

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of June 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Christianity Is a Spiritual Religion – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Last week we began to consider the final passages of the letter to the Hebrews. Broadly, we are being reminded that the Christian religion is of a spiritual, not material, nature. At verse 14 our hopes are founded on the heavenly Jerusalem, not any earthly temple, such as in the earthly Jerusalem.

Consequently there is no place for the Christian to have anything to do with the old Levitical sacrificial system. We do have sacrifices, but these, which we offer through the mediation of Christ alone, are of a completely different sort.

Verses 15 & 16: We are not required to make the long Trek to Jerusalem these days. To kill lambs and bulls. To engage in all those rites and ceremonies. But we are called, today, to offer sacrifices. Through Christ we offer sacrifices to God. We don't do it once a day, or twice a day, but continually. We don't do it with our hands, but with our lips. The sacrifices we're called upon to bear and to give, are the sacrifices of praise to God. Giving thanks to His Name! That's the sacrifice you're told to make. Not a sin offering. One has been made, once for all, never to be repeated. In the light of the fact, that your sins are cleansed, the sacrifice you're called to bear and to make, is the sacrifice of continual praise to God. And this is to be followed, verse 16, by the sacrifice of love, to others. Giving ourselves to good deeds.¹ Acting to meet the needs of others. "Those", says the Apostle, "are the sort of sacrifices which please God."

So the main core of what the Apostle is saying: Is Christianity a religion of Rites and Ceremonies? No! It's what is going on in your heart that matters.

Does Christianity have an Altar and a sacrificial system? No! The only altar which Christianity has, and the only acceptable sacrifice, which has ever been offered, is Calvary. The only blood that has actually been availed for sin, is Jesus Christ's blood! (He was also the high priest who offered that sacrifice.)

And so we erect no Altars; we kill no Sacrifices and we ordain no Priests!

What do we do? All those things are superfluous they have passed away, and all our hopes depend on none of those things. They were all 'pictures' of the better things to come. The only thing that matters is your heart. The relationship your heart has with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to identify with Christ, and to do it gladly, even though it means reproach from the 'world'.

¹ The status of 'good deeds' in the Christian life can be confusing. Here they are commended as part of our sacrifice to God (made as always through Jesus Christ). Elsewhere we cite the error of trying to earn 'brownie points' through good works. The confusion is resolved when the similar dichotomy regarding obedience to the law is involved. We cannot earn our righteousness through works (of the law), this righteousness is a free gift of grace earned by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. But once justified by faith (in Christ's work) we are made able; our wills are fortified by the Spirit; our hearts overflow with gratitude; and so we obey the moral law as a consequence. Similarly, our good works done with the motive of earning our salvation are valueless, (are sinful - WCF 16-7) while the good works that Christ requires of already justified believers are made acceptable to God through the merit of Christ (whose works they are) and are the fruits, the evidence, of a true and living faith of the believer.

Do Christians then make no sacrifices? Christians make no 'blood' sacrifices. Nor anything that purports to be blood. What they do do (verses 15 and 16) is they live in fellowship with God; thankful fellowship with God. And they devote themselves to the service – particularly to their fellow Christians – to all 'men'. Because Christ activates them to live unselfishly in the world.

Christianity is not a religion of Rites and Ceremonies. It is not a religion of offerings and liturgies. It is not a religion of priests and mysteries. It is not even a religion of 'do's and don't's'. Not a religion of altars and candles; robes; plates; incense and sacrifices. That's just what it isn't! And anything that gives attention to any of those things is not Christianity.

True Christianity as a matter of God's grace in the heart. Resting on the finished work of Christ. Daring the same reproach as He received in the world! Being publicly identified with a failure. Longing for Heaven – the city which we seek. Fellowshiping with Heaven, while we're here upon the Earth. Approaching God, constantly, through Christ. Being filled with overflowing praise and thankfulness. Devoting ourselves to living for others.

Those that haven't been able to grasp that, risk not being Christians at all.

If progress is to be made in the Christian life, such a grasp of the spiritual nature of the Christian religion is absolutely necessary. So the Apostle has told us in this paragraph, to give particular attention, to grasping the fact, that Christianity is essentially a spiritual religion.

Verses 18-25: (since we covered verse 17 earlier) This closing paragraph of the letter consists of exhortations and benedictions.

Exhortations:

Verse 18. For the very first time in the letter the Apostle speaks of himself. He's got all this way before he mentions himself, but he cannot close his letter, without confessing that he needs the prayers of his readers. He acknowledges, in verse 18, that his letter may have been misunderstood! Because it's been very blunt in places. But he assures them that he is doing his best to keep a clear conscience. He's doing his best to be 'above board' in everything. "But there's one particular prayer request", he says (in verse 19), "that I leave with you. Pray that I might be with you, sooner rather than later." The humility of the Apostle is astonishing. Having been blunt and forthright with people whom he suspects of being on the very brink of apostasy. He adopts no superior, 'holier-than-thou' attitude. Putting himself in the position where he pleads with them to pray for him. Tremendous humility! Great sensitivity in his heart. Perhaps we, on occasion, have written a blunt letter. Our first reaction may have been to congratulate ourselves on how well we've done, without ever being sensitive enough we even think about the reaction it might have had on the reader. However the Apostle shows his sensitivity to this.

[A useful lesson for how we are to pray: He prays for something very specific. "... do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner."]

Continuing with the exhortations, look now at verse 22: In this verse he claims to have written – briefly. Well we've been nearly a year studying his 'brief' letter! However if we consider the vastness of the themes he's been treating, it is a brief letter.

