

No Middle Ground in Ephesus

8/21/2022

Ephesians Series

Message 1

Ephesians 1:1–3 (CSB)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

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

1. Preaching a book like Ephesians is a challenge.

A. It's different from a book like Exodus.

1. In Exodus, you deal with big picture stuff.

2. You can read multiple verses, and there is really just a few key concepts that we should walk away with.

B. The letters that Paul wrote are really different.

1. Each sentence is pregnant with meaning.

2. Each word is loaded and full of information being transferred.

C. Paul's writing style makes it even more a challenge.

1. If you were to study Greek at seminary, they do not start you off with Paul's writings because his writings are terribly complex.

2. For example, "Ephesians 1:3–14 constitutes the longest sentence ever discovered in the Greek language...¹".

2. Ephesians is one of the most beautiful and important books in the NT.

A. I've noticed tons of preachers and ministries focusing on Ephesians lately.

1. Why?

2. One reason is that I believe Holy Spirit is convincing people of the importance of their identity in Jesus.

3. Another is the importance of having a high view of God!

B. When we read Ephesians, we are confronted with some of the highest words of praise ever used.

1. **There is a time to talk simply about God.**

a. Jesus himself told stories and parables to connect with ordinary people.

b. Jesus looked and walked like an ordinary man, and it was prophesied that there would be nothing special about his appearance to attract people to Him.

c. There is a time to speak about God in plain language.

2. **Then there are times when even the best of human language can never be enough.**

3. Ephesians chapter 1 is written like Paul is trying to find a way to adequately address and praise God and, yet, finds the human language falling far too short.

C. Ephesus plays an important role in the early church.

1. Ephesus is mentioned in Acts and in Revelation.

¹ Osborne, Grant R. 2017. *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Asia occupied the western third of modern-day Turkey. It was a very pro-Roman province and quite wealthy as a result. Pergamum was the capital, but Ephesus was the leading city and center of Christian activity. It was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire (behind Rome and Alexandria), with about a quarter million in the city and its environs. It was the major port city of the region and a trade center for the whole province and was home to one of the seven wonders of the Roman world, the temple of Artemis (her Greek name; her Roman name was Diana). Because of this temple it was the religious center of the province; it also boasted three temples to the emperors, making the imperial cult (the worship of the emperor as a deity) especially prominent. Magic was also prominent there, as attested by the interconnected stories of the sons of Sceva and the burning of the magic books in Acts 19:13–20. Because of this fascination with the occult, the war against the cosmic powers was especially relevant to Ephesus.²

2. Ephesus existed at the crossroads of the demonic and the Gospel.

- a. As people came and went through the city, one thing was sure:
- b. They would be confronted with the powers of light and the powers of darkness.
- c. They would encounter warfare, and wrestle against “principalities and powers in heavenly places”.
- d. **There is no middle-ground in Ephesus.**

3. As we journey through Ephesians together, we will learn what it means to live for Jesus in the middle of hostile territory.

- a. Paul, the prisoner surrounded by guards, is writing to believers surrounded by pagan Temples.
- b. Will the Ephesian believers influence their surroundings or will the surroundings win over the faith of the believers?

² Osborne, Grant R. 2017. [*Ephesians: Verse by Verse*](#). Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

c. There is not middle-ground in Ephesus, and there is no middle-ground in our culture today.

Let's look at Acts 19 which tells of the Apostle Paul's first extended encounter with the people of Ephesus.

Acts 19:1–7 (CSB)

19 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples ²and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

"No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

³"Into what then were you baptized?" he asked them.

"Into John's baptism," they replied.

⁴Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus."

⁵When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. ⁷Now there were about twelve men in all.

3. Nothing wrong with John's Baptism, but it wasn't complete.

A. Today, several are following in the footsteps of Jesus, the Disciples, and all the Saints in submitting to water baptism.

1. It is a baptism of repentance.
2. A public declaration that the old me has died, and a new me lives.
3. Water baptism is a beautiful and necessary moment in the life of believers.
4. **The Baptism of John, a baptism of repentance, was the front door to a grander and more powerful encounter with God.**

B. To be Baptized only in water is much like buying tickets to a great theme park, entering the front gate, and going no further.

