

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 1:1-2 - Introduction

We begin this morning in one of my favorite books of the New Testament because it's like Romans and James and Galatians all packed into one 6 chapter book. It's short so you can read it quickly but it's also deep - there are many weighty issues that Paul talks about in the book.

My goal this morning is really twofold. First, it's to encourage you to dive deep into the book of Ephesians. If you are a new believer or have been a Christian for some time, my encouragement to you is to immerse yourself in this great little book.

When we went through 1 Corinthians I said it was like a Swiss Army knife - Paul deals with so many critical issues in that book it's like a Swiss army knife of topics.

Ephesians is like your everyday carry knife - it's the one you always have on your hip because it just does everything. Hopefully you have a crease in your Bible in this book or if not you will by the time we're done. I really want you to love this little book.

My second goal this morning is to give us a high level overview of the book. These letters to the churches were meant to be read all in one sitting. We go verse by verse and exposit them for their rich content, but the original churches would have just sat and listened intently to the whole letter as it was read.

And so what I usually do is try to give you a high level over of the content of the book itself and I hope to do that this morning.

Last week, Nathan took us through **Acts 19** and walked through Paul's initial ministry in Ephesus. He gave us the background. I asked him to do that because whenever you read a book in the Bible it's good to try to get as much surrounding information as you can to help you understand what's happening. Or what has happened.

Ephesus was a big deal in the early church. We saw that Paul spent 3 years there. There were amazing things happening from the wildly supernatural to the ordinary - teaching in the hall of Tyrannus for years. It became the hub of Christianity in the early church.

Not only do we see that in the book of Acts, but we see that in other books of the Bible as well.

We have 4 total letters in the NT directed toward the Ephesians. Paul wrote the book of 1 Timothy to Timothy to urge him to stay at Ephesus to courageously battle against false teachers. Then in 2 Timothy, near the end of Paul's life it seems Timothy is still there. But Paul wants Timothy to come see him in Rome before he dies.

There's actually another letter written to the Ephesians in the Bible. This book is 1 Ephesians. There's a 2nd Ephesians as well. **Turn to Rev. 2:1-7**. These small letter in the book of Revelation were actually letters written to specific churches. And the first church addressed in the book is to the church at Ephesus. **Read 1-7**

This letter was written some years after Paul wrote his letter. But we get a sense for the direction of the church over time.

Here, the Lord Jesus commends the Ephesian church for their labor, their endurance, their discernment against false teachers and false apostles. That's great. They're enduring persecution - wonderful.

But the Lord also points out a problem. They have abandoned their first what? Love. Their affection for Jesus had waned. And I think that also affected their zeal as well.

I think of all the churches in Revelation Redeemer Bible Church is probably most like Ephesus. We are strong on doctrine, we're willing to endure hardship for the Lord, we don't put up with false teaching. But I think if we're honest it's easy for us to lose our first love. To lose genuine affection for the Lord Jesus. Love for truth

and doctrine is not the same as love for the Lord Jesus who saved us. So we always need to be mindful of genuine affection.

I say that as we turn back to Ephesians. There's a lot of good stuff in here but we need to be mindful that all of this should encourage our hearts to love Jesus more.

So let's do this: I want to unpack these first two verses, then we'll get to a larger overview of the book and to give us a good foundation of where we'll be heading. **Read 1-2**

What we have in these opening verses are a classic mark of Roman letters called epistles. An epistle was a short, official letter. It starts with an opening that tells you who the sender is. With most of our official letters the name and title of the writer doesn't appear until the end. In Roman letters that information was given all up from.

You'd have the name of the sender, their rank or title, the recipient, some kind of greeting. Then there was the body of the letter and some kind of official ending.

Look at 6:23-24. Read

This is a pretty standard closing as well. Final greetings and a salutation.

Interestingly, epistles were often written by professional scribes called amanuenses. They would actually write out the intro, the body and oftentimes the actual author would write the closing of the letter. **Look at Gal. 6:11** for a moment. **Read 11-18**

Why does Paul mention his own handwriting? Probably because professional scribes would write the bulk of the letter.

In **Rom. 16:22** the amanuensis Tertius actually says hello: "I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord." Paul was the author, but Tertius the writer.

So Ephesians, and all of Paul's writings, are epistles - official letters.