He asks, them in verse 22, "To bear with my word of exhortation" Some have used this as a 'proof text' to justify putting up with poor preaching. But this is not the sense of the use of the word 'bare' in this exhortation. It means, 'give it your patient attention'! Can we say now that we have done that?

Can we pause and review what we learned in the past year. What have been the main lessons? How will we implement these lessons? And the most important lesson of all: which should I act on first?

Verse 23 is also an exhortation. "Take notice: *that our brother Timothy, has been released.*" From this we see that it's part of your Christian Duty to be, 'in the know' about the fate of other Christians. We're less inclined to this these days, but one of the great sins of the past, and still of many people today is parochialism. The only aspect of the Lord's work that they're interested in, is that particular part of the Lord's work in which they, personally are involved. Parochialism leads to the attitude: where that ceases to be the Lord's work in our minds and becomes, my work in my mind. They're interested in those that they meet – but any other Christians: 'out of sight and out of mind'. They're just not interested!

Contrary to the whole spirit of the New Testament and it's contrary to the spirit of this command, to be like that. It is part of my Christian Duty to be informed about the needs and movements other Christians. News of Christian's – particularly persecuted ones – comes to us, for example, through the pamphlets from the Barnabas Fund.

On the occasion in Hebrews, that we're just been reading about, it is Timothy who has just been freed. The writer is hoping to come with Timothy to meet his readers. Clearly he hopes to visit, because from the example of the New Testament the personal touch comes first and letters come second. Of course when the personal touch is impossible (verse 24) we must do the best we can. So we see the writer sending greetings to the leaders, and to all the Hebrew Christians. He also passes on greetings from the believers in Italy. (He was either over in Italy when he wrote or he was in the company of a group of Italian citizens.)

Have you ever had a letter which ends with telling you to do all sorts of things, but doesn't give you any good wishes? Hebrews doesn't finish like that it would be an awfully cold letter if there was just the exhortation and no benediction. To have closed with a list of instructions and nothing else!

Benedictions:

So we close by looking at the two benedictions. We will take the second one first:

Verse 25: This whole letter closes with just a single simple sentence – ²⁵ *Grace be with all of you*. It's a perfectly understandable closing in the light of verse nine. He's told them in verse 9 that what establishes the heart, and consolidates the heart in Christian things, it's not what you eat, but grace. That's what he wants most for his readers. Spiritual strength, in their hearts. So he closes the epistle on that note! And surely that must be what we want for each other also, more than anything else in the world.

But before that he has written one of the most wonderful benedictions, in the whole of Scripture. Look at it now. It's verses 20 and 21: ²

He closes the letter by focusing their eyes on the doings of God. The Jew never understood that God is the God of Peace. His religion spoke of access but never gave him access; his religion spoke of a welcome into God's presence but never gave him a welcome into God's presence. He enjoyed the 'picture' but never enjoyed the reality. For believers who are tempted to give up Christianity and go back to Judaism, he reminds them that this God is the God of Peace! *Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ*. Not just as a private individual, but as the leader, that is, the Shepherd, of his people. In other words: Those who belong to Christ may expect the same Resurrection that Christ had! So in focusing their attention on the doings of God, he focuses their attention on the Resurrection

For Christian's going through trouble and persecution and tempted to go back there's no better place to fix their attention than on the Resurrection! The Shepherd of the Sheep has been raised from the dead; the Sheep will follow. The 'forerunner' has gone that way, so those who are following the 'forerunner' shall go the same way.

But that Resurrection was preceded by a death (verse 20). Jesus rose because Jesus died. He spilt his blood. He didn't spill his blood in accordance with Jewish Rites and Ceremonies. He spilt his blood in accordance with the Everlasting Covenant. Jewish Rites and Ceremonies are a faint 'picture' of the Everlasting Covenant. Calvary's cross is the fulfilment of the terms of the Everlasting Covenant. Jewish Rites and Ceremonies will pass away – and have done! But Jesus Christ's blood was spilt in accordance with the Everlasting Covenant, and therefore it's benefits will never pass away.

It's with great truths like that, that he garrison's their hearts before he closes the letter. (that's how hearts are made strong: by the way)

2 ²⁰ *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,* ²¹ *equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

So the God he speaks of is the God of peace; the God of power; and the God of love. Now he prays (verse 21) that God may *equip you with everything good*. He's praying there, that they won't have any weak points in their Christian life. So that, "... *you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.*" That you have no weak points so that you spend your lives doing the will of God. Through being inwardly strengthened so that your outward life pleases God.

Then he concludes: *through Jesus Christ to whom be Glory for ever and ever*. "I'm praying this for you", he says, "as I sign off. Through Jesus Christ. Knowing that all blessings that flow to you in the Christian life must flow to you through Jesus Christ, or not reach you at all."

Then he says, *Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory, for ever and ever*. When an apostate hears that sentence he's not interested. But when a backslider hears that sentence he knows that his heart should be saying that also. But at this point in his life, it doesn't. (yet)

Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory, for ever and ever. When a believer, who is going on in the Christian life, hears that sentence, he loves it! And everything inside him says, "AMEN"

[2154]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

EPHESIANS

Extract from: The New Compact Bible Dictionary.

Generally acknowledged to be one of the richest and most profound of the New Testament epistles. The depth and grandeur of its concepts, the richness and fullness of its message, and the majesty and dignity of its contents have made it precious to believers in all ages and in all places.

Ephesians explicitly claims Pauline authorship (1:1; 3:1) and its entire tenor is eminently Pauline. The early Christian Church uniformly received and treasured it as from Paul. Only within the modern era have liberal critics raised doubts as to its Pauline origin. The attacks are based solely on internal arguments drawn from the style, vocabulary, and theology of the epistle. These arguments are subjective and inconclusive and offer no compelling reasons for rejecting the undeviating evidence of text and tradition. If the Pauline authorship is rejected, the epistle must be ascribed to someone who was fully Paul's equal, but the literature of the first two centuries reveals no traces of anyone capable of producing such a writing.

