

## “Set Apart”

Eph 1:1-3

9.18.22

We begin an exciting opportunity to gain a great understanding of a well loved epistle or letter of Paul. We are preaching through the book of Ephesians a little differently than we normally might preach through a book. Normally, when preaching through a book we go through sections of a chapter. It might be 8-15 verses that we work through on a given Sunday. It is a good way to understand a book. This method is like walking through a rose garden and surveying the different varieties of roses. You get to appreciate the roses and feel like you understand more about them when you are done.

With this series we are going to slow down and focus on a few verses at a time. In the analogy of the rose garden, it will be like stopping and looking at the details of the roses and smelling them. When done, you will know a great deal about roses.

As we go through this series, may you gain a deep, deep understanding of this wonderful book for the church and for you personally. And as we go deeper in God’s Word, my hope is that your mind and heart will grow deeper in love with Jesus. And may that love spill out of you to the lost world around us.

And as we slow down in this book, our hope is that as we will be able to memorize it. Since there are only a few verses each week, we can memorize them and review the verses we have previously studied.

A tool that I am using to assist my study and memorization is the ESV Scripture Journal. On the left side is a section of scripture; on the right side is a lined page to take notes, etc. We have some here for purchase. \$6- the cost of the journal.

Before we look at the first three verses, it is helpful to understand the **background of the book of Ephesians.**

Ephesus around the first century had a population of around 300,000 people. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia and its most important commercial center. Due to a large harbor, Ephesus grew wealthy on trade; and, thanks to the temple of Artemis, named Diana by the Romans.



The temple was about 400 years old in Paul's day. It measured 418 feet by 239 feet. In comparison, the Jewish temple Solomon built was 180 feet long and 90 feet wide.

In the sacred enclosure of the temple stood the "sacred image" of Diana that was supposed to have fallen from heaven. Theologians think it was probably a meteorite. Since Diana was a fertility goddess, cultic prostitution was an important part of her worship, and hundreds of "priestesses" were available in the temple.

The temple of Diana was a great attraction that brought in visitors from all over, who wanted to see this building that in their day was considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

Just like the Corinthians, they worshipped false gods or idols. Though idols are not real, there is a spiritual component behind them. Paul wrote, "What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons." 1 Corinthians 10:19–20 (ESV)

The city was full of evil. Many people had magic books that contained magic spells. We know this because Acts 19 records, "Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver."

God got a hold of these Ephesians and a huge life transformation occurred. The cost of these books, which many could've been books passed on from generation after generation, was the equivalent of the yearly wages of 150 men at that time. Costly magic books burned in a fire.

Apostle Paul traveled on three missionary journeys planting and building up churches. On his second missionary journey Paul came to Ephesus with fellow servants Priscilla and Aquila. But Paul did not stay long in Ephesus. He needed to be elsewhere.

Two years later, while on his third journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for at least two years and saw much of the area evangelized. During these years, he founded a strong church in the city that had been dedicated to the worship of the goddess Artemis- called Diana by the Romans.

The new believers burned evil books and quit buying idolatrous statues. The loss of revenue impacted silversmiths and they created an uproar in the city. Demetrius, a silversmith that created idols said publicly, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. <sup>26</sup> And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. <sup>27</sup> And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." Acts 19:25–27

A riot ensued and was later broken up by the city administrator. But the evidence was clear, Jesus was overpowering the false gods of the Ephesians. Lives that once were enslaved to satan were freed in Christ. The Ephesians were saved to worship God and be His instruments.

What did the Ephesians need to learn and believe from Paul's letter? There are several themes in Ephesians. Identity in Christ. Blessings in Christ. Another key one is the emphasis on the power of Christ over the power of evil. There is more power terminology in Ephesians than any other book than 1 Corinthians- but it has 16 chapters compared to the 6 in Ephesians. Ephesians has a greater percentage of power terminology than any other NT book. So this is a big theme. That is why we are giving our series the title "Battle Ready."

We too live in a spiritually evil world. "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12

**Do you think the world is going to get better or worse as we wait for the Lord to return?** Worse- which means we should get prepared to deal with increasingly evil forces. Ephesians will help us to put on the full armor of God.

