



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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To the Saints **Dr. Steve Walker**

I have no doubt that God was blessed by our worship today as we focused on him and how good, glorious, holy, and loving he is. God is blessed by our worship and that's what makes worship so rewarding and fulfilling. We're blessing the God of the universe who created us and loved us.

As we get ready to open God's Word, this is the last Sunday of the month of Sundays where we invite the elementary-age children to come in and worship with Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, aunts, uncles, and whoever. Now, we want to dismiss all the elementary-age kids to go over with Pastor Alex over there to Children's Church, and then next Sunday, they'll be back to their normal schedule. Go have fun! We'll see you kids in a little bit.

For the rest of us, let's open our Bibles to the book of Ephesians. Today, we begin what I'm hoping will be a faith-changing, church-changing journey through the book of Ephesians, verse by verse. In almost 23 years as a church, we have walked together verse by verse through 20 out of the 26 New Testament books, including all four of the Gospels as well as several of the Old Testament books.

I can't speak for you, but I have loved every one of them. When people ask me, "Steve, what's your favorite book in the Bible?" my answer is usually the book in which I'm currently preaching. So, for the last two years, my favorite book has been the gospel of Mark. Starting today, my favorite book is the book of Ephesians.

Right now, I want to answer up front, "Why Ephesians? Why now?" Another question I get is, "How do you decide what to preach through next?" I don't think there's any formula for that. There's no mystical, magical way I choose a book, but this is what we know about Ephesians. Ruth Paxson (Bible teacher, missionary, and author) called it the Grand Canyon of Scripture, breathtakingly beautiful and inexhaustible.

William Barclay, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism in Glasgow, called Ephesians the most divine composition of man. That's some pretty high praise for a little six-chapter book in

our Bibles. E.J. Goodspeed, Greek New Testament scholar at the University of Chicago, said Ephesians is "doctrine set to music," and "a great rhapsody of the Christian salvation."

I wish my experience with Ephesians so far was as beautifully explained and described as that. As I've been reading and outlining Ephesians for the last six months... That's when I started my journey through Ephesians, wondering if this might be the next place for us as a church.

As I started down that road, it brought me back to memories of my freshman year in high school gym class. That semester, growing up in Southern California, gym class in your freshman year was the swimming semester. Part of the requirements to participate in the deep swimming pool was that you had to be able to jump off of the high dive and swim safely to the side of the deep pool.

If you couldn't do that, you were relegated to the smaller, shallow pool with the not-so-good swimmers: one more of those adolescent experiences perfectly designed to humiliate and scar you for life.

For me, swimming safely to the side of any pool in any depth of water was no problem at all, but jumping off of the high dive for someone deathly afraid of heights was another story altogether, and I remember it like it happened this morning. Not yesterday, but this morning. A long line of skinny, shivering freshman boys, and the closer I got to the foot of that ladder the louder my breathing was becoming. It's doing it right now just thinking about that experience.

By the time I got to the ladder, the boys in front of me had cannonballed, backflipped, forward-flipped, swan-dived, half-gainers, full-gainers... I thought I was accidentally in the gym class with the diving team. That's what was going on in front of me. The ascent up the ladder, for me, was like a death climb. I could barely let go of each rung as I was climbing to the top of this ladder, which seemed to me like it was in the clouds somewhere.

Finally, standing at the back of the high dive, I inched forward to about a foot from the end of the diving board, and I literally felt like I was blacking out. Everything was going blurry. To me, I might as well have been standing on the top of the Space Needle. I stood there, frozen, with 60 other kids and teachers all screaming at me to jump.

This is how I felt when I started studying and outlining Ephesians. I quickly found that, theologically and practically, Ephesians calls us to go places we might never choose to go on our own. At times, Ephesians feels way too high and way too deep at the same exact time, but as I inched my way through Ephesians over the last many months, I actually found myself becoming more and more confident in the bigness of God's love, grace, and power for us who believe.

I wish that was the end result of my day on the diving board that day, but let's just say I spent the rest of the semester in the shallow pool. The good news is that I'm still in therapy and I'm almost over it. My therapist says I have three or four more years. I will be through this. It will be disappointing for you to know I did not jump. I went back down.