Ephesians was written while Paul was a prisoner (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). The prevailing view has been that it was written from Rome during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31).

The letter was transmitted to its destination by Tychicus (6:21-22), being dispatched together with Colossians and Philemon (Col. 4:7-8; Philem. 9, 13, 17). Thus all three were sent to the Roman province of Asia.

Its contents offer no clear indications as to the occasion for the writing of Ephesians. Its affinity to Colossians in time of Origin and contents suggests an occasion closely related to the writing of that epistle. Ephesians seems to be the after-effect of the controversy that caused the writing of Colossians. Colossians has in it the intensity, rush, and roar of the battlefield, while Ephesians has a calm atmosphere suggestive of a survey of the field after the victory.

Ephesians sets forth the wealth of the believer in union with Christ. It portrays the glories of our salvation and emphasises the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ. As indicated by the doxology in 3:20-21, its contents fall into two parts, the first doctrinal (1-3), the second practical and hortatory³ (4-6).

³ trying to strongly encourage or persuade someone to do something:

Why We Must Study This Book - Ephesians

per S Olyott

This morning we begin an exposition of the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. During this Sunday and the next time we meet, we will consider the question "Why must we study this book?" Then the answer will be developed through two further questions each of which will have four parts.

The first question is: "Why bother to study Ephesians?" What's so special about this letter? The opening passage of Ephesians gives us four good reasons, for spending time on this letter.

Look at verse 1 for the first reason. ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.* The first reason for spending time on Ephesians is because of whom it is from.

Today we will look at a map of the general area of the Holy Land. We will note the position of Galilee. Here lives a Jewish family. A very celebrated Jewish family, from the tribe of Benjamin. Very celebrated because unlike most Jewish families, they were Roman citizens! Most Jewish families were counted as the worst of the worst by the Roman overlords. But some were given the privilege, or bought the privilege, of being Roman citizens. This very prosperous Jewish family, moved around the corner of the Mediterranean Sea, into Asia Minor to settle in the 'no mean' city, the sea port and commercial hub, of Tarsus. When they settled there a boy is born to them. He is born free! He is born a Roman citizen.

He's then educated as a Pharisee and when he's old enough he's taken to Jerusalem, where he 'sits at the feet' of the most celebrated teacher of the Jews, throughout the whole of that holy world, Gamaliel. He receives an education that is unparalleled by any of his peers and any of his friends.

So he comes from an influential family; he's a person of means; is a person of status; and a person of education. And there in Jerusalem he quickly rises, even as a young man, to a position of prominence. To such prominence, despite his young age, that Paul was a member of the Supreme Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. His was a name that was on every lip. (Albeit at that stage he was called, Saul.) Because this young man had status, influence, and position! He was the most privileged Jew of his time.

That's the person we're speaking about this morning.

As the gospel spread in the early Christian world, this young, influential man, was the most fierce opponent that there was of the spreading Gospel. He used his influence to

secure official authority to 'put down' the Christians. It was while he was madly pursuing the Christians to the northern town of Damascus, that something that you all know about, and was particularly remarkable, happened to him!

It's noon, and in that location the sun can be very bright indeed. It's the middle of the day as he travels to Damascus. Then there is a light which is brighter than the midday sun. He's struck to the ground. He is blinded. He is arrested by Jesus Christ the Living Son of God. This isn't fancy, this is fact! If we knew the exact spot, we could walk past it today, and say, "He met the Glorified Christ there."

This is what he heard from Christ. It's recorded for us in Acts 26. The Heavenly Son of God said this:

¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:16-18)

So this staggering blind man is told by the Lord of Glory that he is being sent to the Gentiles. He's been commissioned, personally, by Christ. If he doubted that vision was real, the Lord was speaking to someone else in Damascus that same day: Ananias. Ananias was being told that he was to go to meet Paul when he arrived in the city.

Ananias answered: *"Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."* ("I can't go to him Lord, he's here to arrest Christians!") *¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. (Acts 9:13b-15)*

So Ananias is being told that this man is a 'chosen vessel'. Chosen by Christ with a special responsibility to minister to the Gentiles.

So Ananias duly went to meet Paul in a street called 'Straight' – you can still find that street there, today. This isn't fancy, it is fact!

We read further in the Bible that Ananias came in and said: *'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' ... 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. (Acts 22:13b-15)* So again the Lord underlined it. That this man. This young influential Jew. Now soundly and dramatically converted: is a 'chosen vessel'. Personally commissioned by the Lord

Jesus Christ, to go to the Gentiles. That's why he opens the letter to the Ephesians as he does. ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.*

In the years leading up to the time of writing to the Ephesians he hadn't been disobedient to the heavenly vision.

He went to Tarsus and preached there for ten years; he went to Antioch in Syria, teaching the church there for a year; went throughout Asia Minor; returned back to Antioch; again to Asia Minor and then into Europe; again to Europe; at one stage he was based at Ephesus – for the best part of three years – making it his base of operations, by which the gospel was disseminated throughout Asia Minor, and over the water into Europe (Macedonia and Greece). From there eventually he return to Jerusalem. While he was there he was arrested. Being removed to Rome, whereby he realised his lifelong ambition, to preach the gospel in Rome.

He arrived in Rome as a prisoner and it was while he was a prisoner in the year AD 62, that this great man sat down to pen these words which we have open before us this morning. Perhaps he was chained to a Roman soldier, with very few companions around him. He penned letters to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Philippians as well as this one to the Ephesians.

