

2. In Christ

September 23, 2012

Just in case you haven't noticed, people are strange and contradict themselves within their own ideas and behaviors. If they are honest with themselves, they all would like to be accepted by others; yet they want to stand out as an individual. In other words, people want to be "IN" with the crowd.

Myspace.com became the first major social networking forerunner in 2003. In June 2006, it surpassed Google as the most visited website in the United States. But in 2008, it was overtaken by Facebook which changed the media, social, and political landscapes forever. It is boasting 955 million users around the world as of June, 2012.

Do you know what made people choose "Facebook" over "Myspace" other than some fancy technical stuff and features? One simple thing – "Like" button. The Facebook people noticed that people want to be "LIKED".

Because of that addictive feature, some people indiscriminately allow anyone to become their friends in their Facebook and make themselves vulnerable physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

There is one "IN" group that stands out far better than any social networking web site. It is the "In Christ Jesus" group. It is available to anyone who wants to receive Jesus' invitation of eternal salvation. The benefits are heavenly, literally to say the least. The ones who joined receive something far better than Facebook's "Likes"; they get to receive the eternal love of God that has no end. But the majority of people in the human history reject this invitation.

This morning, we are going to learn a tiny portion of God's love through His grace and peace in Christ from the apostle Paul's teaching in the Book of Ephesians.

A. PAUL

Ephesians 1:1a Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God

What do we know about apostle Paul? Actually, nothing much other than what he told us in his letters to the churches in the NT. When you put them together, we can get to have a little glimpse of him.

According to Acts 9, Paul was a Jew from Tarsus, a metropolitan city in the province of Cilicia on the lush plain of Cilicia in the southwest corner of Asia Minor at peace under the rule of Rome.

So he grew up in a multicultural world like the people in Europe. It is not unusual for average Europeans to speak 2-4 languages fluently. Paul was apparently reared in a stable Jewish home, and his father was possibly a wealthy tentmaker with at least one sibling, a sister, but nothing is known of his mother.

Acts 23:16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Paul grew up among strong religious convictions. As an adolescent, he was trained in the OT Law under Gamaliel, the most honored rabbi of the first century, where he learned to dissect the texts of the OT laws. Brilliant mind, strong in character, solid in

leadership, and with his teacher Gamaliel's recommendation, Paul was on his way to taking a seat on the Sanhedrin in the Hall of Polished Stone to become a ruler of the Jews.

Philippians 3:5-6 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians, Saul had a very close encounter with the One whom he really was persecuting – Jesus Christ Himself.

Acts 9:3-5 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

From the chief persecutor to the chief apostle of Jesus Christ, from Saul of Tarsus to Paul the missionary of God, he was transformed inside out.

B. AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST BY THE WILL OF GOD

Ephesians 1:1a Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God

Not only was the letter to the Ephesians impacted by Paul's unique character and knowledge, but it was also supported by the special office he held: an apostle of Jesus Christ.

By now, some of you are thinking, "Are you seriously gonna teach this entire Book of Ephesians one word at a time?" No, relax. We will finish this Book only in about 30 to 32 Sundays.

The Greek term, "apostolos," simply means "sent one." But being an apostle of Jesus Christ has more meaning than just 'sent one'. On a few occasions, I've come across the books by some self-claimed "modern-day apostles" of Jesus Christ. But in biblical sense, they are NOT apostles of Jesus Christ. I am gonna reserve my opinion about them.

Here are the qualifications of being an apostle of Jesus Christ:

1) A witness of Jesus Christ

John 15:27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

The apostles were a special group of messengers sent by Christ to spread the Gospel message throughout the world. These men must have been with Christ during His ministry in order to qualify as His witnesses. For apostle Paul's case, he met the Lord in person on the road to Damascus.

2) Chosen by Christ

Luke 6:13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

All of Christ's apostles were personally called and chosen by Christ Himself. No man had the right or authority to take it upon himself to become an apostle of Christ.

In Acts chapter 1, the 11 apostles decided that they should choose the replacement of Judas who betrayed the Lord Jesus and later hung himself. They thought that God

wanted them to choose Matthias. So they did. Guess what? Matthias was not God's choice, it was Paul.

3) Able to perform miracles

Acts 2:43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

While these miracles confirmed the truth of the apostles' message, they also proved that a man was qualified to serve as an apostle.

No one today meets those qualifications. Therefore, let's guard against those whom Paul warns.

2 Corinthians 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

C. TO THE SAINTS

Ephesians 1:1b To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: If you have the background of Catholic, this verse may alarm you. You may wonder, "Is apostle Paul sending a letter to the bunch of dead godly people in Ephesus?" No! It is the most unfortunate thing that the denominational teachings have become more important and valued over Scripture in religion.

