

Ephesians 1: 1-3; “To the Saints”, Message # 1 in a series entitled “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 28th, 2018, for those who gathered at his home.

I thought that it would be good to begin a Bible Study in the book of Ephesians at this time because I want each of us to understand just how great our God is in power. He is able to do all things and nothing is too difficult for Him. We know that. But sometimes, I think, we become discouraged because we do not realize that there is purpose behind all the exercise of God’s power. God certainly has enough power to completely save all of mankind, but He doesn’t choose to use His power in that way. He has infinitely great power, and yet He chooses to use His power in such a way which will show forth His glory, His goodness, His love and His righteousness, in ways which will help us to learn and to receive the truth that He is also infinitely wise and holy in all that He does. Therefore, I hope that we will be able to learn together and grow together in relation to conceiving how great is our God in His power, and how wise He is in His use of it.

This evening, I would like us to think about the fact that those of us who have been saved from our sins are called God’s saints. I want us to think together 1st of all – About what the term saints means. 2nd – I want us to think about the responsibility of each saint – That is to be faithful. And 3rd – I want us to think about what saints need more of – That is, grace and peace. I pray that this study will help us to grow in our understanding of this wonderful relationship which we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1st – What the term “saints” means.

Verse 1 says – “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” You can see can’t you, who this letter is addressed to? It is addressed to the saints which were at Ephesus. These words, “to the saints” here, ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖοις, means all those who had believed in Christ and had joined the church in Ephesus. A saint is one of God’s holy ones; one who has believed in Jesus Christ. In believing in Him, they have had righteousness imputed to them so that in their standing before God they are no longer seen as sinners by Him, but rather as His saints, His holy ones. This holiness and righteousness has been imputed to them when they first believe. And then by the internal working of the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying influences, they begin to come what they are already called – saints. They will grow up into the reality of what they are already called; God’s saints. They have been set apart to holiness and to God’s purposes in regard to salvation and sanctification. That is a positional righteousness and holiness. But they will over time grow up into holiness and righteousness as their constant practice until they will be made perfect upon their death and the entrance of their spirit into heaven.

Once a believer has been justified and set apart to God’s work in their life, they want to join with others of God’s saints in a local church. Turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 1, verse 2. “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their and ours.” Notice how Paul writes this letter – “to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.” He is speaking of these believers in that church as those who have experienced Definitive Sanctification. At conversion they were set apart to holiness, and were called, even at that time, God’s saints, because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Even though they have much to learn practically about living the Christian life and keeping God’s commandments, and much progress to make in both, still, this is the way that God sees them, as set apart to Himself for a most sure and certain work of making them holy. The whole work of progressive sanctification will be covered by the righteousness of Christ.

You see this further in 1st Corinthians 1: 30 – “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption – that, as it is

written, "He who glories, let glory in the Lord." It is because of Christ's work, not ours that we become saints. It is the fact that in believing in the gospel, that we are reconciled to God, and having been reconciled, that God is satisfied with Christ's work of righteousness and His sufferings on our behalf, and He can now look upon a sinner, not with a view to punishing him, but with a view to blessing him because He sees that sinner from the moment that he first believes, in Christ.

Now, let's back up for moment, to the first part of verse 1 of our text. I wonder if you can see as I do, what Paul is saying to us here about his own becoming an apostle and a saint of the Most High God? Paul became an apostle, not by his own will it says here, but by the will of God. God was the One who sovereignly decided to set His love upon Paul. And we must ask – When? When did he do so? When he was a good man? When he was a wise man? When he had kept the commandments of God outwardly for a long time? No, it was while he was yet a great sinner, that God stretched forth His hand in power, and fulfilled His good purpose toward him. He called him by the exercise of His sovereign power according to His eternal purpose, and He made him into one of His saints. God intention was to turn him completely away from his fixed intention, in being a persecutor of God's saints. Turn with me over to Acts chapter 9 for a minute so that this truth will be impressed upon you mind.

Let's read verses 1-6. "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." "And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven." "Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" "And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?'" "And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'" "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." "So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?'" Now, I want you to see what a tremendous exercise of power this was on God's part. What was Saul doing here? He was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He had gone to the high priest and asked letters from him that if he found any who were of the Way, any who were Christians that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

And then God showed Him the greatness of His power to turn him from his own wicked purpose. He shines a great and overwhelming light around him from heaven. He falls to the ground and the Lord Jesus Himself speaks to him – "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" You are showing off your supposed power in kicking against the goads of truth which My people give to you through their good words of gospel truth, and their good words and actions through which I am trying to show you how very wrong you are; how very sinful you are. But now all that will come to end, for God through Jesus Christ our Lord, showed Saul this great mercy and changed his heart, so that he wanted to acknowledge Jesus as Lord; the very man who in previous years thought that he had to many things against the name of Jesus Christ. Acts 26: 9 – Indeed, I myself thought that I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." So, you see, my brethren, that to become a saint also necessarily involves the sinner's heart being changed by grace so that they will stop opposing Christ and His word, and Christ and His people, and instead they will want to know – Lord, what would you have me to do?

