



Ephesians: The One New Temple of God

Introduction to Ephesians... Ephesians 1:1-2

^{NIV} **Ephesians 1:1**...Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a great story told about Mark Twain that I really love. Once he became embroiled in a debate about who really wrote Shakespeare. In his day, there was a debate among literary scholars about how much of Shakespeare was actually written by Shakespeare. Some scholars argued that much of Shakespeare was actually written by Christopher Marlowe or even Francis Bacon. A few die-hards argued that Shakespeare was actually written by William Shakespeare. Twain weighed into the argument with his usual perceptive wit.

“Shakespeare was not written by Shakespeare,” he adamantly affirmed. **“It was written by another man with the same name.”**

Now, I bring that up for a reason. One of the things you will find as we begin to study Ephesians and any of the many commentaries written about it is that three of the most ancient manuscripts do not have the word Ephesus that we read in

verse one. They actually have no location there at all. The manuscripts (Vaticanus, Siniaticus, and the Chester Beatty papyrus) actually say “to the saints, that is the ones who are faithful”. There is no blank there and it reads fairly well without it. But to further complicate things. The ancient heretic Marcion referred to the letter as the letter to the Laodiceans. That probably means that the copy that Marcion had may have had Laodicea plugged into the spot where our text has Ephesus.

Some scholars have concluded on the basis of Marcion’s calling “**Ephesians**” the Epistle to the Laodiceans that it is the same letter Paul was referring to in Colossians 4:16.

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:16**...After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea

Part of the reason they argue that is because Colossians and Ephesians, or as they would call it the Epistle to the Laodiceans are so similar. James Montgomery Boice says that 35 verses in the two books are substantially the same.

Many scholars argue that Paul wrote the two letters when he was in prison at Rome. He wrote them at essentially the same time and that is why they contain so much similar material.

But even more importantly, the Epistle to the Ephesians doesn’t contain any personal greetings. There are no specific greetings to any of the church members at Ephesus and that really is surprising considering the fact that Paul spent over two years there. He had a wonderfully sentimental relationship with the

Ephesians and it seems strange that he doesn't address any of his old friends. Acts 20 helps us to understand something of the kind of relationship Paul had with the Ephesians. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. It had been prophesied to him that when he came to Jerusalem he would be taken prisoner by the Jews and then turned over to the Gentiles. He knew, though the Spirit of God, that he was on his way to Rome and imprisonment. So, on his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Miletus and summoned his old friends from Ephesus. They rushed up to Miletus to see him. That is where Acts 20 picks up the story.

^{NIV} **Acts 20:17**...From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. ²⁵ "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. ³² "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind

of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" ³⁶ When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

You can see from the story in Acts 20 that Paul loved the Ephesians and that they loved him. Time had passed and the prophecies concerning his imprisonment had come true. Yet, in the glorious letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes no mention of his many friends there. It is almost as if they are strangers. That causes many scholars a problem. Some even deny Paul as being the author. Some scholars argue, and I think wrongly, that the Epistle to the Ephesians was written long after Paul had been martyred and that the author of the letter wrote it pretending to be Paul in order to try to regain an interest in Pauline theology. Some have even argued that the letter was written by Luke. I think those kinds of suggestions are reprehensible and I think there is probably a simple explanation. Most likely Ephesians was a circular letter. That means that Paul intended the letter to be distributed to many churches. It would be sent to one of the churches in Asia Minor and then after it was copied it would be passed on to another church. I think we have insight into how that may have happened based on what we read earlier in Colossians 4. Also, because Paul intended it to be distributed to so many churches he chose not to include personal greetings. The copy of the letter that we have is probably the copy that wound up in the hands of his friends at Ephesus, where his letter would have been copied and reread and protected in the hands of close friends.

Because of that possibility it is worth while, I think, to know something about the city of Ephesus. Now, our interest is not in Ephesus in order to understand the letter; the letter can be understood apart from an understanding of the

particulars of the city. Rather, our interest is in Ephesus to better understand how they would have understood the letter.

