

Sermon Title: Effusing About Ephesians)  
Scripture Text: Eph. 1:1-2 (Ephesians #1)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-9-21

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I'd like you to join me in a new venture. I want to start in the Book of Ephesians. And I say "start"; if you have a memory that goes way back to three weeks ago today, after we had finished the Sermon on the Mount, and the *very strong* exhortation at the end: "Make sure you know that *many* will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I'm going to say, 'Depart from Me! I *never* knew you!' " (see Matt. 7:22-23). That is *meant* to be absolutely bone-chilling, scare-you-to-death—to scare you to *Christ*, to turn to Him for salvation!

And I thought after that, that it would be good to talk about what it is that you *get* when you come to Christ. It's not like you just get on a treadmill and you work super-hard and hope that someday you're good enough for Heaven. No, you come and He "takes away" your "sin" (Jn. 1:29), and you're "forgiven" (Rom. 4:7), and you "stand" in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2), and you're "complete...in Him" (Col. 2:10).

So I decided I wanted to preach on one of my favorite verses: Ephesians Chapter 1, Verse 3, which says that we are "blessed" with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted). And actually, it was during the first service that day when I thought, "I can't do that! I have to do this whole book!" This is about who we are in Christ; and so today, I want to do the sermon that comes before the one that you heard last time: the beginning of the Book of Ephesians.

What is this book? Well, the Apostle Paul was in a Roman jail. It is a couple of years before his death. As it turned out, he was soon to be released; and he would travel a little bit and write a little bit, and then he would be rearrested and eventually martyred. In the midst of this first imprisonment in Rome—he was brought back there and killed there—he penned several pieces of incredibly significant literature. We know them as the Bible Books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The one that we are beginning to study, I think might very well become, for you, the most revolutionizing letter you have ever read.

For today, we're just going to get you acquainted with the territory so that in coming weeks—if the Lord tarries—as we study the text, you'll understand better what we are studying. So today, I'm just going to Effuse About Ephesians. And yes, I *expect* you to look up the word "effuse" or "effusing"—but don't do it while you're in church.

What we're going to talk about is very simple: The Background Of The City—What was significant about this place, that it occupied such a prominent role in the ministry of the Apostle Paul? And then, The Background Of The Church—what it became through Paul's ministry and that of others. And then, The Beauty Of The Letter.

Well, let's talk first about The City. The city of Ephesus was no humdrum, average little town. It was the largest city in the Roman province of Asia; it was thriving in every way. And by the way: in the New Testament, when you see the term "Asia," it's not talking about the continent where China is; it's talking about a Roman province by that name. It was on the northeast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was across the water from Greece in what we would now know as the country of Turkey; and some geographers refer to it as "Asia Minor"—like there's the great big Asia, and this is a little bit of it.

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Three facets of the characteristics of this city bear on the nature of the things written to it and to the church there, and help you see why Paul chose to be there. One of the most obvious things about it is that it was a center of commerce. Ephesus had an excellent seaport. Since the First Century, it has been ruined by silting; so now, if you go to the GPS coordinates of the ancient city of Ephesus, you'll find it's now six miles from the sea—and between there and the sea is a sandy and commercially useless beach-like sort of area. But it was not that way in the First Century.

Ephesus thrived on business from the sea, and Ephesus was the connection between the cities of Asia Minor—and you'll recognize several of the names when I say them to you—and all the trade that came and went there by sea. On the inland side of Ephesus, there was easily-accessible by land, along good roads built by the Romans, this circle of cities; none of them actually *tiny* ones—it was the hub of the trade of Asia Minor, or, "Asia" (Acts 2:9; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 1 Pet. 1:1; Rev. 1:4).

Those two factors—the sea trade and the land trade—made Ephesus a thriving city of commerce in that part of the world, for many years. A byproduct of that active business and trade is that Ephesus had a very diverse population, and was subject to all sorts of influences from around the Roman Empire; everybody came and went there. If you want a ridiculous modern connection: it was like the Mos Eisley of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Everything that goes along with a seaport town—good and bad—was going on in Ephesus. That leads to a second aspect of the city: It was the worldwide center of worship for a goddess named "Artemis"—or, "Diana"—it depends on who you're talking to among Greeks and Romans, whether they called her "Artemis" or "Diana."

