

# Introducing Ephesians

INTRO: It has been a long time since I have been able to say this: We are beginning a new series! If you have been with us at any point from March onward you know that we took a very long look at salvation. I encourage you that if you missed even one of those sermons, please get online and make sure you listen to them all. They build on one another, so to have the most complete picture of our salvation, it is important for you to hear the whole series.

Now that we begin a new series, the same would be true today. We will be going through the book of Ephesians. While you will get something out of each sermon in the series, to have a greater understanding of the book, it will be important to be in on each sermon if you miss one. That is one of the reasons we have the sermons available online - for our folks that are sick or home bound, for our folks that have to miss on occasion, and for people in the community that might listen in. A nice way to spread the gospel, but admittedly not the best way to do so. The best way is always direct person to person contact - what we talked about last week - 82% will come to church with a personal invitation.

As I have taught you in the past, whenever you begin the process of studying a book of the Bible, it is important to know the background of the book which includes things like: Who wrote the book? When was it written? Why was it written? What themes does the book cover? To whom was the book written?

What I discovered as I started studying for this series of messages kind of surprised me. I have read Ephesians many times before. I have studied Ephesians before. This time, however, I dug in deeper than I have in the past, and found out how much controversy there really is concerning the book.

- I. Let's start simple: Who wrote the book? This should be easy. Turn to Ephesians 1:1
  - A. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God"
    1. So that was easy - Paul wrote it!
    2. No so fast folks! Paul's authorship has been challenged by scholars since the 1800's
    3. In fact, there are a majority of scholars that believe Paul did not write Ephesians
  - B. Now I am going to be really, really honest with you on this
    1. This delves into minute bits of information that no normal person cares to argue about
      - a) In my opinion, this is just a bunch of scholars that like to whine about tiny details
    2. So rather that bore you with crazy amount of details

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- a) The commentaries that I used in prep for the series had a combined 100 pages dedicated just to the authorship of Ephesians
  - b) That's a lot of detail - so I will merely summarize a few parts
  - C. We firmly believe that Paul is the author of Ephesians for the following reasons
    - 1. First, there are absolutely NO variant readings on the manuscripts that suggest anyone other than Paul wrote Ephesians
      - a) Hopefully you know by now that our English Bibles have been translated from a host of Greek manuscripts dating at various times from the original date of writing - we have no originals
      - b) ALL of those manuscripts say the same thing, including the earliest copies (only about 70 years after the date of writing) - Paul wrote the book
      - c) Just for reference, the next book, not in the Bible, and it's time gap between writing and the earliest copy we have: Homer's *Illiad* - 400 years
    - 2. Second, the early church fathers, Origen, Ireneus and several others, starting as far back as 180 AD all attest to the fact that Paul wrote the book.
    - 3. One of the reasons these scholars say that Paul did not write the book is because there are 49 terms that are used in Ephesians that are never used in any of Paul's other writings
      - a) So the theory is that someone else wrote the book
      - b) However, Paul was a brilliant man, and to say that he could not have chosen other words to make his points in the letter is foolish
      - c) Plus, the style of this letter seems circular (meaning it was meant to be circulated to several churches), so the style almost demands a different vocabulary
    - 4. Fourth thing, and this is what scholars try to use to disprove Paul's authorship: Ephesians is very similar to Colossians - seemingly dependent on Colossians, so it must be another person copying Paul's work
      - a) The answer to this is simple, and brings in Occam's Razor (basic form is the simplest answer is the preferred answer)
      - b) If there are so many similarities between the two letters, perhaps they both have the same author?
  - D. So, without going too crazy deep into the scholar's arguments, it seems most logical to understand that Paul is the author
- II. How about who the letter was written to? That should be simple!
- A. Continuing in verse 1, "to the saints in Ephesus..." See how easy that was!

