
God's New Humanity:
"The Saints on Winston-Salem"
Ephesians 1: 1-2

Thoughts to Shape and Spark Discussion:

"Nobody can emerge from a careful reading of Paul's letter to the Ephesians with a privatized gospel. For Ephesians is the gospel of the church. It sets forth God's eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society which stands out in bright relief against the sombre background of the old world. For God's new society is characterized by life in place of death, by unity and reconciliation in place of division and alienation, by the wholesome standards of righteousness in place of the corruption of wickedness, by love and peace in place of hatred and strife, and by unremitting conflict with evil in place of a flabby compromise with it." - John Stott

"The Gospel does not become public truth for a society by being propagated as a theory or as a worldview and certainly not as a religion. It can become public truth only insofar as it is embodied in a society (the church) which is both "abiding in" Christ and engaged in the life of the world."
- Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 39.

"Our church communities ought to be cities of refuge for sinners, busy with the traffic of forgiveness, busy with people learning the 'craft' of forgiveness—ordinarily by getting apprenticed to a master forgiver or two. The idea is that saints ought to teach forgiveness to saints-in-training. In the holy catholic church (the communion of saints), we should be rehearsing the forgiveness of sins like pianists, practicing the hard parts over and over till we get them right." –Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Rehearsing Forgiveness: Practicing the Hard Parts Till We Get Them Right," *Christianity Today*, April 29, 1996, 31.

"I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel— evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community." –Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

Themes and Questions to Guide Reflection and Response:

- How does the Resurrection empower a new life for us? How does the Newbigin assertion about the believing community inform this new life? What does this "believing community" living out the new creation look and feel like?
- When Paul addresses the recipients of this letter as "the saints in Ephesus", how does this title strike you? Are you comfortable conceiving of and referring to yourself as a "saint"?
- In your experience, what are the narratives and values that characterize Winston-Salem? What complicates or enables discipleship in this place we live? What are the unique challenges and blessings of being a saint in Winston-Salem?
- "Grace and peace" are the means to the end of being faithful saints in this place God has called us. Are you bored with grace? How do we often marginalize or overlook grace?
- Why is the church so central to the Christian life (see Stott quotation above)? Do you think of church as so uniquely positioned in your life?