

January 6/7, 2001

The Truth About Our Life in Christ
A Study in the Book of Ephesians
From Sinners to Saints
Ephesians 1:1-2
Pastor Bryan Clark

We sometimes hear stories about people who find a coin or a baseball card or something that turns out to be worth a considerable amount of money. I was reading an article last week about a lady who bought a little antique table at a garage sale for \$25. She had it in her home for 20 years and had no idea of its value, until she ran into someone who told her the table was probably worth a considerable amount of money. So she ended up taking it to an auction, and it sold for \$490,000! I don't know why those things never happen to me. For twenty years that woman had no idea of the wealth that she possessed. As I read that article, I thought about how many Christians are like that – they really have no idea of the wealth that they possess in Christ.

Let's imagine that when you graduated from high school I gave you a million dollars and put it into an account. Suppose that I didn't say anything to you about it, but I just gave you a letter. In that letter I explained that I had given you a million dollars, the bank account number and all the information you needed. But when you received the letter you thought it was just a "Happy Graduation" note, so you threw it in a box with some other stuff and the letter was never opened. For 20 years life was not easy for you, and you struggled, trying to make ends meet. Finally, you can't make your house payments, and they are repossessing your house. As you are packing up your stuff, you come across this letter and decide to open it. And in reading the letter, you find out that for the last 20 years you've actually been a millionaire—but you just never read the letter. The money was yours. It was in your account and you had complete access to it. But you just didn't read the letter.

In a sense, that is true of those of us who have trusted Jesus as Savior. God has written us a letter that explains the wealth that is ours in Christ. It is not something we have to earn, and it is not something for which we perform. It is not something that eventually somehow you might get, but it is automatically yours if you have trusted Jesus as Savior. It is our wealth in Christ—not material wealth—but a wealth that is far more meaningful and significant. It's also not an irrelevant wealth—it's not something that is just an intellectual exercise, and you say, "Oh, that's nice." But it's the type of wealth that, if we understood it, it would dramatically affect the way we live every day of our lives.

That letter is the book of Ephesians in the Bible, and we are going to dedicate ourselves to studying it together. We're going to roll up our sleeves and enter into this "diamond mine." Together we are going to find these treasures – these diamonds – that are ours. We'll discover this wealth that is ours because of our relationship with Jesus Christ, and we are going to find out the truth about our life in Christ.

As we begin our study I want to read a few quotes that other people said about the book of Ephesians, just to help you understand where we are headed. The book of Ephesians was John Calvin's favorite epistle in the New Testament. Armitage Robinson called it "the crown of Paul's writings." William Barclay said it is the "Queen of the Epistles." It has been called the "crown and climax of Paul's theology." One writer said it is "the consummate and most comprehensive statement, which even the New Testament contains, of the meaning of

the Christian religion. It is certainly the final statement of Paul's theology." Those are pretty strong words which help us understand the significance of this book that we are about to study.

As I began to open up commentaries and read this week, it was interesting to me how many of the authors said that when a publisher asked them to write a commentary on the book of Ephesians, that through the course of their study, their life was radically transformed, even though they had studied the book of Ephesians many times before. That gives you just some idea of the depth of what is in this book and what can potentially transform our lives in the next several months, as we study it together.

Since Ephesians is a letter, {we call them epistles, but an epistle is a letter} there would have been a certain template that a writer followed, and Paul certainly followed that. That would include, at the beginning, an introduction of who you are and an introduction of who the recipients are, and that is what we find in verse 1: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God..." Here he establishes himself as the author, and that he is an apostle, which means a "sent one from God." He also uses the phrase "by the will of God." It is important to realize that when we understand our calling according to the will of God, it takes any pride and ego out of ministry. Paul is saying, "This is simply my calling—this is what God has called *me* to do for the body of Christ." It is not because Paul is special or because he is somehow outperforming others. Paul is simply saying, "This is my calling," and he establishes that at the very beginning of the letter. The book of Ephesians has a lot to say about the will of God and some commentators believe that Ephesians says more about the sovereign will of God than any other New Testament book. That may very well be the case, and Paul is establishing a tone right at the beginning that this is where the whole book is headed.

