

## *Studying the Letter to the Ephesians*

Learning to let who we are in Christ, shape how we perform in life.

*Christian, remember who you are...* (Rev. 2:1-5)

### **Ephesians Study I**

#### ***Historical Background of the Letter***

**Authorship** – the Apostle Paul (Eph. 1:1 and 3:1)

**Date of Writing** – Ephesians was most likely written between 60 – 62 A.D. during Paul's imprisonment in Rome and is therefore called one of the "prison epistles" along with Philipians, Colossians and Philemon.

**Destination: *Ephesus*** – Ephesus is located on the west coast of modern day Turkey across the Aegean Sea from Greece. Ephesus was a leading center in the Roman Empire. Paul had spent a short time in Ephesus on his way back to Antioch from his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-22). On his third missionary journey he stayed in Ephesus three years (Acts 20:31). Just prior to Paul's return to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey he gave a moving farewell address to the Ephesian elders at the coastal town of Miletus (Acts 20:13-35). That was probably his last time to see them (Acts 20:36-38).

**Purpose for the Writing** – Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians to encourage them to mature in their understanding of their identity they had Christ. Only by growing a love based relationship with Christ could these first century Christians maintain distinction from the worldliness that pressed in around them. Developing a spiritual relationship in this physical world would be the only way to successfully and consistently combat the forces working against the Ephesian Christians.

**The Setting of Ephesians** – The culture at Ephesus was permeated with the false gods of Greece and other global cultures, sexual promiscuity, infidelity, adultery, homosexuality, pleasure seeking, pride filled philosophies, financial greed, oppression, slavery, prostitution, domestic abuse and a general distaste for Christianity and the followers of Jesus.

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### **Group Questions**

It's been said that it is harder to have a Christian walk today in our day and age and culture than it was in past generations.

- True or False?
- Is it really more difficult in our culture to have a holy walk compared to what the Christians in Ephesus were up against? If yes, then in what ways is it harder to live for Christ than 2,000 years ago?

**A Word of Warning** Besides the many times Ephesus is mentioned in the Book of Acts, there is another mention of the church in Ephesus found in the Book of Revelation. **Listen to this:**

**Rev 2:1-5** Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus ... I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, ... Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

### **Group Question**

- **What's the advice for us here today based on the warning in Rev. 2:5?** *A deep, loving relationship with Christ must be THE thing in life.*

*We as individuals and as a church can become distracted and lose our focus. When we forget who we are and what we have in Christ and let our love for Him cool off, we will wind up acting just like the world that knows Him not.*

**Our Attitude for This Study** Let's enter into this study with the goal of resisting those forces at work against us by not losing focus on the **one thing** that makes ALL of the difference in our lives, our relationship with Jesus Christ.

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### **Introductory Story**

**Maintaining Our Focus on Relationship** In the mid 1800's, the state of the Danish church was that it had lost its first love and forgotten the primary objective of responding to God's loving pursuit of Christians. As a 39 year old, the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote a book called, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. In it he developed the theme that a Christian's commitment is revealed by an unwavering, singular devotion he described as "willing one thing." That "one thing" is the pursuit of intimacy with Jesus Christ as the core to every Christians' being and living out of their existence here on earth.

**Our Purpose Too** This thinking is a good fit with regard to our recently defined purpose statement of *leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ*. As we embark in this study as individuals, may each of us draw closer to Him and then intentionally by our lifestyle and by our words and actions reach out to others to pass on to others what we are learning and experiencing with God.

### **Study I – Highlights of Eph. 1:1-6 – Read Text**

#### **1. Greeting from Paul (Eph. 1:1-2)**

**A. "Hey, watch who you're calling *saint*!"** *To the saints which are at Ephesus* – The Greek word "saint" means "holy one." And *to the faithful in Christ Jesus* further defines the "saints" and can be rendered as "that is, the believers in Christ Jesus."

### **Group Questions**

- What does the Greek word "saint" (*hagios*) mean? *holy one*
- Does the word "saint" apply to all Christians? *yes*
- How can the word saint apply to all Christians? *when we trust Christ for our salvation our spirits are reborn as holy and immediately and permanently indwelt with the Holy Spirit / if we weren't reborn holy, the Holy Spirit would have no business being in union with us*

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### **2. Each Person of the Godhead Has Had a Part in Our New Identity**

**A. Chosen by the Father (Eph. 1:3-6)** This week we'll study God the Father's role in creating anew our spiritual identity and next week God the Son and God the Holy Spirit's roles in our spiritual rebirth.

**1. The Seeker is Sought (1:3)** Many religions acknowledge the "seeker's" journey toward the spiritual dimension, but a distinguishing and defining characteristic of the Christian faith is the pursuit of the seeker by the Creator. Ours is not a one way quest toward becoming some super spiritual disciple; the LORD our God *is*, and *has always been*, seeking us and planning for us.

#### **Group Questions**

- How does God "pursuing" you make you feel?
- Does it cause you to feel like doing anything in response?
- What does God's relentless pursuit of each and every Christian do for those of us struggling with low self esteem and a bad self image?

**2. Complete Spiritual Empowerment (1:3)** It was God's design to fully equip our spirits for the journey here on earth at the moment we trusted Christ for salvation. There is nothing we can do to make our spirits more than what they become at the moment we get saved. Our spirits are ready for life's journey the moment we're born again.

**3. Love Based Holiness (1:4-6)** "...that we should be holy and without blame before Him *in love*..." If it weren't for the two little words at the end of verse 4, Christianity would be about rules, regulations and devoid of relationship. Instead of a pursuing God not wanting any to perish He would be a tyrant demanding conformity and coldly dispensing the penalty for non-compliance. In fact, that's what you get without relationship, compliance.

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### **Group Questions**

- What is holiness without love? rules w/o relationship ~ robots ~ harsh ~ authoritarianism ~ traditionalism ~ dictatorship ~ totalitarianism
- With an understanding that rules without relationship won't take us far in life, how can we as parents make adjustments?
- How about as spouses?
- How about as employers?
- Employees?

### **Personal Evaluation Questions**

- ✓ What have I done this week to improve the quality of my relationship with Christ?
- ✓ How many days did I read from the Bible?
- ✓ How long was each reading time?
- ✓ What can I do to improve my Bible reading times?
- ✓ How often did I pray this week?
- ✓ How often did I pray for something or someone other than myself?
- ✓ What can I do to improve my prayer life?
- ✓ Who can I help by praying for them?
- ✓ Who can I help by sharing with them?

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