That is the backdrop of Ephesians. I hope this background motivates you to want to get a great understanding and to apply this important book.

Now, let's begin with the first three verses. It is page 976 in the Red Bibles. Or page 6 in the ESV Scripture Journal.

Ephesians 1:1-3 (ESV), "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> 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."

Paul begins by reminding the Ephesians that he is an apostle because of God's choosing. It was the will of God. Paul had seen the risen Christ and was sent out by

the church with a missionary task. This office or position gave him the authority to speak to them as a representative of God- to communicate from God.

Verse 2 is a familiar phrase that Paul used in other epistles or letters. Grace and peace represent a standard Christian greeting kind of like, "I hope you are doing well." Literally, this phrase could be "I hope that the grace and peace of God may be yours."

Apostle Paul addresses the believers as saints. When we hear saint, the natural thought is someone who lived a great, clean life- someone who served people sacrificially. Paul uses the word saint differently. It is not someone who is pious and morally pure for he called the Corinthians saints and they were anything but morally pure.

The word saint means, "holy, consecrated, or set apart." All believers in Christ need to know that,

**We are set apart.**

When you trusted in Christ you were **set apart from the world**. Jesus said, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19 (ESV) Though you live in this world you do not belong to it anymore. We are sojourners moving through life until we come home to heaven.

Believers, we are set apart from the world so let us not look like the world. If we do the same things as the world does, that is not living set apart lives. Dave Roper in his book *The Strength of a Man* writes, "Worldliness is the lust of the flesh (a passion for sensual satisfaction), the lust of the eyes (an inordinate desire for the finer things of life), and the pride of life (self-satisfaction in who we are, what we have, and what we have done). Worldliness, then, is a preoccupation with ease and affluence. It elevates creature comfort to the point of idolatry; large salaries and comfortable life-styles become necessities of life... Worldliness is reading magazines about people who live hedonistic lives and spend too much money on themselves and wanting to be like them. But more

importantly, worldliness is simply pride and selfishness in disguises. It's being resentful when someone snubs us or patronizes us or shows off. It means smarting under every slight, challenging every word spoken against us, cringing when another is preferred before us. Worldliness is harboring grudges, nursing grievance, and wallowing in self-pity. These are the ways in which we are most like the world.” Christians, we are set apart by God. We are not to live like the world; we are to live like Christ who was set apart for God.

We are set apart from the world. But set apart for what? **We are set apart as instruments for God.** “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.” We are set apart for faithful ministry. Paul writes, “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”<sup>20</sup> Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” 2 Timothy 2:19–21 (ESV)

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is **no longer I who live**, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

**We are saved for service not selfishness.** We are set apart to make a difference in the Spirit’s power expecting to see fruit.

A few Sundays ago we saw in the Word that **we are called to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ.** We are each part of the body. And as part of the body, we are called to build up the body of Christ. You cannot build up the body when you are not around brothers in sisters in Christ. It is not biblical to think you just need Jesus and not the church. Jesus will hold us accountable for how we served the body. He served the

body and gave His life for her. Won't He expect His brothers and sisters to do the same?

How are you building up the body of Christ? How are you using your spiritual gift to make the body more spiritually mature and healthy? If Cornerstone is your local church family, how are you invested in building up this great family?

**We are also called to serve the world.** SERVE Fest Sunday is a reminder of our responsibility to be salt and light to this dark world. God has also placed each of us with a circle of influence- people that we rub shoulders or computer screens with. How are you being salt and light to those in your circle of influence? Are you them see how incredible Jesus Christ is? Are people asking you for the reason for the hope that you have inside?

Or are you purposefully set apart from unbelievers? Do you steer clear from spiritual conversations that can help the lost to be found? That is how the Pharisees lived and Jesus wasn't pleased. He had the harshest things to say to them for their lack of love and compassion for the lost. See Luke 15- a whole chapter that speaks to God's heart for the lost.

Believer, you are set apart for ministry. Be in the game. Make a difference. Bring glory to God.

As Christians, we are set apart. And second,

**We are in Christ.**

Verse 3, "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."

