Paul, an Apostle to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus

Ephesians 1:1-2

This morning we begin the book of Ephesians. We start our first series in Ephesians looking at "Our Spiritual Blessings in Christ Jesus" in Ephesians 1:3-14. Today we're going to simply look at an introduction to Ephesians found in 1:1-2.

By way of introduction, I want to look at three things: 1) the author; 2) the recipients; 3) the greeting 4) The Theme

The Author – "Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (Eph. 1:1a)

The book of Ephesians was written by Paul the apostle probably during his Roman imprisonment between the years 60-62 AD. It was during this time that Paul wrote what are known as the prison epistles – Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians.

There are those who try to argue against Paul writing Ephesians by saying that someone else wrote the letter and used the name of Paul. Paul's authorship was never argued against seriously until 1792. All of the church fathers referred to Ephesians as written by Paul. It was one of the first books to be referred to as Holy Scripture. If Paul didn't write Ephesians then the writer was able to deceive the first recipients of the letter as well as deceive the church for 1800 years.

What's at stake? If Paul didn't write Ephesians we have no real reason to receive it as authoritative. But Paul did write Ephesians and there is overwhelming evidence to support the fact.

Peter alludes to the writings of Paul as Scripture:

> **There are some things in them [speaking of Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:16)**

Peter held Paul's writing to be Holy Scripture. The early church received his letters that way. 1800 years of church history holds Paul to be the author of Ephesians. When we read Ephesians we are reading the writings of Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore we are reading the very words of God Himself.

Paul's conversion to Christianity is one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The only way that you can *reasonably* account for such a radical change is that Paul did in fact witness an encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

Paul is an example of a terrorist turned evangelist overnight. Paul was formerly Saul of Tarsus, a member of a strict sect of Judaism known as the Pharisees, and he was therefore an enemy of Christianity. In fact, he saw to the imprisonment and even murder of Christians. He was a terrorist! It was while he was on his way to Damascus to capture Christians that something happened. He went in to Damascus as a man with a promising career in Judaism, a Pharisee, going to persecute Christians, but he left proclaiming faith in Jesus! What happened? Luke, one of Paul's closest companions, tells us that he

had an encounter with the risen Lord (Acts 9)! The risen and glorified Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus and the former enemy of Jesus Christ became the boldest evangelist for Jesus Christ to the point that he was willing to die for what he claimed. Paul eventually was beheaded for his faith around 68AD.

You tell me, what does it take for a man like that to do an entire 180-degree turn? People will make up a lie and may even be willing to defend it to the death if there is some sort of earthly, carnal benefit for them in doing so. There was no earthly benefit for Paul that would cause him to lie about witnessing the resurrected Jesus. It would be like a terrorist coming to America with the intention of committing an act of terrorism, only to shortly after leave America as a bold professing Christian who then goes right back to his terrorist organization, at the threat of death, to preach Jesus to them – that's Paul's story. You have to agree that something had to happen to Paul – it did…He encountered the risen Lord and it immediately changed his trajectory. ***There would be nothing to gain for Paul in following Jesus if his claim was a lie. But it wasn't a lie, he did in fact encounter Jesus, and Paul concluded that his former life was "dung" in comparison to following Christ to the point of death.***

> **But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:7-8)**

Paul was an "apostle of Christ Jesus". The word "apostle" means "one who is sent" for a specific task. Epaphroditus in Philippians is spoken of as an apostle (Phil. 2:25). Barnabas is spoken of as an apostle (Acts 14:14). Even Jesus is said to be an "apostle" of God (Heb. 3:14).

However, the NT also uses this word to speak of someone commissioned with a unique office. This is the use of "apostle" here. It's a title regarding the office of Paul. The office of an apostle was only given to those who were specifically appointed by Jesus to bear witness to having seen the risen Lord firsthand. In Luke 6 Jesus appointed the twelve disciples to be His apostles. Then later in Acts 1 after the resurrection, Peter speaks of the office of apostle that Judas held which now needed to be filled because he betrayed Jesus. The criteria Peter gives is that it would be filled with someone who had been with them from Jesus' baptism until His ascension and could be a witness to His resurrection.