Ephesians is going to feel like a jump almost immediately. I want to give us some introductory thoughts to kind of set the stage, and then we're going to begin to inch out to the end of the board before we jump all the way off next week. So, if your Bibles are open to the book of Ephesians, let's stand for chapter 1. We're not going to read a whole bunch of verses, but we're just going to get a little taste of what's coming. Verse 1:

"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 to himself as sons 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.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Let's just stop there. You're getting the idea, aren't you? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I pray you would ready our hearts as we humble ourselves before your mighty and glorious grace, under the authority and power of your Word. God, open our hearts and minds for how much more there is still to understand, trust, and experience in you. Lord, we love you. We hand over our hearts to you now. Please continue to mold us and shape us into the likeness of your Son, Jesus. According to your glorious grace we pray, amen.

Some quick backdrop information... If you have a study Bible, you could even see some of this in your notes. Ephesians was written about 30 or so years after the resurrection of Jesus by the apostle Paul to believers living in a city called Ephesus. Ephesus was a major port city and was mostly known for one of the seven wonders of the ancient world being in that city, the temple of the fertility goddess Diana. It was a temple like no other of its day.

This temple in the city of Ephesus was a major source of tourism and economy as well as the provider of prostitution to the tens of thousands of visiting businessmen and tourists who came through there every week. The temple employed over 1,000 prostitutes at all times. This was a very wealthy, educated, and trendy city. It prided itself on being very sexually progressive and socially tolerant of anything and everything except the gospel of Jesus and the church who proclaimed it.

Christians who lived there were under the constant threat of suspicion and persecution. It was really hard to be a follower of Jesus in Ephesus. *Really* hard. Does any of that sound familiar to

us, living where we live? It's certainly familiar to millions of other Christians elsewhere in difficult places in the world.

Knowing this about Ephesus and the Ephesians who believed in Jesus, you would think Paul would write them a long, big, sympathetic and comforting pep talk about hanging in there. You would think he would write them a letter about how unfair and ungodly their city is and how they might go about changing things to make their Christian life a little easier on them.

Yet Paul doesn't do any of that. He does something that shows incredible pastoral wisdom. He takes these struggling people and he gives them a vision for something that's even greater than the things they're going through. He's going to strengthen them with the eternal promises of God, and he's going to remind them that they are the true temple of the one true God.

He's going to give them a vision for the implications of their Christianity on their everyday life. He's going to show them that their faith in the risen Jesus actually has the power to change their family life, church life, work life, character, and morals in this godless world in which they find themselves trying to follow Jesus. In chapter 6, he's going to overhaul their prayer life completely. In that, they are going to find tremendous hope and comfort.

There are two key words in the book of Ephesians: *grace* and *peace*. He uses the word *grace* 11 times. He uses the word *peace* eight times. In fact, I want to show you one of the places. We read it very quickly in verse 2. At the very beginning, in the greeting, he says, "**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" He's saying, "Everything I'm about to say to you is surrounded and saturated in God's grace and peace.

Now, go to chapter 6 with me. Turn a few pages and look at chapter 6, verses 23 and 24. He says, "**Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.**" The bookends of everything in this letter are *grace* and *peace*. "Peace to those of you who believe. Grace be with you always."

This six-chapter letter neatly divides itself into two halves. The first three chapters, 1-3, are all about theology, what we believe. It's all about God. If you could summarize the first three chapters in a thought, it would be...*No one earns or deserves salvation; only faith can save you.* The first three chapters can be summed up in that sentence.

Only faith can save you: faith in God's grace, goodness, mercy, love, and power. It's all about what we believe about how sinful men and women are forgiven. The first three chapters are all about what we believe about how our sins are taken away and we go to heaven.

The main passage in the first three chapters is found in chapter 2, verses 8-9. You'll recognize it. "**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.**" That is the main idea in the first three chapters, Ephesians 2:8-9.

The second three chapters are all about living out our theology. It's all about living out what we believe. If you could sum up chapters 4-6, it would be in this statement: *Saving faith changes you*. It changes everything about you. It changes your relationships. It changes your morals. It changes your ethics. It changes your priorities. Saving faith changes your values. It changes your hope. It changes your confidence.

