we are. We don't achieve the status of being a saint, as if we need to earn it. No, we become saints by God's grace. A saint is someone who is set apart, sanctified, for God's purposes. And the moment you become a Christian, you become a saint. It's not that we're better than others, but rather that God consecrated us for a purpose. If you're a Christian, you're set apart from the world, and set apart from common things, so that you would walk not according to your former life, but according to the new life that you have in Christ.⁴³

Do you think of yourself that way?

The Christian life can't be lived as if we're just going about business as usual. The Christian life is radically different, and requires a radically different mindset from how we think by nature. It requires us to meditate on the things of God. Verse 2.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Now, this was Paul's standard way of greeting churches in his letters, and yet it's also an extremely crucial way of thinking about how we live and relate to God. And that's probably why Paul began all of his letters this way.

Grace and peace are such simple words, such simple ideals, and yet they are often some of the most lacking virtues in the world, and even in the church. The world teaches us to live by certain standards. You've probably heard them before.

Don't get mad, get _____.

Give them a taste of their own _____.

Show them who's the _____.

Teach 'em a _____.

³⁷ Matthew 15:8

³⁸ Psalm 40:6-8

³⁹ John 15:5, Revelation 3:20

⁴⁰ 1 John 3:1

⁴¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁴² Ephesians 2:10

⁴³ 1 Peter 2:9

So many of our clichés teach us not to show grace, and not to pursue peace, so grace and peace can seem like unachievable fantasy. Maybe something to dream about, but certainly not something we can expect in life.

But we can have grace and peace. They come, just as Paul wrote, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, our relationship with God and one another in the church is based completely on grace. It's not based on our goodness, or our accomplishments, or even our good intentions. We have salvation by grace, and we relate to God through grace, and we're to treat others with grace, because any other foundation for our relationships will always lead to broken relationships.

It's by grace that we have peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus, who is the Christ. And the peace that we have from God is a perfect peace. Too often, churches are characterized by gossip and dissension, and churches split because of conflicting personalities, but if we're resting in the grace of God, then we'll have peace from God.

But it's important that we know what kind of peace this is really talking about. It's not primarily talking about an inner peace. It's true that we can have an inner peace because of our relationship with God, and it's a peace that passes understanding,⁴⁴ because it's through a relationship with God that we truly begin to feel the unconditional love and acceptance that we long for. So we truly can have an inner peace because of our relationship with God through Jesus.

But the peace that we have with God is even greater than that. It's great to have a subjective feeling of peace, but what we really need is a truly objective peace. That peace that we have from God means that we're not at war with God.⁴⁵ God is not our enemy, and as God's people, we ought not be at war with each other.

Even as we gather together as a church, and relate to one another in the church, we can have peace. But it's not based on how great of people we are, but on the fact that we rest in the grace of God given to us, and we begin to show that same grace to one another.

I've talked with so many people who have left their church because someone at the church offended them. And I totally get it, it's hard to worship with people sometimes. But you know what you should do when you find out your church isn't perfect? Love them anyway. We should expect to be offended by those in the church once in a while, because none of us are perfect, but even then, we need to love each other anyway. Because God demonstrated His love toward us in that even while we were still sinners, offending God, disobeying Him, acting like complete fools, Christ died for us.⁴⁶ He loved us anyway.

And even though the church in Ephesus didn't seem to have any major problems, we should remember that the church was filled with real people, like you and me. So they still had to intentionally practice showing grace and peace to one another, just as God showed it to them.

So it's interesting that Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus begins by calling them faithful saints. Years later, when the book of Revelation was written, one of the seven letters to the seven churches was written to the church in Ephesus. And it says that they were still doing everything right! But then it says this to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4:

⁴⁴ Philippians 4:7

⁴⁵ Romans 8:7

⁴⁶ Romans 5:8

But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. (Revelation 2:4)

The church in Ephesus was a great church, doing a lot of great things! But they abandoned their first love. They forgot about Jesus.

In the zeal of doing things, never forget why you're doing them. Rest in Jesus, and rejoice in Him.

And so I want to praise God for everyone who's here this morning. If you're a Christian, trusting in God's grace, YOU are the faithful. I know it doesn't always seem that way, because we're so very aware of our own sin. But the fact that you got out of bed on a Sunday morning, and came here, and you came to worship God, and serve one another, demonstrates that you consider your faith to be important, and that you're striving to live out your faith in your daily life. You're the faithful.

So strive to be faithful, but don't trust in your faithfulness. Trust in Jesus.

You see, it's a huge blessing to be called the faithful saints, because if we're honest about our lives and struggles, we all know as we've said that we haven't been very faithful. But God is faithful.⁴⁷ And we have the huge blessing of being declared faithful by a faithful God. 1 Peter says it like this:

Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18a)

God loves you so much that even though we've all disobeyed His commands, He came down in the form of a man, Jesus, to die as our substitute, and so that we who are unfaithful would be made righteous through His blood. And then He rose from the grave, just as we rise to walk a new life in Him, characterized by grace and peace.⁴⁸

So the Scripture challenges us this morning to be faithful to Jesus, seeing ourselves as saints, set apart to serve and worship God.⁴⁹

And if you're not a Christian this morning, you're invited to trust in God's faithfulness.

⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 2:13

⁴⁸ Philippians 2:5-11

⁴⁹ Hebrews 12:1