

In Christ

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[0 : 00] We'd like to turn back then in your Bibles with me to Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 1. And just again reading the opening few verses here.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. To the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

Identity. Identity is a big thing in the culture in which we live. And where you find your identity varies massively.

[1 : 10] There is probably a variance within this building today in where we find our identity. People find their identity in many different things and in many different places.

In their looks. In their personality. In their belongings. Accomplishments. Athletic ability. Relationships.

Children. Perhaps even in the church. However for the Christian. For the person who has come to a saving knowledge and faith in Jesus Christ.

Our identity must be found. Must be rooted in Christ. Christ. Ephesians is a letter in which the fundamentals of the Christian faith are outlined along with the duty that follows that faith.

John Mackay the former president of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote to this book. I owe my life. Through his reading of this letter and from his understanding of this book he wrote.

[2 : 24] 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 had become the center of everything. I had been quickened. I was really alive. His description of the letter to the Ephesians as the apostle proclaiming God's order to the post-Augustan Roman era.

Which was marked by a process of social disintegration. Makes this book the most contemporary book in the Bible. Since it promises community in a world of disunity.

Reconciliation in place of alienation. And peace instead of war. I would like to look this morning at our identity in Christ.

[3 : 29] And as we do that let's begin by looking at just the opening few verses and see what we have there. First of all we have the author. Who is it that wrote this book?

Now you know letter writing is a dying art. But when we write a letter generally we start with our address and then perhaps the recipient's address.

Then by a salutation and then we get into the heart of the letter. However not so in the first century. They would begin a letter by announcing who was sending it.

And in that sense our email system is much more closely linked to Old Testament missive writing. Our name is at the top as the sender.

The recipient of who we are sending it to then appears. The subject of the letter and then the content. And that's what we have here. We have Paul identifying himself first.

[4 : 34] Then his status. Then to whom he's writing to. And then the body of his letter. Let's just note a couple of things first.

He begins with his name. Paul. What do we know about Paul? We know he wasn't always Paul. We know that at one time he was known as Saul.

He was a Jew. He was born into the tribe of Benjamin. Whose namesake was the first king of Israel. Paul was trained as a Pharisee.

Under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. We know that from Acts. He was advancing in Judaism. Well beyond many of his fellow men. He was more extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions. He heartily approved of the persecution of the Lord's people. He was there when Stephen was stoned in Acts 7. He gave approval and assent to it. His desire was to destroy the church of Christ. [5 : 33] It was to imprison the Lord's people. And yet on his way to Damascus. On his way to persecute the Lord's church. He met with Jesus.

The Lord revealed himself to Saul. And he was changed forever. So it's worth remembering who it is that's writing this letter.

His background. His knowledge. It's also worth remembering that at this time Paul was not dissatisfied with Judaism. He wasn't considering various different religious alternatives.

No he was just militantly opposed to Jesus Christ. And to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Until he met with Jesus Christ.

But when God. Who set me apart from birth. And called me by his grace. Was pleased to reveal his son in me.

[6 : 35] So that I might preach him. Among the Gentiles. Paul didn't have anything to do with his conversion. Rather it all happened at the sovereign hand of God.

Paul was fiercely opposing God. At the very moment that God literally stopped him in his tracks. Blinded him physically. But opened his eyes.

Spiritually to see. The risen saviour. To call him to faith. And then to service. And isn't that the essence of Christianity?

Isn't that the essence of our faith? Faith. And then service. Paul's testimony was dramatic. And whilst our stories may not have the drama.

Of Paul's encounter with God. Our stories. Our testimonies. Are equally significant. Because the results are the same. First we are called to faith.

[7 : 37] Faith in Christ Jesus. The risen saviour. And then into his service. All of us. Every Christian. Bar none.

The risen saviour. The risen saviour. The risen saviour. Bar none. Is called first to faith. And then to service. Employing our gifts. Our talents. The resources we have been blessed with. For his glory. To return the blessing. To God. The one who blesses us. Is your faith in Christ this morning? Are your gifts employed in his service?

Yes. Here we have Paul. Writing to the Ephesian church. But he doesn't just start with Paul. Does he? He talks about who he is.

