

## Greetings from Paul

### Passage

*<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### Introduction

As part of my intention to share some thoughts from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians with you, last month I introduced you to the Apostle himself. I tried to explain just who Paul was and how he came to play such an important part in the growth and development of the early Christian church. When I look at Paul's background and the difference in his life between the time before his conversion and the time after that momentous event, the only conclusion I can come to is that there is indeed hope for all of us; hope in the Lord Jesus Christ that is.

This morning I want to look at some of the background to this particular Epistle together with a fairly detailed exposition of the opening two verses before moving through the Epistle over the coming months. The person that many regard as the greatest British preacher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, me included, Martyn Lloyd Jones, preached 232 sermons on this wonderful Epistle. I should point out that there are 6 chapters and 155 verses in the Epistle, so I think it is fair to say that Dr Lloyd Jones really dug into what Ephesians has to say to us. You may rest assured that I don't intend to go anywhere near that many sermons!

### Background

We learn from [Acts 18:18-23](#) that Paul visited Ephesus very briefly in 52AD during what we know as his second missionary journey. I've not been able to discover just how long he stayed other than that it was long enough for him to make his customary appearance in the synagogue where, as always, he shared the gospel with those present. Paul never missed an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with as many as possible and although his main mission was to be an Apostle to the Gentiles he also wanted to win Jews to Christ as well.

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It was during what we know as his third missionary journey that Paul visited Ephesus and stayed for quite some time, staying there between 53 and 55AD. He preached regularly in the synagogue for a period of approximately three months before strong and determined opposition led him to move to a lecture hall in Tyrannus where he preached and taught on a daily basis. Over many years I've preached in various settings on hundreds of occasions and yet my efforts are nothing when compared to the number of sermons Paul must have preached during his time in Ephesus and elsewhere. He undoubtedly put those three years he spent with Jesus in Arabia into good use!

Having visited Ephesus during that missionary journey, it was some years later that Paul sat down to write this letter somewhere between 60 and 62 AD and we can deduce from [Acts 28:30](#) that this was during the time of his house arrest in Rome.

The Epistle itself is very similar to the other twelve in the New Testament that are attributed to Paul. All of them follow what was a standard pattern for letter writing at the time. The opening verses include details of who wrote the letter and to whom followed by greetings in one form or another. This tended to be a short section which was then followed by the main body of the letter. Paul's closing comments generally included final greetings from him and others together with messages to pass on to the recipient. These comments tend to occupy a handful of verses although in the case of the Epistle to the Romans they occupy a whole chapter! However, in this Epistle there are no such greetings other than a warm comment about his helper Tychicus.

### **Paul**

Before looking at [1:1](#) I'd like to point out something that I missed when I spoke to you last month on "*Who was Paul?*" I mentioned then the comment in [Acts 13:9a](#) where we read, "*Then Saul, who was also called Paul ...*" I said at the time that we didn't know why his name had changed. However, I have since learned that Saul was a Jewish name whereas Paul was more of a Greek or Gentile name and given Paul's ministry was mainly to the Gentiles it was obviously more acceptable to have a Gentile name.

Paul identifies himself as the writer of the letter in the very first word of [1:1](#). However, there are those who suggest that it is possible Paul didn't actually write it and that it may have

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been one of his team who did so albeit in a similar style. The letter leans heavily on Colossians given the many similar phrases and thoughts contained in it, similarities which would point to Paul being the author. However, one clue that someone else may have written the letter comes as a result of the comment in **1:15** where we read, “*ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints ...*” That comment seems rather strange given the time Paul spent living in Ephesus and so he would surely have seen their faith for himself. However, we need to understand that this letter was probably written in or around 60AD some five years after Paul left Ephesus and as the church could well have grown considerably he would not necessarily have known everyone now involved there.

As I mentioned a moment ago, there is also a problem with the closing greetings and messages. The lack of any personal greetings seems strange and could point to someone else being the author since Paul always acknowledged those he knew. It could add weight to the thought that the Epistle was a circular letter rather than something written specifically for the Ephesians.

