

How to Think Like a Christian

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[0 : 00] Now, all the Bible is God-breathed. All the Bible is useful and edifying, but we know that there are some parts of the Bible! that we're more excited to have a sermon about than others.

There are some portions of Scripture that the church returns to time and time again in order to be restored and refreshed. And historically, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one of those.

And it's widely regarded as a competitor of one of the most clear and most powerful books in all of Scripture. You know, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin, he said that this book is the beating heart of Scripture.

You may know that I'm a big fan of John Calvin, and John Calvin wrote books and preached on most of the Bible, but this was his favorite. And even Martin Lloyd-Jones, who many of you will know is a really big fan of Romans, even he said that Ephesians is the sublimest and most majestic expression of the Gospel.

And as we begin today, I want you to think about the book of Ephesians as the Ephesian botanical garden. And before you even walk through the entrance, I want you to see the winding path that leads you past some of the most incredible, beautiful displays.

[1 : 28] You can glimpse the incredible flowers of the blessings of Christ from chapters 1, verses 3 to 14. Behind those, you can glimpse the trees of grace alone and faith alone, the vine of union with Christ.

Behind those, you can see even more famous passages about our new life in Jesus Christ from chapter 4 or the whole armor of God from chapter 6.

And after you've imagined the Ephesian botanic garden, I want you to take one step inside and stop. And I don't want you to look around at anything that you find so incredible around you.

I want you to stop and just look down at the first two verses of this letter. There are 38 blades of grass there in the ESV, 36 in the NIV, a mere 30 blades of grass in the Greek.

And this patch of ground is what some people consider the least sublime and the least majestic part of this entire garden. And understandably so. It's an introductory patch of grass.

[2 : 43] But to just dig into this illustration a little bit more, I believe these first two verses are the theological equivalent of Bermuda grass. What is Bermuda grass?

Bermuda grass looks like grass. It feels like grass because it is grass. But even though it's very short, it has roots that stretch up to seven feet deep underneath.

And I know these couple of dozen words before us don't look particularly interesting, but what is really impressive is the thought behind them, the roots. And what I want to do today is to pull these words up by their roots and really look at the root structure, the thought behind these words.

Why is Paul saying these precise words and what does he precisely mean? Because what we will find is that the roots here are tremendously important for us to see.

they're the same roots that you need in your Christian lives. Because you need deep roots to get nutrients that you need to grow as a Christian.

[3 : 55] And so today we're going to have four points, all relatively brief, all dealing with how we're supposed to think as Christians in order to be able to read this beautiful letter and really any portion of Scripture.

But the first thing Paul teaches us in this letter is how to think about the Bible. I want you to notice how Paul begins his letter.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. And what Paul is doing there is saying that when you hear or read this letter, you are coming face to face, not just with my words, but with God's words.

When Paul says he is an apostle, he's not just throwing in a generic filler word, trying to get a little bit more space in the introduction. Apostle is an office.

It's an office as sure as the defense secretary or the home secretary, the first minister or the prime minister. You know, I know that there are some Christian denominations that call their leaders apostles and they throw around that term.

[5 : 04] But real apostles are only commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. And it is a title that was given only to the 12 disciples, including Judas' replacement, and Paul.

And it literally means one sent out. One sent out by Jesus. And Jesus gave these specific men the title of apostle so that they could function as his special ambassadors, as heralds.

And Paul here is opening up this letter with his credentials. An apostle. On whose authority?

Paul's? No. By the will of God. And that means when Paul speaks and writes as an apostle, he is really speaking and writing words with divine authority on a divine mission.

You know, when you hear Paul's words read to you, you're really hearing them twice. Not just once. You hear Paul's words and Jesus' words at the same time.

If you could skip forward in your Bibles very quickly to Ephesians 2, verse 17. I want you to notice the precise wording he uses.

[6 : 26] He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. And that he there, who is that?

That's Jesus. Paul is saying that Jesus himself preached to those who were far off including the Ephesians.

Including the Ephesians that he's writing this letter to. You know, how is he able to say that? You know, Jesus himself technically only left Judea a couple of times and not for very long.

You know, really the longest stretch is when he was a baby when he went to Egypt and he wasn't doing any teaching then. You know, there is no secret gap year in the Bible where Jesus decides to take a quick trip to Ephesus and start teaching the Ephesians.