Back in Ephesians, Paul opens the letter with who he is and his role in the Church. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus."

Paul, as you know, was Saul before his conversion. Saul in Hebrew meant sought after or asked for. If you remember King Saul was sought after by all the people - they desired him rather than God as king. The apostle was named initially to be someone who was sought after. And he was. He says in **Gal. 1:14** that he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age because he was so zealous.

He was making a name for himself.

But his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road changed him forever. He was no longer Saul - the one everyone sought out. He was Paul. Paul means little, of small account.

In light of the glory and grandeur of the Lord Jesus Christ, Saul realized what we all realize when we come to faith: that we are nothing. We are of small account. Jesus is everything.

Even in his own name, Paul decreased so that Jesus could increase. **Read 1**

This little phrase is packed. What is an apostle? There's a lot of people going around saying they're an apostle. There's even a movement called the New Apostolic Reformation - NAR. The NAR is a heretical group that believes the Lord is still raising up apostles even now.

An apostle just means someone who is sent. That's all the word means. But in the New Testament it referred to a specific set of people who were specifically commissioned by God to proclaim the gospel with authority and miracle working power.

In **Acts 1** remember the apostles were looking to replace Judas. Judas was an apostle but hung himself after he betrayed Jesus. So the disciples were looking to replace him. One of the qualifications they decided was indispensable was that the replacement had seen the risen Jesus. An apostle had to be an eye witness to the resurrection of the Lord. (**Acts 1:21-26**).

So an apostle had to have seen the risen Lord Jesus. Another qualification was that they had to be able to do miracles.

2 Cor. 12:12: The signs of a true apostle - there were fake ones - the signs of a true one were performed among the Corinthians with patience: signs, wonders, mighty works.

When God called a man - and only a man - to be an apostle he equipped them with miraculous power. Why? Because those miracles confirmed the message that they would be preaching. "I saw a man who was dead, but was resurrected 3 days later." "Why should we believe you?" "Because I can heal all these people and cast out demons."

The apostolic signs served to confirm the message that Jesus is the resurrected God-man who will judge all men because he rose from the dead. As that message spread, the apostles began to die out.

So apostles saw the risen Jesus, they could do miracles. A third aspect of apostles is here in this verse. **Read 1**

Apostles were called by the will of God. No one just proclaimed themselves to be an apostle. No one took that title for themselves. In **Acts 1** when they wanted to replace Judas, they narrowed the field down to 2 men and then cast lots so that God would decide who was the right man. And Matthias was numbered among the apostles.

Paul says in **Gal. 1** he wasn't made an apostle from man or by man. This wasn't some good ol boys club that let him into be in charge. No, he says he was an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father. The calling to apostleship is a divine calling. It from the throne of God.

Interestingly Paul seems to be as surprised as anyone that God chose him to be an apostle. He calls himself the least of all the apostles because he persecuted the church of God. Ironically, we usually consider the Paul the greatest of all the apostles. He wrote the most, traveled the most, suffered the most, endured the most.

And I really think that the Damascus road was his Isaiah-like vision. God had called Paul to a hard ministry. Apostleship wasn't a life of luxury. Paul says being an apostle was like being a spectacle to the world. They were like circus animals, the main attraction for the unbelieving world to mock and ridicule and kill.

And I think the only thing that kept Paul going was that vision on the road to Damascus and the vision he received in **2 Cor. 12** where he saw the indescribably glories of heaven. Sometimes it's only a vision of God and his glory that can sustain us in hard times.

So we have Paul - the little apostle - who was made an apostle directly by the will of God.

Who is he writing to? **Read 1**

He is writing to the saints. Hagios. The holy ones in Ephesus. The Catholic Church has corrupted the idea of sainthood. They make it out to be those who are supposedly super-Christians who have performed some kind of supposed-miracle and lived an exemplary life.

But that's not how the Bible uses it. The Bible uses the word saint - holy one - for absolutely every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how new you are to the faith, or how long you've been a Christian, you are a saint. You are a holy one. How are you holy?

You are holy through faith in Jesus. You're not holy because of your own actions. You're not holy because you cleaned yourself up. You're holy because through faith in Jesus God has credited your spiritual account with the righteousness of Jesus.

It's like if you woke up one day and checked your bank account and it said \$100 billion. I'm guessing you didn't earn that. You'd probably think it was a mistake. The bank credited your account with \$100 billion even though you didn't deserve it or earn it.