Even the dictionary defines a saint as a "person officially recognized for holiness of life." Who makes this official recognition? According to the Vatican' canonization process, the deceased person's life is examined carefully to see whether he qualifies for sainthood. If the candidate's character and conduct are found to be above reproach, if he has been responsible for working at least two miracles, then he is qualified to be made a saint.

As interesting as this procedure is, we never, ever find this saint canonization process anywhere in the Bible. Nine times in this brief letter, Paul addresses his Ephesian readers as saints – Ephesians 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18. These saints were alive, not dead, though once they had been "dead in trespasses and sins". And it is clear that they had never performed any miracles, though they had experienced a miracle of salvation by trusting Christ as Savior.

In other words, every born-again Christian is a saint, and every saint is a born-again Christian. So, now you are looking at "Saint JK." Moreover, every true Christian is in some sense separated from the world. If we are truly Christ's, we have a new nature, a new set of loyalties, and a new agenda. We belong to a different kingdom.

The Greek word for 'saint' is "hagios". It means "the most holy thing". Some might object that we cannot be the most holy thing, not even close. True, we are not holy at all without what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. He wiped away all of our sins with His precious blood, and input His holiness in our spiritual heavenly account so that we can be the most holy by His most holy nature.

D. FAITHFUL IN CHRIST JESUS

Ephesians 1:1b To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: The word 'Faithful,' in the New Testament, can mean "exercising faith" or "to continue in faith." In this verse, it probably means both. The Ephesians believed in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and were continuing to rely on God and grow in Him.

Notice that Paul focused on their faithfulness “in Christ.” This, and the equivalent “in Him,” is one of the most important phrases in the whole Book of Ephesians. Paul, in all his letters, used these phrases more than fifty times. In the first fourteen verses of Ephesians chapter 1 alone, he repeated them almost a dozen times. Do you get his drift?

Let me rephrase this: “In Christ” points to our being joined to Christ in one spiritual body so that what is true of him is also true for us.

This reminds me of the verse from the Book of John you all know very well.

John 15:5-7 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Paul would never have been an apostle, unless he was in Christ; none of born-again Christian would have been a saint, unless he or she is in Christ; we cannot be faithful to God, unless we are in Christ first.

So, to be in Christ means to be joined not only to our Lord but also to our brothers and sisters in the faith. And this makes sense because in order to remain faithful to Christ, we need the support of His people-and they need ours.

E. GREETING TO THE EPHESIANS

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

Grace – even non-Christians have heard and used this word, though the majority of them don’t care to know its true definition. Unless they are hardcore atheists, they would bow their heads before meals if there is someone who is leading a prayer which often is called “Grace” or listen quietly to that famous hymn “Amazing Grace.”

Let’s define ‘Grace’ even though many of you already heard about this:

Grace means “God’s undeserved favor” for sinners like us. It is the free, unmerited, unexpected love of God, and all the benefits, delights, and comforts which flow from it. It means that while we were sinners and enemies we have been treated as sons and heirs.

Peace is one of the side-products of grace. When we’ve been blessed by God’s undeserved gift of salvation, we have been reconciled to God – we have peace, both with God and in ourselves. God’s wrath no longer burns against us, and we, as a result, no longer have anything to fear.

Peace, then, produces a joy that transcends circumstances and all boundaries between fellow believers – whether it be race, class, gender, intellect, or anything else.

Without having the grace of God, we cannot have the peace with God. Without having the peace with God, a person cannot have the peace of God that calms his heart because he is still a sinner and an enemy of God. This is the reason all of unbelievers seek peace from all the wrong places, yet not find it.

Paul included grace and peace in all of his greetings. He wanted all of his readers to experience God's unmerited love and rest in their daily living. And the Lord wants that for us too.

Grace and mercy often are found together in the Bible, because they certainly belong together in the experience of salvation. Grace and faith go together, because the only way to experience grace and salvation is through faith.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Do not be deceived by those who call themselves apostles of Jesus Christ of the 21st Century. The office of the apostles of Jesus Christ has been closed with Paul.
- 2) Do not be confused by some religious concepts of 'saint.' If you are a born-again Christian, you are a saint, not by your good behavior, but by Christ's holiness.
- 3) Do not think that we can chart our own spiritual journey without Jesus. Unless we are in Christ, we are utterly lost, poor, and will be damned in hell eternally.
- 4) Do not seek peace anywhere else other than Jesus Christ. We won't find it.