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- B. You know it will not be that easy right? There are good reasons for this scholarly debate, however.
  - C. You remember the manuscript issue I mentioned a few minutes ago? The earliest and most reliable manuscript does not have the words “in Ephesus” in it
    - 1. That seems to indicate that those words were added at a later time
    - 2. And just in case you are questioning if our Bibles are reliable, let me reassure you that they are
      - a) When the scholars that do all of this with the manuscripts compare them, they find that they are 99% accurate for the entire Bible
      - b) The few discrepancies are of no consequence to the Bible’s core message
  - D. So in answer to the question of who was the letter written to, that answer is as follows:
    - 1. We believe the letter was written as a circular letter (as I mentioned before)
    - 2. It was meant to be read by multiple churches in Asia minor, including Ephesus
    - 3. It is possible that an early church father added the phrase “in Ephesus” because of tradition of that being the place that the letter went first, or simply went there and stayed at that church
- III. The time period and history of the letter
- A. Most scholars agree that the letter was written during one of Paul’s stints in prison - most likely while he was in Rome
  - B. This would place the letter having been written about 62 AD - or right at the very end of Paul’s life
  - C. To give you a little historical perspective, as we can reconstruct this, here is how this seems to have played out:
    - 1. Paul was imprisoned (most likely in Rome)
    - 2. Onesimus was a slave that ran away from his master, Philemon (also a book of the Bible)
    - 3. Paul, while in Rome, convinced Onesimus to return to Philemon (a Christian master)
    - 4. Tychicus was entrusted to return Onesimus
    - 5. The route they took most likely would have taken them from Rome, through Asia minor, passing through Ephesians and Colossae
      - a) We know Tychicus took the Epistle of Colossians to the church at Colossae

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- b) Not hard to see Paul writing two similar letters - the book of Colossians and the book that we call Ephesians and having Tychicus deliver both letters as he journeys with Onesimus back to Philemon
- D. Isn't that enough history to make you head spin a little bit?
  - 1. The reason I give all of that to you is to show you that the events in the Bible did not happen in a vacuum
  - 2. They all happened in time and space, in relation to other events
    - a) Too often we hear and understand about Paul's imprisonment in Rome
    - b) But we fail to realize that he wrote to the churches he started
    - c) He dealt with issues between a slave and his master
    - d) And all of these events affect each other
- E. Now, on to the best part, digging into the book - Ephesians 1:1-2

## IV. The Epilogue

- A. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God..."
  - 1. There is actually a lot in that brief statement that we need to break down
  - 2. We understand that Paul is the author, which we made brief arguments for earlier
    - a) Paul uses his Greco-Roman name Paul, rather than his given Jewish name Saul
  - 3. Paul also identifies himself and the recipients of the letter in relation to God
    - a) Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ
      - (1) This is to establish his credentials early on, and give the letter more weight and an official nature
      - (2) In the NT an apostle was one who:
        - (a) Saw the risen Christ
        - (b) Was sent by the church as a missionary
        - (c) Or sometimes as broad as a representative
        - (d) Paul fit all of these categories
      - (3) Paul's apostleship was directly from Christ (Galatians 1:1)
    - b) Paul is an apostle by the will of God
      - (1) Further Paul explains that he did not appoint himself to this position - God chose him
      - (2) Those words "by the will of God" seem to emphasize the fact that there was no merit on Paul's part - it was by God's grace that Paul was chosen - just like you and I are chosen by God's grace and nothing else
- B. "To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:"
  - 1. Some versions of the Bible have the word "saints" here

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- a) That word is perfectly appropriate - what is unfortunate is how we have changed that word in its meaning
  - b) Originally the word “haigos” meant one who had a quality to approach the divine
    - (1) And in essence that is its rightful meaning when we understand where the quality to approach the divine comes from - it comes from the divine
    - (2) To be holy means to be set apart (in our case, set apart by the divine to approach the divine)
  - c) The problem is that we have a different understanding of the word “saint”
    - (1) Due in large measure to the Catholic church’s canonization process to declare people “saints”, most people have that as their concept of saint
      - (a) In that process in the Catholic church, the person’s character and conduct are reviewed and if they have been found to work two miracles, they are qualified to become a saint
      - (b) That whole process is built on good works and that is not what we are looking at here - perhaps an illustration will help
  - d) When we accept Christ as our Savior, we have come into the position of “saint” (holy ones)
    - (1) As we have said before, God has declared us right in His eyes (justification) because of Christ taking our sins and giving us His righteousness
      - (a) The righteousness is NOT our own
      - (b) It comes from Christ
    - (2) So we have just been placed in the position of saint
    - (3) Now, we are being asked to live up to the position
    - (4) So it is like this, you have just been elected to a high office (the presidency)
      - (a) You are the president no matter what, because you have been declared the president
      - (b) Now, you have to act and work in a manner that is becoming your position
      - (c) Same thing for us, we ARE saints, but because of our love for Christ, we desire to live up to our position as saints
2. We have already gone over the phrase “in Ephesus”
3. “The faithful in Christ Jesus”
- a) The faithful can mean proven faithful or it can mean someone that has faith. Someone who has faith seems to fit better