Ephesus was a tremendously important city in the ancient world. It boasted the largest open-air theater in the ancient world. It seated about twenty-five thousand people. It was a melting pot of many different cultures; it was also a melting pot of many different religions. It was, however, dominated by the cult of Diana. The temple of Diana in ancient Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It measured 425 feet by 220 feet by 60 feet high about 94,000 square feet. Another way to think of it based on its height is that was about the size of three large Target stores stacked on top of each other. It was ornately adorned made of hand-carved stone. In the middle of the temple was an enormous statue of Diana which was said to have come down from heaven. The temple was serviced by hundreds of priestesses of the cult of Diana who also happened to be temple prostitutes.

There is a wonderful account in Acts 19 that helps us to understand something of the importance of the worship of Diana there.

NIV Acts 19:23...About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." ²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The

people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. ³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash. ³⁷ You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰ As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

So you get a sense, I hope, of the kind of pagan world into which Paul had carried the gospel of Christ. It was a wonderful church of converted pagans, but it was different than much of the rest of the church. It was primarily Gentile. I want you to keep that fact in mind in the weeks ahead. This letter, whether it was addressed specifically to the Ephesians or whether it was actually a circular letter was addressed not to Jews and Gentiles but rather specifically to Gentiles. I will speak much more about that later.

Now, if I could take just a moment, I would like to talk about the structure of Ephesians. It is always important, I think, to get a handle on the big picture of any biblical book before looking into any of its particulars. The book of Ephesians can be divided into two parts: the doctrinal part and the ethical part.

The doctrinal part of Ephesians includes the first three chapters. The ethical part, or the part that talks about how we ought to live, is included in the last three chapters. There are few books of the bible where the transition from doctrine to behavior is so clear. If you will look for a moment at the beginning of chapter 4...I think you will see what I mean.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:1**...As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

You will notice, I think, that Paul is anxious to communicate to the Ephesians three things: (1) how they should live (2) the attitude they should have as they seek to live in that particular way, and finally (3) the reason they should do both. To put it another way, Paul is asking the Ephesians to live godly lives, to do so with an attitude of humility, gentleness and patience, and he wants them to do so in order to preserve Christian unity and peace. But he doesn't ask them to do so in their own strength. He doesn't ask them to do so for no reason. In fact, Ephesians 4:1 starts off with the phrase **"therefore"**, signifying that the reason he can ask them to do so is on the basis of everything he has already discussed. One famous bible teacher has said rightly that whenever you see the word **"therefore"** you should ask yourself what it's there for. I think that's right. In particular, I like the way Dr. Packer put it in a copy of Crux magazine. He was writing on the issue of godliness in Ephesians. Listen to what he says:

Paul wants his readers to know God's grace in order that they may grow in it. Accordingly, he devotes chapters 1-3 to celebrating the greatness and glory of the saving mercy that has created the new society to which they belong; after which he spends chapters 4-6 begging them to behave in a way that is worthy of their calling, maintaining unity, ministry, and charity within their diversity, doing good, fighting evil, and honoring Christ no less in their family than in the church.

The dictum that for Paul doctrine is grace and ethics is gratitude is verified by almost every verse.

What Paul is doing pastorally in all this is raising steam. In former days on the railways trains of over a thousand tons were moved at high speed by the expansive power of steam. Such trains could not be moved by passengers pushing, but when the fire in the firebox of the locomotive had raised steam in the boiler and that steam was piped into the cylinders, movement began at once. By dwelling upon grace in a way that calls forth gratitude, Paul is lighting the fire that raises moral and spiritual steam for spontaneous, whole-hearted godliness as his readers' response to divine love. (Crux: March 1989/Vol. XXV, No. 1)

If I could put it a different way maybe I should ask, **“Do you have trouble finding the moral strength to live a more godly life? Do you find it difficult to work yourself up to obedience in particular areas of your life? Do you find it difficult to be faithful in praying for other Christian brothers and sisters?”**

I certainly do. I often find myself focusing on and failing to obey many of the ethical commands of Scripture. I focus on the things that I should do or not do. Often when I do so I fail to focus on the theological basis of those commands. Often as Christians we focus on the what and not the why. But when we do that we gut the underpinnings of biblical writers like Paul, or worse we dispense with the gist of the message as intended by the Holy Spirit.