### **Apostle**

Having identified himself as the writer of the Epistle Paul next tells us that he is an Apostle and so we have to ask, what is an Apostle? Now I have always understood an Apostle to be someone who has met the risen Christ face to face which would of course include the original 12 disciples. Mark tells us how these men were first chosen and appointed as Apostles in **Mark 3:13-15** where we read, “*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.*” The Greek for Apostle is *apostolos* which means “*sent one*” and the Greek word for “*send out*” has the same root. Mark lists the names of those chosen in **Mark 3:16-19** and it is important to understand that these 12 men were all appointed by Jesus and it was He Who designated them as Apostles with special responsibilities. These responsibilities were many and varied and included preaching the gospel (**1 Corinthians 1:17**), teaching and prayer (**Acts 6:4**), performing miracles (**2 Corinthians 12:12**) and building up leaders of the church (**Acts 14:23**). That may seem a daunting list but we must remember that these men were empowered by Christ in all they

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did and had help and power from the Holy Spirit. In the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus told the remaining 11 Apostles to “*go and make disciples of all nations*”. When we place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour we become His disciples; that is, followers. We can all be His disciples but as we have not met the risen Lord face to face we cannot be seen as Apostles.

I have not found a verse that explicitly states that Paul met Jesus face to face. However, we may be able to deduce from **Galatians 1:17-18** where Paul spent time in Arabia learning more about Jesus that he may well have met and seen the Lord. Paul himself implies in **1 Corinthians 9:1** that he did see Jesus. Paul certainly heard the Lord’s voice and was appointed by Him as an Apostle following that Damascus Road encounter and he was subsequently given the special responsibility of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. That surely leaves little doubt that Paul was quite entitled to call himself an Apostle.

### **Called by Christ**

As I’ve just mentioned, Paul was an Apostle who was called by God through Jesus Christ. He himself did not choose to be an Apostle, in fact it was probably far from his mind even after that Damascus Road encounter. It was God Who chose Paul from before the beginning of time to serve Him in that role as the Apostle who would take the gospel to the Gentiles so that they could be part of His family. God did not intend that family to be exclusively for Jews, especially as they kept disobeying Him! In order for the Gentiles to become followers they needed someone to take the gospel to them and Paul was chosen for that task, just as God told Ananias before the faithful and obedient disciple collected the blind Saul in order to help and heal him. After Ananias had balked at the idea of helping Saul, God said to him, “*Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.*” (**Acts 9:15-16**)

Isaiah prophesied that God would include the Gentiles in His family when he wrote, “*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*” (**Isaiah 49:6**). Jesus was the One Who would be that light. Later in **Isaiah 49:22** the prophet reported God’s word when God said, “*See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters*

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*on their shoulders.*” By way of confirming that prophecy by Isaiah Paul told the Galatians in **Galatians 1:15-17**, “*But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.*” Notice from that that Paul’s calling was all of God and nothing of Paul or any other man. God had His plan for the Gentiles and Paul was a major part of that plan. Despite that Paul seems to have a low opinion of himself partly due to his past persecution of the church. This is what he told the Corinthians: “*For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*” (**1 Corinthians 15:9-10**) Notice that although he finds his past upsetting Paul does acknowledge that it was only by the grace of God that he was able to do what he did.

### **Will of God**

It is Paul himself who tells us that he was called by “*the will of God*” following his incredible meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was God’s decree that this should come about and so could not be ignored or forgotten about. Because it was God’s will that this should happen it is very clear that Paul’s Apostleship did not come from man or by some form of a vote but purely from God. What a privilege to be appointed by the will of God.

