

Journey To A Better Life

Lesson 1 . . . Getting Started to a Better Life (Ephesians 1:1-6)

Notes

People today are looking for a better life. Politicians know this. In every presidential election, candidates declare how they will lead our country so we can all live a better life. The candidate who best persuades the majority that he or she can do that will win. However, the way to a better life is not found in politicians, money, success, or any temporal thing. The way to a better life is found only in Jesus Christ and in understanding who we are, what we have in Him, and how to acquire it.

It is not enough just to know we are Christians; therefore, God inspired Paul to write this epistle to motivate us to draw upon the resources we have in Christ so we can live a better life. In our "journey" we will discover the way to a better life in our church, in our family, our work, in our prayer life, etc. To get started toward a better life we must understand three things:

First, In Christ I Am a Saint (1:1-3)

This epistle begins: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God . . .* (1:1a). In his pre-Christian life Paul thought the way to a better life was found only in Judaism. Therefore, he was a zealous Pharisee and a militant opponent of Christianity. But on the Damascus road he met Christ, who is the only way to a better life. As a result of his conversion, Paul found what purpose for his life, as described in Acts 9:15?

After spending three years in Arabia, where he was taught by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 1:16-19), Paul became *an apostle (APOSTOLOS)*, which means one who is personally commissioned by Christ. Thus, he spoke and wrote with divine authority. When we read Paul's words, they are not just the words of an ancient church leader; they are the inspired words of Almighty God.

Look at the chart of Paul's Christian life on page 12 and answer the following questions:

From where and in what year did Paul write *Ephesians*?

What other letters did Paul write during this period of his life?

During what era did he write most of his epistles?

Paul never ceased to be amazed at the good life he found in Christ. The Lord should have struck him dead on the Damascus road, but it was on that road the great apostle found the way to a truly better life, which he shares with us in this letter.

Though this epistle was written to Christians like you and me, Paul writes: *To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus* (1:1b). The word *Ephesus* does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and in some manuscripts there is a blank instead. The reason is that it is a general, or circular letter, and various names were put in the blank. This is why there are no personal names in the closing verse, as there are in *Colossians*.

Paul calls those to whom this letter is written *saints*. The word *saints* translates a Greek word (*HAGIOS*), which means "separated." If you are a Christian who has separated yourself from sin and dedicated yourself to God, you are a saint to whom this epistle is written. The word *saints* implies availability and usability in God's service. Probably the greatest appeal for a saintly life is found in Romans 12:1. What is it?

All *saints* are *in Christ Jesus*, which suggests a spiritual union or inclusion in His spiritual body, the church. We may live in Dallas, New York, Sydney, or Hong Kong, but as believers we are all in the same place spiritually—in Christ.

You may say, "I don't feel holy; I don't feel worthy to be a saint." None of us is worthy, for at times we are all selfish and prone to sin. But we need to understand the phrase *in Christ Jesus*, which means God sees us only through Christ's righteousness. Believers are referred to as being *in Christ* more than 75 times in the NT. Fourteen of these references are in *Ephesians*. What wonderful assurance is given to those who are *in Christ* in Romans 8:1?

Being *in Christ* is cause for celebration. Thus, Paul says in Ephesians 1:2a, *Grace and peace to you. . . . Grace (CHARIS) is the common Greek greeting from which we get our English word "Karen."* It refers to receiving something completely undeserved. *Peace* is the common Hebrew greeting and refers to enjoying inner tranquility, undisturbed by outward circumstances. How is this peace described in Philippians 4:7?

Paul explains these wonderful spiritual riches are *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:2b). The **Source** of our spiritual wealth is *God* and the **Bank** that dispenses them is *Jesus Christ*. In Christ we have a spiritual blank check signed by Jesus. *Grace* and *peace* are the beginning of a "journey to a better life," but there is more, as we shall see.

In response to the good life we have in Christ, Paul says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ* (1:3). The key to a "journey to a better life" is understanding that it is not found in money, success, prestige, or anything temporal. It is found only in Jesus Christ, who will provide us *with every spiritual blessing*. In the OT, God's promised blessings were mostly material, such as the promised land, protection from enemies, etc. Likewise, in the NT, Jesus promises to take care of our physical needs with what declaration in Matthew 6:33?

In addition, we can have *every spiritual blessing* (Eph. 1:3). No blessing in heaven will God withhold from those who are in Christ. Why? We are the children of God *in Christ*, and *in Christ* the treasure chest of Heaven is open to us. A "journey to a better life" begins by understanding who we are in Christ and accepting the blessings that are ours in Him. First, as a believer I must realize **in Christ I am a saint** and . . .

Second, I Am Chosen by God (1:4a&5)

As a believer I am in Christ, but why? Paul says, *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world . . . (1:4). In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will* (1:5).



Two phrases reveal the reason for our blessings in Christ: God *chose us* and God *predestined us*. These are references to what is called the doctrine of election. This doctrine is one of the greatest paradoxes in the NT. How can one believe in election, that God sovereignly selects individuals to be saved even *before the creation of the world*, and at the same time believe that a person has complete freedom of choice as far as his own salvation is concerned? This is one of the great mind-boggling questions of all time. What does the last sentence in 2 Peter 3:9 declare?

The Bible does teach that every person has a choice. If we didn't, we couldn't be held accountable for our decisions and actions. However, the Bible also teaches that God is sovereign. The Bible teaches both: God is sovereign, and we have a real choice in salvation (see Matthew 11:28, John 3:16, and Romans 10:12-13). To deny one or the other would be to distort the teaching of the Bible. Then how do we make sense out of this paradox? We begin by recognizing what principle found in Isaiah 55:9?

Our finite minds cannot understand everything God has written in the Bible. Some things we just have to accept without understanding. We do that every day with light. According to my encyclopedia, light is "electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range from about 0.4u to about 0.7u." Do you understand that? I don't even know what the "u" means. But I make use of light every day. We must do the same with salvation—accept what we don't fully understand. However, one day we will understand, because of what truth found in 1 Corinthians 13:12?

To have a better life as a believer, I must realize **in Christ I am a saint, I am chosen by God**, and . . .

Third, I Am Chosen for a Reason (1:4b&6)

Why did God choose us? He chose us *to be holy and blameless in his sight* (1:4b). The word *holy* is the same Greek word as the word translated *saints*, only in the singular. It means set apart from the world and dedicated to God.

The test of whether we are really Christians is if we try as best we can to live a holy life. How does 1 John 3:9 verify this fact?

The word *blameless* (*AMOMOUS*) means "without blemish," or "without rebuke." It doesn't mean we never sin, but when we do, we take what appropriate action found in 1 John 1:9?

When we take the action regarding our sin specified in 1 John 1:9, God makes the heavenly record as though the sin never happened, and therefore we are *blameless* (see Jeremiah 31:34).

God also chose us *to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:5). This likens to Roman adoption, in which an adopted child enjoyed the same status and privileges as a natural child. Also, in the eyes of Roman law all debts and obligations connected with the previous family were canceled. This is what God has done for us in Christ. We were in the power of sin, but God took us out of that family and adopted us into His family, canceling all our debts.

Salvation, which is the beginning of a better life, is the result of God's *glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves* (1:6). Therefore, God deserves our *praise*. No amount of material riches or worldly achievement can give us what we have *in Christ*. Furthermore, what we have in Christ is not something we will receive in the future but is available to us right now. In Christ we can "journey to a better life" here and now.

For what blessing *in Christ* are you most grateful? _____

Paul's Christian Life