She was considered the mother-goddess of the Earth. There were statues to her all throughout the city of Ephesus; so this city was very prominently full of idolatry, and it was centered around the popular worship of this goddess. There was a huge temple to Diana—or, Artemis—in Ephesus, and that was the most remarkable physical attraction or site in the entire city.

Diana herself—as idols go—was a crude, strange-looking one. Her upper body was covered with rows of breasts to signify that she was supposedly the mother of all life; she was said to be the personification of the reproductive powers of all living things. Her temple was enormous; it was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was 450 feet by 220 feet. It had 120 columns around it, each 60 feet high. If you want to compare it to something that you'll have a visual reference to, it was about 50 to 75 percent larger than any of the Mormon temples you've ever seen—and you know how prominently *they* stick out, wherever they are. It was *the* sight to see in Ephesus, whether you wanted to see it or not.

Worship of this false god in her temple, like all idol-worship, involved some sorts of sacrifice; and in her case, there was an added feature of ceremonial prostitution. I read estimates that say that as many as a thousand prostitutes may have been involved at one time in the temple of Artemis during the era in which Ephesians was written.

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Ephesus was full of the *grossest* of idolatry; so in a sense, it was a very spiritual place. But on the other hand, it was also full of, like I say, everything that a seaport town would bring.

That leads to the third characteristic: Not surprisingly, it was a center of crime and immorality. If you want to make a really popular temple even more popular, make it an asylum for criminals. Criminals of all kinds had total asylum in Diana's temple, so they flocked there to claim "King's X" against their pursuers who might want to bring them to justice. And not surprisingly, they found the style of worship of this particular goddess attractive—adding to the booming business of the temple prostitutes. I'm not real sure that everyone who frequented that aspect of it was *truly* spiritual in their motivation.

Ephesus was fertile ground for the saving message of Jesus Christ. It was a place where the light would shine most vividly amidst the darkness; and isn't it interesting that we're going to see in Ephesians that "you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). It's not an accident that this was written to the church at Ephesus.

Well, that's a little Background Of The City. The Background Of The Church is also remarkable. If ever there was a church that had an inside track to success, it *had* to be the church at Ephesus. Its early history was unparalleled. The church was founded by Paul on his Second Missionary Journey—Acts 18:19-21. It was nurtured in its infancy after Paul by Aquila and Priscilla, along with Apollos—and in Acts 18:24-26, Apollos is called "an eloquent man...mighty in the Scriptures."

During Paul's Third Missionary Journey, he spent three years there making it a *very* strong church. Such an impact was made by the Gospel in Ephesus that a riot once erupted because of the ministry of Paul, and it was precipitated by a drop in the manufacturing business of idols. It's an interesting story, over in Acts 19. I want to read you a few verses there, to explain part of what's going on here.

Acts 19, starting at Verse 23—"About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis"—he was an idol-maker—"was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business"—the idols—"You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.'

"When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia." Well, that tells you what an impact the Gospel had there, during those years that Paul spent.

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But notice that phrase: "in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people" from idols (vs. 26). From that little hint, and the lack of any other explanations, it seems quite obvious that during those three years that Paul was in Ephesus—and obviously, it went on for the years after that—all the other known churches in the Roman province of Asia must have been founded. Ephesus was the home base, if you will, of evangelistic operations for the whole region (cf. Acts 19:10).

That would include the cities of "Smyrna...Pergamum...Thyatira...Sardis...Philadelphia...Laodicea" (Rev. 1:11), "Colossae" (Col. 1:2), and "Hierapolis" (Col. 4:13). If those sound familiar to you, it's because all but two of those are mentioned in Revelation 1, 2, and 3—and that's quite natural, since, if you started in Ephesus and you followed the way the roads connected them that were built by the Romans for trade purposes, that's the order in which you would come to those cities.

