

Joined Together In Christ
Ephesians 1:1 – 3:21
Lecture by Dellen Ludwig

When I was a little girl, it was a deep desire to be “with” Jesus that brought me to the point of salvation. I saw in my mother's eyes how wonderful He was and I never wanted to be separated from that wonder! But a few years ago, a friend told me that she was starting a Bible study to learn who she was “in” Christ Jesus. She asked me if I had done such a study and I had to confess that in all my years as a Christian, I had, at that time, never searched the Scriptures specifically to find out what a believer is “In Christ.” Our study today will lead us to begin this exact journey.

The phrase “in Christ Jesus” or “in him” is repeated 10 times in verses 1-14 alone! But our journey “in Christ” begins in Paul's common salutation, as he identified the objects of his letter of Ephesians as being “the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” The term “saints” referred to more than those who are recognized by the formal church as having done a life time of good works, which are above and beyond those of ordinary people. Matthew Henry, referring to this reference wrote, “All Christians must be saints...Those are not saints, who are not faithful, believing in Christ, and true to the profession they make of relation to their Lord.” Zondervan's Study Bible notes that, “the basic idea of the Greek for this word is “holiness.” All Christians are saints in that they are positionally “set apart” to God and are experientially being made increasingly “holy” by the Holy Spirit.” (note on Romans 1:7) From this greeting, we can understand that Paul is writing to believers and that the following instructions are understood to be for them.

As we learned to be true in our study of Galatians, this book may also have been written as a more general letter, to be circulated around to many churches. Paul began the church in Ephesus during his second missionary journey. Ephesus was a busy trade and pilgrimage city during the time of the Roman Empire. It had a port which lay on the banks of the Cayster River, which also opened the city for trade inland. Furthermore, one of the seven man-made wonders of the ancient world beckoned pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire to Ephesus, the temple of Artemis. As we read in Acts 19, Paul's establishment of the new church of believers caused some anxiety with the silversmiths who saw fewer customers for their idols and amulets for Artemis because people turned to the worship of the one true God. There were also some Jews who refused to believe in Jesus and argued with Paul. Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years, and continued to challenge Jewish and Gentile unbelievers and believers, establishing the church there with elders and leadership.

In Paul's greetings of the saints in Ephesus, he emphasizes the position all believers have in Christ. Their relationship is by the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He chose them. He blessed them. He caused them to be accounted blameless in His sight and to be adopted as his sons. The Father planned all of this before the creation of the world. His whole purpose for creating the world was so that he could have millions of children, just like his beloved son Jesus! It is his will and great pleasure for us to believe in Christ so we will be redeemed out of a lost and condemned eternity of outer darkness, have our sins forgiven, and taste of God's amazing grace.

We may doubt our worthiness to even be called saints. We have seen the sin in our lives and wonder if “this one” is too great for God's grace. Have I wandered too far? Are all these promises

to saintly people far out of reach for a sinner like me? Paul's answer, to Jew and Gentile, is that we underestimate the measure of the Father's grace. You are not coming to a stingy pot of porridge, begging for just a scrape of oatmeal to stave off starvation. You have a large bowl, held in both hands, standing under the waterfall of his grace! Christ's death on the cross offered to all who have accepted his finished work on the cross the never ending waterfall of God's grace which flows from the limitless supply of the Father's glorious grace. The only limit we put on his grace is the size of our bowl! Have we tested his limitless supply?

Because God planned all of redemption before time began, Paul called this "predestination." Barnes described predestination by saying, "It is not a temporary arrangement. It has not grown up under the influence of vacillating purposes; it is not a plan newly formed, or changed with each coming generation, or variable like the plans of people. It has all the importance, dignity, and assurances of stability which necessarily result from a purpose that has been eternal in the mind of God." This is elemental to Paul's message to the legalistic Jews and the dilemma they created in the early church. As the first Jewish believers were Jews, many felt Christianity was a wonderful completion of their worship of Judaism. Now, in this city of many Gentile believers, the same question had invaded the church. Although the early church leaders answered this question in Acts 15, some Jews still asked, "Should all believers in Christ worship Him as saints in the religion of Judaism?"