You see what Paul does in chapters 1-3 is lay out for his readers some wonderful theological propositions. They are glorious; they are life-changing. They inspire and fill his readers with awe and most especially with gratitude. It is only after he has done that that he can ask or plead with his readers to live a certain way. Obedience can sometimes be obtained through fear but it only approaches consistency when achieved through gratitude.

Theologians call this kind of structure the indicative and the imperative. The indicative indicates what is. The imperative indicates what ought to be based on what is. The church I grew up in as a boy focused on the imperative. They told me what I should do. In my case they told me over and over again without much result. I became consumed with guilt at my inability and eventually I became indignant. The thing that was never stressed was the theological grounds for why I should do what was commanded. I was told what to do; I was told much less often what God had done.

That is not, however, the way Paul does it. In Ephesians, Paul focuses on what God has done on behalf of His people. It is only when he is overcome by the glory of God's kindness toward us in Christ that he shifts to the way in which we should respond. Chapters 1-3 are about guilt and grace; chapters 4-6 are about gratitude. He is going to lay out a theological basis for asking these converted Gentile pagans to live righteously. He is trying to persuade them that they have been grafted into the glorious family of God and that as a result they have certain familial obligations. These obligations are not limited to ministers. They extend all the way up and down the ladder of this new community called the church. There are going to be obligations placed on husbands, wives, children, and even slaves. There are obligations placed upon young and old alike and these obligations are the result of something Christ has brought about in His redemption of His own people.

So that's the structure of Ephesians in a nutshell. You may be asking yourself at this point. **"Well, that's all very well. I understand how the book is structured. What is the book about?"**

The answer to that question is that Ephesians is about what Christ has done for sinners and how His action has created a new and unique community on earth and how that new community ought to seek to live in unity. When I say that I am tempted almost at once to begin to throw in several disclaimers. I am certainly not talking about unity at any price. I am certainly not talking about unity at the expense of doctrine. I am talking specifically about the unity that comes through the agency of doctrine. In the weeks ahead, we will see, I pray, that the only genuine unity that can exist in the church is the unity that comes as a result of proper doctrine.

Paul, in fact, is going to camp out on doctrine. He sees it as the basis for genuine unity. In our day, there is a tendency to go in just the opposite direction. We see it displayed in the evangelical church's aversion to doctrine. You may have even heard someone exclaim, "**Doctrine divides!**" I don't, however, believe that to be true for a moment. Genuine biblical unity must be based upon the common thread of what Christ has accomplished for His people. If it is not it is doomed to failure. That is why Paul makes the first three chapters of Ephesians so theology intensive. He is trying to educate his readers on what Christ has accomplished and how that glorious truth is great enough to illuminate the mind of the vilest pagan. It was that truth that opened the eyes of the slave trader John Newton and eventually allowed him not only to write the hymn *Amazing Grace* but also to become a champion for the cause of slaves. It is doctrine that will allow an Anglo-Saxon Protestant to love an Arab Christian in a way that he could never love an Anglo-Saxon Mormon. It is the doctrine of Christ's redeeming work that has broken down the wall of hatred between Jewish and Gentile believers. It is doctrine that we need but not just any doctrine; it is doctrine associated with what Christ has wrought on behalf of His people. If you want to know why our

churches are still racially segregated 130 years after the Civil War I will submit to you a reason. We have not adequately allowed the redeeming work of Christ to saturate our hearts and minds and modify our inward prejudices and behaviors. That is why we need to study, understand and memorize Ephesians. The wall of enmity has been broken down in Christ.

Yet, we see in our own time unity being sought in other areas. We see unity being sought in the avoidance of doctrine. Issues like predestination and election that Paul thought were central to creating unity in Christ's body are avoided like they are the very cause of disunity. Churches are seeking to make unbelievers comfortable by dispensing with doctrine altogether and even if it could be proved that such an action brought results, which I do not think it can, it is at the sacrifice of what the Bible actually teaches. I think there is a better way and in the next twelve weeks we are going to try together to understand exactly what it is that Paul was trying to say.

I wish I could guarantee that what we discover together we will begin to practice. I wish I could guarantee that once we understand Paul's theology we will be changed so much that we will begin to see Paul's ethics being put into practice. I cannot, but this I can promise unless we begin to understand Ephesians' theology concerning Christ's new society we will never, ever see that society in reality in this place.

