

Ephesians 1:1-14

Introduction to Ephesians

The epistle to the church at Ephesus has been called "the crown of St. Paul's writings" and "the quintessence of Paulinism." We are told that Ephesians was John Calvin's favorite letter and one commentator even wrote, "Only Romans can match Ephesians as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality."

Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul from his Roman imprisonment (**Acts 28**) around A.D. 61-62, probably sometime after he penned the epistle to the church at Colossae. In fact, there seems to be a close corollary between the content of Colossians and Ephesians. However, unlike Colossians, Ephesians is unique among Paul's letters in that the content of the letter is extremely general dealing with no specific conflict in the church. Paul does not have to attack some form of Jewish Gnosticism or the teachings of the Judaizers. In fact, Ephesians lacks any personal address from Paul who speaks to the church in a manner that could easily be addressed to any church. This lack of personal greetings seems rather strange seeing that Paul always addresses the churches personally dealing with specific problems that seem to have developed in the church.

Equally, this seems odd when one considers the close contact Paul had with the church over the years. Paul first arrived in Ephesus towards the end of his second missionary journey (autumn A.D. 52) and ministered there for a short time before returning to Jerusalem (**Acts 18:18-21**). He returned a year later on his third missionary journey and ministered there for two and half years leaving in the spring of A.D. 56 (**Acts 19:1-20:1**). A year later he visited with the elders of the church of Ephesus in Miletus on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth (**Acts 20:16:38**). Paul described his ministry in Ephesus as laboring from house to house, both night and day proclaiming the full counsel of God through the ministry of the gospel (**Acts 20:20, 31**).

Because of this lack of specifics some have conjectured that Ephesians is really a circular letter written to several churches in the Roman province of Asia. One commentator has argued that Tychicus, who carried the letter to the Ephesians (**6:21**) and who also carried the letter to the Colossians along with Onesimus (**Col. 4:7-9**) would have landed in Ephesus and then traveling east towards Colossae in the Lycus valley would have read the letter to the many churches along the way. Along with the absence of specific details in the letter, some have argued for Ephesians being a circular letter because in some very important older copies of the letter the phrase "at Ephesus" is missing so that the greeting reads very generally "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus." When Tychicus arrived at the various churches he could simply insert the name of that specific region at the beginning of the letter and address them with the same letter and therefore, the general content of the letter could easily apply to all the churches.

However, regardless of where one comes down on this very difficult issue in the text, the epistle was clearly written by the apostle Paul and whether it was addressed to Ephesus in particular or a much wider audience, it is clear that the letter was inspired by God to be addressed to all believers in Jesus Christ.

Paul describes himself as "an apostle" "by the will of God." This emphasis directs our attention to the authority behind the letter. Paul is not simply writing under human inspiration, but by the authority of Jesus Christ who appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's apostleship was not simply his own making, but by the will of God. Paul did not choose to become an apostle, he was chosen by Christ and sent to preach the

gospel by the authority of Christ. Therefore, when Paul speaks to us through this letter, he is addressing us as the ambassador of Jesus Christ and we must hear him even as if we were being addressed directly by Jesus Himself.

Paul greets the church who are saints and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Already at the beginning of the letter Paul summarizes the content of His letter and the whole Christian life. Even in our present weakness, the church is already positionally declared to be "saints" and "faithful" because of our union with Jesus Christ. It is clear, this side of the glory, that no human can be considered a "saint" or even "faithful" to God in himself. The only reason Paul can address the church as "saints" and "faithful" is because they are "in" Christ Jesus.

Paul's standard greeting is "grace and peace." Paul takes the common greetings of the Greeks and Jews of wishes for earthly happiness and transforms them into Christian and Trinitarian greetings of eternal and heavenly happiness that is already our present possession in Christ. We now have the grace "unmerited" or "demerited" favor with God and the peace of God who is now our Father and no longer our judge which are now our heavenly blessings known only through Jesus Christ.

Paul's purpose for writing the epistle to the Ephesians is centered in a mystery from God which has been hidden in ages past but is now revealed to us in these last days. Beginning in eternity past (**v. 4**), Paul explains that God has revealed a mystery to us now that we have entered into the fullness of times (**vv. 9-10**). That mystery is that God is summing up all things in Christ, things in the heavens and on the earth. That word "summing up" has the idea of "bringing something to a main point, in that God is taking a world that has been fragmented and alienated in the fall of Adam and is restoring and reunifying them in and under Christ. Jesus Christ is God's means through whom He is summing up or restoring harmony to the whole universe. Therefore, Paul sweeps from eternity to eternity in this epistle showing the cosmic reordering of creation in Jesus Christ. This is the mystery that has now been revealed to us. This is what Paul told the Corinthians concerning the wisdom and power of God which was revealed through Christ's sufferings so that in the Spirit we might have the mind of Christ (**1 Cor. 2:1-16**).