That's not what's in Scripture. The Ephesians never literally heard Jesus' own voice with his precise accent preach to them. But still, they did hear Paul.

[7 : 32] They heard Paul the Apostle. And it's not, and it's really the same not just for Paul's letters but for the entire Bible.

In the Bible we have a lot of different authors. We have a lot of books in the Bible. And they're written by many people. You can think of Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah. We could go through them.

Many of them have the books titled after them. But when it gets right down to it, we can talk about Scripture having two authors. There's a human author and there's a divine author.

And when you read the words of the Gospel of John, those words really are written by a human man named John who knew Jesus and walked with him.

And all of his friends could have read that Gospel and thought only John could have put it that way. Doesn't that sound just so much like John? And yet every human author of Scripture is carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 35] And every word they write is God-breathed. And every word of Scripture are, these are not just the words of a human author but of God himself.

And when we read Scripture we need to recognize that we are really reading the Word of God. That it is God's Word to us. This is so important for us to see because it affects the way we read Scripture and the way we hear Scripture preached.

And when you read your Bibles you need to accept them not just as the words of Paul not just as the words of Moses but as Jesus' words as well.

Your Savior is speaking to you. He wants you to know your Bibles and he wants to teach you through his Word more and more about himself.

Every Christian is taught by Jesus. Every single one. And you commune with God whenever you open up your Bibles. What you need when you read your Bibles are really better eyes.

[9 : 51] By that I don't just mean better eyes to see the words on the page though that's obviously very important and I recommend reading glasses. But what you need are eyes to see the miracle that happens when a Christian reads the Scriptures.

You know a sinner who is distant from God is brought near in Jesus Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit and given new spirit illumined eyes to read their Bibles and commune with their Saviors.

And seeing that should make you eager to read Scripture. Eager to just read it and see what is there what has been given to you and to commune with your Savior.

This also changes the way we hear preaching. One of the things we believe is that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.

And granted that's only insofar as preaching is right and true and that's perfectly correct. Bad preaching and preaching that is false and teaches bad doctrines that is not the Word of God.

[11 : 03] But your goal when you come to church is not actually to hear the preacher. Your goal is to hear Jesus. And really your goal is to ignore the preacher really as much as possible whether you like them or don't like them.

Your goal is to see Jesus and to hear His voice. What you need when you come to church is to be able to say the same words of Ephesians 2.17 that we have heard Jesus Christ come to us and preach peace.

And that is something that everyone in this room can say every Sunday here together we hear Jesus preach peace to us.

And doesn't that just fill you with a little bit of joy? Doesn't that fill you with a little bit of majesty? Doesn't it also fill you with a bit of helpful trepidation? Because sometimes at the end of a very long week we're not that eager to come to church and we find ourselves tired and it's hard to listen.

But what we need to do is have this truth in front of our eyes. The main point is that the Word is the Word of God. But the second thing Paul teaches us in this letter is how to think about yourself.

[12 : 31] I want you to notice how Paul describes the Ephesian church in chapter 1 in verse 1. He says they are saints or God's holy people and then also faithful.

And he's not saying that some are saints over here and that some are faithful and he's just lumping the two together. He's saying that all are faithful and all are saints.

I want to break that down for a minute. Anyone who everyone who understands here that to be a Christian you need to have faith. That's non-negotiable.

You need to have faith and not just faith in that really squishy modern sense of just hoping everything's going to pan out some way or the other but faith in Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian.

This is why we talk about salvation being by faith alone. You are given faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit and then Jesus saves you through your faith not by your works.

[13 : 31] But what does Paul mean here by saints or holy people? when we hear about saints we usually think about super Christians super Christians because we know that this word saint has an association with Roman Catholics and only special Christians get that title saint saint Augustine saint Patrick most Christians don't think about themselves as saints but that's not the way the Bible uses the term.

In the Bible the word holy is the word saint and the word saint is just the word holy and all Christians are described as holy it's not something that's added extra on top and that you try to work up to after you have faith.

Every Christian who had faith in Ephesus was also holy. It wasn't something they had to earn by their works after they were a Christian they were holy because they were Christians.

But I don't want you to but I also want you to understand that there's an order here. There's an order here between faith and holiness and you can't see this precise order in these verses I grant you but if you step take a step back you can see it in this letter and in all of Paul's letters almost all of Paul's letters you can cut them in half with a knife very very neatly.