Who is Paul writing to? "To the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." When we hear that word "saint" in our current religious climate we unfortunately think of something different than what the New Testament intended. We tend to think of a saint as someone who has performed exceptionally well in their religion, and who has reached some level of performance to be dubbed a saint. We must understand that has nothing to do with what the Bible means when it says *saints*. The word literally means *set apart ones*, and every single person who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior is called a saint. We are saints, not because of how we have performed; we are saints because of what God has done for us. We are saints on the basis of Jesus Christ's work on our behalf. Therefore, every believer is a saint, and that is what Paul says at the end of verse 1, when he defines the saints as "those who are faithful." We might translate that as "those who believe in Christ Jesus." Verse 2 says: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This was a fairly standard greeting, but also speaks of the two major themes in this book—the *grace* of God and the *peace* of God.

Next week we will dig in to verse 3 and go on from there, but first we need to better understand the city of Ephesus, who these Ephesian believers were, and how Paul established this church. Acts 18 & 19 gives us the background information that sets the tone for our entire study.

Antioch was home base for Paul during his various missionary journeys, when he went up around the Mediterranean Sea, and up around the Aegean Sea, visiting a number of cities. The New Testament epistles reflect the different cities where Paul established

churches. On his second missionary journey, Paul ends up in Corinth, which we read about in Acts 18:1-4:

After these things, he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them; and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

This is the second journey of Paul and he comes to Corinth. While in Corinth, he runs into Aquila and Priscilla, who are also tent-makers who had been in Italy. Claudius, the emperor, kicked all the Jews out of Italy, so they went to Corinth. There Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, because they were both tent-makers, and they spent the next 18 months together – living and working together. Paul spent an enormous amount of time pouring his life into these two, as he taught them the Scriptures. And in a moment, we will see the sovereign hand of God moving all these “chess pieces” just where He wanted them, in order to accomplish His purpose.

Acts 18:18-21: And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus.

So Paul goes from Corinth to Ephesus, and he takes with him Aquila and Priscilla, whom he has mentored and discipled and has poured his life into. As he was teaching in the synagogue, the Jews there said, “Would you stay and teach us some more?” Paul said he could not stay there because he had a commitment. He went on to Antioch, but he left Priscilla and Aquila, and they carried on the teaching ministry in the city of Ephesus.

To better understand the city of Ephesus, we need to understand that it was a port city. Picture the Mediterranean Sea, with the Aegean Sea up above that, and on the eastern border of that is the city of Ephesus – a port city. Since Ephesus was right on the sea, it was a very significant city. It was the capital of the Aegean province and a city of about 300,000 people (approximately the size of Lincoln and half again). Because of it being right on the port, Ephesus was a significant place for commerce and traffic. By the first century a lot of the ports were starting to silt in, and it was hard getting ships in and out. Many cities were fading in terms of their role as a port city.

But what was most significant to those in the city of Ephesus was the temple to the goddess, Artemis (the Greek name) or Diana (the Roman name)—it was the same goddess of fertility. Alexander the Great, about 300 years before, began work on this temple. By now it was completed and was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was a magnificent structure that paid homage to this goddess of Diana. Because she was the goddess of fertility, there were hundreds of prostitutes at the temple; and part of worshiping the goddess was to go up and have relations with those prostitutes. So Ephesus was a very pagan and occultist city – a very immoral city of about 300,000 people. We then ask the question: how could Paul and a couple of people go in and change that city at all? How could they have a significant impact and establish a church there? And yet, as we read on in

the story, what we are going to find out is that they not only established a church, but they literally changed the city. They changed the culture, and they changed the entire province. How did they do that?

Acts 18:24: Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, and he was mighty in the Scriptures.

That verse (24) says a lot. Apollos was an Alexandrian, and the city of Alexandria was the second most influential city in the Roman Empire. It had a population of about 600,000 people and it was an intellectual capital, where the university was located. The university had about 700,000 books in its library, so it was a very significant place for anybody who considered themselves to be a thinker. In the Greek culture what people admired more than anything else was the ability to speak, or to be an orator, so that would have been a significant educational place. We are told that is where Apollos came from, that he was highly educated, and that he was “eloquent.” That meant he was a mighty orator, but he was also mighty in the Scriptures—and that is a good combination. He had both the knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to communicate them.