The saints in Ephesus were challenged in this letter like we are. They needed to understand where they stood in Christ too. So Paul introduced a mystery in verse nine. Paul encouraged believers by saying this amazing grace had been, "lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" by God, to help us understand his mystery. Now, I love a good mystery. I am very entertained by a story that has a secret I have to figure out using the clues along the way. Here Paul left a clue for his readers, saying that this mystery "is of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." He also said that this mystery was, "to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ." (Eph.1:9,10) This was the illustration of one body with Christ as the head. But with that illustration, it also used the words here of reconciling a line of numbers so they add up. So it is like saying, in a world where things just don't seem to add up, this mystery will make sense out of things. Wow! Is that a clue or what?

But, like a great mystery writer, Paul seemed to develop the story further, going on with his description of how we are in Christ, without explaining the mystery. So don't forget this clue as we follow on in our reading. Continuing on in explaining God the Father's great plan for believers, Paul stated, "In him (meaning in Christ) we were also chosen" (Eph. 1:11-13) and predestined by God's own plan, to hope in Christ. Believers in their relationship to Christ are the praise of His glory whether from Judaism or from heathenism. It is amazing to me that we can actually bring attention to Christ's glory just by following God's plan. It is not that we are performing miracles, but that we are walking miracles! The change in our lives, since we heard and responded in faith to the gospel, points other people to Christ and enhances his glory.

Our relationship to God the Father through Jesus is so valuable that He has brought in his own security to protect it. We have a seal on us which says, "Marked in Him." My parents long ago put a sticker on their front door that stated our house was protected by a certain security company. The point was that a supposed burglar would think that to try to break into this house would be too great a risk. The Holy Spirit is such security for us. God's seal says, "This believer is under the protection of my own Spirit. Don't even try to touch God's possession!" God gave his own presence, his own Holy Spirit as a sort of down payment for how it will be for us in eternity, securely belonging to him as his own dear son or daughter.

And for that reason Paul burst into prayer for the saints in Ephesus. He was delighted to hear of their faith in the Lord Jesus and how they acted out their love for all the saints. So he prayed with thanks to God and kept making requests for their growth in wisdom and revelation. The Greek word for revelation means "a new understanding by removing the veil of natural ignorance." Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Paul asked that the same Holy Spirit that was given to them at their conversion, would be given continually so they would be "enlightened" in their heart and would know their calling of hope, and know the "glorious riches of the saints and the incomparably great power for us who believe." (Eph. 1:18,19)

But this is not just a prayer that believers may see their calling and those riches far off in the future. Paul wanted the believers to understand how God the Father has exerted His power on our behalf first through Christ's resurrection. and then to empower us for daily life in him. Ours is not a life of meager existence or of "fire insurance" in which we barely make it through until we finally live with him in eternity. God's own Holy Spirit is connected to the unlimited power of "his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." (Eph. 1:20)

We cannot look at the plan he has for our daily life and say, "This is too hard!" We cannot retreat from the fears of what might happen from standing on our faith before hostile family, neighbors or co-workers because it is just too difficult to get through to them. We must not fall under the heaviness of the physical or emotional trials we face. Instead we must hold up our empty bowls and boldly step into God's waterfall of grace to experience the same power He used to raise Christ from the dead. Satan, in his self appointed authority, thought he had Jesus down for good too. But his dominion had no power to keep Christ in the grave. The Almighty Father stretched out his powerful arms and not only raised him from the dead, but lifted him up to the heavenly realms and seated him on the throne at his right hand, way above Satan's self proclaimed authority or power. This power exalted Christ to the highest conceivable dignity and honor. Isn't that kind of power big enough for our fears? Isn't it big enough for our troubles and trials?