Paul had not been with them, this could be why he often needed to defend his calling as an apostle. However, he *had* seen the risen Lord and was commissioned by Jesus Himself:

> **For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1 Tim. 2:7)**
>
> **Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? (1 Cor. 9:1)**

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul speaks of those who had witnessed the resurrection and of his own commission to be an apostle as to "*one untimely born*"

> ***Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor. 15:8-9)***

Paul was commissioned by Jesus as an apostle to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. His commission was unorthodox and different from the 12. Because of this he would spend most of his ministry having to defend his office as an apostle to the church that he himself served.

Notice that He is an apostle "by the will of God" – Paul did not appoint himself to this position. Paul greeting to the Galatians was similar - **"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man". (Galatians 1:1).** He goes on to show that it was Jesus Himself who revealed to Paul the gospel message and that it must be preached to the Gentiles.

So we see here that Paul wrote the book of Ephesians. He is writing with authority, as an apostle, and as a prisoner for the Lord. This isn't something he took upon himself, but it was appointed to him by Jesus Christ and by the will of God.

The Recipients – "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1b)

Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman empire located in the region of Western Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Paul had spent several years there establishing the church which eventually became a regional hub for churches in Western Asia Minor.

It is possible that the book of Ephesians wasn't actually written to Ephesus. The words, "In Ephesus" are not included in very early and reliable manuscripts (Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, P46). It could be that Ephesians was actually meant to be a circular letter (like Hebrews or James) written by Paul to the churches in the surrounding region of Ephesus. Because Ephesus was a major hub and would have been included in the circulation of this letter, it could be that the Ephesians later became associated with the city of Ephesus and the words "In Ephesus" were later added.

Ephesus was well known for its cult of Artemis and had a massive temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis. This is really important to understanding Ephesians and the audience of Asia Minor. Artemis was believed to have great power over the spiritual underworld and she was referred to with names such as "Lord" and "Savior". She was said to possess the power needed to overcome all kinds of spiritual darkness. The followers of Artemis and other magical cults would recite incantations and practice magic in order to overcome spiritual, wicked oppression. One document known as the Ephesia Grammata contained magical incantations that were used to defend the practitioner from demonic oppression. A whole collection of magical papyri has been discovered that describes the pagan witchcraft and worship of Artemis as well as the use of magic in Ephesian culture.

The cult of Artemis was a HUGE part of Ephesian culture. It was a large source of financial revenue (the temple of Artemis was actually the center for the banking industry), there was an entire month every year called the "Artemisia" that was dedicated to Artemis where Olympic style games would be held. ***Know any cultures today where entire months are dedicated to celebrate spiritual darkness? Imagine living in a culture where you are brought up to celebrate and perhaps even worship Artemis and practice magic. Now you have put your faith in Jesus, and you are still surrounded by this pagan way of life that is at the center of where you live. Paul speaks at great length about spiritual wickedness and darkness in Ephesians.***

Words and phrases that Paul uses such as "spirit of the air" and "power, rule, authority, and dominion" would mean a great deal to the people of Ephesus.

A couple of examples:

In Ephesians 1:21 Paul shows that Jesus is raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God…

> **far above all *rule* and *authority* and *power* and *dominion*, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:21).**

In Ephesians 2:2 Paul describes the Ephesians in their state before they put their faith in Jesus:

> **following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2)**

The word "prince" is the same word as "ruler" and the magical papyri describes satanic influence in terms such as "powers" that move about in the "air".

In Ephesians 2:6 – The Ephesian believers are described as "*raised with Him*" and "*seated with Him in the heavenly places*". Christ is ruling and reigning over spiritual darkness, and we too, in Christ, are ruling and reigning over spiritual darkness as we are raised and seated with Him.

In Ephesians 6:10-17 Paul writes in detail about spiritual warfare with spiritual wicked enemies.

> **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12).**

Magic and Power and Spiritual, demonic oppression are major themes in Ephesians. There is a right ordering of all things – things on earth and things in heaven (Eph. 1:10). God, in Christ, has taken everything that was turned upside down by Satan and the fall and put them back in their proper order.