So Apollos makes his way down to Ephesus and begins to teach there in the synagogue in verse 25:

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.

Apollos arrived and was speaking the truth very accurately because he had a thorough understanding of the Scriptures. What he did not know was the rest of the story. Apollos only knew the story up as far as John the Baptist, but he did not know the rest of the story. Now, think about who would have been there who was familiar with the rest of the story. Think about who had poured his life into another couple and taught them the rest of the story. Wouldn't that couple then be in an ideal position to help Apollos understand the rest of his theology? Verse 26 tells us:

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

So Aquila and Priscilla hear Apollos teaching and they say, “You know, he is completely accurate up to what he knows.” But they pulled him aside and taught him the rest of the story. They taught him about Jesus as the Redeemer and Savior, and Apollos understood it. He completed his message, and he was such a powerful orator that he wanted to go to Corinth, which was one of the philosophical capitals, to talk to those people. So the church sent him away, and he went back to Corinth. (We find that out in Chapter 19:1.) Achaia was the province and Corinth would have been the city in that province.

Now look at the sovereign hand of God in what we have covered so far. You have this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who (because of Claudius) were kicked out of Italy and ended up in Corinth. There they met up with the apostle Paul, and because they were all tent-makers they spent 18 months living together, while Paul poured himself and his theology into them.

Then they all moved on to Ephesus. Paul went back to Antioch, but Aquila and Priscilla were still there when Apollos came—a powerful teacher of the Scriptures who just didn't know the whole story. So there were Aquila and Priscilla, properly positioned to teach him the rest of his theology. Apollos then was sent back to Corinth in order to teach there. You see God moving all these people, like chess pieces, exactly where He wanted them placed in order to accomplish His mission.

Acts 19:1: And it came about that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.

Now Paul is beginning the third missionary journey. He had been back at Antioch, but he now has left for the third journey, which takes him back to Ephesus. Here he runs into these disciples.

Acts 19:2-7: And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John's baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying and there were in all about twelve men.

So Paul ends up back in Ephesus, hears these men, and says, “Have you heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit?” And they say, “No. All we understand is up through John the Baptist.” So Paul teaches them the rest of the story; they put their faith in Jesus; and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. What they really experience is life in Christ.

The emphasis of every single passage that we have read so far is the value or importance of the teaching of the Scriptures. We see Paul, over and over again, teaching the scriptures to Aquila and Priscilla. Then they all come and teach in Ephesus, and the teaching goes to Apollos, and then from Apollus to Corinth, and now back to Ephesus, correcting or fulfilling these people's theology. The emphasis we see in all of this is the importance of the teaching of the Scriptures.

Acts 19:8-9: And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, *{the Way was what they referred to Christianity as in the 1st century}* he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

I think this is important because I find it interesting that Paul was teaching in the synagogue, and he taught there for about three months. Soon they got tired of hearing it, and they started to grow angry and began to dig their heels in and said, “We really don't want to hear this anymore.” Now try to imagine—how would we in the 21st century, as evangelicals, respond to that? I think in the current climate we would probably dig our heels in and fight back. We would probably justify that by saying, “Well, we are teaching the Word, and nobody is going to chase us out of here!” But what I find interesting is that Paul just simply withdrew out of the synagogue, because his passion was not to argue with people who didn't

want to listen. His passion was to teach the Word of God to those who wanted to learn. Paul wasn't really interested in having a big debate or a fight with people who didn't want to hear it, so he simply moved to a different environment. He moved to the school of Tyrannus and he began pouring the Scriptures into anybody who wanted to come and to listen and to learn.