That's how it works spiritually with us. When we repent from our sins and believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is our Lord, our master, God credits our spiritual account with the all the righteousness of Christ. The full measure. However much righteousness and goodness Jesus has, that's on our ledger too.

And only because of what Jesus has done are we considered "saints." Holy ones.

And here's the important thing: the Bible calls us to act like who we are in Christ. If you're a saint - a holy one - through faith in Jesus, then act like it. Not to earn salvation, but to live out your salvation.

If you're a saint, live like a saint.

If you're a child of the King, then live like a prince.

If you're a son of God, then act like the Son of God.

Your identity in Christ matters because it affects how you live your life.

In fact, this is how Paul divides up most of his letters. He starts out with theology and then in light of that theology, shows us how we should live.

In Bible terms we call this the indicative then imperative.

This is going to be a little nerdy but bear with me. An indicative is a verb that just tells you what something is.

God is holy, we are chosen by God, the Spirit seals us, Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. Like the word suggests, indicatives just tell us about a reality. They are not commands.

Imperatives are commands. Clean your room. Brush your teeth. Forgive your brother. Love your wife.

So we have indicatives which just tell us realities. And imperatives which tell us what to do.

The indicative section of Ephesians is in chapters 1-3. In chapters 1-3 all Paul does is tell us about who God is and what he's done for us and who you are in Christ. How God chose us, sealed us, saved us, gave us the promises he gave to Israel, and revealed the mystery of the gospel to us.

In fact, in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians there's only 1 command. And that command is to remember what God has done. All the other verbs simply describe God and his promises. These are all indicatives.

Only after he's hammered that into our heads does he switch to the imperatives. So in chapters 4-6 Paul gives us a whole slew of commands: "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, speak the truth in love, don't lie, work hard, be generous, escape sexual immorality, put on the armor of God." Those are all commands: imperatives.

And how I remember indicative and imperative is that an indicative indicates a truth. Imperatives are commands like "it's imperative that you do this."

So it's the indicatives, then the imperatives. Why? Because God doesn't just tell us to do something, he tells us why. He gives us the motivation for our actions. And the reason that we act is because who God is or what God has done.

Be holy - that's a command, an imperative. Be holy for I am what? Holy.

Why should you live a holy life? Because God is holy. That's an indicative.

Paul does this more or less in all of his letters. Romans is 11 chapters of indicatives. All kinds of theology, all kinds of truth, all about who God is and what he's done. And then in chapter 12 he says this: I speak to you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. 11 chapters of truth, to get to 5 chapters of how we should live in light of that.

Here, in chapter 1:1 Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are saints. They are holy. And because they've been made holy through faith in Christ, Paul is going to call them to be holy.

And his greeting is the common greeting he gives to most of the churches. **Read 1:2**

This is prayer wish. It's not really a prayer, but it's a blessing for God's grace and peace. Everything that follows in this letter flows out of a desire that God pours out grace and peace to the Ephesians.

Now, I want to do a high level overview with our time left. We don't know exactly why Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians. There doesn't seem to be one main concern or problem. He hits a bunch of different issues. Actually, there's evidence that Paul may have written this exact letter to a bunch of churches and just changed the name of who he was writing to.

You know when you get an email from a company that's a mass mailer and kind of generic? Has your name at the top, but it got sent to 20,000 people? It may be that this letter is like that. Several of the early copies don't have the words "In Ephesus" and there aren't a lot of personal references in this letter like Paul's other letters. So it may be that this letter is a general letter to a bunch of churches in the region around Ephesus and a few of the copies we have were sent to Ephesus.

And it seems like Paul has 4 big picture things on his mind.

1) They needed to be reminded of **God's power** over all spiritual things. The letter opens and closes with amazing discussion about God's power not only over the spiritual condition of believers, but also over spiritual forces. I'll show you that in a second.

Remember in Ephesus there was a lot of dark spiritual stuff going on. Ephesus was the heart of Artemis worship. The gospel was a threat to the guys who made idols and they wanted Paul thrown out of town.

There was other demonic stuff, not the least of which was the demon-possessed man beating up the sons of Sceva.