Paul is picking a fight with the devil and with Gentile cult worship in the book of Ephesians. He describes the Ephesians as already ruling and reigning over spiritual darkness in Christ Jesus, and yet as still fighting a very real spiritual battle. So there is a battle with Satan in the book of Ephesians, but it's a battle that's fought from a position of victory. The Ephesians are described in 1:1 as "saints" or "holy ones" – those who have been "set apart" (hagios – set apart) from their former life of bondage and cultic/demonic worship. They are described as "faithful" which could speak of their faithfulness but could also simply describe them simply as those who are "believing".

Ephesians was written to Gentile Christians who lived in a very spiritually dark and pagan society by Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Formerly dead to God, they now found a new identity as they are "saints…and faithful in Christ Jesus".

The Greeting – "Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:2)

This is a very common greeting to Paul, and yet it is unique. The common way a Jewish person would greet someone would be to say "Shalom". It means "peace be to you". It was a way of blessing those you greeted. A common greeting for Gentiles was "grace" or "favor be upon you". Here, Paul the Jew is writing to Gentiles in Asia Minor and so he greets them "grace to you and peace". But this grace and peace is "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". And so grace and peace, we'll find are major themes in Ephesians as well. Grace – undeserved favor from God. We are saved by grace through faith and this is not from ourselves it is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Peace – we now are at peace with God as Christ has "preached peace to those who are far (Gentiles) and to those who are near (Jews) (Eph. 2:17). Jews and Gentiles who were formerly hostile to one another and both hostile to God are now at peace with one another and with God as in Christ both are reconciled to God and made into one new humanity. Jews and Gentiles are both now at peace with one another and at peace with God in the book of Ephesians.

The Theme – God's Plan in Christ to Bring Peace on Earth and in Heaven

Some see the theme of "peace" and the Mission of God to bring peace in Christ as the theme of Ephesians. The whole world around us is at war with one another and at war with Satan. But in Ephesians, the plan of God to bring about peace and reconciliation to the world has begun – on earth, and in heaven

This plan of God is best summarized in Ephesians 1:9-10 (the thesis of Ephesians):

> **Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:9-10)**

Everything that has been turned upside down by the fall, by the devil, by humanity, by sin and wickedness on earth and in heaven are turned right side up in Ephesians. Jesus is seen as ruling and reigning over all things at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:20-23). Those who were formerly dead to God are now at peace with him (Eph. 2:1-10). Jew and Gentile hostility is removed as the law that separated both has been abolished in Jesus and both can now be at peace with one another and at peace with God. (2:11-22). The Gentiles who were formerly far off from God have been included into His family in the fulfillment of this mysterious plan of God of which Paul was a steward (3:1-13). The church has now been built that Christ rules over and there is unity in the midst of diversity where there was formerly division and animosity (4:1-16). Our lives are being set back in proper order as we put on Christ and put off the old man (4:17-32). Love and Submission in relationships are now set back in their proper order: Marriage turmoil from the fall is turned right side up (5:22-33), parenting set in its proper place (6:1-4) and work relationships are put in proper order (6:5-9). The devil no longer has power over us…we have the armor of God with which we can fight against him (6:10-17)…and we fight from a position of victory as Jesus is raised and seated over every enemy of God and we too are raised and seated with Him and in Him.

If you are a Christian, you are no longer who you formerly were – In 1 Timothy 1 Paul describes himself as the chief of sinners…he saw his salvation as a pattern, an example, used by God to demonstrate God's mercy and perfect patience. We have to be reminded who we are in Christ. We are alive to God. We are chosen by God. We are adopted into His family. We have the inheritance of Christ. We have redemption by His blood through faith in Him – the forgiveness of sins. You are chosen, adopted, alive,

redeemed, forgiven, set apart to holiness, His handy-work. You can now have peace with others, you are now free from condemnation of the devil. You are no longer under the wrath of God. You are no longer a son of disobedience. You are seated in Christ in heavenly places at the right hand of God. You are a recipient of the grace, kindness, and mercy of God. So be who you already are…that's the exhortation of Paul to the Ephesians and to you and I…be who you are.