The key passage in the second half of Ephesians comes in chapter 5, verses 1-2, where Paul says, **"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..."** He is saying, "Therefore, based on everything we know and believe about God and his salvation and forgiveness, be imitators of God!"

If you were to sum up the whole letter of Ephesians in one thought, it would be this simple thought: *A faith that doesn't change you can't save you*. That's the whole book of Ephesians in one sentence. A faith that isn't real enough to affect your life and direct your life isn't real enough to save your life.

Now, here's the reality with which we're faced right now. Church, there's way too much compromise and sin in our lives. You see, Paul writes to the Ephesians and he doesn't say one word about the godless city in which they're living. He doesn't say one word about the godless people around whom they're trying to follow Jesus. He totally and completely brings them to a mirror and he says, "Here's what needs to change." While it may hurt for us to admit that, if we're really honest, the amount of acceptable sins in our lives is still too much.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones bluntly but fairly summarizes it this way. He says, "Much of the trouble in the Church today is due to the fact that we are so subjective, so interested in ourselves, so egocentric... Having forgotten God...we become miserable and wretched, and spend our time in 'shallows and in miseries'." Oh, I wish I could write and think like that.

I think he's right, church. He's saying we're still way too in love with ourselves right here. We see that play itself out, don't we? We see it in the church, in the lack of contentment and generosity with our time and resources to the spread of the gospel.

We see it in the amount of promiscuity and pornography in the church and the lack of purity and holiness. We see it in the amount of all kinds of abuse in families and the lack of sacrificial love and gentleness. We see it in the amount of anger and unforgiveness amongst Christians and the lack of loving patience and godly conflict resolution.

I don't say any of this to drive us into hiding or shame, not at all, but to draw our attention on how relevant Ephesians is going to be, to draw our attention on how much we need the message of Ephesians, because Ephesians is no doubt a study of what we believe about the Christian good news, but it's also a call to action, to live in a completely different way than the world around us.

So, you'll notice in verse 1, Paul addresses this letter, **"To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus..."** He wastes no time. The definition of what Paul believes a

Christian to be is contained in the opening greeting. In fact, Martin Lloyd-Jones, again, calls this one sentence, "the irreducible minimum of what constitutes a Christian."

1. *Christians are saints.* Notice in verse 1, Paul reminds us that Christians are saints. Do you see that? "**To the saints...**" Referring to ourselves as saints always feels weird for us, doesn't it? Part of the reason that feels weird is the way our secular culture understands saints or sainthood. Typically, the culture understands sainthood to describe someone who has earned the reputation of being exceptionally moral and good.

In fact, the Catholic Church even piles onto that secular understanding. Their definition of a saint also includes the fact that a saint has to have performed a verifiable miracle. So, is it any wonder, in the world we grow up in, when we think of the word *saints*, we certainly don't want to think of ourselves.

Yet that is not how the Bible teaches the idea of a saint. In the Bible, to be a saint actually means to be set apart. It means to be separated from. The setting-apart or separation from is what God does. It's something God does to us and for us, not something we earn. So, in a sense, every Christian is a saint...

A. *Separated from our sin.* The power of sin has been broken in the Christian's life. Our sin has been removed by Jesus making an atonement for our sins on the cross. Our sin no longer defines us and it no longer confines us in slavery to shame and condemnation. The old life and the old heart, however bad it was for some of us, is washed. It's made new. It's cleansed by the perfect, sinless, holy blood of Jesus Christ. Every Christian is a saint separated from our sin.

B. *Separated from the world in which we live.* You see, as Christians, we have been welcomed as saints to be a citizen in God's kingdom now. We have a new set of values. We have a new set of loyalties. We live by a different set of rules. So, our heart is motivated by different motivations because we serve a different King now. So, the world, for us, is not the comfortable place it once was. We don't fit here anymore.

Paul is going to give us 100 reasons why that is really good news. You see, Paul isn't writing them a letter to try and help them to figure out how to fit in as Christians in their crazy, sin-broken world. He's basically going to tell them, "You don't fit in this world anymore. You'll never fit in. It'll never be comfortable. Don't think when you wake up you're going to try to figure out how to blend in. It's not going to work. If God is your God and Jesus is your Savior, you don't fit in." There's actually reason to rejoice over that instead of mourning it.