### **Saints**

Having dealt with details of the writer of the letter, we next learn that it was addressed “*To the saints ...*” The word or name “*saints*” is one of Paul’s favourite ways of identifying believers in Jesus Christ and he uses a similar greeting in Romans and Philippians. The word “*saints*” is used here to mean believers in Christ and should not be confused with the way in which the Roman Catholic Church uses the same word. They use the word as a means of elevating people to a particularly exalted position based on an apparent miracle that they have been proved to have performed. In that way these people are set apart and raised above other believers; that is not what Paul is suggesting. In Paul’s usage the word means all those who have come to faith in Jesus and in doing so have become His

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followers; it does not indicate any special position or role in a hierarchy of any sort. As “*saints*” we are all “*ordinary*” followers of Christ, and I’m not using the word “*ordinary*” in any detrimental way. Paul uses “*saints*” throughout his Epistles and in this Epistle to the Ephesians the word is used 7 times in the original Greek version whilst one commentator suggested it was 9 times although I’ve only been able to find 7 occurrences! The Greek for “*saints*” appears in **1:1**, **1:15**, **1:18**, **3:18** and **6:18**. The NIV translates the same Greek word in **3:8** and **4:12** as “*God’s people*”.

### Ephesus

Paul tells us that he is writing “*to the saints in Ephesus*”. However, the question has been raised as to whether this letter was exclusive to Ephesus or whether it was a circular sent to a number of churches? This question arises as a result of some original manuscripts omitting the words “*in Ephesus*”. The suggestion is that this was a circular letter with the name of each church to receive the letter being inserted before being delivered by Tychicus. In his *Notes on the New Testament*, John Wesley, the 18<sup>th</sup> theologian and founder of the Methodist church, suggested that this letter was to the believers at Ephesus “*and all other adjacent places. For this Epistle is not directed to the Ephesians only, but likewise to all the other churches of Asia.*”<sup>1</sup> Another source<sup>2</sup> I consulted agreed adding that the letter was intended for Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and of course, Ephesus. The other two churches in Asia, those at Philadelphia and Laodicea may also have been included in the circulation. When you look at a map of the region you will see that these churches follow a logical route through the region of Asia and it’s interesting to note that these seven churches are all referred to in **Revelation 2** and **3** as having received letters from Jesus criticising their performance.

Paul wrote to most if not quite all of the churches he founded and took a keen interest in their spiritual progress. For reasons best known to the Holy Spirit Who guided those who put the original Canon of Scripture together, very obviously not all of those letters are included in the New Testament. For instance, we know that there were at least four letters sent to the church in Corinth although only two are found in the New Testament. Another

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley, John, *Notes on the New Testament* (electronic version)

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Ephesians*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 1986, page xii

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example comes in **Colossians 4:16** where we read “*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.*” That comment would suggest that there was a letter to the church in Laodicea that is not included in the New Testament. Despite that we’ll treat this Epistle as if it was written specifically to and for the believers in Ephesus.

### Faithful

To reinforce the point that he is writing to believers in Christ, Paul also describes them as “*the faithful*”. They have become believers and have remained faithful to Christ. Their faith was rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ and we should follow their example and remain faithful to Him and to our heavenly Father. I wonder if we are like them; since we placed our faith in Jesus Christ have we remained faithful to Him or have we drifted from time to time? The pull of the world is powerful and the problems and opposition that we face can sometimes lead us astray and away from our faith. We need to avoid that at all costs and join the Ephesians in remaining faithful to Jesus. When writing to the Galatians, Paul told them that they “*belong to the family of believers.*” (**Galatians 6:10**). Not only do we have Christ with us at all times but we are also members of a family and have their support to help us.

### In Christ

Once again we see Paul emphasising a point when he tells us that the believers are faithful “*in Christ Jesus*”. The city of Ephesus was the centre of the worship of Artemis; a goddess described in various sources as being the goddess of wild life, hunting and the underworld. The city had a huge temple built in her honour and local silversmiths made a lot of money by producing silver statues of her and the temple. This worship of an idol became big business and Paul’s activities in Ephesus had caused a major disruption to the trade of the numerous silversmiths in the city who made these images of Artemis. On one occasion a man named Demetrius stood up and said to the assembled crowd, “*Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 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. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess*”

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*Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." (Acts 19:25-27)* As a result of that speech the people were roused to anger and a riot ensued during which Paul was asked not to venture into the theatre to continue his ministry. As you may imagine the believers in Ephesus were surrounded by followers of Artemis and as such were constantly under pressure to renounce their faith and return to worshipping a silver idol. Even though Paul had left Ephesus shortly after the riot he obviously felt that it was important in this letter to encourage and reassure the believers in Ephesus that their faith was in Jesus Christ and that they should remain faithful to Him.

