
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

Who are you?

Ephesians 1:1-2

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

Setting out from Hamburg, Germany, one day to give a concert in London, violinist Fritz Kreisler had an hour before his boat sailed. He wandered into a music shop, where the proprietor asked if he might look at the violin Kreisler was carrying. He then vanished and returned with two policemen, one of whom told the violinist, "You are under arrest."

"What for?" asked Kreisler.

"You have Fritz Kreisler's violin."

"I am Fritz Kreisler," protested the musician.

"You can't put that on us. Come along to the station."

As Kreisler's boat was sailing soon, there was no time for prolonged explanations. Kreisler asked for his violin and played a piece he was well known for. "Now are you satisfied?" he asked. The policemen let the musician go because he had done what only Fritz Kreisler could do.

As we begin our look at the book of Ephesians and specifically at these first two verses, let me tell you that one of the great themes of the book is that of identity, of who we are "in Christ." As we progress in what we call the Christian life, it is to be increasingly evident to all exactly who we are. And like our opening story, who we are cannot simply be a profession of the mouth, but must also be proven by performance that we make. Our performance and our profession is to clearly identify us with Christ.

Last week I had asked the question, "How long would a person have been with Paul before he knew that Paul was a Christian?" We need to remember that if we are in Christ; if we possess the fullness of Christ, saved by the grace of God, having been born-again, filled with the very Spirit of Christ; then we are, of all peoples on the face of the earth, most blessed and most rich. Our lives ought to reflect this identity, this position we have in Christ.

It is in light of whom we are and what we have in Christ that I have entitled this series of messages, "Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace." Beloved, it is one thing to know you are rich; to know you have wealth; and yet quite another to live in light of that. God has lavishly and richly poured out upon us His grace and His expectation of us is that we would live; live fully, live rightly, live faithfully in light of our rich heritage and identity in Christ.

So then, what does this look like? Well, even in these opening verses of Ephesians, we are presented with answers to identity. Paul identifies for us both who he is as a servant of Christ as well as whom the recipients of this letter are because of Christ.

We begin with the opening word, "Paul" – informing us as to who is the author. Remember that Paul started as "Saul" - named after the most famous of Benjamites, the very first king of Israel, King Saul. Saul (Paul) was well educated in the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3); was a

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rabbi and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was a prominent and pre-eminent Jewish leader and one who hated the followers of Jesus Christ with fevered passion (Acts 22:4-5).

Remember that it was even while he was on his way to arrest Christians that Saul of Tarsus had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-9). Through that encounter, the Lord saved Saul of Tarsus and equipped him to preach the Word of God around the known world. Paul became the greatest preacher of the Christian era and is responsible for writing 13 of the 27 books of our New Testament. With this background about Paul, let us note four things Paul identifies in these opening two verses and then seek to apply those truths:

I. Paul's Authority (1:1a)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God

Paul begins by stating the dual source of his authority. These opening words demand that Paul be heard, not because of who he is, but because of who he represents. Notice how Paul describes himself as "*an apostle of Christ Jesus*". The word "**apostle**" translates the Greek word "**apostolos**" and means "*a sent one*". The word is used in the New Testament to refer to those men who were chosen to be the foundational leaders of the fledgling church (Ephesians 2:20). They were the men who received direct revelation from God and gave it to His people. They gave us the apostle's teaching or doctrine.

The word "**apostle**" is most often used as a specific and unique title for just fourteen men (the Twelve original disciples of Jesus, with Matthias replacing Judas, plus Paul) whom Christ personally chose and commissioned to authoritatively proclaim the gospel and lead the early church. The thirteen **apostles** not only were all called directly by Jesus but all were witnesses of His resurrection, Paul having encountered Him on the Damascus Road after His ascension. These apostles were given direct revelation of God's Word to proclaim authoritatively, the gift of healing, and the power to cast out demons (Matthew 10:1). By these signs their teaching authority was verified (2 Corinthians 12:12). Their teachings became the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), and their authority extended beyond local bodies of believers to the entire believing world. In the present context Paul uses **apostle** in its more common specialized, restricted meaning. The authority of Paul's message did not derive from the messenger but from the Sender.