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- b) The expression “in Christ” is very significant
    - (1) In 13 of Paul’s letters, he used “in Christ” “in the Lord” “in Him” or some variation 164 times
    - (2) This is a huge theological concept that we will see throughout the letter
      - (a) In fact, Ephesians uses those phrases 36 times - more than any other letter
  - c) The language Paul is using is interesting because it is a language of geography
    - (1) Just like these believers lived “in Ephesus” (or around it)
    - (2) Just like we live in Almont
      - (a) We are shaped by where we live
      - (b) If we picked up and moved to Detroit, due to the change of culture, we would change many of the ways we do things out of necessity
      - (c) We are shaped by the culture that we live in
    - (3) So if we are “in Christ” we will be shaped by that - it will mold us into the people we are to be
    - (4) The Christian life is not a nice set of ideas, or a beautiful avenue that we follow
      - (a) Paul uses “in Christ” to describe our relationship to Jesus
      - (b) A deep relationship that conforms us into who we are
  - d) An now consider this: how deep does the significance run that the believers were in a certain location, and in Christ?
    - (1) What impact does that have on them
    - (2) If they are shaped by Christ by being “in Christ” and they are part of a culture where they live, doesn’t that mean that they have a responsibility to influence that culture?
    - (3) We can’t ignore the place we live or betray Christ in whom we live
      - (a) Being “in Christ” is what affects us at our deepest level
      - (b) So that should be displayed in the place where we live
- C. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 1. Every letter in ancient days contained a greeting similar to this
    - a) Paul however did a bit of a play on words when he changed the normal greeting of “greetings and peace to you”
    - b) The word for greetings in Greek shares the root word with the word for grace (charis)
  - 2. Part of the reason for the change is explained in the rest of the phrase, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

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- a) It is interesting that grace first came from God the Father
  - (1) In the form of Jesus being sent for our sins
  - (2) In the fact that God the Father draws man to Himself, removing spiritual blinders and allowing us to see Jesus for who He is
  - (3) Grace is from the Father
- b) Peace is brought by the Lord Jesus Christ
  - (1) We are at peace with God because of what Christ did for us on the cross
  - (2) We are at peace with ourselves
  - (3) We are at peace with others as we grow deeper in the grace God has shown us - we of course begin to show that grace to others
- 3. Notice too the fact that Paul is, throughout this greeting, very intentional about being focused on God
  - a) It is God who made us holy
  - b) It is God who gives grace
  - c) It is God who gives peace
  - d) It is all focused on God's activity - not on man, his perceived "worthiness" or goodness
- V. Which all of this brings me to some ways to apply all of this that we might skip right past if we are not careful
  - A. This seems like such a simple little opening, but there is so much here
  - B. For example: Paul used his culture's method of letter writing to write decidedly Christian letters
    - 1. But how do the gospel and culture relate?
    - 2. If the gospel defines life for Christians, we still have to live in a culture that wants to define life for us
    - 3. It becomes imperative for us to understand our culture, learn what we can adapt to the Christian life, and what must be flatly rejected
    - 4. If you ever go on a foreign mission trip, and ALL of you SHOULD (at least once), you will see how the gospel conforms to each culture without compromise
      - a) I have been in churches in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica where dancing for the church service is the norm
      - b) It is their cultural expression - yet in many American churches we don't do that - some even view it as wrong
        - (1) It's not wrong
        - (2) It's just not our culture
    - 5. If we learn how to adapt our culture as the gospel shapes us, we can reach our culture in incredible ways
    - 6. The greatest tool on our side in relating to culture has to be authenticity!

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- a) When we try to relate to our culture we cannot relate by other people's experiences of God's grace, or through their words
  - b) We can learn from others, but we must have our own experiences with Christ ourself
  - c) Our expression of the gospel in culture has to flow naturally out of our experience with the gospel
- C. This text assumes that God is setting a people apart for Himself
- 1. We sadly fall into the lie that God's activity was for then, but not now
  - 2. God is still setting people apart for salvation
  - 3. God is still putting callings on people's lives
  - 4. We can assume God is active or passive
    - a) If we assume He is passive, He will probably fulfill that role
      - (1) We will miss out on what He is doing
      - (2) We will miss it because we are not looking for God to do anything
    - b) If we assume He is active today, we will be ready to respond when God calls!
  - 5. With this idea that God sets people apart for Himself, I caution you NOT to make the same mistakes the Israelites made
    - a) They became arrogant that God set them apart
    - b) They gained a superiority complex
    - c) Remember, even when one passage tells you that you have been set apart, there are several other passages warning against feeling superior because God made a sovereign choice that had nothing to do with how awesome you are - it had to do with God choosing the weak of this world to confuse the strong
  - 6. Is it amazing that God has set us apart as a holy people who are in Christ?
    - a) You better believe it!
    - b) If for no other reason than because not one of us here deserves it
    - c) Again, Paul's way of pointing out God's activity in our lives, His initiation, and His supremacy, not ours