He is an apostle. Of Christ Jesus. This is the designation that he gives to himself. In this letter. Apostle.

[8 : 34] Comes from the Greek. Apostolos. One who is sent. One who is called. And one who is sent. To teach. And to preach. Under the authority of the one. Who has called him.

In Paul's case. Jesus Christ. This was the one. Whom he had been called by. To faith. And who had been called by. To service.

Paul hadn't volunteered himself. The church. Hadn't appointed him. He was an apostle. Of Jesus Christ.

By the will. Of God. It was. God's will. That he would be. An apostle. It was God's will. That this. Man.

Who had been transformed. By Christ. And his sacrifice. Would go out. And would share. The gospel. Would teach. The gospel. Of grace. Of which he was a recipient.

[9 : 31] So Paul is stating. Right at the outset here. That it is not. Himself. That he spoke. But Christ. These words.

Are inspired. By. The Lord himself. Paul is not. Venting his opinion. He is not giving. His preference. He is not. Setting himself up. As a. A theological. Teaching guru.

Or a. A missionary. Hero. But as an apostle. One who has been. Called. By God. One who has been. Sent. By. Him. To write.

To this church. And who is it. That he writes to. To the saints. Who are in Ephesus. And the faithful. In. Christ Jesus. Two things there.

Isn't there. The saints. And the faithful. When Paul addresses. The people. To whom he is writing. As saints. He is not employing. The language. Perhaps. That we would.

[10:26] Necessarily use. For a saint. Oh. She is a saint. Oh. She is perfect. She is good. He is not referring to. A spiritual elite. Within the church. But to all.

God's people. In the church. In Ephesus. Why saints? Because that is exactly. What the Lord's people are. Because of the Christian.

According to the word of God. God. Is a saint. One who has been. Set apart. The one who has. Been called. To be holy.

This term. Of course. Was first applied. To Israel. As the holy nation. But was extended. To the whole. International. Christian community. The Israel. Of God.

The people. Of God. John Calvin. Said. No man. Is a believer. Who is not. Also a saint. Saint. And on the other hand.

[11:24] No man. Is a saint. Who is not. A believer. What about you. Today. Paul writes here.

To these. Saints. These people. Who are living. In a pagan. City. Who are living. Under the shadow. Of. A false temple. That housed. A false. God. God. And yet.

They are referred to. As saints. Those set apart. Why? Because they are the faithful. In Jesus Christ. That's what the Christian is.

Somebody who is faithful. In. Jesus Christ. Paul is speaking to people. Who are. Actively. Believing. Who are trusting.

In God. Regardless of the world. Around about them. With all of its pressures. With all of its dangers. With all of its temptations. These people were growing.

[12:26] In their faith. The church was. Being built. Because of their saintliness. Because of who. Their trust was in. Because of who. They believed in. Because of who. They were faithful.

To. So Paul's description. His designation. To those. To whom. He's writing. Is comprehensive. They are saints. Because they belong.

To God. They are believers. Because they are trusting. In Christ. They have two homes. They reside in Ephesus. And yet have a place.

In his kingdom. Can the same be said. For you this morning. This afternoon. As Christians. As the Lord's people. Every one of us. Has been made. Holy. Every one of us. Has been set apart. To God. In Christ.

[13:21] Every one of us. Has been made. Righteous. In the righteousness. Through the righteousness. Of Christ. We are saints. The reason we are saints.

Is because we have acted. In faith. Towards Jesus Christ. What was he writing to say. We see it was Paul. That was writing.

To the saints. In Ephesus. This fledgling church. That was in a. In a very difficult situation. What does he begin with. Grace. And peace. These people are living.

Amidst. Powerful. Paganism. Idol worship. False gods. It was. It was a pluralistic. A hedonistic. Society. It was a difficult place.

To be. God's people. Isn't that the case today. Difficult. To be the Lord's people. He writes to encourage them.

[14:20] And we need encouragement. Don't we. He writes to encourage them. All through this letter. Encouragement of who we are. In. Christ. Christ. But what does he start with.

