

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## ***An Introduction to Ephesians***

### ***Ephesians 1:1-2***

**Keywords:** Praise, Thankfulness, Election, Sovereignty, Adoption, Blessings

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Paul immediately brings his readers into an invitation to praise God for the great things which He has done for and to them. He begins with the humbling doctrine of election and moves to the hope-filled doctrine of adoption. And then shows us the purpose for all of this, that we might be a people who praise God.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Give basic introductory background.
  - 1. Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.
    - a. Several other times Paul identifies that his apostleship is of God's will. And in every other place it is because people who receive his letter challenge that claim.
    - b. Notice also that he is Christ Jesus' apostle, he belong to Jesus.
      - (1) This conveys the honor and authority that is his as an apostle.
      - (2) The office of apostle is a commissioned messenger. And what he makes plain up front is the one who commissioned him with this message was Jesus Himself.
      - (3) Notice also how he put the order as "Christ" and the "Jesus." This is to emphasize that he serves the promised Messiah/Savior who is Jesus.
  - 2. In all of this there is a humility that does not wrap itself in wimpiness.
    - a. He recognizes that his position and authority does not arise from himself and any decision he made.
    - b. But it does not cause him to hold back on writing boldly and even bluntly to these brothers and sisters in Christ.
    - c. In fact, it emboldens him.
- B. The recipients.

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1. They are the saints—those set apart for God’s use and purposes.
  2. And they are the faithful ones—the gospel always changes the person. One’s heart is given over to a commitment of Jesus as your Lord whom you serve.
  3. But notice where: "in Christ Jesus." This union with Jesus is huge in Paul’s writings and are often the basis for most everything, if not everything we enjoy as those who are saved from hell and forgiven of our rebellion.
- C. The blessing.
1. This choice of words is purposeful for in using "grace" and "peace" he incorporates both the Gentile/Greek world and the Hebrew/Jewish world, something that he will later address more forcefully.
  2. When he says "grace" it function like a "prayer-wish" (Thielman, 35) desiring God’s grace to continue to be upon them.
    - a. It is like when I say good bye to many of you I say "Lord bless." It is intentional and meant for your good.
    - b. The grace of God flavors the entire New Testament and speaks of God’s good will, not only unto salvation, toward believers.
    - c. This is done in assisting, sustaining and encouraging us.
  3. "Peace" speaks to the common word of blessing and desire for "shalom" a place of well-being where all things are in proper order and place.
- D. For the remainder of our time I want to focus upon just Paul. A man who has huge influence in the Christian faith. A man who had a unique upbringing as God sovereignly prepared him for the task of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

## **II. Paul—A Brief Description.**

- A. Paul of “Tarsus.”
1. Acts 21:39.
  2. Although Saul was “brought up” in Jerusalem, he returned to his home city of Tarsus after his conversion (Acts 9:30). Doubtless he was proud of his linkage to Tarsus, a university city as well as center of government, banking, and commerce. Paul was hence well acquainted with pagan “high culture”—an acquaintance that, when sanctified, would thrust him, not Simon Peter, forward as the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). Roman citizenship and life in a university city, after all, did have its privileges. This

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background would aid him enormously during his apostolic ministry—particularly in a city like Athens.

Why was Tarsus the city which should produce the apostle to the Gentiles? Uniting oriental and occidental cultural and intellectual life, the institutions of Tarsus were uniquely suited to mold Paul’s intellectual development. Cicero was governor of Tarsus in the mid-fifties BC. It was here that Mark Antony met Cleopatra in 41 BC. Tarsus was the native city of several famous Stoic philosophers—among them, Zeno, Antipater, Athenadorus, and Nestor. In the period of 27 BC-AD 14, during the reign of Augustus, Tarsus came to be renowned as a center of intellectual life. As a “university” city, Tarsus is said to have surpassed Athens and Alexandria in terms of zeal for learning. (TrinJ 16:1 (Spring 1995) 49).

3. We know that he was a tentmaker as well and according to the customs of the times it was probably due to the fact that his father was a tentmaker as well.
4. Although being a citizen of Tarsus was helpful and good, there was another citizenship that Paul enjoyed throughout his life, being a citizen of Rome.