Look at what it then says in verse 10: "And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Paul was dedicating himself to the teaching of the Scriptures. When it talks about teaching daily, it is important to understand the schedule of someone in the 1st century. Paul made his living in Ephesus as a tent-maker, so he would have gotten up fairly early in the morning and would have worked at his occupation until around 11 o'clock, when people in that culture took a break. From 11 to 4 was a rest time during the heat of the day, and it was during that rest time when the people would gather and be taught the Scriptures. Then, from 4 o'clock until about 9:30 at night, they would go back and work their job, and then they would go to bed. They would have had that schedule six days a week, so it would amount to about five hours a day of teaching time that Paul poured the Scripture into these people's lives.

For two years that was Paul's strategy for changing people's lives – and for changing a pagan city, for changing a culture, and for changing a whole province. When I think today of all the strategies for planting churches and all the plans for getting people in the doors of a church, I realize that Paul didn't have any of those clever ideas. Paul's idea was to just sit down and pour the Scriptures into people's lives, and that would have a radical affect. So that is what he did. For 4 or 5 hours a day over two years, he poured the Scriptures into the people's lives. I'll do the math for you—that ends up to be about 3,120 hours of Bible teaching in two years. That was Paul's church-planting strategy and that was the cornerstone of this church in Ephesus. It was just an overwhelming desire to teach and know the Scriptures.

What kind of an effect was it having? They said it went all the way out into all of Asia – that people were learning about Jesus. Look at verse 11:

And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued both of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

You say, "What in the world is going on there?" Whenever there is a powerful movement of God, you always find imposters who come and try to get in on it. And because Paul is pouring his life into these people and God is doing such a work, the imposters start to come up out of the carpet, and decide they are going to do the same thing. So they try to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. The problem is they didn't even know who Jesus is, and so the demon says, "I know Jesus and I know Paul, but I don't think I know you." And then they have this weird scene and they all get beat up. At the end of that text it just simply says

that the authentic was being confirmed and the imposters were being exposed. And all of that is still going to the truth of the Word that was being taught.

Look at verse 18: “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.” In the Greek it actually reads to say that these people were coming continuously. The more they were taught, the more they were dealing with things in their life, and they were coming and repenting of their sin and getting right with God. It really was a revival that was happening there.

Verse 19: “And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” So all these pagans who had occultic books full of magic formulas were bringing them and putting them in a pile and burning them. There were so many of them that the value was about fifty thousand pieces of silver. The monetary value of that would have been the equivalent of about the annual salary of 150 men put together, so that was a considerable amount of money that was burning there in the middle of town.

And then I love verse 20: “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” That is the emphasis here. It is the teaching of the Word that is producing this revival – this change – not only in the people’s lives, but also in the culture. You have to love, then, this story that follows beginning in verse 23, because it is a story about how Paul was radically changing the whole culture:

And about that time, there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence.” And when they heard this, they were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

We need to understand what Demetrius is saying. Demetrius was someone who made all these trinkets and artifacts that went with the goddess, Diana, or Artemis. And because Paul is pouring the Scriptures into these people’s lives and it is spreading (in Demetrius’ words) all over Asia, these people are no longer buying his trinkets. They no longer need his idols; they no longer need his junk. And so he gathers together all of his fellow tradesmen, and says, “If we don’t do something about this guy, we’re out of business, because he is totally transforming the culture.” They get this whole riot together and say that they have got to do something. If you read the rest of the chapter, this riot breaks out and they finally end up before one of the officials in the city. The official tells them, “You’re going to have to learn to live with it,” and he breaks them up and sends them on their way.

What I find to be so interesting is Paul’s strategy for dramatically changing that culture. His strategy wasn’t to picket. It wasn’t to protest, or to try and pass some sort of policies. He brought about the change by the systematic teaching of the Word of God. As Paul poured the Word into these people’s lives, their lives were radically changed, and the rest

took care of itself. All of a sudden, not only in Ephesus, but in all of Asia, the entire culture is being dramatically changed because of the power of the Word of God as it is being taught.

I remember the British theologian, John Stott, when he spoke at Moody Bible College when I was a student there, talking about this text. He said, “Wherever the apostle Paul went, they had a riot. Wherever I go, they serve tea.” I’ve always remembered that, because whenever you read through the book of Acts, it is true. Paul had a very simple strategy. He went into a city and he just taught the Word of God. He taught it passionately and he taught it hour after hour after hour. And what resulted was typically some sort of a riot, because the culture was being so radically transformed that it would just explode out into the community. Paul’s strategy was not complicated – it was just to teach the Scriptures.