1. I've been to the doors of both Disneyland and Disneyworld, but I've never actually gone into either.

2. I've also spent time in the airport in several cities and a few countries, but never stepped outside to explore.

a. So, although technically, I've been to those places, my experience is very different than actually touring those places.

b. In a sense, this is what had happened to the Ephesus believers.

C. Notice, that the writer of Acts calls them "disciples" and asks about when they believed.

1. Some scholars and groups say these people were not "saved".

a. They dismiss the language, and consider this experience their salvation experience.

b. But Paul treated them like they were fellow Christians.

2. He called them disciples, followers, just like he was a follower of Jesus.

a. And he asked them specifically about what they received when they believed.

b. The word for believed is the same word for faith that is used throughout the New Testament.

c. In other words, these believers WERE followers of Jesus.

D. This is why Paul takes immediate action after he learns they had not received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. Paul could not grasp or comprehend of followers of Jesus who did not receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit also.

2. When we read Ephesians, we are reading a letter penned to Spirit filled people.

a. These were people who had been filled with the Spirit, and spoke in tongues, and prophesied.

b. Ephesians, just like every New Testament letter, is a Pentecostal letter written to Spirit-filled people.

C. What does that mean?

1. To get the most from the Book of Ephesians, we need to experience Jesus like Paul and the Ephesians did.

2. When we walk in the fullness of the Spirit baptism, we can appreciate the 3 benefits or declarations that Paul mentions in these first few verses.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

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

4. Paul opens his letter with 3 declarations:

A. He was sent from God, by the will of God.

1. Apostles are messengers sent on a mission.

2. Paul was certainly that kind of guy.

3. How could Paul boldly know what his mission was and what God's will was?

a. Paul experienced Jesus in a meaningful way, and stayed connected to Jesus in meaningful ways.

b. Our identity and confidence in God's will comes from exposure and experience.

c. Exposure to God's word.

d. Experience with God's spirit.

4. Paul knew who he was and what he was about because of his intense relationship with Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

B. Paul knew he could call these people the "faithful saints in Ephesus."

1. Faithful and saints.

2. Sainthood is not a position of perfection but of relationship.

a. Paul could call the believers in these cities "saints" not because they had it all together but because they were together in Jesus.

b. Catholicism messed up the biblical view of sainthood as someone who is dead and who did miracles during or after their life.

c. Biblically, saints are those who are in relationship with Jesus.

d. The word "saint" is "holy", means separated for a godly purpose.

3. Every "saint" should strive to be faithful.

a. We are faithful when we do not stray in our worship.

b. When we make Jesus our everything, and strive to honor him with our lives, we become faithful saints.

c. Every one of us here are called to be faithful saints "in Christ Jesus".

1. Apart from Jesus, you are neither faithful nor a saint.

2. In Jesus, you are both.

C. Through the Father and Jesus, we receive grace and peace.

1. Grace and peace are two of the greatest benefits for every believer.
2. **Grace is unmerited or undeserved favor.**
 - a. Grace is unearned acceptance.
3. Peace is an expression of completeness in God: wholeness, wellbeing, tranquility in the midst of a storm.
4. Paul prays that the believers might receive exactly what you and I need today:
 - a. We all want acceptance and wholeness.
 - b. Our culture is striving to be accepted and to be whole.
 - c. And Paul speaks those very possibilities over them as he writes this letter.

5. As we close, I again mention this concept: There is no Middle-Ground in Ephesus.

A. Everything about this letter and Paul's experience in Ephesus, is pushing them AND us toward a life fully committed to Jesus.

1. Acts 19: Don't merely repent of sins, but be TRANSFORMED and FILLED with the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul in the first verses tell them what they are and should be in Jesus:
 - a. They are not loveable losers, they are faithful saints.
 - b. They are not "in "Ephesus" or in the "Diana" or "in the cult of the Emperors" but they are IN JESUS.
 - c. Even though they experience persecution, attacks, and spiritual battles that manifest in physical forms, they can also lay claim to the Grace and Peace that only God provides through Jesus.

B. This morning, can you sense God leading you to get out of the middle and into a relationship with Him?

1. As we pray this morning together as a response, my prayers are for this:

a. If you are not Baptized with the Holy Spirit, then you will be.

b. Second, if you are struggling with God's will then you will know exactly what that is, just as Paul knew.

c. Third, that you will walk in faithfulness and sainthood.

d. Lastly, that each of you will know God's grace and peace in an amazing way.

2. Let's pray.