In the expression "in Christ Jesus" we encounter one of the most important points in Paul's writings. Paul is not merely saying these Ephesians believed in Christ; rather, they were in Christ positionally. Commentator Kyne Snodgrass writes, "This language

expresses the oneness and the identity that a believer shares with Christ. Paul's gospel is a gospel about union with Christ, and this is the meaning in 1:1. Ephesians focuses more on union with Christ and on being *in Christ* than any other letter."

The expression "in Christ" is used eleven times in Ephesians. Ephesians 2:6 (ESV), "and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus.**"

Paul wrote to the Galatian church, "for **in Christ Jesus** you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one **in Christ Jesus.**" Galatians 3:26–28 (ESV)

It is quite amazing to think of the transformation and changes we experience positionally and relationally with God once we trust in Jesus Christ.

Before faith in Christ we were helpless sinners; after faith in Jesus we become saints—set apart ones.

Before faith in Christ we were enemies of God; after faith in Jesus we become children of God.

Before faith in Christ we were separated from God; after faith in Jesus we become in Christ. We have forever union with Christ. Ephesians 2:13 (NLT), "But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ."

Before faith in Christ we were a hodgepodge of people differentiated by education, wealth, color, age, status; after faith in Jesus we become brothers and sisters in Christ who are equal in every way.



How do we respond to such an amazing transformation?

Paul wrote in verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God deserves to be blessed or praised. The word for **praise** comes from a verb that means “to speak well of.”

In the New Testament it is applied only to God. Only God deserves to be praised at this level. For no human being can do what God has done. He deserves to be spoken well of. Not only privately in our minds or by ourselves. But also publicly. Praise the Lord. Speak, share how great God is to your family. To your co-workers. To your neighbors. To people that come into your path.

God doesn't want us to be fake or weird about it. A grateful heart should naturally speak praise about God.

The God who is to be praised is the One **who has blessed us**. For **We are blessed with every spiritual blessing**.

Again verse 3, “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.”

Notice the tense of the this phrase- “Who **has blessed us**.” Paul used past tense to describe the spiritual blessings we have already received. Some of the blessings in verses 3-14 occurred in eternity past- before humanity ever existed. For example, verse 4. “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...” Ephesians 1:4 (ESV). Other spiritual blessings recorded in these verses are experienced as a result of accepting Christ.

Every communion Sunday we highlight spiritual blessings we have received as a result of trusting in Jesus Christ, “I am totally accepted, fully pleasing, deeply loved, completely forgiven and empowered to live a new life in Christ **because** of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.”

Paul says we are blessed with every or all the spiritual blessings we need. We receive them because we are **in Christ**.

The place of these blessings is **in the heavenly places or realms**. Right now we live in the earthly realm. But there is another realm full of activity that is unseen to us- the heavenly realm. In the heavenly realm there are spiritual battles being waged. Satan and his angels fighting against God and His angels. Satan has been defeated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Though he is defeated, he is trying to keep people from trusting in Christ. If he fails to stop individuals from trusting in Christ then he will try to keep Christians from being effective in bearing fruit.

**Our spiritual blessings impact the heavenly places because it was those blessings that gave us freedom in Christ. Believers are united with Christ- and no longer united to the devil.**

**These blessings are spiritual. They are not material or temporal.** Paul wrote the Corinthians, "as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are **eternal.**" 2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)

Because of God's grace; because of His unmerited favor; because of His generous love we are blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Family, you do not want to miss the next several weeks of messages in particular. We will look at the amazing blessings that God showers on us in order to make us His children. We are going to be looking at key theological words. Words like: choose, predestined, adopted, redemption, inheritance to name a few.

We are going to see very clearly. We are going to gain absolute proof that getting to heaven has nothing to do with our ability to earn it and **everything to do with God securing our salvation for us.**

We are going to see that it gave Him great pleasure to bring us into His forever family. Oh praise God with me will you? We are so unworthy of being forgiven. We are so unworthy to be called His children. We are so unworthy to receive an inheritance that does not fade. We are so unworthy to spend eternity with a Holy God. We are so unworthy of being God's forever children.

Out of this overwhelming appreciation and thankfulness let us be set apart- let us live for God for His glory. May Christ be glorified in our lives this week.

Let's pray o.b.g.