In Acts 1:21-22, Peter specifically outlines the necessary qualifications of the office or title of apostle saying, *21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us — 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.*

So Peter tells us that an **apostle** (by title and position) is a man who had seen the risen Messiah and who was sent forth by Him with His full authority to proclaim and establish the faith of Christ in every place and to every person to which His master led him. Peter was Christ's emissary and spoke with His authority as was Paul's. The work description of an apostle included the following: preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17), teaching and praying (Acts 6:4), performing miracles to authenticate their message (2 Corinthians 12:12), building up other leaders of the church (Acts 14:23), and writing the Word of God (Ephesians 1:1). When Paul refers to himself as an apostle here, he is establishing his divinely bestowed authority to speak on behalf of God. He will begin with this title in ten of his thirteen letters.

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By way of a position or title in the church, there are no **apostles** today in the sense that Paul and Peter were apostles. Beware of any person who claims this title for themselves today. With that said, every believer is expected, regardless of their particular spiritual gift, to know they are sent out one, that they are on a mission and have authority to proclaim the gospel of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, believers are all called "*ambassadors for Christ.*" Every true believer is sent out by Christ Jesus for the purpose of spreading the gospel.

Do you see yourself as sent out to proclaim the gospel? To tell others about the person and teaching of Christ? Are you sent out? Sent into the neighborhoods where you live, sent to the jobs you have; sent onto the campuses you attend; sent to your places of play and your places of labor? Where stands it written? Where is this mandate to be sent out for such a purpose as this; a purpose that parallels and imitates that of the apostle Paul? You know it well. Our Lord Jesus uttered the familiar but often neglected words found in Matthew 28:19-20, saying: *19 Go [having been sent out] therefore and make disciples [learners/followers of Jesus] of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit [your authority], 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you [your mission]; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age [your confidence].* Indeed, we are all sent out.

Paul was a man sent from God for a special mission with divine authority. He also tells us that he is an apostle "**by the will of God**". This reminded his readers that Paul has not chosen this path for himself; the Lord had chosen him for this path. Paul's own testimony reveals what he knew to be true about himself, the least of the apostle and the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-15). Paul's use of the word does not arise out of pride, but out of profound humility that he had been counted worthy to be an apostle.

By the way, Paul knew that his first priority was to be a servant of Christ (Romans 1:1). But, God had placed His hand on Paul and called him to a special place of service. He does the same for every one of His children. None of us will ever be apostles, but we have a place within the body of Christ where we are expected to serve. When we are all in our place, serving the Lord, the body of Christ functions as it was designed to function (1 Corinthians 1:27). When Paul mentions his apostleship, he is not throwing around titles. He is merely stating his divine authority to deliver truth to the people of God.

II. Paul's Audience (1:1b)

...To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus

Having written about the dual source of his authority, Paul issues a dual designation concerning the audience of his letter. He calls them by two titles; "**saints**" and the "**faithful in Christ Jesus.**" Let's unpack these, shall we?

To begin with, let me ask you this question, "How do you tend to speak about God's people?" Do you communicate fondness and affection? Brotherhood and fellowship? Notice how Paul speaks of believers.

Here he first calls them "**saints**". The word "saints" comes from a Greek word that means "holy." So in your bibles, when you read the words, holy, saints, sanctified; these are all related words that come back to this word "holy". Believers are called "**saints**" – holy ones. When people hear the word "**saints**" today they tend to think of dead religious people who have been exalted by the church. If you are from some religious backgrounds, you might think of statues to which you

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pray in times of need. Those ideas do not even come close to what the Bible means when it calls believers "**saints**".