So, all of that having been said let's look for moment at Ephesians 1:1-2.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 1:1**...Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thing I notice right off is that Paul is an apostle by the will of God, not by his own will, or by the will of the church. He is what he is by the grace of God. That is a theme that Paul is going to camp out on in the first chapter of Ephesians. He is going to talk about **“election”** and **“predestination”** and such noble themes. But for Paul that is not theology that is off-limits. It is part of the glorious work of God and it is something that he addresses even here in the opening of the letter. I think that is important. These subjects are not something you that should make you feel uncomfortable. Once, when I was teaching school I was relating something of the history of the Reformation to my students. I had one boy come up to me after class and he was almost shaking with anger. He said, **“Mr. Browning, I will never believe in election. I will never believe in predestination. The Bible could never teach such abominable doctrines.”**

I asked him to take his Bible and turn to Ephesians 1. I asked him to read verses 4 and 5. He read aloud:

^{NIV} Ephesians 1:4...For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

I said, **“Stop right there. Do you still think that the Bible doesn’t teach “predestination”?”**

“No,” he said. **“It obviously teaches predestination. I just don’t think it means what you think it means.”**

“That all right”, I said. **“There’s plenty of time left and think how much progress you’ve made in the just the last 60 seconds.”**

Now, I was trying to be clever and that was wrong. But Paul is not trying to be clever. He is laying the groundwork for this idea of election and predestination right off.

Secondly, I notice that he is writing to **“saints”** and that they are **“saints, who are faithful.”** What a wonderful state the church would be in if we realized that we are all, in fact, saints. Paul uses the word, not in the sense that the world thinks of, but in the sense that Christians are a separated people. They are separated by God from the rest of the world unto God. It is not that we are saints based upon some heroic action or sacrifice that we have done but rather because of what Christ has done.

When Brother Danner moved to Memphis, we made the decision to try to keep in touch using email. I don't know why we did it but from the very beginning we addressed each other as **“Saint L. Wayne”** and **“Saint Thomas”**. I'm sure that, early on, it was because it was funny. But you know as I have reflected over the last two years how much he means to me, I have no problem at all now of thinking of him as a saint in the same sense Paul is using here. I think it would make us a little more tolerant of each other and each other's weaknesses if we could keep the idea that we are speaking to a **“blood-bought saint of God”** when we speak to fellow Christians.

But not only are the Ephesians **“saints”** they are also **“faithful”**. That means among other things that they are faithful to Christ and faithful to each other. There was no place in Paul's mind for this notion of rugged isolationism that permeates so much of modern Christianity. Paul knew nothing of a Christian who could take his relationship to fellow-believers lightly.

Finally, Paul extends his greeting:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 1:2**...Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This greeting was uniquely a Christian greeting. For centuries, Jews had spoken the greeting “**Shalom**” to each other. But Paul and other early Christian writers changed this traditional greeting by adding the word “**grace**”. By adding the word “**grace**”, he was emphasizing that God had demonstrated kindness to us. But how did he demonstrate kindness to us? The answer as we shall see in our study is that God demonstrated kindness to us in Christ Jesus. He did so by placing the weight of His anger and wrath against us and our sins on Christ. Romans says that God was propitiated by Christ’s atoning work. That’s an important theological word because it signifies that God was really righteously indignant towards us. But now His righteous anger has been satisfied or placated. Modern theologians hate that idea, that is, they hate the idea that God could have been angry with sinners. But Paul, as he does with “**election**” and “**predestination**” revels in the idea. That is why he can then add “**peace**” to his greeting. Grace and peace, they go together and they form the basis of his greeting but it is a greeting not just from him. It is a greeting from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I think we will stop there for now. But for next time, I want to give you an assignment. I want you to read Ephesians 1-3-14. In Greek it is one long sentence but it forms the basis for almost everything Paul is going to address in the rest of the letter. In particular, I want you to notice how Paul uses the phrase “**in Christ**” or some variation of that phrase. What I want you to do, is take a yellow pad and write out each time you come across the phrase “**in Christ**” or “**in Him**”

or anything like that. Then beside that phrase I want you to write out what Paul attaches to it. Finally, I want you to write out what he means by the thing attached. It may take you an hour or so to finish the assignment but I think it will pay dividends the next time we meet.

Let's pray.