What brought Saul to this point? It was not his free will. No, he was bound as a slave in his sin. No, it was that God the Holy Spirit worked savingly in his heart, and caused him to be born again. He demonstrated his power to Paul. He took away the hardness and opposition of his heart to spiritual truth, and made becoming a Christian appear to be a very desirable thing to him. Look with me over at Ephesians chapter 3, and verses 1-8. "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles--if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed

by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

This is the reason that Paul became a saint, even though he considered himself less than the least of all the saints; it was the gift of the grace of God to him by the effective working of God’s power, that made him one of His saints. His heart was changed entirely so that he would see spiritually for the first time in his life, and that he would see the glory of Christ and know the reality of His resurrection power working in his heart. In applying this to us; let us see that God’s purposes govern the use of His great power in terms of who is saved and how they are saved. Not everyone who is a stubborn, obstinate persecutor has been saved by God. But some have. And therefore, we ought to be very thankful that God does save some, and study to appreciate God’s wisdom in His purposes, and pray that He would grant power to the preaching of His word, so that many might be saved; and yet also to understand and justify God if He does not save many at any given time in Church history. If it is His purpose, He is certainly able to save many, but if he chooses to save but a few in this generation, let us thank Him and praise Him for it; always believing that He is able to save whether by many or by few. Those whom He will save, will all be known to Him as His saints.

2nd – I want us to think about the responsibility of each saint – That is to be faithful.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus.” The word “faithful” in the Greek is Πιστοις, and this appears to me to mean that they were first faithful in the sense that they had believed in the gospel; they had believed in Jesus Christ, and then they had continued faithful in His word, showing forth their true faith by good works. You will notice that he calls them faithful in Christ Jesus. Those who know the Lord know that their faithfulness, like everything else in living their Christian life, comes from Christ’s grace, and from having fellowship with Him in the Spirit. Look at 1st Corinthians 1, verses 4-9 – “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of Lord Jesus Christ who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

You can see here that Paul thanks God for the grace that was given to these believers. They were enriched by this grace, and it came out in their faithfully speaking the word and they were looking to Christ’s Second Coming, the ultimate revelation of Him to themselves. And Paul knew that Christ would confirm their true faith, and their faithfulness, to the end of their lives and ministry, that they might be blameless in that day when He returned. It was their fellowship with Christ in spiritual truths and realities which proved that this would most certainly take place. But he also talks about their responsibility to be faithful in practical ways. You can see this in verse 10 – “Now, I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and same judgment.” “For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.” “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or I am of Christ.” “Is Christ divided?” “Was Paul crucified for you?” “Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Now look at verse 17 – “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.” And

verse 24 as well – “But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

I want you to see that the power to be faithful to Christ is based upon the power of God which we first find in the gospel. And having believed in the gospel, we then live out our faithfulness, not in the way of contending with other saints, but by understanding that our first loyalty is to be faithful to Christ Himself in accordance with His word. If our first loyalty is to Christ Himself, and others in the church that we are a part of, have the same loyalty; then we will not divide up into parties where some of us will give our allegiance to one leader within the broader Church, and others giving their allegiance to other leaders. It is not good to be dividing up into these parties when Christ is our all-in-all; He is the One whom we are following and it is His Spirit who give us the power to accomplish any good thing which will promote Christ’s kingdom and further God’s good purposes.

You say, well what about doctrinal disagreements? It is not possible that there will not be some, and these differences will have major implications when it comes to our church and living out our Christianity in the context of the local church. Well, let us ask ourselves if the doctrines that we hold to, contend for, and suffer for, are those which promote Christ’s kingdom and His glory and peace and unity within the church. 1st Corinthians 4: 1 and 2. “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” Now look at verses 15-19 – “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” “Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in the church.” “Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.” “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.” “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” Beloved, this is the truth of the matter. Let us follow Paul’s example in word and deed as he followed Christ, and let us take notice and listen to the teaching of men who have not been proud of their knowledge but who have humbly given themselves to the service of the saints.

And then 3rd - I want us to think about what saints need more of – That is, grace and peace.

Verse 2 – “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul was writing to the saints; those who already had grace and peace, but he prays that they might have more. Let us not be content to simply rest in what we already have which is good, and which has taught and blessed us, but let us eagerly seek for more, and pray that others of the saints may experience greater measures of grace and peace too. Let us not be self-satisfied as Christians, but let us long to know more of the fullness of Christ; grace upon grace. Do you have good-will toward all the saints? Then show it forth in your desires and prayers for them. Matthew Henry says – “These peculiar blessings proceed from God, not as a Creator, but as a Father by special relation: and they come from our Lord Jesus Christ, who, having purchased them for his people, has a right to bestow them upon them.” “Indeed the saints, and the faithful in Christ Jesus, had already received grace and peace; but the increase of these is very desirable, and the best saints stand in need of fresh supplies of the graces of the Spirit, and cannot but desire to improve and grow: and therefore they should pray, each one for himself and all for one another, that such blessings may still abound unto them.” (end of quote)

Brethren, we should definitely want more grace (that is God’s enablement, His wisdom, power, and sense of His favor and blessing, in terms of having assurance, and doing good and right things. We should want this to come to all of God’s dear people. This is the means that God would have us to avail ourselves of; that is, of prayer, that these things might come about. Remember the benedictory prayer of the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth in 2nd Corinthians 13: 14 – “The

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” “Amen.”