C. *Separated for good works for God.* As saints, we have been given the gift of a higher purpose and a greater glory to live for than our own lives. We've been given a higher purpose and a greater glory than our own to live for. Our lives no longer consist of setting up our own little claustrophobic kingdoms, hoping we're sovereign enough to get the things we want and think we deserve.

Please wrap your mind around this. As saints, as Christians, we no longer are living to try and create this daily claustrophobic, kingdom-like mindset like, "With God in my little kingdom, I can actually find everything I want and need in this world so I can just feel happier every day and all the good stuff that comes with the things of the world." That is no longer why we live. In chapter 2, Paul is going to basically remind us that all Christians are saints and that all saints must increasingly be saintly.

2. *Christians are faithful.* No surprise here in verse 1. "**To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful...**" Whenever Paul talks about faith and faithfulness, Paul always has in mind three inseparable components that make faith in God real and not some mystical experience or idea, not some foggy thing that somehow only Christians get to grab onto and hold on tightly to. No, when Paul talks about us being faithful and being people of faith, there are always three components to that faith.

A. *Our faith is intellectual.* Faith always has content. Something must be proclaimed and understood in order for there to be real faith. This alone eliminates all the mist of what most people call spirituality or religion today. You see, for real faith to exist, there must be an object, a truth, or a person. For the Christian, the person is Jesus Christ, the truth is his death and resurrection, and the object is God's grace and salvation for those who have faith. It's intellectual. It's something we understand.

B. *Our faith is emotional.* Faith is emotional. When Paul talks about faith and faithfulness, he means once we really understand, there has to be a response. When I understand that the very Son of God died for me, a sinner, saving faith invokes an irresistible, loving response to God. It has to! If our faith does not invoke a loving response to God, that means we don't understand it. It has to mean that.

To understand what God has done for us in Christ absolutely allows and expects an emotion. Now, it doesn't mean we're all blubbering crybabies every minute of our day, but the emotion can be joy, love, happiness, and so much. It has to have an emotional response to it or else you don't get it. You don't understand it. Paul understands that.

C. *Our faith is volitional.* By that, the Bible means that once we understand the gospel and have been affected by it, the Christian now makes a personal commitment to follow Jesus, who died for him, persevering all the way to the very end of life.

True, biblical saving faith involves understanding and believing, being moved emotionally by the magnitude of what God has done to the point where we're willing to place all of our trust in the one who did it for us, and, not only doing that, but that commitment involves all the way to the very end of our lives. We're going to see that become really clear before we get out of chapter 1.

Here's what I think we're seeing in our church today. We have four services today, so I don't think the people I'm about to describe are in this service at all. They're in the other three services, but let's talk about them. Can we talk about them? Here's what I think is happening in our church today.

A lot of people stopped at the intellectual or emotional parts of their faith. In other words, many sitting in church today will claim to understand and believe in Jesus and what he did on the cross. Many will even be very emotional about that, but here's what I'm seeing. We have too many people sitting in our churches who have mistaken their faith *in* Jesus for faithfulness *to* Jesus. Did you get that?

They believe in Jesus. They believe in the cross and they believe why he died, and it even stirs them up a little bit, but that's where their Christianity stopped. It stops there. Their Christianity is something they did in the past. It's complete. It's finished. They did it, but their Christianity has not continued to change them, transform them, empower them, and comfort them in the face of being a follower of Jesus out there.

Now, how else do we explain there being so much unrepentant sin in the church today? So little change in so-called believers' character? So little change in morals and priorities? You see, Ephesians will honestly and even a little fearfully call us up the ladder of saving, joyful, true faith that also becomes life-changing faith. That's where Ephesians is calling us.

Now, I said that that sentence in verse 1 gives us that threefold irreducible minimum that constitutes a Christian's life. We said the first one is that Christians are saints set apart. Second of all, Christians are saints who are faithful all the way to the end.