The first half talks about who you are in Jesus Christ. You can see that in Ephesians chapter 1 to 3. It describes the blessings you have in Christ describe what Christ has done for you and your new identity in Christ and then in chapter 4 it switches gears and the second half talks about what you're supposed to do in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 17] The great hinge is in Ephesians 4.1 I therefore a prisoner of the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of a calling to which you have been called. Paul's saying that in light of everything I've just told you in the first half here's what you're supposed to do you're supposed to act like it.

You're not supposed to earn it but you are supposed to act like it. The first half describes the second half commands and Paul thinks both are incredibly important but he always puts the commands after.

We don't follow God's commands in order for him to allow us to be in Christ once we've measured up but precisely because we are already in Christ.

We obey not because we want to be loved but because we have been loved and we want to show our love to God. What Paul wants to tell you is that you are faithful and holy simultaneously.

Maybe that point about the whole book of Ephesians is a little too abstract. Maybe you want it a little more simply. Just look at Ephesians 2 8-10. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[16 : 46] You are saved by faith not by works but you are also saved in order to glorify God through your works not in order to try to earn your ability to stand before God not at all but you are called to glorify God and so I want you to think about yourself like this someone who has faith in Jesus Christ but also someone who strives day after day day in and day out to be holy like their savior imperfectly yes one step forward maybe in a step backward maybe two steps forward one step back absolutely but you need to have faith and holiness on the mind I want you to think back to your catechisms what do the scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man we expect to find both of those things in scripture something to grow us in faith and something also to call us to greater holiness to be more like our savior and that's what we expect whenever we open up any portion of the

Bible including Ephesians something to feed our faith and something to call us to holiness but the third thing Paul teaches us in this letter is how to think about ministry in verse 2 Paul says grace to you and peace now Paul always says grace and peace in his letters it's kind of his phrase you know in his letters to Timothy and Titus he sometimes adds in mercy just for good measure but most of the times it's grace and peace but that's rather interesting this is not a standard way to open up a letter in the ancient world nobody else does this except Paul but Paul just does it out of hand all the time and part of what's happening here is that he's actually trying to pull off a bit of a pun and the Greek word for greetings is kairate and the Greek word for grace is kairis and so he's basically giving Christian greetings and he's making grace foundational to everything grace is the first thing in the Christian life grace is the first thing

I'm going to mention to you that's part of what's happening but what's happening here is also it's not simply a pun this is a reference to the ironic blessing of numbers 6 24 to 26 the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace that's the famous blessing of the Old Testament it's always pronounced over God's people and what is that blessing it's simply giving them grace and peace and really Paul's ministry and all of Christian ministry can be summarized by those two words grace and peace this is precisely what you should expect when you come to worship we come with guilty consciences before God and we receive not the punishment due to our sins but grace and peace we are invited to sing and to praise and we who were once rebels in his sight are now able to say we have a perfect relationship with

God and desire only to grow in love of him Paul's ministry and Christian ministry is really doing the same thing as ministry in the Old Testament we here today we are not getting something fundamentally different than Abraham Isaac and Jacob they had peace with God by their faith not by works they looked to the grace of Jesus and when the saints gathered in the temple or the synagogues they rejoiced in the peace they had with God even though they didn't deserve it and that's why we preach from the Old Testament that's not a sidetracked thing that's not something fundamentally different it's for Christians something we are called to see and enjoy we as Gentiles we've been engrafted into Israel and we received the exact same thing Old Testament Jews did grace and peace now I grant to you that we here today we have a fuller understanding of what those things are we understand grace and peace we understand the grace of God in this that while we were still sinners

God sent his son to die for us on the cross for our sins and we understand the peace of God in this that our high priest has sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high there are no more ceremonial laws there are no more sacrifices we simply have peace and we're able to come boldly before God's throne not as a throne of judgment but as a throne of grace Abraham understood these things but he understood them through a veil he understood them by shadows he did not fully understand who Jesus was he saw his shadow coming but he didn't see his face and we have we

have looked upon Jesus Christ and we live on this side of Christ death and resurrection and even us today here in Edinburgh we are able to say Jesus Christ has come to us today to preach grace and peace to us sinners but what we should strive to do as a church is to offer grace and peace to each other we are miserable sinners who have been given grace and peace from God and we gather together as a church to hear that grace and peace preached to us that we may rejoice in it that we may rest in it that we may be restored by it and then what we should do is stand up afterwards and seek to show that grace and peace to each other we who have been filled with grace and peace should have it overflowing into every parts of our lives in equal measure what else can we do a church which doesn't teach grace and peace is teaching a different gospel and really a different savior true gospel ministry deals with grace and peace and it is infectious in the best of ways so we're called as a congregation to bear with each other in our burdens and also to encourage one another because our savior he is a never ending fountain of grace and peace but the fourth and final thing