Now, a pause is required here so we might review all the things stated in Chapter one concerning what saints have become in Christ. I encourage you to just jot down the verses, and study this for yourselves.

1. As saints: we are faithful in Christ. Verse 1
2. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Verse 3

3. We are chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless. Verse 4
4. We have redemption in Christ. Verse 7
5. We have the knowledge of His will purposed in Christ. Verse 9
6. We were chosen according to God's plan. Verse 11
7. We put our hope in Christ. Verse 12
8. We were marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit in Christ. Verse 13
9. We exhibit our faith by loving other saints in Christ. Verse 15
10. We have the same power of the resurrection in Christ. Verse 19,20

This list is only from Chapter one of Ephesians. For our purpose today/night, I cannot list more for now. But, does this standing in Christ answer our question about His power being big enough to handle our daily struggles? I challenge you to continue this search, for all you are "In Christ", during our study this year. Start a chart and continue to add any reference to who we are in Christ. Refer to it often. How full is your bowl of grace now?

So, assimilating the facts of Christ's position above all earthly powers, and standing over everything, Paul brought his readers back, in chapter two, to understand how great a miracle that mighty power had made in their lives. Again Paul stated the illustration of believers belonging in a body that has Christ as its head. Their state before conversion was "dead." They were dead in transgressions and sins. Transgressions meaning "swerving aside and falling" while the word for sins, means missing the mark. Without Christ, we were as powerless to lift ourselves out of our sins as a dead person is powerless to lift their body out of a grave. Not only were our own sins holding us down, but we were following the ways of Satan into will full disobedience to gratify our selfish cravings. The Gentiles had just a few years or days to glance back on their lives to recall this state of affairs. They remembered their hopelessness. But Paul reminded them that saints were given a new body, one with Christ as the head. Then, Paul perks up the ears of his Jewish listeners as he included them in that lost state of affairs. "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." (Eph. 2:3b)

Wait a minute, the Jewish believers might say. We were following the law. We were seeking God. How can Paul include us in this hopeless condition? Didn't all their religious history and efforts make their position in Jesus their Messiah a little easier? Paul continues as if he had not heard their objections by stating again that God's rich "mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved." God raised us up with his mighty power, just like he raised up Christ and lifted us up with him into the "heavenly realms."

God's eternal plan was coming together. All though the ages of man, he planned to show the riches of his grace through redemption. Who can argue that their religion or heritage was more important than God's eternal plan for grace and mercy to be extended to us? This is one more clue about the mystery for us to remember. Salvation is a gift of grace – unmerited favor. It comes through faith and even faith is a gift from God resulting from his amazing love. Works are not a means to acquire faith. But they are a result of our absolute amazement over God's gracious gift.

The Gentiles were formerly unaware of God's love or of his deep desire to save mankind. They may have heard about Judaism and may even have heard about the "One God" that they

worshiped. They heard about their rites like circumcision that their God had instituted and about how Jews kept themselves apart from non-Jews, referring to others as the so-called "uncircumcision." Gentiles were "separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:12) The Jews would be nodding their heads in agreement. Yes, they well knew the Law given by Moses commanded them to keep themselves separate from Gentiles. They had traveled to Jerusalem to worship in the temple on holy feast days. They had themselves walked through the wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner court where the sacrifices and worship took place, for them – the Jews.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13) Bam! Paul took all of the pride of the Jews and slammed it into that wall of separation! Christ himself, the long awaited Jewish Messiah, had ended it. He "has made the two one" (Eph. 2:14) and had created a new man, a new body; that body of which he is the Head. Both those who were far off, the Gentiles, and those who were near, the Jews, have been given access to worship the One True God, the Father through His one Spirit.

You can imagine how hard this was for the Jewish believers to comprehend. They had felt superior to the Gentiles all their lives. Would they have any special standing before God? Hadn't they been waiting all their lives for the One the Father would send while these Gentiles were living so far away, with no idea of how lost they were? How can they now be standing on level ground before God?