And realize: Jesus wrote *two* letters to the church at Ephesus: this one we have as the standalone Book of Ephesians, but you also have Revelation Chapter 2, Verses 1 through 7, in which Jesus *Himself* dictated a letter to the church at Ephesus, and one to each of the other six churches that are named there. So this church in this place was the recipient of a tremendous amount of *very* significant revelation from the Lord.

Paul, for the human part of this—he wrote this from Rome. Realize: *not many churches* got letters from an Apostle! That's *really* pretty rare. It's possible that Paul not only founded the church there and then spent three years there and then wrote this letter to them, but he likely visited this church again after his first imprisonment, because we are told that he left Timothy there (1 Tim. 1:3), so that kind of implies that he and Timothy probably physically visited each other there, but we can't absolutely prove that.

After Paul was released from that first imprisonment, whether he came there or not, we know that he assigned Timothy to minister in Ephesus for a while, as described in First Timothy 1:3-4. He said to him, "Timothy, there are some people who have come into Ephesus that are teaching some 'strange doctrines!'" Not a big surprise, given the nature of the city. And he said, "You have to get in there and straighten that out." We don't know for sure how long Timothy ministered there. Strong tradition also says that the Apostle John ministered in and around Ephesus for several years, until he was eventually exiled to the island of "Patmos" (Rev. 1:9).

So, there has *never* been a church with better leadership than what the church of Ephesus had in its first 30 years. Just imagine the portraits on the wall in the entrance to the church building—which they probably didn't have; certainly not photographs. They may have had paintings: "Here are our first pastors: Paul, Apollos, Aquila, Timothy, and John." Those are the heavyweights of leadership in the First Century.

The Background Of The City, The Background Of The Church, and now: I just want to introduce you to The Beauty Of The Letter, and then we will take our time to work through the whole Book of Ephesians.

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Ephesians is a book about riches; it's about *spiritual* riches. It tells us who we are in Christ. A *very significant* amount of what we call "Ecclesiology"—the Doctrine of the Church—is embedded here in the Book of Ephesians. It tells us how rich we are, and it tells us how to *use* our riches.

The book has gotten a lot of nicknames. One of them is: "The Bank of the Believer"—because the idea is that we can draw on this account of the riches that we have in Christ, and the account never diminishes, regardless of the number of checks written on it. It's also been called "The Treasure-house of the Bible"—showing us the great treasures that are our sin Christ.

Just a couple samples of those things: Ephesians 1:7-8—"In Him"—Christ—"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Those are *hyperbolic words*, and they're true!

Ephesians Chapter 3, Verse 8—Paul says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." You Gentiles—*you get in on all of this inheritance*—equal standing with Jews!

Ephesians 3:16—"...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." The *riches*, the *riches*, the *riches* that we have in Christ, all for His glory!

By the way, I just read to you Ephesians 3:16; here's a complete freebie, unrelated to the Book of Ephesians, specifically: If you want to do a fun little Bible study, if you just need a little side trip, go check out "3:16" in your Bible. So many of the authors of Scripture wrote these profound things—*not one of them* wrote "Chapter 3, Verse 16." None of them wrote chapters; none of them wrote verses—those were added later for easy reference. But just, in the strangest phenomena of things, *a whole bunch* of those verses that we know as labeled "3:16" are the kind that you want to memorize! Just check it out. I read you Ephesians 3:16; go check out Genesis Chapter 3, Verse 16. I think there's a good one in John that goes by that same number. It's just *incredible*, how many 3:16's are completely awesome! Not so in Philemon; not so in Obadiah; not so in Jude; but where you have a Chapter 3, look for Verse 16—it'll be fun. You might want to memorize a couple of them.

The vocabulary of this book *all the way through* is the vocabulary of spiritual riches. Get a load of this: The word "grace"—that's the source of *all* of our riches: God's "unmerited favor"—it occurs 12 times in just these six chapters; the word "glory"—eight times; the word "inheritance"—four times; the word "riches"—five times; the words "fullness" and "filled"—seven times in this book. And the key to the whole thing—and I hinted about this to you last time—the phrase "in Christ" occurs *27 times*! *That's the key* that unlocks all of the riches. Apart from Christ, you're beggarly poor. *In Christ, all the riches of His inheritance* are yours (cf. Rom. 8:17). In Christ you have the inheritance of the riches of the glory of His grace, and you don't get better off than that!