In Acts 20, from about halfway through the chapter to the end, you have the last of what is written about the city of Ephesus in the book of Acts. Paul brings together the Ephesian elders and reminds them that he has taught them the Scriptures. He tells them that he thinks soon he is going to be imprisoned, and he also warns them of false teachers who are going to rise up among them. And then you have a very emotional parting at the end of chapter 20. Ten years later Paul would be in a Roman prison, and he would write this letter of Ephesians back to the city of Ephesus—the city where he had such an emphasis on the teaching of the Scriptures. He would write back, then, this theologically packed letter to remind them of what was true about their life in Christ.

I talked earlier about wanting to set a tone for this study for the next four and a half months. The tone that we set needs to be consistent with what we find about the city of Ephesus from the book of Acts, and that is this very high value on the teaching of the Word of God. I would like us to challenge ourselves to kick up our commitment to the teaching of Scripture and the memorizing of Scripture. I’d like us to “kick it up a notch” as Emeril Lagosse says. {When I had heart surgery, I had to watch something on T.V., so I watched the cooking channel.} So in the words of Emeril, let’s “kick it up a notch.” I think we have a high bar, but my challenge is to kick it up a little bit higher. In children’s ministry, in youth ministry, in college ministry, in single adult ministry and adult ministry, in men’s ministry and women’s ministry, and here in this environment, let us kick it up a notch and go one level higher in our commitment to teaching and understanding the Word of God.

I am willing to commit myself to that. The goal I have set for myself, in both my study and my teaching, is to kick it up a notch and go a step further to try and get into this “diamond mine” to learn what is there for us. But I want you to come on this journey with me – I don’t want to go solo. So let me give you three practical ways that we, together as a congregation, can go up a notch in our value of biblical instruction.

#1: My challenge would be for every one of us to read through the book of Ephesians one time every week for the next 18 weeks. Every week that we are in this study, sometime during that week read the book of Ephesians through cover to cover. It takes about 30 minutes. Maybe you want to gather as a family one evening a week and take 30 minutes to read through the entire book as a family. I guarantee that if you do that every week throughout this study, you will understand this book far more than you can imagine. So that’s number one.

#2: Let’s see how much of this book we can commit to memory. For some of you, that will be ten verses. For some, it will be a chapter. For some of you, it will be the whole

book. My challenge to memorize is not just for the next 4 ½ months but for the year—for the entire year of 2001. We are going to immerse ourselves in this book from now until the middle part of May and we will then understand it much better. Then let us spend the whole year trying to see how much of it we can commit to memory, not just as an intellectual exercise, but to saturate our minds with the truth of this book. Let us absolutely immerse ourselves in this truth this year and see how it changes our lives.

#3 is to use the Bible study lessons that we make available to further your own study of the text each week. These study lessons coincide with the passage that we study on Sunday morning and are intended to be studied together with a group. They can be used in a growth group, a small group, an accountability group, or as family devotions. The lessons take the text that we study on Sunday and take you one step further in studying it, discussing it and deciding how to apply it to your life. Rather than studying something else, let us see how deep we can go with this one particular book. The study lessons are available every week at the Information Center. Try to find some forum where, throughout the week, you can study further this Ephesian letter.

Let us, between those three things, just absolutely immerse ourselves in this book of Ephesians. I'm convinced that if we do that, we will see radical changes in our lives.

John Mackay was the president of Princeton Seminary in the middle part of the 20th century. As a 14 year-old boy, he read the book of Ephesians from cover to cover, and he said it radically changed his life. Listen to how he puts it in his own words, "I saw a new world... Everything was new... I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything... I had been 'quicken'd'; I was really alive."

- from *The Message of Ephesians* by John Stott, p. 15

Think about the effect reading through the book of Ephesians had on that 14 year-old boy and how it impacted his life. My prayer for all of us is that the book of Ephesians will do the same for us in the months ahead.

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