Grace. And peace. This double. Blessing. Imagine we met. One another. On a daily basis. With. Grace and peace.

From God. Our father. And the Lord. Jesus Christ. Rather than. How are you doing. How are you getting on. How are you.

Grace and peace. From God. Our father. That's what we have. In Christ. Does it not. As his people. We are recipients. Of his grace. Recipients.

Of. His peace. These are two. Fundamental. Tenets. Of. The Christian faith. To which we adhere. Grace. And peace. And who are they from.

[15:18] From God. Our father. And the Lord. Jesus Christ. Christ. These two words. Are what this letter. Is based upon. These two words.

These two themes. Are what our lives. In Christ. Are based. Upon. When you consider. Who you are. In Christ.

What you have been given. In Christ. Christ. His grace. His grace. His unmerited favor.

Towards us. As sinful. Infallible. Men and women. And you know. In this life. Of. Self-righteousness. Of. Ego mania. Of. Uncertainty. And cruelty. And evil. And wickedness. All around. What do we crave? We crave peace.

[16:14] In the sadness. Of life. That we experience. What do we crave? We crave the peace. Of God. That peace. Which surpasses. Understanding. And that's what Paul.

Sends to his. Recipients. To his. Hearers. To his audience. Grace and peace. That comes only. From. God. It's all. Grace.

Grace. Is the fountain. And peace. Is the stream. Because I have. Grace. From. God. I have peace. With God.

It's because of his. Grace. That I have peace. There would be no. Peace. Without. His. Grace. So here we have.

An introduction. By Paul. To this letter. Paul the apostle. To the saints. Who are faithful. Grace and peace. From God. The father. And Jesus.

[17:12] Christ. All of these blessings. Blessed be the God. And father. Of our Lord. Jesus Christ. Who has blessed us. In Christ. With every spiritual blessing. In the heavenly places.

Even as he chose us. In him. Before the foundation. Of the world. Election. Is something. That scares us. It is. A topic.

That you bring up. And immediately. The hackles. Go up. You know. Like a dog. When the dog. Sees something. That it's uncertain of. The hackles. On the back of its neck. Stand up. Election. Is one of these things. That causes us. To bristle. It makes people. Uneasy. And yet. In. This doctrine. We can find.

Stability. We can find. Steadiness. We can find. Rest. And reassurance. Knowing. That it's in Christ. That we are saved. That was certainly.

[18:07] The pastoral driver. That led. John Calvin. In his exposition. Of this point. Of doctrine. Wasn't it? Calvin was painfully aware. That many of the people. That he pastored.

Had no assurance. Of their faith. They had absolute. Insecurity. In their identity. As Christians. And I suppose. We can see why. For so long.

The dominant doctrine. Of that church. Was. A works. Based. Righteousness. It was ritualistic. It was religion. And then.

Along came the reformation. As we're celebrating. This year. And people begin. To understand. That it is. That we are saved. By grace. Alone. Through. Faith. Alone.

In. Christ. Alone. And wouldn't that. Understanding. That revelation. Have come. As such an encouragement.

[19:02] And brought such joy. And assurance. To people. Who were no doubt. Under the attack. Of Satan. Attacking their joy. Filling them with doubt.

And lack of assurance. And hasn't that been his whisper. Throughout the ages. It's too good to be true. It can't be as simple.

As repent and believe. You can't trust God. On that. Satan loves to rob us. Of our rest. In Christ. Christ. But Calvin. Through his. Exposition. Of election. Brought. Comfort.

And reassurance. To his people. But what does it mean? Firstly. It means that we have been. Chosen. All of us.

[19:57] Will have been in positions. At some point. In life. Of where we have. Been chosen. Perhaps it was on the football. Pitch at school. Perhaps it was in the dance hall.

As you waited for. Your person to come. And pick you. But in all of these situations. Inevitably. Somebody. Is left. Because either. Neither team wants them.

Or nobody's willing. To dance with them. And often. You would be allocated. A team. Or a partner. Because you hadn't been chosen. But with God.

There are no. Last picks. He chooses. Us. He chooses. To speak to us. He chooses. To draw us. To himself. He chooses.

To show us. Grace. In Jesus Christ. For he has chosen us. Before the foundation. Of the world. In love. He predestined us.

[20:54] He has chosen us. To be his saints. Or to be given the opportunity. To become. His saints. Those blessed. By him.

In time. And for. Eternity. Think back to the passage. That we read in John. For you did not choose me. But I chose. You. Sometimes we think.

It's the other way around. Don't we? Well. I'm choosing. To come. To church. I'm choosing. To explore. God. To examine.

The evidence. For him. I'm choosing. To consider. The merits. Of. Christianity. I'm choosing.

Whether to. Decide. If God. Exists. Or not. And whether or not. I want to.

Commit. To him. Perhaps. You're here. This morning. With that. Very thought. But yet. You see. The Bible.

[21 : 49] Tells us. That that's not. The case. The lost sinner. Left to his own devices. Does nothing. To seek. God. Romans 3.

There is no one righteous. Not even one. There is no one who understands. No one. Who seeks. God. But rather.

The gospel is. The son of man. Came to seek. And to save. That which was lost. It wasn't an impulse decision.

God's part. It wasn't an afterthought. He chose us in him. Before. The foundation. Of the world. What does that mean?

For you. Today. Means that your attendance. Here. Isn't coincidental. You didn't come here. By chance. You didn't come through your own.

[22 : 46] Determination. You came because God has chosen you to come. He has set. This appointment. For you. You are hearing this. Because he has deemed it possible.

You have come here. Because Christ. Is seeking you. If you are lost. You are here today. Because he is giving you another opportunity. To give your life to him.

Because he has chosen you. Before. The foundation. Of the world. He is giving you a chance. To trust him. To be forgiven by him.

To know his peace. To become. A saint. Or to draw closer to him. If you have already come to him. In faith. We often hear people talk about. This is your big chance. This is your opportunity. In relation to. Sport.

[23 : 42] Or work. Or romance. You have got to take the bull by the horns. You have got to take the opportunities. Well. No different here. We have to take the opportunities. That we are given. This day of grace. Today.

Is the day of salvation. Do we know. When our last day will be. We don't know. How many days. We will be given. In time. We don't know. How long. God will choose.

To open our ears. And soften. Our hearts. To the gospel. So if you hear him today. Do not harden your heart. As they did. Psalm 95.

Today is the day of salvation. In my time. In the time of my favor. I heard you. And in the day of salvation. I helped you. I tell you. Now is the time of God's favor.

And now is the day. Of salvation. Second Corinthians 6. Trust him. With your life. Trust him. With your salvation.

[24 : 38] Sing with the children. I have decided. To follow Jesus. No turning back. It's a steadying. Reassuring truth.

That God himself. Has chosen. Us. Us. But not only are we chosen. We are adopted. In love. He predestined us. For adoption. Through. Jesus. Christ. Football teams. I'm not really a football person. I'm much more of a tractor person.

But. Football is all around us. There's no escaping from it. And you hear about it in the news. And it's in the papers. And there's so much analysis. That goes in. To this game. How much analysis. Goes into choosing a team. And finding the best player. And sourcing the best. Makeup. Or whatever they call it. Formation. And you can have the greatest player.

[25 : 37] In the world. Who is that? I don't know. Messy. I hear. But that person is only chosen. For 90 minutes. At best. If he plays badly. He can be substituted.

At any time. Not so with God. He doesn't just choose us. For a short. Fixed period of time. He doesn't just retain us.

On a match to match basis. A season by season arrangement. He doesn't just keep us. According to our ability. He takes us into his family.

For eternity. Forever. From everlasting. To everlasting. He becomes our father. He is our brother. He is the guarantor.

Of our inheritance. For eternity. His love for us is deep. His commitment. Eternal. He loves us with an everlasting love.

[26 : 35] And when he takes hold. He will never let go. And although. The world. And Satan. May try to pull us. From the clutches of God. It will never happen.

His grip. His grip. Will never break. And we're not strong enough. To break. His grip. Upon us. We're blessed with two young children.

And it would seem. In my experience. That children. Are drawn towards danger. Regardless of where you are. They will find the thing. That is dangerous.

And they will be innately drawn. Towards that thing. Be it. The edge of the pier. Or a top of a cliff. Or an electric fence. Or a knife. Or whatever it may be.

It's as if they're pulled. Towards that. And yet. We as parents. We've recognized the danger. We see the caution. We have the warning. And we take a grip. Of the child.

[27 : 33] And even though. They may want to break free. They're not strong enough. To do so. The love. That as a parent. That I have. For my children. Will not allow me.

To let them go. And if that's true. Of our earthly parents. Then how much more. Of our heavenly father. It's not speculation.

Is it? My sheep listen to my voice. I know them. And they follow me. I give them eternal life. And they shall never perish. No one.

Can snatch them out of my hand. My father. Who has given them to me. Is greater. Than all. No one. Can snatch them. Out of my father's hand. I and the father.

Are one. God. Amen. But we struggle. To grasp that truth. So often. Because it's so alien. To the culture. In which we live. We live in an age.

[28 : 28] Where commitment. Is a great phobia. Of people. We hesitate. To commit to anything. long term, whether it's a mobile phone contract, a mortgage, a relationship, a Bible study, whatever it may be. It's a characteristic of our fallen nature and our fallen culture.

But God is different. He chooses us to be his children. He invites us into his heavenly home. He adopts us into his family. He gives us a new name, Christian, a name that can never be taken from us because it's guaranteed to us in Christ through nothing we've done.

I wonder how keen we are to tell people of our new name. Names are precious to us, especially in the west of Scotland. We take great pride in our names. Our names go back generations.

You know, the Slynyug. I was looking at an old headstone in Newest recently of a great uncle of mine, Malcolm MacDonald. We knew him as Uncle Callum. But on his headstone was Malcolm MacDonald, Callum Alistair Lachlan. We're known by our names. We're known by our heritage in names. We take great pride in our names, but do we take as much pride in our name in Christ? Are we as ready to tell people of our identity in Christ? Chosen, adopted, finally, briefly, accepted. We are accepted in him. Why? Because of Christ. Because of Jesus. Our status as saints, our eternal home, our temporal and eternal blessings, our election, our adoption, our acceptance is all in Christ. This book is all about unpacking the riches that we have in Jesus. Grace is used 12 times. Glory is used 8 times. Inheritance 4 times. Riches 5 times.

Fullness 7 times. And the key to all of these things is the phrase in Christ. Employed 27 times in this short letter. It's because we are in Christ that we have all the fullness and all the riches of the inheritance of the glory of grace. It's because of Christ. It's because of him. It's in him that our identity must be founded. We can't make ourselves acceptable, but we are made acceptable in Christ because of who he is and because of what he has done in his living for us, in his dying for us, in his rising for us. We are accepted by grace, through faith, in Christ.

[31 : 40] Romans 5. First 11 verses. Read it. It's amazing to think of all these blessings that Paul is talking about here. Loading them on one after another. How blessed he must have been. How joyful he must have been. Where was he? He was in chains. Locked up. Imprisoned for the gospel.

Chapter 3 verse 1. For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Chapter 4 verse 1. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord. Paul is in chains as he writes all of these truths. And wouldn't Satan have been attacking him?

Oh, Saul, you're deluded. You've sinned too much. You're the chief of sinners. And Paul says, yeah, I am the chief of sinners and yet I have met Jesus.

And in Christ I am new. In Christ I am Paul. In Christ I am an apostle sent by him to preach the good news and the unsearchable riches of Christ. In Christ. Satan's tactics don't change.

He still loves to dig up our old confessed faith. He still loves to point the finger at us. To accuse us. He still loves to throw grenades of doubt into our hearts and our lives. Don't listen to him but listen

to God. Who knows the worst from the first? Who knows our hearts? Who knows your sin? Who knows mine?

And yet he loves us. And yet he loves us. In Christ. And yet he calls us to himself. And yet he has chosen us.

[33 : 21] And yet he has adopted us. And yet he has made us acceptable. Where is your identity today? If your identity is in Christ. Then you will know unsearchable riches in him.

You will know grace and peace in your life. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.