[23 : 45] Paul teaches us here is how to think about God where does grace and peace come from from God our father and Christ Jesus our Lord first Paul here is telling us to recognize God is our father that is a profoundly Christian way of talking about God the Old Testament has little glimpses of this but they're glimpses you know Israel sometimes talked about God as a father to all of Israel broadly more specifically some of the Davidic kings could say God is acting as a father to me but no Israelite opens up their prayers by saying my father that is a dramatic change in the New Testament when Jesus teaches all of his disciples to just pray his prayer our father who art in heaven that is a profound change and we see this blossoming of father language all throughout we can see this in first John three one see what kind of love the father has given to us that we should be called children of God father that's not a throwaway term that is a profound important term it's proclaiming a deep important truth this is a special grand privilege that we have as

New Testament believers J.I. Packer says this is even grander than justification and we all know we're big fans of justification but being able to call upon God as father that is profound in the Old Testament what's the highest way to talk about God it's the covenantal name Yahweh I am who I am but in the New Testament it's just to cry out Abba father that's the most profound way you can talk about God think about the way that should affect the way you pray we're able to approach God not simply as a servant not even as a highly privileged and forgiven servant but as a son or daughter who is eagerly welcomed in where angels fear to tread someone who is where they are supposed to be in and amongst the family we pray not just to a distant God but to our father who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing of the heavenly places and if you're struggling and you feel like the entire world is just caving in around you and you're at the end of your rope you don't need to sit there and try to come up with the best theological phrases in order to pray to God in order that he can hear your plea you just need to cry out father and that is enough prayer is family time for Christians and we gather together with our father but Paul doesn't just refer in these verses to God the father he also talks about God the son he talks about Jesus Christ our Lord that title there Lord that is a divine title Paul uses that title for God generically and he's applying it to Jesus and he's referring to the father and Jesus in the same breath as if they are equals because they absolutely are really what I want you to understand is that Paul is a Trinitarian and you should be too and he's not a Trinitarian trying to show off how much he understands and how he's superior to everyone he's not trying to show off how he understands that God is three persons father son and holy ghost yet one God the Trinity is confusing it is confusing because it is mysterious but Paul is mentioning this because he thinks the Trinity is tremendously practical when he talks about the blessings we have from God he talks about the being from the father in Jesus Christ by the spirit that is him trying to give you words to thank God more precisely he's trying to give you more to sing about not less does that just make instinctive sense once you think about it if God has truly saved you and adopted you as his child and promised that you will commune with him in all eternity face to face don't you think that we should strive to know him all the better and speak of him as he has revealed himself to us we're called as Christians to know and love our father and also his son Jesus Christ our brother and call upon him as well and our duty as Christians is to declare their worthiness to worship them and to talk about their worth to the best of our abilities and we can't do that without seeking to know God as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as father son and holy ghost as we close I want you to look briefly at the drum beat of these two verses Paul an apostle of Christ of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the God's holy people in

Ephesus the faithful in Christ

Jesus grace and peace to you from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ Jesus is at the center of these verses and Paul is bringing up all these different topics about the Bible yourself ministry and God and he's relating them to Jesus because he wants to tell you who Jesus is and what he has done and he wants to see you the rich wants you to see the riches that are in Jesus Christ if you if we've been pulling up these words and looking at the roots underneath and looking at their structure we need to realize that these roots are planted in the soil that is Jesus Christ the whole point of a root is that you're trying to get life and nutrients out of the soil and Paul is digging these roots into Jesus Christ trying to get life from Jesus thinking about the Bible yourself ministry and even God separated from Jesus is disastrous but with Jesus they make all the difference with them you get Jesus and you get the grace and peace you get to enjoy scripture as the word of Jesus himself and you get to come before

[30 : 21] God as father to grow as a Christian we need to have our roots in Jesus Christ and he is the one we must think about really at the end of the day because he's the whole point not just of Ephesians but of everything voy