The word "**saint**" means "**a most holy one**". It speaks of something that has been sanctified and set apart for God's exclusive use. It speaks of that which is cut out, or a cut above for special use. Beloved, the word "**saint**" is a description of how God sees His people as well as what God expects from His people. And what God sees and expects is what Paul sees and expects. Paul calls these believers "**saints**" because he sees as God's chosen people, a people separated from the ways and thinking of the world; and made this way, that is "holy – set apart" by God's free life-transforming and saving grace in Christ. All who trust Christ have been sanctified, made holy, made saints in Christ...

- By God's eternal decree
Ephesians 1:4 - just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him...
- By the blood of Christ's atonement
Hebrews 10:14 - For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.
- By the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit in the new birth
1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Notice that the idea here is one of identification. Believers are "**saints**" by virtue of what God has done. The church does not make people saints; God makes every child of His a saint. Every person who is saved by the grace of God and washed in the blood of Jesus is now "**a holy thing**", set apart for the glory of God and for His exclusive use in this world. This is who we are now in Christ, we are saints. But the word "**saint**" also reminds us of what God had done for us in Jesus. When God saved us and we expressed faith in Christ, God imputed (charged to our account) the full and rich righteousness of Christ to us (Romans 3:21-22; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 3:9). We are rich because all the righteousness of Christ now dwells within us.

Then Paul goes on to describe believers as "**the faithful in Christ Jesus.**" While the word "**saint**" describes our standing before the Lord, the word "**faithful**" describes our "activities" in the world. Beloved, if you are a saint, it will affect all areas of your life. Because we have been saved and sanctified by God, we are new creatures in Jesus. You know the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17 which says what? *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

What does this mean beloved? If we are saints, we are to be faithful; we are to be the faithful. That is, our lives ought to be lived notably different from the world. People should sense distinctiveness about our lives. In other words, what should they hear us talking about? Christ. What or who is to be reflected in our jobs, in our play, in our speech? Christ. Just as in a

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marriage, both spouses are to be known for loving one another exclusively; for possessing a fidelity to one another both physically and mentally; so is it that we are to be spiritually set apart to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are His bride; His intended and our hearts, minds, actions and attitudes toward Him, toward the things He loves is to be pure.

Let me ask you, do people know you are “married” – covenantally committed to the Lord Jesus Christ? Or might it be that if someone heard that you call yourself a “Christian” – that your commitment to Christ could be called into question because what you say and do does not match the level of commitment such a position calls you to.

Now, do not get me wrong. I know we will all fail Christ and that we will do so often. While Christ does call us to pursue perfection and will one day bring us to complete perfection, we will stumble. But do you desire to be more faithful to Christ; more committed to Christ; more reflective of Christ? This is what Paul recognized about and called these Ephesian believers to; and this is what the Holy Spirit calls you and me to. The point is this, those who know the Lord are His holy saints, who live faithful lives in a world that does not know the Lord. If this describes you, excel still more. If it does not, then repent and call upon the name of the Lord to be saved from such selfish sinfulness and for the grace to know and live for Him. This is how we live faithfully before God in light of the riches of His saving grace. So, we have seen Paul's authority and Paul's audience; next we find...

III. Paul's Acknowledgement (1:2a)

Grace to you and peace....

Beginning in verse 2, we have Paul's acknowledgement. Can you see the riches and fullness Paul is describing here? First he mentions a full Christ-granted authority, next he speaks of believers as fully saints and fully faithful; and now give a word of full acknowledgment, or greeting to the audience of this letter. Paul extends a double blessing to his readers.

First, Paul greets them by saying, “**grace to you**”. The word “**grace**” translates a word that means “**good will, lovingkindness, highest favor**”. We use the word to speak of the Lord's work in saving us, keeping us and changing our lives. We all know that “**grace**” refers to “**the underserved love and favor of God for lost sinners.**” In that day it was a common greeting. When we meet we say things like “**Hello**”; “**How are you?**”; or “**What are you doing?**” All of which mean absolutely nothing, right? Such words are but fillers more often than not. But when people of Paul's day met, they would say, “**Charis**”, which is the word translated “**grace**”. In other words, when they met they in effect said a prayer, “**I pray for you the best God can offer.**” That's a lot better than our greetings, is it not?