B. Paul a “Citizen of Rome.”

1. Acts 16:37 ; 22:28.
2. One was born a Roman citizen because your father was a Roman citizen before you. However there is no information about the family of Paul that helps us in this matter.
3. It is clear that Paul, first known as Saul of Tarsus, was not just a basic run-of-the-mill Jew. Rather he was a man who was raised from childhood in Judaism and grew up with the reading and living out of the Old Testament. As he describes himself in Phil. 3:5, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews.

C. Paul the “Pharisee.”

1. Phil. 3:4-6.
  - a. Important passage that helps us begin to appreciate this man raised up by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles.
  - b. Note in vs 5 he is called a Pharisee and in vs. 6 he speaks of his zeal for the cause of God.
  - c. This zeal is a strong emotion that goes deep into the soul and literally drives people along. For him, that zeal drove his decision to persecute the Church.

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2. Romans 10:1-2 Paul speaks out of this understanding of the Jewish heart when he says, “Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”
  - a. But this zeal is driving them in their lives and understanding.
  - b. Paul speaks of this zeal in his own life in another passage in Galatians 1:13.
3. A basic conclusion that we can draw from all of this is that zealousness defined the life that Paul took in his days before his conversion. I would also say that this zealousness never stopped, but, to rework Romans 10:2, it was now a zealousness according to knowledge.
4. This zealousness helps us understand what kind of a Pharisee Paul was. As he said of himself, he was not just a Jew, but a Pharisee, and not just any kind of Pharisee, but the kind that was zealous, even to the point of persecuting others.
  - a. This makes him most likely what was known as a Shammai Pharisee.
  - b. There was a split within the world of Pharisees before Paul’s time. There became two basic schools of thought, both following the influence of a great teacher, either Hillel or Shammai.
  - c. Hillel tended toward leniency while Shammai was known at the strict one, the fundamentalist of the day. The followers of each group would then discuss and argue about various points of theology from these positions.
    - (1) An example of a Hillelite would be the Pharisee, Gamaliel.
    - (2) Acts 5:34-39.
  - d. Hillel’s position ultimately became the preeminent view within Judaism. But during the time of Paul there was still a lot of controversy and a lot of public and private debate. This is the world that Paul was raised, one filled with hot tempers and fierce loyalty to party line.
  - e. For Paul, many of the Hillelites were Jews who had compromised the Torah, what we would call the Old Testament. They were the “liberals” of our day.

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5. These two positions affected how the various Israelite or Jew would live in his world and view that world.
  - a. The Hillelites would have been content to let the unbelievers, the Gentiles rule the world, including them as long as they could continue to practice their religion in peace.
  - b. The Shammaites rejected that belief. For them, there could be no other master but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There could be no real peace until the presence and pressure of Gentiles were thrown off and they could fully serve God.
6. 'Zeal' for the Shammaites would mean much the same as Jihad for the militant, fundamentalist Muslim.
7. In Acts 22:3 Paul says that he had been educated under Gamaliel, so there was certainly the influence of the Hillelite position in his life. But as we consider the other information that I have spoken of it appears that Paul respected Gamaliel but rejected aspects of his teaching in relationship to a Jew's relations with the Gentiles and the strictness of the Law.
  - a. Acts 7:58-8:3
  - b. Gamaliel would not have accepted as good and proper the stoning of Stephan, but for Paul, still called Saul, it was a good thing.
  - c. The thinking that drove this type of violence and passion was found in how the typical Jew understood the bible.
    - (1) God had chosen out of all of humanity Israel to be His chosen people. He had given them a covenant. He had given them the Law and the Prophets.
    - (2) The purpose of this was that they would be a light among the darkness of the Gentiles and that through them ultimately the fall of Adam and its effects on humanity would be done away with.
    - (3) But the problem was that Israel had strayed from God and as a result the promises that were given to them, with a promise of a golden age of Israel where the pagans were brought into submission to God was being withheld.
    - (4) But the promises still remained and built into them was the key promise that one day God, Yahweh, would reign on earth.

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- (a) A key passage that would be typical of this is Isaiah 52.
- (b) Isaiah 52:6-10.
- (5) And for the Shammaite, this was not something that they were to wait for passively. They would see that it was their job to bring this final glory into reality. They would powerfully react against all that opposed God and His plan and people.
- 8. This was the zeal of Paul, when he was still named Saul. This was a man who did delight in God and sought to magnify His Name and even defend the honor of that Name. And this zealousness for God did not end at his conversion.
- D. Paul, the “Christian.”
  - 1. Acts 9:1ff.
    - a. We see the depth of this zealousness in the first verse. We see him getting letters of approval from the high priest so that the various synagogues would not prevent him from doing his work.
    - b. Damascus was a city of about 150,000 and was a 6 day walk from Jerusalem.
    - c. Apparently he was close to Damascus when he was converted.
    - d. The light came and he fell to the ground. The word there speaks of falling into ruins, collapsing, or prostrating your body in worship.
    - e. Note the words of Christ. Close connection between the Lord and the Church, one that we cannot easily separate.
    - f. Note the words of Paul.
      - (1) The term “Lord” is important for it is not a word that he would use casually. It would be normally reserved for God alone.
      - (2) This must have been an amazing event. For Saul many things radically began to change at that time.
      - (3) He realized that this one He thought was a fraud, one who was a threat to the glory of God was not a fraud at all.

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- (4) The resurrection of Jesus showed him that Jesus had been approved of by God. That Jesus was not the enemy but that he was exactly whom He claimed to be, Jesus the Christ (Messiah).
  - (5) For Saul, there was a massive theological shift that occurred then. For he saw that the “new age” of the reign of God had truly already come. That Jesus Christ was the king.
  - (6) He realized then that the enemies of Israel, sin, death, and Satan were defeated foes.
2. Paul entered Damascus and found Annanias (10-19).
  3. Notice how the zealotry did not change however. He was as committed as He had been before.
    - a. Verse 20 “immediately.”
    - b. The message was a key one for Jews. Jesus was the Son of God.
      - (1) For Paul, this had been confirmed in the resurrection.
      - (2) Romans 1:4.
    - c. Not only the Son of God, but he was “the Messiah” (verse 22); note also Acts 17:1-3..
  4. He also had problems because now the tables were turned on him and those who were rejecting Jesus plotted his death (23-24).
    - a. Notice that he already began to have disciples.
  5. It was here that he probably went into Arabia for 3 years, according to Gal. 1:17-18. There he was taught by the revelation of Jesus Christ.
  6. Only then did he come back to Jerusalem but he also was not readily welcomed into the churches because of his past (Acts 9:26ff).

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. So this is Paul. A complex man, a unique man, a prepared man who brought life through the gospel to the world of the Gentiles.
- B. Now turn back to Ephesians 1. In vs 2 Paul gives this short blessing and he then moves quickly into a very unique section known as a *berakah*.
  1. No other New Testament letter opens like it does here in Ephesians.

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2. 3-14, to remind you, is a single sentence that seamlessly takes the saints and faithful from eternity past to eternity future.
  3. It's function and purpose in this letter is important to understand. It serves to form the identity of the people of God (Gombis, 67).
  4. What he invites us all to do is to look at what God has done and how they fit into God's vision and purpose for reality.
  5. We are to see these mind-blowing acts of God as His glorious gifts to us. He places His acts on display and then calls us to give Him praise and thanks.
  6. Notice this is seen in vss 6, 12 and 14.
  7. So as we plunge right into the deep end of theology do it with a heart that is filled with anticipation to see the depth and fulness of the glory of God in the salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ.
- C. What Paul is doing in these verse is not a theological treatise but a very carefully written declaration of who and what we are because God crucified Jesus, raised Jesus, placed us in Jesus and gave us the Holy Spirit.
1. It is designed to help transform us from what we think we are to what we truly are in Jesus.
  2. It is to set the stage for the rest of the book of Ephesians.
  3. And over the next three sermons I hope to unpack this passage with that in mind.