Why bother with this Letter then? Because of who it's from. We have before us this morning a letter from a man of God. The greatest theologian who has ever lived. No armchair theologian this man. Not an ivory tower man hidden away in his study – never descending. The soul winner. A missionary. An evangelist! But more important than all that: A man who was personally commissioned by God the Son to teach the Gentiles.

We, by and large, are Gentile Christians. Here is a letter from one whom God the Son commissioned to teach the Gentiles. That's why we bother with Ephesians this morning!

Now we bother with Ephesians for a second reason. Look again at verse one: 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:* We bother with it not only because of whom it's from but because of who it's to. This letter is a letter to a local church. You can see in verse 1, that it's addressed to, *the saints who are in Ephesus*. There's Ephesus out there in Asia Minor. Although it wasn't the Capital of the Province of Asia (at that time) it was certainly the 'first' city. In fact it was one of the three leading cities in that early world as far as international trade was considered. There was a triangle of Alexandria in Egypt; Antioch in Syria; and Ephesus. Three prominent commercial centres! Ephesus was one of them: an important regional port. It was cosmopolitan with people from all races and backgrounds; and also a great centre of the Arts. This early world was filled with a great number of wandering philosophers. They tended to wander until they

settled down in either Athens, Corinth or Ephesus. There were all sorts of poets, found in Ephesus. Artists and orators. All having migrated to Ephesus!

But it was particularly famous for its immense temple, dedicated to 'Diana of the Ephesians' Not only that, but the Emperor Augustus was worshipped by thousands of people. The spiritualism (occult) of the first century world, was also centred on Ephesus.

In that important City there was a Church – not a building – but an assembly of Christian believers. How did that come to be there? You don't expect to find believers in a pagan environment like that. How did they come to be there?

Some were converted on the day of Pentecost: as Acts 2:9 tells us. Jews who had come from Ephesus; converted in Jerusalem; and back they went. Some were converted in the events recorded in Acts 18:18-21. ¹⁸ *After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.* ¹⁹ *And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.* ²⁰ *When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined.* ²¹ *But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills",* And he did! Chapter 19 is the story of how Paul did return to Ephesus in the year AD 52. He stayed there the best part of three years.

Look what happened (verse 11) ¹¹ *And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,* And also verse 19: ¹⁹ *And a number of those who had practised 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.* ²⁰ *So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*

If you read further in the Acts of the Apostles you'll know that his ministry at Ephesus was cut short by a riot. The Gospel was so powerful under the preaching of Paul, that the silversmiths who made models of Diana, we're in danger of going out of business. So there was a riot and he had to leave. It's to that local Church that his letter is written.

But again, look at verse 1: *To the saints who are in Ephesus, and (are) faithful in Christ Jesus.* The Greek⁴ leaves the option that there are two sets of recipients, which

4 There is an element of ambiguity in the literal Greek (without taking into account any conventions flowing from the grammatical construction compared with those automatically understood in English). The Greek, literally word for word, is *"To the Saints (the) being in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus."*

While both recent English translations remove the ambiguity by adding one or two words (or in the case of the NIV also deleting a word: 'are' so that 'faithful in Christ Jesus' becomes an adjectival phrase qualifying those: 'saints in Ephesus': ESV: *"To the Saints (who) are in Ephesus and (are) faithful in Christ Jesus."* OR NIV: *"To the saints in Ephesus (the) faithful in Christ Jesus."* Alternatively the KJV resolves the ambiguity in the other direction. Making it clear that there are two sets of recipients, by adding three words ('which', 'to' and 'the') and changing the 'in' to 'at'. KJV: *"To the saints (which) are (at) Ephesus and (to the) faithful in Christ Jesus."* (see printed side by side table)

the King James translation says explicitly -- "*and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.*" *This view is supported by further historical information.*

From AD 62 onwards, this letter has been known as the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians. But equally true from the year AD 62 onwards this letter has actually circulated throughout Asia Minor without the words 'at Ephesus'. It was written as a letter to that church, but immediately it was written, copies were made of it and the words 'at Ephesus' were left out. It went to all the surrounding churches – Tychicus took it there. Each church he arrived at, he read the letter, perhaps just filling in the name of that particular Church at the point where it says Ephesus.

So it's not only a letter to a local church, it's a circular letter, an encyclical as it were, to local churches generally. That may be why of all the letters of Paul, it contains no personal greetings (even though he knew the members of the Ephesus Church very well). It does have a general character about it. Philippians on the other hand deals with particular problems and themes. Colossians deals with a particular problem that occurred there. The letter to the Ephesians is more general. It's a letter to all, and every, local church.

So while we're necessarily interested in letters to the Philippians and others, the letter to the Ephesians has a different significance to us, because of its general (one might say universal) nature.

So the second reason why we bother, is because of whom it is to. It's from the Apostle to the Gentiles – to us!

[2205]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

3972 [e]	652 [e]	5547 [e]	2424 [e]	1223 [e]	2307 [e]	2316 [e]	3588 [e]	40 [e]
Paulos	apostolos	Christou	Iēsou	dia	thelēmatos	Theou	Tois	hagiois
1 Παῦλος ,	ἀπόστολος	Χριστοῦ	Ἰησοῦ	διὰ	θελήματος	Θεοῦ ,	Τοῖς	ἁγίοις
Paul	an apostle	of Christ	Jesus	by	[the] will	of God	To the	saints
N-NMS	N-NMS	N-GMS	N-GMS	Prep	N-GNS	N-GMS	Art-DMP	Adj-DMP

3588 [e]	1510 [e]	1722 [e]	2181 [e]	2532 [e]	4103 [e]	1722 [e]	5547 [e]	2424 [e]
tois	ousin	en	Ephesō	kai	pistois	en	Christō	Iēsou
τοῖς	οὔσιν	ἐν	Ἐφέσῳ ,	καὶ	πιστοῖς	ἐν	Χριστῷ	Ἰησοῦ .
-	being	in	Ephesus	and	faithful	in	Christ	Jesus
Art-DMP	V-PPA-DMP	Prep	N-DFS	Conj	Adj-DMP	Prep	N-DMS	N-DMS

ESV:(who) are in Ephesus and (are) faithful in Christ Jesus

NIV: in Ephesus (the) faithful in Christ Jesus

KJV:(which) are (at) Ephesus and (to the) faithful in Christ Jesus

Why We Must Study This Book – Ephesians – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Now look at verse 2: ² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* Why bother? Because of who wrote it and to whom it is sent and also because of the spirit with which it comes.