3. *Christians are in Christ Jesus.* In the next 23 verses, Paul uses the phrases *in Christ* or *in him* 11 times. He's describing and defining our oneness with Jesus. This is so crazy deep that you have the sense that Paul is standing at the end of the high dive as he's trying to wrap our hearts and our minds around this amazing truth when he writes this letter of Ephesians. He's going to tell us that everything we know to be true about Jesus is also true about us saints. He's going to tell us everything we know to be real about Jesus is already real about you and me.

It's what theologians call the realm of the already-but-not-yet. Right now, some of you are thinking, "What in the world are you talking about?" Do you want me to give you an example? Nod your head. I'm so happy you want me to give you an example of this. I'll just give you a little taste, just one little morsel of the fact that what is already true about Jesus is already true about us.

Turn to Ephesians, chapter 2, and look at verse 4. Now, we're going to get to verse 4. We're going to be in this chapter about six months from now, so hang onto this. Underline it. Circle it. Look at verse 4.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." Right there, that should slow us down. **"...by grace you have been saved..."** There's that key verse in the first three chapters. Here it is, verse 6: **"...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."**

Paul is saying that right now, in the economy of God, we are already sitting with Jesus in heaven. Okay, if that doesn't bend your head a little bit, you're not awake yet. Paul is saying, "Listen! In God's universe, which is not bound or limited by time, we are already there with Christ, seated with him in the heavenlies."

Paul is going to say, "Those things have implications for us being able to live the Christian life, to follow Jesus, in this sin-broken world. When we get up every day, it's not going to be about how we figure out how to fit in so we can love Jesus, be happy, get along, and have no problems. That's not how you're going to wake up every day. When we finish Ephesians, you're going to wake up every day already knowing you're in heaven. You're there. It's done." How does that affect the way we live today?

Before he takes us off that high dive together he wants us to know that the way ahead is filled with God's grace. It's only by the will and the strength of God, who alone can help us, that we can even go forward from here. He says, in chapter 6, in the verses we read earlier, that the result will be a deep and divine peace we wake up with every day that is guided by a heart full of thanksgiving, contentment, and holiness. That's where he's taking us. That's how Ephesians ends.

Where we are going will be a place of peace every day. Not a place of ease or absolute comfort in this world, but a place of down-deep peace that comes in a heart filled with thankfulness to God for what he has done, filled with contentment, and filled with holiness. Isn't that what we all long for? Isn't that what we are all wanting more than anything, a heart that lives at peace, content, thankful, and holy? Whew! That's what I'm longing for for myself and just as much for all of us.

I want to start this journey by giving some of you an opportunity to recommit your life to Jesus Christ, because the truth be known, there are some in this service, intellectually and emotionally...absolutely, but the present-tense, transforming power, comfort, and holiness of your Christian faith stopped somewhere along the way. I want to give you an opportunity to commit to that changing. Let's bow our heads right now.

In the quietness of this room, if your desire is to say, "God, I believe I am humbled by what you have done for me, so undeserving, but I know there's more work to be done. I want to wake up every day differently than I'm waking up now. I want to continue to grow. I want to continue to change. I want to continue to find that grace and peace that strengthens me every day," recommit your life to him right now in your own words. In your own prayer, you and him, right now.

Father in heaven, you promise us that you reject the proud but you lift up the humble. We find ourselves now humbled by your love, patience, grace, power, strength, and the peace that comes from it all. So, God, we ask that the journey ahead in your wonderful Word will result in all of us being transformed in how we live and think.

We pray, God, that you will begin burning out the dross of our sin and burning in the grace of your holiness. O God, we look forward to it. We go with you, knowing your grace and peace

goes with us. We love you and we long to see you. In the name of your Son, Jesus, we pray, amen.

I know for some of you this whole conversation is just a little bit farther ahead than where you are, even spiritually. You're listening. It makes sense, but you've never taken that first step of intellectual faith. You've never repented of your sin and said, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I want to put my faith in him." If you have not taken that step, then a lot of what we just said this morning is just a little premature for you, spiritually.

The people standing up here are willing, ready, and able to help you take that step of trusting in Jesus once and for all by turning from your sin and turning to him for forgiveness. If you would like to have that talk or get something to go home with, please, before you walk out of the room, come and say hi to one of these people. They would love to do that with you. I hope you will. For the rest of us, we will look forward to seeing you next week in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 3. See you there!