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When Paul finishes reciting—for three chapters—all of our riches in the Savior, he bursts out with this, in the end of Ephesians Chapter 3, Verses 20 and 21—"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think..." Now, just ponder that for a moment: *I can think of a lot*, okay? And we can go "beyond all that we ask or think," but not only "*beyond*" that, but "*abundantly beyond*" that, and "*more abundantly beyond*" that, and "*far more abundantly beyond*" that! How rich are you in Christ? Wow! "To Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Where does this power work? "Within us," when we're "in Christ"! It is *transformational* to be "in Christ."

I doubt you have ever heard of a theologian by the name of Hetty Green. Actually, she was not a theologian, but she *had* a theology; everybody does. Her story is rather remarkable. Hetty Green was nicknamed "America's Greatest Miser." She died in 1916, and left behind an estate of at least 100 million dollars; *that was real money* in 1916! Now, it's not even a "stimulus" payment.

She was said to have never turned on the heat or to have used hot water. It is said she wore one old black dress, and undergarments that she changed only after they had been worn out. She didn't wash her hands. She rode around in an old carriage. She ate mostly little pies that cost 15 cents each.

On July 3rd, 1916, Hetty Green died at age 81 at her son's New York City home. According to her longstanding official "World's Greatest Miser" entry in the Guinness Book of World Records, it says she died of apoplexy after arguing with a maid over the virtues of skimmed milk because it was cheaper. The New York Times reported that she actually had a series of strokes leading up to her death.

Upon her death, Hetty Green was known as "The Wizard of Finance," and "The Richest Woman in America." We said she left behind at least 100 million; estimates are 100 to 200 million. If you want to adjust that for inflation, she left behind somewhere between 2.35 and 4.7 *billion* dollars—what would be the equivalent of that in our world. That did, indeed, make her the richest woman in the world at that time—probably the richest woman in the world, having accumulated her own wealth, of all time.

Hetty's only son's name was Ned. Ned broke his leg as a child; and Hetty at first tried to have him admitted to a free clinic for the poor, so she wouldn't have to pay. Charles Slack, her biographer, said that she was recognized in the clinic, and they did *not* agree to take Ned; so *she* didn't agree to pay for the medical services, and she treated him herself. How did that go? Ned's leg did not heal properly, and had to be amputated due to gangrene. Oh, but she was rich!

Hetty Green illustrates, in the human realm, what it's like to be a Christian the way many Christians live. Like Hetty, a lot of people don't understand how to use their riches—or, they're just *unwilling* to use them; they just think they know something better.

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The Book of Ephesians is written to explain your riches in Christ, and to tell you how to use them. In Christ, you have enough riches to cover *all* your past debts, *all* your present liabilities, and *all* your future needs—and you will *never* diminish the resources at all—it's *endless!*

And by the way: it all comes with a Better-Than-Lifetime Guarantee! There's an *eternal* guarantee on this! Remember: 27 times in Ephesians, it says that this is all "in Christ." All your riches are secure to you, as Christ is secure in the plan of God. We, in Christ, are "fellow heirs" with Him in the plan of God (Rom. 8:17). What does He inherit? Oh, I don't know...*A kingdom!* The whole Earth! Romans 8:16-17—"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God"—we're going to see the Doctrine of Adoption here in Ephesians 1—"we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." If you're "in Christ," you're going to stand with Christ, and the hatred for Him will be focused on *you*, if you represent Him well—that's that part about suffering with Him.

But you know, often Christians act as if they are paupers—like they have to beg for spiritual crumbs that are dropped from the table of God. But in reality, in Christ you are rich beyond imagination! (see 1 Cor. 3:21-23) A Christian who acts like a beggar is someone who doesn't understand who he or she is, or doesn't know what to do about it.