When a Greek met a Greek in the street (we're talking about 2000 years ago. no idea what they say today) they said Charein. When Christian Greeks met each other they said Charis. Almost the same word but it had a small change in it. So they used the word meaning the grace of God as their common greeting between themselves. When Jews meet each other, then and now, they say Shalom – which means peace, health, wholesomeness. Now Paul takes up this Christian Greek greeting and he takes up the Jewish greeting and he uses it there in the second verse of the letter. Grace and Peace!

You can take great comfort from the greeting in this second verse, used in any letter but particularly those from Paul. The letter comes with friendly greetings. This is the spirit of the letter. It wishes me health. It wishes me Grace. It intends to do me good. And the greetings don't come in Paul's name (verse 2). This letter wishes me spiritual health and Grace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This letter then is a 'means of Grace'. Intended to bring me spiritual health from my God and Saviour.

How would you feel if Paul came here today? Especially if he came to lunch, and asked questions after lunch. Somewhat intimidated. He being the Apostle to the gentiles – personally commissioned by Jesus Christ. But as Paul writes his letter to you and me, he tells us that he doesn't want us to be intimidated! This letter he says, comes to you as from a friend. It comes to you from God. It comes to you from your Saviour. It has a human pen-man. Yes, but it comes as a means of Grace and the means of spiritual health. You don't need to be on your guard. You don't need to be cautious. You don't need to be suspicious. You don't need to be on edge or afraid, as you read this letter. Open your heart to it. Welcome what it teaches. Embrace it as the friend that it is. That's a further reason for studying the letter to the Ephesians.

So we study it because of who it's from; whom it's to; and especially for the spirit in which it comes. And fourthly we study it because of what it's about. Look at verse 3: 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,* Blessed us! With blessings! This letter is about the enormous privileges which Christians enjoy. And therefore, of course, the responsibilities that are put upon them. This is why it is composed of three doctrinal chapters followed by 3 practical (application) chapters.

Firstly it's a letter telling me what my privileges are: as a Christian. We could look at it like this: There are such things as earthly blessings, which all people enjoy. And there

are such things as spiritual blessings, which some people enjoy. This letter is about spiritual blessings.

Now earthly blessings are the blessings from God which come to all men and women simply because they live on the earth. Who does the sun shine on? The just and the unjust alike! Who does the rain fall on? The just and the unjust alike! Who has life? All have life on this Earth as a gift from God. The measure of health and strength that we have, is God's gift. The possessions that we own. The clothes that we wear. The family life we enjoy. The friends that we have. The employment if we have any. Our leisure, interests, abilities, flare! These are all blessings of this life and they come to men and women alike. They all come from God, and we should remember that. Never to belittle their importance. However these blessings are for this life only. They're part and parcel of this life and they end with this life. God gives these gifts to men and women whether they care about Him or whether they don't. That's His 'common' Grace! ⁵

But then there are spiritual blessings! Heavenly blessings. This letter is about those. There are some people who besides belonging to this world, belong to another world. They live in two worlds! In fact they belong so much to this other world, that very often, they feel that they don't belong in this world. Quite rightly they see it as a passing world. The world to which they belong, is of course, an eternal world. It's an invisible world, but no less real because of that.

They're in fellowship with God. They're aware of God. They know God. They love God. The Lord Jesus Christ is a reality to them. They think in terms of the holy Angels and spiritual warfare against spiritual wickedness which is taking place.

Now they enjoy the blessings of this world as much as anybody else.⁶ They enjoy the blessings of this world, but they enjoy the blessings of the spiritual dimension also! As they grow spiritually, they enjoy the blessings of the spiritual dimension to a greater degree than the things they enjoy in this life.

Now it's about those spiritual blessings, that this letter is written. You will never enjoy all the blessings of this life: Never swim in every Lake; never hear every piece of beautiful music; never play every match of sport or whatever you particularly enjoy. You will never enjoy all the blessings of this life. But the people of whom we now are speaking do enjoy (verse 3), **every** Blessing Of this other world!

There is no blessing of this other world, which is not theirs!

Now what those blessings are, and how they come to us, and the difference they make to our lives, and the responsibilities that they lay upon us: That is the great theme of Ephesians.

⁵ As far as unconverted people are concerned (and if one thinks like this, you're certainly unconverted) the only things that matter to them are these things: The money they have; the friends; the family; the holidays they have. The blessings of this life are the only things that matter to them. They are earthly blessings and you have them as a consequence of living on this earth.

⁶ They can swim like other people. They can play football like other people. They can listen to music like other people. They can walk about like other people.

So we have four good reasons for bothering with this letter: It's from the apostle who is commissioned to teach us, who is the personal representative of Jesus Christ; it really is to local church Christian's everywhere; it's intended to do as good; and it's about spiritual blessings, which God has heaped upon us. What else do we need for our appetites to be stimulated to study this letter?