Oh that Christians would learn to greet one another in such a way that points them and all who hear to God. In Paul's companion letter to the Colossians, Paul writes in 4:6 these words, *Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.* If we would greet one another with the subject of God's grace on our minds, it would have a profound impact on people. Why? Because it provides an opportunity to acknowledge the grace of God that bought us, the grace of God that gives us hope and empowers us for living. I suggest to you that if as believers we would intentionally work on how we greet one another, it could completely open up not only doors of encouragement, but also of evangelism. Would you think about how you greet people?

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But Paul does not leave it at "grace". He next says "**peace**". This would be a prayer for well-being from God. John MacArthur says, "**grace is the fountain of which peace is the stream**". Because the grace of God is being poured into our lives; the peace of God is to be flowing out of our lives. It is because of the grace of God, we can have peace with God; this sense of well-being and right standing with God. This is exactly what Paul declared in Romans 5:1 saying, "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...*" And now, because we have peace with God flowing for the grace of God, because we know this richness is ours, we can be confident in proclaiming the availability of this peace to others. What people want and need is peace; that sense of well-being. Christians are rich in peace and are to even begin their greeting reminding themselves and those whom they greet that peace is available, if we are in Christ. It is the grace of God that brings us to God, and when we come to God, His grace is able to give us boundless peace in our hearts. Do you both communicate with your mouth and in your actions that you possess this grace and peace of God? But this begs a bit of a question; one we have answered but Paul is clear to identify in the last half of verse 2, naming for us the very source or agent of this grace and peace.

IV. Paul's Agent (1:2b)

...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For Paul, everything he has said thus far flows from this one source. Paul's calling and apostolic authority; the sainthood and faithfulness of the believers; the dual blessings of grace and peace, all come to us through our relationship with God the Father. A relationship with God is only possible through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is Jesus who said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life; not one come to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6).

Beloved, when we trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord, all the riches of God become ours in Him. See here that Paul does not call God, "the Father" but what? God our Father. Paul tells his audience that the agent of this grace and peace as well as both their standing as well as his own, all comes through the agency of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an intimacy expressed here. God is our Father; our Provider, our Protector and that is most readily revealed to us in His sending to us the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, we become instantly wealthy in the things of God. We become the recipients of every spiritual blessing; of the full grace and peace of God. Notice how Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 8:9 saying, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.*"

Now beloved, we are rich, rich in Christ, rich in blessing, rich in grace, rich in hope, rich in peace, and rich in glories of God. And because of this, we need to answer two questions as we work through the letter. First, do I know how rich I am because I have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord? That is a question of identity, do you know who you are? And the second question is, "If I do know how rich I am in Christ, am I living like a rich man? Am I being extravagant in my living for Christ? Do people know just how rich I am in Christ?"

If not, why not? What needs to change in you? Your heart? What needs to be confessed and repented of so that you might live as a rich man for Christ? If you are living as a rich man for Christ, let me remind you never to be stingy; never hold back, but faithfully live your life out as one who has come to possess the riches of God's grace. Let us seek to pour out the grace of God, which we have received, upon others even as richly as it has been poured out upon us.

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Now, you might ask, "How do I do this, pastor?" Glad you asked. Let me give you a reminder of some things you ought to be doing that will help you grow in the realization of how rich you are in Christ:

1. Remind yourself daily that you are a sinner saved by God's life-transforming, saving grace. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 2:4-7 where we read, *4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
2. Wash yourself daily in the Word of God. Make sure you are spending adequate time filling your mind with the truth of God. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 5:25-26 where we read, *25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...* Christ loved the church enough to cleanse her with the "word". Husbands are to love and lead their wives in this way, longing for the holiness of their wives by washing them in the "word" of God. Since we believers are the bride of Christ, we ought to long to be washed in the water of the word of God daily; for this pleases our bridegroom, Jesus Christ.
3. Intentionally speak to others of the work and glories of Christ. We find Paul exhorting this in Ephesians 4:24-25 where we read, *24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.*

Soli Deo Gloria

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