Paul's focus in Ephesians is not upon the sufferings of Christ, but the resurrected and ascended Christ through whom God has brought all things under His feet. The fragmentation of the universe is focused in two areas, things in heaven and things on the earth. As an example of the things in heaven, Paul has much to say about the spiritual powers that are in rebellion to God (**1:21; 2:2; 3:9-10**). In summing up these spiritual powers of evil, Jesus Christ has not only conquered them but they have become his footstool (**1:22**). As an example of the things on the earth that have been summed up in Christ, Paul looks to the division between the Jews and Gentiles in how Christ brought the two together by abolishing the Law of commandments through the cross (**2:14-16**). In bringing peace to these two people, God has restored the broken humanity through Christ.

But how has God restored paradise? What has God done to bring harmony and order to this fallen creation? God has summed up all things in the new man of the new creation (**2:15; 4:13**). It is through this new creation that God has laid the foundation for a new creation; a new building; a new temple in which God may dwell (**2:20-22**).

Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of God in bodily form, has filled the creation through His work of salvation so that all of creation is now restored in Him (**1:23; 4:13**).

Now the point of Ephesians is that you have been caught up into this new creation through union with the new man so that everything that is true of Jesus Christ is now true of you (**1:3, 4, 5, 7-8**,

11, 13-14). Note the connection that Paul makes between the ascended Christ and you (**1:18-20 & 2:5-7**). What is true of the new man is now true of you. You are now the body of Christ (**1:22-23; 2:14-16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23**). You are the bride of Christ for which Christ has purchased with his own blood and to which he has been joined into one flesh (**5:25-32**). This is the ultimate love story of the prince who has entered into the kingdom of darkness and laid down his own life to gain his bride and bring her home into the marvelous kingdom of light.

You, who were once alienated from God, are now the building of God (the household) built upon the foundation of Christ, being fitted together into a temple in which God may dwell (**2:19-22**). The reader can feel Paul's struggle to perfectly capture for us the fullness of Christ's filling all things and how we, in Him, have received a rich inheritance in the new creation. In Christ, you have been caught up in this glorious mystery that has been revealed in Christ. God is summing up the whole creation in Christ and you have become partakers of this glorious work as the new creation in Him.

Paul closes the first three chapters which describe who you are in Christ with a prayer in which he prays above all else that you may comprehend who you are in Christ. Paul sees this as the heart of the purpose of the gospel in the life of the Christian. Before we know anything else, we must first comprehend who we are in union with Jesus Christ.

However, though the end of the ages is upon us and the fullness of time has already begun, the work of summing up all things is not yet complete (**1:21**). Therefore, in the last three chapters of the epistle Paul turns to the ethical imperatives that flow from our union with Christ. All that Paul says can be summed up in **5:8**, "You are the Light in the Lord, now walk as children of the Light." In other words, Paul first tells you who you are in Christ. This, above all else, is what you must comprehend. And then knowing what you are, you are to spend the rest of your life becoming what you are in Christ. We no longer live according to this present age that is passing away. We no longer live according to the darkness, but according to the light of heaven. We are heavenly citizens and therefore we are to live according to our heavenly status.

We live as the new humanity; the new man who is Christ, not the old man, Adam (**4:22, 24**). We are called to put on Christ as our new garment of righteousness and to walk in that new robe of righteousness in a manner worthy of our calling living in peace and unity with all men. Christ has given us the gift of the ministry of the Word to build us up into that new man until we all attain the unity of the faith. Our union with Christ should affect all of our earthly relationships (husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters). Even though all the spiritual forces of evil have been conquered by Christ and are put in subjection under His feet, we must still stand firm against the schemes of the devil putting on the full armor of God.

Paul expects, now that you know who you are in Christ, that you may now be clothed with the power and strength of the Lord to fulfill or fill full your union in Christ in every area of your life on earth. You are to live in and out of your new union with Christ so that He alone will receive all the glory that is due His name (**3:14-21**).

Amen!

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