That's been our first question: Why bother? The second question is a little briefer.

Do the opening verses teach very much about these spiritual blessings? They do – also in four ways.

- These opening verses tell us from whom these blessings come, look at verse 3: 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,* The blessings of the spiritual world are not ours naturally. We weren't born with them. We didn't enter into them until we were 'born again!' The blessings of the spiritual dimension are not earned and they're not transferable from one person to another. They certainly can't be given by parents to their children. Or even a husband to a wife or a wife to a husband. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, ...* Everyone who enjoys spiritual blessings remembers the time when he didn't. But then they did. Receiving the things of which this letter is going to speak.

It's from God that these blessings come. And the God from whom they came is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. All spiritual blessings are **given** blessings and they are **given** by God. And when He gives the blessings of the spiritual world. He gives **all** the blessings. So immediately we've learnt something from Ephesians: We are boundlessly rich. Do these opening verses teach us very much about these spiritual blessings? Yes, they tell us whom they come from.

- They also tell us by whom they come. Now Paul's language is very careful. Look at verse 3. He emphasises, "In Christ" And again in verse 4: ⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,* Also verse 5: ⁵ *he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ,* . Verse 6: ⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* "In Christ"; "In Him"; "By Jesus Christ"; "By the Beloved".

God's method then is this: All that Heaven contains is in the hands of Christ. When someone 'receives' Christ, that someone receives all that heaven contains. That's how we receive every spiritual blessing in heavenly places: "In Christ".

Dr Ernest Kevin, was a great theologian but also a very effective speaker to children. He had a marvellous children's address on Ephesians chapter 1. Consider a series of bricks in ascending order of size that fit inside one another. (or alternatively a Babushka doll)

The smallest item carried the name '**perseverance**'. So Dr Kevin talks to the

boys and girls about the wonderful blessing of perseverance in the Christian faith . Then he would put that brick, into the larger brick called '**sanctification**'. Because there would be no perseverance unless there was sanctification. That is how God makes us holy. Next he fitted that brick into the brick called '**adoption**'. To show that there would be no sanctification unless we are the adopted children of God. Then he fitted that brick into the brick called '**justification**'. Showing that we wouldn't be the adopted children of God unless we were right with God. Finally the largest brick had the name 'the **Lord Jesus Christ**'. So he summed up: Perseverance is in sanctification; sanctification is in adoption; adoption is in justification and all these blessings are ... And a small boy in the congregation raised his hand and said, "Please sir, it's all in Christ." Dr Kevin said no more and closed the Service with a hymn!

The boy had got it! All these blessings are in Christ. When we receive Christ, we received **all** those blessings. Everything that is in heaven, is in Christ. We enter into spiritual blessings on no other condition than being simply, in Christ. All that was necessary for me to have those blessings was done by Christ through His perfect life and glorious death. When I receive Christ, I received every spiritual blessing. That's why of course there's no other way of Salvation!⁷

- So we know from whom spiritual blessings come and by whom spiritual blessings come. But do you know why they come to us and not all men and women?

Why are you justified, adopted, sanctified and persevering today? Where most people aren't! These verses tell us why these blessings come to us, and not to all men and women. You've asked that question haven't you? None of us are better than others. Not more discerning. More intelligent than others or outstanding in character. Look at verse 4: *4... he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*" Now look at verse 5: *5 He predestined us for adoption as sons (children) through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will,*

Here we quote some wonderful words from John Calvin: "The foundation and first cause, both of our founding, and all the benefits that we receive from God, is Here declared to be His eternal election."

If the question is asked. "Why God has called us to enjoy the Gospel? Why He daily bestows on us so many blessings? Why He opens to us the gate of heaven?" The answer will constantly be found in this principle: That He has chosen us, before the foundation of the world. The very time when this election took place, proves it to be free. For what did we deserve, what merit did we possess: before the world was made?

That's a wonderful truth! You might not fully understand it and the first time you heard it you might not have liked it. But do believe it! Because the great Apostle to the gentiles, teaches it here! The only reason anybody enters into spiritual blessings, is because God chose him to. God chose her to. Marvel at this truth: Before the world was made even before Adam 'fell'. Even before an angel

⁷ All spiritual blessings are in Christ. Today there are Clerics who say that you can come into these blessings without Christ. Paul vehemently contradicts that. Paul is a million miles away from modern theology. He shows that all spiritual blessings are in Christ and therefore when we are 'in Christ' we have all spiritual blessings.

prostrated himself before Yahweh's marvellous throne, when there was none other than the three majestic Persons of the Trinity, together in glorious harmony, the thoughts of God were towards you! The thoughts of God which were towards you were loving thoughts. God had decided that every spiritual blessing in His dwelling place should be yours, in Christ.

- So in closing one more detail: Do these opening verses teach us very much about the spiritual blessings? Yes! They tell us whom they're from; by whom they come; and why they've come to us and not to others. And they tell us why. The purpose for which these blessings were given.

Verse 6: to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. If you are a Christian today it's because of God's undeserved kindness or Grace. He chose you. He found you. The Good Shepherd gave His life for you, long before you knew about Him. He did it all. The very change that made you love him and choose him for yourself, that's the change which he brought about in your life. It's all Grace. And it's glorious Grace, because it's God's Grace. It's God's intention in saving us this way. That there will be an innumerable company, throughout eternity, who would praise the glory of His Grace. It would be awful wouldn't it, if in eternity, God was only praised for his Justice. Or praised for his power. But throughout eternity God's going to be praised for his Grace! That's why he saved us that way.