How many times have we wondered the same thing? How could God love the evil people in our world? The robbers, adulterers, swindlers, murders, terrorists in this world are so far away from him. But we live in a Christian nation. Our parents, grandparents, ancestors gave us a very religious heritage. So of course, we heard about Jesus in our childhood. Haven't we been waiting all our lives for Christ's salvation? Is this now saying everyone must have been as far away from God as those others? But just as the Jews needed to understand Jesus' death was the only way to pay for their sins and bring them redemption, so did we Gentiles. Salvation is not of works or heritage, so none of us may boast. "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Eph. 2:18)

Now Paul used two illustrations to help these Jewish and Gentile believers to begin to understand this concept. Jesus prayed for us as his disciples to this end. In John 17:11 he prayed to the Father that, "they may be one as we are one." His purpose and will is that we would together have such a unity that we would be like one big family in one household. All the members of a household should live and work together for the good of the whole family. Even if we have had disagreements in this family, we can rely on the foundation we all stand upon to keep us united, joined together in Him.

The foundations of the Old Testament, the old contract with the Jewish people, pointed to the One through whom all the nations would be blessed, who would complete the law, namely, Jesus Christ. Isaiah spoke of Jesus as The Servant, saying in chapter 49, verse 6, "It is too small a

thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

The foundation of the apostles pointed to Jesus as mankind's hope of salvation. He is the cornerstone that aligns both into the proper strong foundation that builds us up into a living temple to worship the One true God. Barnes described this unity as, "The different materials of the Jews and Gentiles; the people of various nations, the heretofore separated and discordant become now united, and form a harmonious society."

So, this is the mystery Paul had been leading his readers to uncover. He received his first glimpse of the mystery when Christ revealed it to him by revelation. When Ananias was called by God to first see Paul in Acts 9:15, God told him that Paul was "my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles." Since then, although he first presented the gospel in the Jewish synagogues in each town to which he traveled, once rejected, he would speak to Gentiles and Jews who would listen receptively, and a new church was born. Here now, from prison, Paul reminded his readers that this mystery was not known through all the generations before. But now it had been revealed. The promise God made to Abraham that through him "all the nations will be blessed" is fulfilled today. "The mystery was that through the gospel the Gentiles were heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 3:6)

Ellicott stated that Paul believed his calling to be an apostle was, "laid not on the spiritual power, but on the freedom of God's gift to the Apostle of this high privilege of preaching the mystery of the gospel." His was the privilege to share the "unsearchable riches of Christ" with the Gentiles too. He was to share how God the Father allowed both those who had an idea of his holiness and those who were "clueless" of how to approach Him, to have freedom to draw near to Him with actual confidence. God left clues all though the ages. And now, the mysterious idea of the Holy God's redemption for all of mankind had been revealed, just as He had planned from the creation of all things.

This is a major paradigm shift. Jews had been trying to pass-on the rites and laws they grew up understanding, to the new Gentile believers in Ephesus. Some would continue to do so whether by just creating strife or honestly trying to help non-Jew converts understand how to worship a holy God, nonetheless, they were presenting salvation by grace plus works. In your paradigm, how difficult is this for you to grasp?

After I accepted Christ as my Savior, I understood that he had paid the penalty for my sin. But then, as I attended Sunday School, and preaching services, well meaning people began to explain that if I believed in Christ, I had to show it by doing good choices. I soon realized how difficult it was to "do what was right." I struggled, not understanding how "works" fit into this new life.

But one day I heard this story. A woman married a man and discovered he was a harsh husband. He was very strict on how he wanted her to keep his home clean, prepare his meals and budget his money. He even made a list for her to follow. The woman tried as hard as she could to please him, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't keep everything done to his satisfaction. Finally, he passed away, and in time, the woman met another man. He was kind and thoughtful and wooed her with his love for her. They were married and the woman bloomed under his encouragement and praise. One day, the woman was going through some old boxes in the attic and opening one, she found "the list" from her previous husband. She knelt with tears filling her eyes as she read it. The tears were not from the memory of his harsh treatment, though. She realized as she read, that she could now check off every item on that list. She was now keeping them, not out of fear but out of love.