Now, by the way, there's an important caveat: We are not rich in Christ because of anything inherent in us (Rom. 7:18a; cf. Dan. 9:18). Nor are we rich because of anything that we *do* or *don't do*. The teaching that says that if we do such-and-such, God will be bound to do a certain thing in return—that's an insult to the character of God, and that's a *total* misunderstanding of His grace and His sovereignty; it makes *us* the ones in control, and not Him.

Our riches are all "in Christ"! And look what they're based upon—this is all from the first two chapters of Ephesians: Your riches are based on God's "will" (1:5); your riches are based on God's "grace" (1:7); your riches are based on His "purpose" (1:11); they are for His "glory" (1:12, 14); they are all connected to His "inheritance" (1:18)—the inheritance of Christ; it is all about His "calling" (1:18); it's by His "power" (1:19); it is in His "love" (2:4); it is for His "good pleasure" (1:9, NKJV); you are all His "workmanship" (2:10). It's *all* "in Christ"! Do you see it? Because we are "in Christ"—*not because* we've been baptized or confirmed or ordained or catechized or Sanforized or winterized; it's because we are "in Christ"!

And now, let me give you a little introduction to the Book of Ephesians. This book has one of the easiest-to-remember structures of all the books in the Bible that have more than one chapter. Ephesians is like a basketball game—there are two halves, two equal halves. I think most of you have taken mathematics far enough that you can divide six by two. There are two three-chapter portions of the Book of Ephesians: Chapters 1 through 3 is about doctrine—who you are in Christ; this is your riches explained, itemized, laid out for you. Then, Chapters 4 through 6 is about your practice—*what to do* because you are "in Christ"—how to put your riches to work, how to enjoy the benefits of your riches.

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Chapter 4 even begins with urging you "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You've been called into Christ—now, *live up to it!* You might even say, "*Live it up* in your riches!"

The first two verses—that's our venue for this morning—this is the very brief introduction to the book. Ephesians 1:1-2—"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's another little Bible Trivia thing for you, besides looking up all the "3:16s"—if you want to start memorizing books of the Bible; if you want to say, "I'm working on half the books of the New Testament, memorize the word "Paul" and you've started memorizing 13 New Testament books; his name comes first in every book that he wrote. Now, going beyond that takes a little more effort.

Everything that Paul says in this little introduction is double-barreled; he's going to talk about a double source of authority. He introduces himself here as "Paul." Well, who is that? Well, the guy who was once "Saul" (Acts 7:58)—he was the zealous Jew of "the tribe of Benjamin," a leader among the "Pharisees" (Phil. 3:5; cf. Acts 22:3; 26:5)—he called himself "a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6) and "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5; cf. Acts 26:5; Gal. 1:14). He was so committed to what he believed that he actually travelled around to do anything he could to persecute Christians and to stop the spread of the Gospel (Acts 26:9; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13). His life was turned around on the road to Damascus, when the risen Jesus Christ confronted him (Acts Chapter 9).

He was a man of excellent training (Acts 22:3); even before his salvation, he was a very learned man (see Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). But after he was brought to Christ, he spent three years in the desert, with the Lord teaching him (Gal. 1:17-18), causing all that he knew about what we call the Old Testament to sink in. Then, he bursts onto the public scene when he, along with four others, was among the pastors in the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26)—that was the first Gentile church to train, send, and equip missionaries and receive them back (Acts 13:1-2; 14:26-27). From Antioch—that's when he was sent by the Lord—he launched the most significant missionary endeavor ever. He spent the rest of his life travelling, teaching, preaching, discipling, and writing.

What is before us—this Book of Ephesians—was written somewhere in the range of A.D. 60 to 62; we can't be absolutely dogmatic about it. But he calls himself "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." That means that he is saying that he is one of the foundational ones in the Church. Ephesians 2:19 and 20—I told you a lot of Ecclesiology comes from this book; well, here's part of it: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens"—Jews and Gentiles are completely one in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:28)—"but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." So, "by the will of God" Paul was one of the Apostles; he was one of the foundational men in the Church age. And as far as lasting effect through preserved writings, you could certainly say he is the most influential of the Apostles (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 11:5).