Recall verse 4: *that we should be holy and blameless before him.* It's God's desire, that even in this life, there should be people who are different from all the rest, living in two worlds: not just one. With characters more and more conformed to that world and less and less conformed to this one. So positively (verse 4) they are holy! (different – set apart) And negatively they are without blame – that is they're trying to finish with every blemish. Aware that they live their life in and by his presence.

This is the opening paragraph of Ephesians then, which we're going to be studying on Sunday mornings. It's a book from our Saviour through His Apostle, to us: to do us good; to tell us of spiritual blessings. It's going to tell us about spiritual blessings that come from God, through Christ, because He chose to do it, with the intention that we should praise Him for his grace, and live, to his praise, differently, in this life.

The hope is that these opening comments stir your appetite, and each week we will come with eagerness to the epistle to the Ephesians, as we study this book together. Please pray that each time you come, the message will come to your heart – into all of our hearts – with spiritual power. And that every time we gather we will not just have our minds filled with propositions, but that we will be aware that the ever present Saviour is speaking to us through His word. Even more than that, pray that as he speaks to us through His word our lives shall be transformed into His likeness.

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May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Spiritual Blessing

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

We are studying Ephesians each Sunday morning. Last week we looked at chapter 1 verses 1 to 6. Today we start to consider verses 3 to 14. So you will notice there will be some overlap, between last week and now.

This is a letter to a local church and local churches everywhere. Immediately then it's relevance should grip us. Realise that this is a letter that is intended to benefit us in our Christian lives. It comes as a friend to do us good. But what is of particular importance, is that it is a letter from Paul, who was personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to be a teacher to the gentiles. So here we are in a local church, composed of gentiles, and have open a letter from the man personally commissioned by God the Son to teach us. Therefore we are called in the name of God to give very particular attention to the words that we're going to study during these Sunday mornings.

Last week we learnt that there are two sorts of blessings: earthly blessings and spiritual blessings. We have earthly blessings, simply on the basis that we live on this earth. However none of us enjoys all of the earthly blessings! All of us enjoy some of them. We all enjoy life: that's an earthly blessing; we have a measure of Health and strength. All of us have various abilities; home and friends; things that we're good at; things that we enjoy. We have a sense of beauty and pleasure. We have the use of our senses. These are all blessings of this earthly life. They all come to us from God!

But we also saw, last week, that there are such things as spiritual blessings – heavenly blessings. These are not enjoyed by all people or even most people. But they are enjoyed by some: There are people that not only live in this world but they live in another; they're not only members of this dimension but they are also members of another. This invisible world is real to them. Their fellowship with God is real. Their enjoyment of Christ is real. They understand the world of the invisible; the world of the holy angels; and the world of a spiritual warfare. These people enjoy, besides the earthly blessings, which they enjoy as much as anybody else, the spiritual blessings. So we have already seen that this letter is about spiritual blessings. It is letter to tell those who are Christians what spiritual privileges they have. How to enter into them and what responsibilities these privileges lay upon them.

We saw last week that all these blessings are gifts, from God the Father. All these blessings come to us through Christ, the Son. All these blessings are only given to those whom God intends will get them. The purpose of it all, being that we should live lives to His praise, and then join Him in heaven, and eternally thank Him for his grace!

And above all: while no one person enjoys all the multitude of earthly blessings, each and every true Christian enjoys all (without exception) of the heavenly blessings.

All that we learnt last week. Now this fortnight, we come to chapter 1 verse 3 through to verse 14, (with some overlap) and we ask two more questions: First is what are the spiritual blessings that Christian's enjoy: and secondly, how do we enter into them?

- What are the spiritual blessings, which true believers enjoy? Earthly things were health and strength; food; clothes; all the others that have already been mentioned and many, many more. But what are the spiritual blessings that Christians enjoy?

If you look through the whole paragraph you'll see that there are three sorts. First of all there are blessings to do with the present. Paul deals with those first. Then there are blessings to do with the past. And thirdly blessings to do with the future. And all these spiritual blessings belong to all Christian believers. (as he told us in verse 3)

- Blessings to do with the present: As we sit here on this Sunday morning as Christian men and women, we enjoy these now. Non Christian men and women do not enjoy them. We experience them now! (Verses 5 & 6) ... *he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*" The blessings, of the present, to Christians are the Adoption (verse 5) and the Acceptance (verse 6). One of the most wonderful truths of the Bible! That is as a Christian man, as a Christian woman, the relationship which we enjoy with the Eternal God is the relationship of children to a father.

That is not the privilege of all men and women: There are some people who teach the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal Brotherhood of Man. But the Word of God does not teach that! But it does say: (John 1:12) ¹² *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ...*

We have this adopted – son-ship. It is ours – as Christians! We enjoy the relationship of family, kinship, with Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our elder Brother. It's the highest privilege that the Gospel offers. And it's something we enjoy right now this Sunday morning, as Christians. Consider this illustration: If you were in court as a guilty person, and the judge declared you to be guiltless. That would be wonderful. God righteously does that! That's called justification! But if the judge should then take home the guilty criminal – despite all his crimes – and should adopt him into his family, giving him all the pleasures and benefits of the judge's own home. To be to him as a father, treating the guilty criminal as a son – that's a far higher privilege. The Second can't exist without the First, but that is the relationship we enjoy with the Living God, as Christian men and women.

So when Jesus defines a Christian: He says, "So you may be the children of Your Father." That's what a Christian is: Someone who has God as his Father. When Jesus tells us how to behave, He says (Matthew 5:48), ⁴⁸ *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* We're to take on the family likeness!

When Jesus tells us how to pray, He says (Matthew 6:9), ⁹ *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven,* and when Jesus tells us not to worry about the provision of our needs, He says (Matthew 6:32), *Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

This is the great strength of teaching that runs right through the New Testament, in a way that's not even envisaged in the Old Testament. (There's only bare hints of it there.) The great privilege for New Testament Christians is that now, in this life, they enjoy the relationship of adopted sons, to their Heavenly Father!