This story helped me understand this concept. The harsh husband is the law. It is impossible to keep all the law's commandments on my own power. I cannot earn God's pleasure. I can never be good enough or be holy enough to earn my way into his Holy presence. But the loving, encouraging husband represents grace. Because of God's wonderful love, he gave us the gift of faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. I live in His grace and mercy, fully forgiven and on my way to eternal life with Him. But meanwhile, I desire to do good works. I just can't help wanting to be like Him and to please Him. The presence of His own Holy Spirit inside me gives me the joy of doing kind things for others, of sharing His love and being the kind of person who points others to Him.

Because God planned our life in Him to be this way, Paul deeply desired that the believers in Ephesus understand this paradigm shift too. He knelt in prayer for them. (Eph. 17-19) What would best help these believers while he was so far away in prison, unable to teach them? He didn't want them to be fearful or embarrassed for his imprisonment, but he wanted them to feel joy and the glory his imprisonment meant, because he was fulfilling God's commission to share the gospel. So, he prays that:

1. They will be strengthened by God's power through His Spirit.
2. They will have Christ dwelling in their hearts through faith.
3. They will be rooted and established in love.
4. They may have power, together with all the saints.
5. They may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.
6. They will know this love that surpasses knowledge.
7. They will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul defined the new paradigm as having come though God's power alone. Believers will only be able to live out their salvation by this same power given to them upon faith through His Holy Spirit. Being saved by grace, through the faith given by the Father, the believers would then understand that Christ was actually living in them. The Holy Spirit was Christ's own Spirit that He had promised his disciples would come and comfort them after Jesus left to live at the right hand of the Father. (John 14:15,16) "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." Paul prayed that the believers would tap into that same power that saved them as they lived out God's will in their lives.

When Christ's Spirit indwells a believer, He begins to change us. Where we once were unable to keep his commandments, the Spirit begins to empower us to find joy in doing good, motivated by His love. He makes us "rooted" in His love, like a tree receives nutrients and strength to grow through its roots. We are established, or "founded" in His love, like a building can be built taller on a strong foundation to function as it was intended. Where we once had no strength to reach out beyond our own self to help others, His love gives us that strength and support to do so. We can now have the power of Christ with all the saints to even reach out to other believers in love, not competition.

When we were established in his love, we began to see and understand just how big his love really is. We began to knock down our flimsy tower of "good works" which only had the foundation of pride instead of love. We began to break down the walls of our expectations that only blocked our loved ones from learning about Christ. Then, we could begin to grasp how wide, long, high and deep Christ's love really is! The unbeliever asked, "How much do you love me?" And Jesus spread out his arms, and died on the cross to show it. Now as believers, Jesus asks us, "Do you know the measure of my love for you?" and we begin to see we could never really measure it. It surpasses all our knowledge and will take an eternity for us to begin to do so.

But Paul ended with a blessing to answer our failing knowledge. He prayed about how Christ "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Eph. 3:20) The power he placed within us, through His indwelling Spirit can accomplish all He wants to do in us. He can open our eyes so we shall begin to see and show His love. He can lead us to wish to share that love with others. And He can work within us to form a church of saints who will be united to bring glory back to Him through all generations into eternity.

My prayer is not as eloquent as Paul's. But pray with me, please: Oh Father, let us stand united as one in Christ. Let us stop seeing differences and start seeing Your Spirit, oh Lord. Let us, too, understand that the measure of your love covers all of our sin, all of our fears and all of our weaknesses. Build us up as your very own body to respond without hesitation to do your will. Let our only thought be to know your unknowable love and to lift up our bowl under the waterfall of your grace to be blessed beyond our imaginations. Thank you dear Father, Son and Holy Spirit!" Amen.