When you're around that kind of darkness an important truth is that God is in control of all that. He's not just one of the many spiritual options. No, he's sovereign over them. How do we know? Because he raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. **Read 1:3-10**

Who's in charge of the order and manner of salvation? God is. God is not threatened by pagan deities. It's not like it's a wrestling match. No God's will is the one that stands. **Read 1:15-23**

Jesus sits far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. Those are spiritual forces, spiritual beings. And Jesus is completely sovereign over all of them. In fact, Paul says they are all under his feet. **Turn to 6:10-13**

This is the armor of God section that many of us are familiar with. But notice the reason he gives the armor of God is because there is a spiritual war going on all around us. **Read 14-20**

So the armor of God is something we put on because our battle is against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces, the devil. We don't see those things. We can't feel them. Day to day it looks like we're fighting flesh and blood but the reality is that there's a massive spiritual situation going on all around us and Paul has told us how to fight it.

The Ephesians needed to understand that the stuff they were seeing day in and day out with idolatry and demonic activity was spiritual in nature, but that God is sovereign over all of it.

So because there's a large emphasis on spiritual powers and God's control over them, it seems like Paul was writing to encourage them in their spiritually dark setting.

2) Paul seems to be writing to **encourage Jew/Gentile relations**.

Most of chapter 2, 3 and into chapter 4 is talking about how Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. There's no more distinction. **Read 2:11-3:6**

Why might Jew/Gentile relations be an issue in Ephesus? Well, Josephus tells us that Ephesus had a large Jewish population. Maybe 10-20% of the city was Jewish. Remember, back in Acts 19 where did Paul start preaching when he was in Ephesus? He went to the synagogue, for 3 months until they finally kicked him out and then he went to the pagans/gentiles.

So imagine this baby church in Ephesus: you've got these deeply committed Jewish Christians. They've known the OT since they were babies, they're steeped in Judaism, they are the descendants of Abraham, they know the Law, and they know the right way to worship God.

And then you slam them up with a bunch of former pagan idolators who would frequent the prostitutes at the Temple of Diana wearing amulets, doing drugs and the whole rest of pagan worship. That's going to be a wild church service, you guys.

I mean, imagine Mennonites and former biker gang Christians and former drug addicts all trying to worship in the same spot without pulling their hair out.

Not quite like that, but you get the idea. The relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the Bible seems complicated. Paul says actually it's not complicated. Through Christ we are all now one. There is no more Jew/Gentile distinction. It seems they needed to be reminded of this.

So God's power, Jew/Gentile relations.

3) He's writing about **basic Christian ethics**. **Turn to 4:17-32**

We take for granted what it is to be a Christian. We know the 10 commandments - or we can recite most of them. We know some basics of Jesus's ethical teaching. But here Paul sketches out the basics of the Christian life ethically. This is an amazing section and I am excited to unpack it more, but for now let's read and notice a couple things. **Read 17-24**

Most of these things we know - tell the truth, don't be angry forever, don't be bitter. But we need to actually teach people things. We have to teach them what Christian morality is. And we need to be reminded of these things as well.

Over and over we have basic Christian morality - he goes on to elaborate more in chapter 5.

4) Theme is that the Christian's **identity is completely in Christ**.

What defines you as a person?

Is it your career?

Your family name?

Smarts? Sports? Money?

Political affiliations?

Maybe a sin defines you.
Maybe your upbringing defines you.
All those are wrong.

Paul makes it clear that for the believer, our whole identity is wrapped up in Jesus.

There's a phrase that happens over and over throughout the epistle and that is the phrase "in him" or "in Christ" or "with Christ." And what Paul is doing throughout is constantly reminding us that everything we have from God is all because of Jesus. Because we are "in Jesus" - we are united to him in faith.

Read Misc passages

Everything about us is because of Christ. It's through Christ.

You have the Father's love. Why? Christ.
You submit to your parents? Why? Christ.
You know how you grow in faith? Know Christ.
You want to thank God for what he's given you? Who do you thank? Christ.
Wives submit to your husbands like they're who?
Men loves your wives how? Like Christ.
The church is built up in Christ.

How prominent is this in Ephesians?

Slideshow - Ephesians Highlighted.

This is all 6 chapters of the book and the blue is every time the phrase is used. Over 30 times in 6 short chapters.

You know what I think Paul is driving at? Everything about us, all our hopes, promises, commands, blessings, life should point to exactly one person. Who's that?

The Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray