

A Greeting of Grace

Ephesians 1: 1-2

Today I want to begin a series of messages that will lead us through the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Ephesian church. While the letter to the Roman believers is considered Paul's "magnum opus," Ephesians has been referred to as the "Queen of the Epistles." One cannot doubt the significant doctrinal truths Paul presents within this great epistle. The major theme of Ephesians is Reconciliation achieved through God's Redemptive plan for humanity.

As one studies the life and ministry of Paul, his love and devotion for the church are quickly apparent. His ministry in Ephesus was certainly no exception. In fact, Paul's ministry there lasted longer than any other. While scholars cannot agree on an exact time, we can be certain he ministered there at least two and a half years, with some suggesting he may have been in Ephesus for as long as three and a half years.

What began with twelve Jewish believers, became a strong and vibrant church in Ephesus. We know the church remained at the time of the Revelation because Jesus sent a specific word to the Ephesian church. Even though the Lord commended much that was healthy in the church, He did admonish them for leaving their first love.

Having some basic insight to the culture and social environment of Ephesus at the time of Paul's writing will help us better understand this powerful epistle, and even shed some light on their diminished love for the Lord in the Revelation. There were 230 cities along the coastline of Asia Minor in that day, and Ephesus was the most important. She boasted a natural harbor that accommodated great commerce and travel. Along with the booming commerce, Ephesus was also one of the greatest cultural and religious sites of that time. The temple of Diana was located in Ephesus, bringing in untold visitors annually for the cult-worship rituals.

Unfortunately for Ephesus, the great natural harbor filled with silt and became less desirable than the port in neighboring Smyrna. Ephesus became a dying city but refused to accept the reality of her condition. She depended on her past reputation, the city she had formerly been, rather than striving to renew life and sustainability. Eventually she succumbed to the disease of sensual pleasure. The church eventually died as well, failing to return to her first love.

This serves as the backdrop for Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Like the culture around them, humanity stood in need of new life and vitality. Simply relying on one's prior works or accomplishments would not provide reconciliation to God or redemption from sin. Paul knew the city of Ephesus was a clear representation of the dreadful condition of sinful humanity. As we begin to examine the [insights](#) of Paul's opening words, I want to consider: [A Greeting of Grace](#).

I. The Greeting Revealed (1) – Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. In these simple words of greeting, Paul reveals much about himself and his desire for the church. We discover:

A. Paul's Authority (1a) – Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. Paul introduced himself in the opening statement, letting the church know this letter was from the beloved apostle who had planted the church there and cared so deeply for them and their well-being. In regard to Paul's authority, he revealed two significant insights. This introduction revealed:

1. His Position – Paul was quick to remind the reader that he was in fact an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. While this is not uncommon in Paul's writings, I am convinced the reference to his apostleship was done with purpose. In some settings, like his work in the region of Galatia, Paul's apostolic authority was challenged. Some refused to submit to the authority he carried as an apostle of the Lord. This reference was not made in arrogance or to inflate his ego, but rather to remind them of the call he had received of the Lord to serve in the capacity in which he did. The Lord had separated Paul unto a special work, and the church would do well to heed his instruction and receive this letter as it truly was – the Word of God.

➤ It is also evident that Paul desired to relate to the church through the mention of his apostleship. He had received a work of ministry to benefit the church, and yet he was a servant of the Lord as they were. While he enjoyed a special calling and work, he too was nothing more than a sinner saved by grace whom God chose to use. By identifying with the Lord, in essence he also identified with the church. (We are all part of the same body. Each has different gifts and abilities, but we all serve the same Lord and should strive for a common goal. Regardless of our position within the body, like Paul, we too are nothing more than sinners saved by grace being graciously used of the Lord for His glory.)

2. God's Providence (1a) – Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. Although Paul was not ashamed of the position he enjoyed, he wanted to ensure the reader understood the providence of God in his life. He had not chosen this work of his own desire. In fact, when one studies the life of Paul, it is evident that he had no desire for the things of God. He hated the church and the Lord, doing all he could to defeat the church and hinder the spread of the Gospel. His standing and position in ministry had come according to the will of God. I believe Paul was offering a word of praise and gratitude unto the Lord. He was where he was in life, enjoying the blessings of the Lord, all due to the divine providence of a gracious God.

➤ We too should rejoice for the providence of God in our lives. I am thankful for all the Lord has done and continues to accomplish in my life. I do not stand before you today of my own choosing or within my own ability. Apart from the grace and provision of God I would yet be in my sin, lost and undone without hope, and destined for eternity in hell. It is nothing less

than God's good grace that has brought me to the position I enjoy in life. God had a work for Paul to perform and He has a plan and purpose for all who are born-again in Christ. [John 15:16](#) – *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

B. Paul's Audience (1b) – [Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus](#). Like his personal introduction, the audience to whom Paul spoke was also two-fold. He was writing to:

1. The Local Church – Paul clearly stated that his letter was written to the saints at Ephesus. He was writing to a literal body of believers who met within the city of Ephesus for the purpose of worshiping the Lord. He was writing to individuals who lived and ministered within the vast city. Paul was well aware of the church in Ephesus, having founded it, and he remained burdened for the ministry they were responsible to engage and carry out. He realized the significance of the local church and sought to equip them for fulfilling ministry.

➤ I do not understand how anyone can read the New Testament, the epistles in particular, and miss the significance of the local church. I realize we are part of the greater body of Christ, but the Lord has placed us within this context for a reason. In order to serve the Lord and be pleasing to His desire for the church, every believer should be active and engaged within the local church. God has called Shady Grove to a work that is specific to us. He has gifted and enabled us to faithfully fulfill our calling. Nothing can replace the local church within the Lord's plan to further the Gospel and make disciples.

2. The Global Church – It seems apparent that Paul made reference to all the faithful in Christ as well, not just the saints of God within the church at Ephesus. Often Paul's letters were circulated among the churches and not kept solely for the benefit of the recipient. Paul likely expected the Ephesian letter to be read among other churches throughout the region.

➤ These words serve as a two-fold reminder to the church today. We are part of the larger body of Christ. While the local church has great significance, we cannot dismiss the work of the church as a whole. We should rejoice in the victories and spiritual success of other congregations. The work of the Great Commission is not merely about growing attendance at Shady Grove, but impacting the world with the Gospel. When possible, we should join in cooperative efforts with sister churches, whether local or around the world, to further the advancement of the Kingdom.

➤ Also, the principles Paul would share in this letter were not reserved for Ephesus alone. The great doctrines of redemption and reconciliation are universal and applicable to all people

of all generations. The same Gospel Paul preached in Ephesus is the Gospel we need to continue sharing in our day. The admonitions and instruction for victorious Christian life exceed the limitations of time, culture, and geographic boundaries. The Word of God, including the Ephesian letter, needs to be preached and heeded by all people, everywhere, in every generation.

II. The Grace Desired (2) – *Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.* As Paul concluded his greeting, he revealed his desire for the church. Consider:

A. The Substance – Paul prayed the church in Ephesus would receive and enjoy the grace of God and peace from God. Being part of the New Testament church, having spent years in Bible study and reading, these words may seem as nothing more than a greeting, but they are very significant. Paul was not seeking fluff or filler as he penned words on the page. He knew the benefit of God's grace and peace. He had rested in both on numerous occasions, during times when it seemed as if God was the only one who remained. He longed for the church, both in Ephesus and at large, to experience grace and peace.

➤ There are times in the busyness of life that we fail to recognize all the Lord provides for us as we strive to serve Him in a hostile world. I am very thankful for the grace and peace of God being offered freely without measure. Our Lord doesn't want us to simply exist; He wants us to have abundant life in Him. His grace and peace provide much needed strength and guidance to endure when life is difficult.

B. The Source – Paul also reminded them that grace and peace were available through God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. In the next few weeks, we will discuss the roles of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit in our salvation and security. We serve a mighty God who is more than able to provide our every need. While they are three distinct persons, He is one God. It is impossible to fully describe or comprehend the Trinity, but I rejoice in a triune God who loves, cares, and provides for us. We are secure within His mighty hand and blessed with His daily provision.

Conclusion: These verses would be easy to read and yet fail to give them the consideration they deserve. I hope you have been encouraged and challenged by considering the blessing of being saved by the Lord's grace, placed within the church, and kept by His sovereign grace and power. If there are needs in your life, bring those to the Lord. He is more than able to meet your need and stands ready to respond to your situation. Clearly, Paul is writing to the church, to those saved by the Lord's grace. If you remain unsaved, now is the time to repent of your sin and believe on the finished work of Christ to secure your salvation. Come to Him in repentance and faith and be saved today.