That phrase "*in Christ*" together with "*in Christ Jesus*" are key expressions in this letter as they are used frequently throughout the Epistle. If I can count correctly then it appears that Paul used the phrase **15** times and it is a main focal point of what Paul has to say to the Ephesians. For Paul, to be "*in Christ*" meant to be personally united to Christ, as branches are to the vine and limbs to the body, believers are to Christ and to one another. According to many passages in the New Testament, and especially in those written by Paul; to be a Christian is in essence to be "*in Christ*" and to be one with Him and His people. I intend to look further at what it means to be "*in Christ*" in a future sermon.

### **Ephesians 1:2**

Our examination of **1:2** is a lot shorter and easier! The verse is in two parts and in the first part we see a form of greeting that was fairly common in letters at the time. The normal style of letters was to include greetings of one sort or another with the Greek style tending to be related to "*grace*" (Greek: *charis*) and the Jewish style was related to "*peace*" (Hebrew: *shalom*) and so their letters often began "*grace and peace*". Paul combines these two thoughts when he uses the phrase "*grace and peace to you*" as a way of greeting both the Jewish and the Gentile believers. Grace is that undeserved and unearned gift that God gives to believers the moment they come to faith in Jesus Christ. God continues to shower us with His grace throughout our daily walk with Christ and in many ways it is God's grace that keeps us going.

The Jewish greeting of peace covered a number of thoughts. It follows on from grace since receiving God's grace brings with it a peace in our hearts that is difficult to comprehend just



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as Paul told the Philippians when he spoke of the peace of God “*which transcends all understanding*” (Philippians 4:7) before adding that this peace will “*guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” That final thought is important and follows on from Paul’s comment in 2:14 that Christ “*himself is our peace*”. This very special peace is ours when we come to faith in Christ and allow Him into our lives and hearts. When we do that His grace will flow into us and will lead to evermore peace in our hearts that we so desperately need.

This greeting that includes grace and peace is included in each of Paul’s 12 other Epistles whilst in the two Epistles to Timothy Paul also includes the thought of mercy.

By including our Father and Jesus as the providers of this grace and peace, Paul is putting God and His Son on the same level which is as it should be. He is also making it clear that they are the Source of the grace and peace that he has just referred to.

### Conclusion

Regardless of who may have written it and whether or not it was a circular letter, this Epistle to the Ephesians is one of the most beautiful books in the New Testament. Martin Luther is reported to have said that the Epistle to the Romans is “*the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression*”.<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd Jones, who I mentioned earlier, agreed with that statement before adding, “*the Epistle to the Ephesians is the sublimest and the most majestic expression of it.*”<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to disagree with that beautiful description of Paul’s Epistle and whilst there may be some scholastic disputes over who wrote it, there can be little doubt that it is focused on Jesus Christ and all that He brings into our lives.

Despite some scholars disagreeing, it seems to be generally accepted that the writer was Paul and it’s quite amazing to think that despite his earlier persecution of followers of Christ, his unorthodox entry into faith in Jesus Christ should lead to this Epistle as well as the other 12 contained in the New Testament.

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<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Jones, Martyn, *God’s Ultimate Purpose*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1978, page 12

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd Jones, page 12

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Although the opening two verses only cover who the author was and his opening greetings, it is always helpful to understand such matters as they help to set the tone for what follows in the following chapters. The recipients of this letter were undoubtedly blessed by its contents and my hope is that we too will be similarly blessed.