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And that, by the way, is all that *he* ever says about his own credentials: "An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (cf. Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 9:1). There's no B.A., there's no M.A., there's no M.Div. or Th.M. or Th.D. or Ph.D. or LL.D., or ordination certificate. He didn't have a ministerial license (cf. Gal. 2:6). He didn't even have a *podcast* or a TV show. Just: they "laid their hands" on him, and they "sent" him out (Acts 13:3); he preached the Gospel; he came back; he reported. They sent him out; he preached the Gospel; he came back. They sent him out; he preached the Gospel; he came back. His fourth trip—government expense, all the way to Rome; and then he travelled even more after that. An "apostle"—one who is "sent with a message."

Notice his dual source of authority: "An apostle of *Christ Jesus* by the will of *God*." "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," at the end of Verse 2. God the Father and the Son—they're his authority; not his opinions, not his great wisdom. His words are no less inspired than the words of Jesus (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. Lk. 10:16; 1 Thess. 4:2)—you know, the red letters of the Gospels in some Bibles. By the way: I think red-letter Bibles are a *really bad idea*, because it kind of gives the inference that there is something *super-duper* special about the words of Jesus. *It's all the Word of God!* My computer Bible program defaults to the red-letter version, and so I turn it off. Paul wrote as the instrument of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the revealed Word of God (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

And would you notice: there is also a double designation of believers. First: "To the saints"—"saints," that word *hagioi*, "holy ones"—this is a Christian from God's point of view; you've been made holy by the holiness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:27), you are holy "in Christ" (Phil. 3:9; Rev. 7:14). And then: "faithful"—"faithful" is the word translated "believing ones"—this is the Christian from man's point of view. "In Christ" you've been made holy. From man's point of view, how can you tell if you're following Christ? Well, you're "faithful" (Rev. 17:14)—you "live by faith" (Rom. 1:17), you exercise "trust" (Prov. 3:5; 2 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 1:14; 2:24), you "obey" (Jn. 3:36; Heb. 5:9), you "follow" Him (Jn. 10:27; cf. 1 Jn. 1:7; 2:3-6). And both terms are accurate; they fit together to give the full picture of what a person "in Christ" is: By virtue of exercising faith, you have been made holy in Christ (Jn. 13:10; Rom. 5:19)—and it's *all* "the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8), and "no one" can "boast" (vs. 9).

So he's "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are *at Ephesus*." Now, there are two words that you could probably just kind of slide by, *but don't*. That phrase is significant in that: if you could find the oldest manuscripts of the Book of Ephesians, most of them don't have the words "at Ephesus." But it isn't just that it's *not* there—in some of them, there is actually a blank: "To the saints who are at (fill in the blank), and who are faithful in Christ..." That was apparently intended to be filled in by the recipients of the letter, in any city in which it was read.

And if you look at it carefully and compare it to other letters in the New Testament—mainly Paul's letters—there are no references to anything personal, no greetings to specific people, no references to anything precisely local, no references to anything geographical. And that leads us to conclude that this letter was probably written *first* to Ephesus, but was intended to be a "circular" letter to *all* the churches, beginning with the

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churches in Asia Minor—*just exactly like* the Book of Revelation: brought to Ephesus; and then, as New Testament books would have been distributed, it would arrive at its first destination—it would be read there, preached there, studied there; and then they would make a copy of it and keep the copy, and take the original and move on to the next place. But that's more formalized, apparently, in this series of cities in Asia Minor.

Interestingly, over in the Book of Colossians—written by the same Apostle, from the same jail cell, in roughly the same period of time—in Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 16, Paul says: "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans"—that was the next nearby city; so, *that one* was meant to be circulated. And then, he says: "And you, for your part, read my letter that is coming *from* Laodicea." Many believe that *that* letter "coming *from* Laodicea" was quite likely the Book of Ephesians. So, the route of circulation would fit exactly what we know to be the order in which the cities were arranged—whether you go counterclockwise or clockwise—in which the churches are described in Revelation Chapters 1 through 3.

So: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at (fill in the blank) and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice also: there's a double blessing: "grace" and "peace."

