

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY TWO

Unloading the Theological Truck

Ephesians 1:1–14

How could Paul write a letter like Ephesians? The answer is he lived what he wrote. Christ was in control of his mind, his attitude, his heart, his desires, and his perspective.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A single principle revolved around Paul’s teachings about the Christian life: *grace*. According to Paul, we must securely fasten our salvation to the solid bedrock of grace, not the shifting sands of personal righteousness (*Ephesians 2:8–9*). But Paul also taught that grace is more than a foundation; it is *fuel* that energizes our daily walk as God works through us (*1 Corinthians 15:10*). Just as we can’t save ourselves, we can’t grow in godliness without grace.

Paul wrote about grace because he lived by grace. He drew this spiritual power from his close relationship with Christ, to whom he had given complete control. Paul took to heart the lesson Jesus taught about Himself and how we relate to Him:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.” (John 15:5)

How did Paul come to embrace God’s grace through Christ? The answer can be traced back to Paul’s first encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. The experience reshaped Paul from the inside out—from being a hateful, murderous legalist to becoming the man we know as the Apostle of Grace.

Let’s examine Paul’s story in more detail, because we really can’t appreciate all the features of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians until we understand Paul’s heart—the source from which his fountain of theology flows.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Scripture encourages us to “come boldly to the throne of our glorious God. There we will . . . find grace to help us when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:16). Draw near to God’s throne in prayer right now. In what circumstance do you need His gracious power? Are you in conflict with a loved one? Have you been struggling with guilt or shame? Come boldly to the throne! Express in prayer your desire to seek grace as you turn to His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first words that flowed from Paul’s pen identified himself as the writer of the letter and the believers in Ephesus as the recipients. In this straightforward greeting, we find hints at who Paul was and his mission in life.

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God’s holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. (Ephesians 1:1–2)



Observation: The Author

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by noticing details. This is the observation phase, which lays the groundwork for interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ We may wonder when Paul was “chosen” or what is an “apostle of Christ.” Let’s dig through Paul’s background to find some answers.



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Read *Acts 7:58; 8:1–3; 22:3; Philippians 3:5–6* and write down Paul’s original name, his activities prior to conversion, his hometown, and his credentials as a Jewish rabbi.

Paul was a “pure-blooded citizen of Israel” (Philippians 3:5), but he was also a Roman citizen by birth (*Acts 22:25–28*). Given “a thorough Jewish training from [his] earliest childhood” (26:4), brilliant young Paul rose in the ranks as a Pharisee, “the strictest sect” of the Jewish religion (26:5). In his own words, “I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors” (Galatians 1:14). Paul was on his way to taking a seat on the Sanhedrin, the highest religious court in Israel.²

Fanatically zealous, Paul determined to stamp out the church as a heretical sect by imprisoning and torturing Christians. What turned Paul from a persecutor of Christ-followers to a follower of Christ (*Acts 9:1–5, 17–18*)?

Through this personal encounter with Jesus, Paul’s militant zeal for the Law melted into devoted love for Christ. How many times does Paul mention the name Jesus in *Ephesians 1:1–2*? What does the repetition of Jesus’ name suggest about Paul’s heart?



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At this time, God revealed Paul’s life mission. What did God call Paul to do (*Ephesians 3:8–9*)?

Paul’s grace-encounter with Christ transformed this violent legalist into a new person with a new life!

When Christ comes into your life, He transforms you. Your whole future is changed. Your whole occupation is transformed. Your whole reason for existence is altered. Your whole attitude is reshaped. It’s Christ, Christ! —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Apostles and Saints

In the interpretation phase, let’s examine the meaning of the phrases, “apostle of Christ” and “God’s holy people” (*Ephesians 1:1*).

Read about Paul’s unique role, *apostle of Christ*, in the online [Encyclopedia of the Bible](#). What does the Greek root word for *apostle* mean?



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How were apostles called by Christ *after the resurrection*?

In the section, “The apostles and the Church,” what were the vital functions of the apostles in church (*Ephesians 2:20*)?

Christ’s appointment of Paul on the road to Damascus as the missionary to the Gentiles qualified Paul as an apostle and included him with the Twelve as the foundation of the church—second only to Christ Himself.

God’s holy people is a translation of the Greek word, *hagios*, translated “saints” in the New American Standard Bible. In his message, Chuck explains the meaning of this word as an individual “set apart to God.” Would Paul include *us* as God’s holy people? Yes!

Do you think of yourself as one of God’s holy people, a saint? What does that title mean to you personally?



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When did God set us apart as “saints?” When we believed in His Son, God placed us *in Christ* (Ephesians 2:10). Our union with Christ is a central theme in Ephesians, which Chuck explains in his commentary on Ephesians.

This phrase [“in Christ Jesus”] and its equivalents, such as “in Him,” “in Christ,” or “in the Lord,” occur thirty-nine times in Ephesians. They reflect a profound theological truth. . . . By God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, every believer is incorporated “into Christ.”³

We don’t deserve our position in Christ; rather, God grants it to us as an act of grace. What does *grace* mean? And what is the connection between grace and *peace*? For help with the meanings of these words and how they are connected, look up Ephesians 1:2 in [Constable’s Notes](#), which is a free online commentary at NetBible.org.

When you said yes to the Lord Jesus Christ, God took you into His own and He placed you into His beloved Son, so that the things He sees about His Son, He sees about you. This is called your position in Christ. You are in Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: United with Christ

To be “in Christ” is to be united to Christ, just as the branches are joined to the vine and all the members of a person’s body are joined to the head. Let’s look closer at this analogy. According to the following verses, what are the implications of our position as members of Christ’s body with Christ as the head?



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Ephesians 4:15–16

Colossians 1:18

Paul could write so eloquently about life in Christ because, by God’s grace, Paul lived every day joined to Christ as his head—his highest authority. And so can we!

Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

We’ve unloaded a truckload of theology from Ephesians, and we’ve only covered the first two verses! Studying Ephesians will transform your life by helping you lay a solid theological foundation. Upon these truths, we build a lifelong love for Christ—which is the goal. Paul’s heart was completely devoted to Christ. Christ had control of Paul’s mind, his attitude, his desires, his motivation, and his perspective.

What does it mean to you for Christ to have “control” of every part of your life?



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What assurance do you get today from the truth that you are God’s holy one because of your union with Christ?

Read Paul’s blessing of grace and peace for you, personally: “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give *you* grace and peace” (Ephesians 1:2, emphasis added). How can you receive that blessing and pass it to others today in the way you relate to them?

Paul could write a letter like Ephesians because he had first built his life on the truths contained in its pages. Let’s make it our goal to not just learn the truths but live them as well. Then a life of grace and peace will be truly ours.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, what a blessing You have given me through Paul's life. He was a man of violence heading down a road of hate, and yet, You met him on that sinful path and turned his life around, merely through the true knowledge of Your Son, Jesus. May, like Paul, I see Jesus on my road of life as I study this beloved book of truth. And may my life be transformed forever. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. For more fascinating background information on Paul's life prior to conversion, we recommend John Pollock's, *Apostle: A Life of Paul*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 164.

