

Being in Christ, living for Christ (Ephesians 1:1–2)

People are regularly concerned with their identity, who they are. It is significant, because it affects also how we live. The letter to the Ephesians helps us understand better the believer's spiritual identity. Gentile believers in Ephesus needed to be reminded that they all, both Jewish and Gentile believers, were together set apart to God, 'saints', and were to live faithful in Christ. His address to the them, "saints ... and faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:1) is developed throughout the letter.

(For further information on the church in Ephesus see Acts 18:18–20:1, 13–38; Revelation 2:1–11; cf. 1 & 2 Timothy.)

I. Reality (the indicatives) – who you are (1:3–3:21)

1. *Blessed (1:3–14)*: In Christ the true believer is blessed. The ministry of God in Christ is exceedingly adequate for salvation and demands our praise. He sets the believer apart ("saints") in Christ to His glory.
2. *Provisioned (1:15–23)*: The blessings motivate thankfulness and the request that believers really experience knowing God and His blessings. The Spirit of wisdom and resurrection power is available for every true believer. The believer, set apart in the exalted Christ, can enjoy Him.
3. *Quickened (2:1–10)*: Every true believer in Jesus Christ has been made alive in Christ. The 'saint' has been separated from the world, sin, and death, and separated unto God, good works, and eternal life, to the glory of God alone.
4. *United (2:11–22)*: Since the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, all true believers in Jesus Christ have been joined together into one new body, the body of Christ, and are becoming a dwelling place for God, a holy temple, for His praise and glory.
5. *Enlightened (3:1–13)*: God revealed to the apostles and prophets what was not previously known, that believing Gentiles would be included with believing Jews in one new body. This one new body reveals even to the spirit world God's great wisdom. By this the saints and faithful in Christ proclaim the glory of the wisdom of God.
6. *Loved (3:14–21)*: God wants every true believer to grasp the greatness of His love for them and to be strengthened by His power. The church, as Christ's body, exists for the glory of God.

This is the reality. True believers are saints, set apart from the world to God, by faith in Jesus Christ. How believers should then live, their duty, is explained in the rest of the letter.

II. Duty (the imperatives) – how you should live (4:1–6:20)

1. *Live worthily, rightly relating to one another (4:1–16)*.
2. *Live differently than the Gentiles (4:17–5:2)*.
3. *Live holy as children of light (5:3–14)*.
4. *Live carefully in wisdom (5:15–6:9)*.

Paul uses the relationship of husband and wife, one of the pairs explaining how to live in wisdom with one another, to teach again on the relationship of Christ and the church. This has been a theme in the letter (1:13, 22–23; 2:15; 3:6, 21; 4:15–16, 25). Careful, wise living portrays important spiritual truths. It is another reason to live faithfully in Christ.

5. *Live resolutely in spiritual combat (6:10–20)*.

Just as Paul began the letter with grace and peace (1:2), he concludes the letter (6:23–24). Only by God's grace have we become who we are, and only by grace can we live as we should live. By grace we discover who we are in Christ and gain peace by being in Christ. The true believer is indeed a 'saint' who demonstrates that by being faithful in Christ and growing in faithfulness.

Questions for further thought and reflection:

- Consider again each of the six truths in 1:3–3:21 about the believer's identity in Christ. Which ones particularly help or encourage you at this point in your life? Why?
- Who benefits from the believer's new identity in Christ? How? Why?
- How do the general categories of duty (4:1–6:20) conflict with the pressures of society around us to conform? Are there any individual commands which particularly stood out in this regard?
- What other theme or themes did you notice in Ephesians besides being saints, faithful in Christ, or the importance of the church?
- In what way(s) did it help to consider the entire letter at one time? Would you consider doing it again yourself? Why/why not?