"Grace"—"I wish to be gracious to you. I wish to remind you of the grace of God which brings us all of our spiritual riches. I want to remind you that you *stand*" in His "grace," like he would write in Romans 5:2.

And then: "peace"—"peace," drawn from that standard Hebrew greeting: "Shalom." You could say that "grace" is the fountain of blessing; "peace" is the stream that flows from the fountain. Because of the "grace" of God, I have "peace with God"—and that's Romans Chapter 5, Verses 1 and 2, summarized.

Those two terms—"grace" and "peace"—common, very meaningful First Century greetings to Christians: "Grace to you and peace" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Philem. 3; Rev. 1:4). Check the beginning and end of Paul's letters—you're going to find "grace" and "peace" galore (Rom. 16:20; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4).

Notice, there is also a double source of the greeting. Look at the end of it: "...from God our Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ." This is very Trinitarian; he's going to talk about the Holy Spirit in this book as well.

One additional note about the beauty of this book: This one is especially easy for us to connect to. Remember, I told you what an idol-filled, diverse city Ephesus was. There's a smaller gap between what the people were like in Ephesus in the First Century and what we are like, than with the original readers of many of the books of the Bible, compared to us. This book is addressed to Gentiles—people who were about as much like us as First Century people possibly could be. So this is a timeless book.

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Now, they *all* are—I'm just saying, it's *really easy* to connect with everything in the Book of Ephesians without having to do a lot of homework to figure out which things are specifically cultural, and which things are transcultural. We don't have to unscramble it to make the applications—that's what I'm trying to say.

This is a letter to you and to me, from God, about our lives "in Christ" and with each other. "In Christ"—mainly the first three chapters. With each other—mainly the last three chapters. So, would you accept my challenge? I know—I bug you with an e-mail every single day: "Read these few verses in John..." How about we also read Ephesians? You can read the whole thing in ten minutes—fifteen minutes, if you're a slow reader. Maybe read it every day this week. Or, I'll make you a deal—let's go easy on you: There are six days after today and before next Sunday. There are six chapters of Ephesians. Let me see...six divided by six—*one chapter a day*, and you can work your way all the way through this book. And trust me: you'll find things you want to come back to again and again and again. So, yes, I am Effusing About Ephesians! It is such a wonderful, *wonderful* part of the treasure of God's Word to us.

Now, let's pray:

*Our Father, we do say "Thank You" for this portion of Your Word; thank You for all of Your Word. Thank You for the Word Incarnate: Your Son, Jesus. Father, it is beyond our ability to fully describe all of the riches that are ours in the Savior. As we embark on our exploration through this book, cement these things to our hearts, and make us stronger than ever in understanding the riches of the glory of Your grace, and use us for Your purpose. Thank You that we can gather today and worship in Your name. Thank You that You know our every need, even before we ask.*

*Thank You for reminding us to pray for those in our world, in whom You have invested authority and put them in positions over us. We pray for our President and others. Oh, the Gospel needs to go to Washington, D.C. as much as it ever needed to go to Ephesus, Father; and You know that. We pray that You would stop the nonsense. We pray that You would please stop this "Equality Act"—which, if implemented, will specifically declare us to be evil, and bring about more persecution than we've ever known in this country. But Father, if that passes, teach us to embrace the fact that we stand in Your grace, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against Your Church; so, use us, we pray—whatever happens there. But we do pray that You will bring those people in authority to the Savior. Father, thank You for the many reasons we have for rejoicing within the Heritage Bible Church family. Thank You for Chris Kosecki, and what appears to be her very good recovery from open heart surgery. Thank You for the good word from Shane and Charity Jensen, and the outcome of their surgeries—and even some of it not necessary for their injuries. We lift up our friends Larry Doyle and Alan Bjorner, both of whom are awaiting surgeries that have been now postponed; please grant them relief. We pray for our friends at Grace Life Church in Edmonton, now driven underground; and for many like them, and for churches around the world that have been burned and destroyed, and people arrested and killed, just for worshipping You. Teach us to rejoice in our Savior, we ask in His name. Amen.*