Remember in the early world, it wasn't babies that were adopted. It was Grown Ups! There would be a rich person who had nobody to leave his riches to, because he had no natural children. Therefore he would look around for someone with promise; someone with ability; or academic prowess; or a hero from the wars. When he found someone who was outstanding: he would adopt him! Grown Up as he was, so that he in his turn could enter into all the treasures. God however does not look around for someone who is outstanding. He doesn't look around for people, who have lived holy lives; people of spiritual prowess! He searches out sinners. 'Puts them right' with himself, and then upon those sinners, He bestows the privilege of adoption. So that sinners can actually enter into the inheritance which God has prepared for them.

So what are the spiritual blessings that believers enjoy? In the present: They enjoy adoption, and also (verse 6) acceptance. To see what Paul is getting at in Verse 6, we only need to remember the parable of the 'prodigal son'. Here was a boy – he was a son. He was an absent son! Though separated from his father he was still a son. Eventually, down there amongst the pigs, he made up his mind to return to his father. He said (Luke 15:19), *Treat me as one of your hired servants.* In that little speech, that he was preparing, as he was about to return to his father's home. But when He got there, the father refused to treat him as a servant. When he was a long way off the father ran to meet him; fell on his neck and embraced him; kissed him and said, "This is my son." The father put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. The best robe was put on him and they began to make merry!

Why didn't the father treat him as a servant? Because he was a son.

That's the way it is with us. That's how we are regarded in heaven.

At the end of the day when you're stained with the sins of that day. The end of the day when your tongue has been stained with unwise and unkind words. When your life has been stained because your hands have done what they shouldn't and not done what they should. Feet that have walked in places where no Christian feet should have walked. When your mind has been defiled with ungodly and sometimes pernicious thoughts. You return at the end of such a day, in repentance, to your Heavenly Father. Why doesn't He treat you as a servant? Because you're not. You're a son! However far you wander and however defiled you may become, He always treats those whom He's redeemed in Christ, as sons. So that every time they come in prayer, the welcome is uninhibited and unreserved.

The Father always throws his arms around us. He never turns us away. He never hesitates. Always he runs to meet us, even when we're a long way off. Always He rejoices, every time we come home to him again.

That's the great privilege of Christians in this present life. That they have intimacy with the everlasting Yahweh, whom they know as a Father. Those are the spiritual blessings believers enjoy in the present.

This then raises the question how can a just God adopt sinners? How can the holy spotless Yahweh embrace those who are defiled?

- To answer that Paul now mentions spiritual blessings to do with the past: We enjoy spiritual blessings in the present, because there are spiritual blessings which have dealt with our past! Look at verse 7.

⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ...* The word Redemption in verse 7, means to buy back. To re-purchase. It's a shame that the old pawn brokers have gone. It was a way of raising money urgently if the pawnbroker was just. If you were short of a bit of cash you took your wife's mink coat to the pawnbroker and he gave you a 'few bob' (shillings) for it and then when she found out! You re-purchased it. You had to pay extra. But you could redeem it, by the payment of a price.

The same is seen in the Old Testament. If a man came to the point of poverty he could sell off his land to raise money. But as soon as he had enough money again he could buy back. It was his right to do this. If a man or woman came to the point where they were reduced to abject poverty and they needed to raise money to pay off their debts. They could sell off themselves! And go into a voluntary slavery. But when at last they had some money again, they could buy themselves back, or a near relative – a Kinsman Redeemer – could come and buy them back. The word Redemption means to buy back. By the payment of a price. To reclaim ownership, by payment.

You may have heard the story of the old Christian slave: He spent all his life in slavery but had saved up a little money. His master decided to sell him. The auction duly took place. The bidding started at \$25, which was quite high for an old man. He was old but he was honest! "\$25 .. 30.. \$35 .. 40." The crowd standing around were bidding. As he stood on the platform his eyes began to fill with tears. He had saved up a little money and soon all he could afford would be reached. "\$55 .. 60 .. \$65" then with a burst of courage, he

shouted, "I bid 70!"

The effect on the slave market was overwhelming. Every tongue was still. People looked aghast. But he paid his \$70 and he was free! He who had always been a slave. That's Redemption.

Now says the Apostle, in Galatians (3:13) ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ...* . Which is exactly what Paul says here: ⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood.* There's a price, you see, for the breaking of the Law. But somebody else has paid the price. So I am free from the penalty for the broken law.

That's how Jesus was announced: When Anna saw the baby, she rushed around Jerusalem, talking about the baby to all who looked for Redemption.

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus said. (Mark 10:45). At the 'Last Supper' He said that the cup was for the remission of sins. It's all the same concept: (all) *are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* (Romans 3:24)

Now this morning you and I. We stand before God has people who have broken His Law. There's a price to be paid for breaking the Law of God. It's the price of eternal punishment! But into our place has come the Saviour. The price that we could never pay, the infinite Son of God has paid, and we are free, because of the shedding of His blood. This is exactly what Paul says in verse 7: ⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (sins),* The words Redemption and Forgiveness can be used interchangeably!

We owe a debt to God. The debt of perfect obedience. A debt of unrestrained love – with all heart, mind, soul and strength – it's not a debt that I can pay. It's not a debt that you can pay. But the Saviour has paid it: for us! The life we should live: He lived! The punishment: He has paid. That's why there's no cloud between us and God. Because all barriers to Fellowship all hindrances to enjoying God have been removed by Redemption. We are forgiven because of those past blessings, so that we can enjoy the present blessings of Adoption and Acceptance.

[2565]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.