# Introduction to Ephesians

Ephesians 1:1-3

## Introduction

The first thing to note about this book is that the earliest manuscripts make no reference to Ephesus in v.1. There are also no personal greetings at the end of this letter. This has led to a consensus among scholars that this was a circulatory letter that went amongst the churches. However, from quite early on in church history, this letter has been very much associated with the church at Ephesus probably because the Ephesian church retained a copy of the letter.

This also explains why, unlike many of the other letters, Paul does not deal with specific issues arising at Ephesus in the letter but rather presents a summary of his doctrine, particularly the what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and how we need to walk that out.. Paul is not addressing some kind of error that has crept into the church or some controversy that has arisen. Instead, he seems to have put together a body of teaching to equip the church and to reinforce the teaching he undoubtedly gave whilst he was amongst them.

There is a split amongst scholars as to whether this letter was actually written by Paul or by one of his followers. The reason given is that the style and vocabulary of the letter differs from some of the other letters, e.g. Corinthians and Romans. This letter is written in quite a formal style of Greek and the subject matter is different from say Romans or Galatians. However, as Tom Wright says, ‘Paul wouldn’t be the first or the last writer to use different styles when different occasions demand it’.

The letter was written from Rome in AD 64 whilst Paul was a prisoner there awaiting his execution under the persecutions of Nero, and was carried by Tychicus to the churches in Asia Minor (Ephesians 6:21). Thus, Paul is putting together a body of teaching that he wants to leave with the churches he has been associated with after he has gone.

Paul’s aim in writing this letter is to make clear to the believers their standing in Christ and from that to reveal the nature and purpose of the church. In chapters 4 to 6, Paul declares some of the practical outworking of these things as they affect, the body of Christ, walking in righteousness, relationships in the family and in the church, and finally, overcoming the enemy.

Thus we can break the letter up into four major sections:

Chapters 1&2 – The Believer’s position in Christ

Chapter 3 – The Church as God’s Special Revelation

Chapter 4, 5 & 6:1-9 – The Walk of the Believer

Chapter 6:10-22 – Overcoming the enemy

In Watchman Nee’s classic, Sit, Walk, Stand, he divides this book between these three elements:

We are seated in heavenly places in Christ; we walk by the Spirit; we stand against the enemy. That is a good summary of this book for the individual believer.

## Opening Words

*‘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.’*

There are a number of things we can draw from the greeting Paul gives at the beginning of the letter.

### He establishes who he is and whom he serves and by what motive:

He is Paul an apostle – a sent one. One who has gone out from his home town (Tarsus) or from the place where he had been living (Antioch) in order to spread the good news. He also makes clear who has sent him, Christ Jesus. The Damascus Road experience is familiar to most of us, how Paul, on his way to Damascus to throw the Christians in prison, was knocked off his donkey and found himself speaking to Jesus himself in a vision. Even today, in the media, you will find people talking about a ‘Damascus Road experience’ when someone has a dramatic change in their life.

In Paul’s case, it was a matter of ‘poacher becoming gamekeeper’ as he turned from being one of the chief persecutors of the Church to being one of its champions. What could have caused such a dramatic turnaround? A BBC programme which came out about 10 years ago and which examined this turnaround concluded that he was:

* struck by lightning
* had an epileptic fit
* had a delusion, or
* genuinely had a religious experience

Paul, himself is in no doubt as to what has happened to him. In Galatians 1: 15-16, he states it as being the moment when ‘God...was pleased to reveal his son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles’. For Paul, this experience on the Damascus Road was a life-changing experience that changed his trajectory from being a persecutor to a preacher of the gospel. It was a 180 degree turn.

That could be the same for anyone of us who comes to faith. Faith is not a passive thing but is active. It is not just a matter of taking on some extra beliefs, but of everything being new and that will have a dramatic effect upon our lifestyles. This can be painful and, in Paul’s case, ended with him being beheaded for his faith. In order to make such a step, one must be pretty convinced of the blessings and benefits that accrue from such a decision. It is not a light or easy thing to become a Christian, but it does bring joy and fulfilment.

You can’t come to faith and remain the same. If faith does not impact our values, beliefs and behaviours, I would question whether we have ever really come to faith. It must also impact our worship because God will have first place in our affections. If he does not, either ourself or something else remains on the throne of our lives and that means that Jesus is not Lord.

### He establishes his audience:

Whilst the words ‘at Ephesus’ do not appear in the earliest manuscripts, as mentioned earlier, the target audience is clear: ‘saints’ who are ‘faithful in Christ Jesus’.

What is a ‘saint’? It means ‘holy one’. From the first sentence, Paul is underlining the status of his audience. He does not say, ‘those who will be saints’. He does not say, ‘those who, when the church deems it appropriate, will be designated as saints’. He says, ‘to the saints’. That is you and I.

We are already made holy because of what Jesus achieved for us on the cross. He took away the guilt of our sin. He dealt with the effects of our sin. When God looks at us, he does not see us any longer as sinners. He sees us as holy.

Holiness is not just about no longer being sinners, however. It also means to be set apart for God and for his service. This simple designation of ‘saints’ sets the tone for the rest of the letter where Paul develops this theme of who we are in Christ and then tells us how we need to work that out in terms of our service because ‘we are created in Christ for good works which God has prepared in advance that we should walk in them’ (Eph. 2:10).

### He reminds them that they are ‘faithful in Christ Jesus’

In other words, he is directing his letter to those who have not just accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but who are also seeking to walk that out.

Salvation is not a one off decision that we make; it is a life lived out in faithfulness to God. Every day, you and I have the opportunity to be faithful to God. This will be demonstrated by the words we speak, the decisions we make, and the things we do. In chapter 4 and 5 Paul will go into a lot of detail about these things and what it really means to live as those who are ‘faithful in Christ Jesus’.

### He blesses them with the ‘grace and peace’ of ‘God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’

Throughout the remainder of the letter he will expand on the grace of God (‘it is by grace you have been saved…’ (2:8)) and all that it means, and he will teach on the peace of God (He came and preached peace to you who were far away…’ 2:17) through which the Church has been established.

Grace and peace are important themes in all of Paul’s writings and here he imparts these as blessings to the recipients of his letter.

Grace is the unmerited favour of God. Thus, Paul desires them to receive the favour of God in all aspects of their life. This is our inheritance in the Messiah. God wants to bless and enrich all areas of our life, not because we deserve it, but because he wants to give it.

Peace is the Greek word *Eirene* from which we get the English name Irene. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom* and means ‘a state of untroubled, undisturbed wellbeing, free from commotion or confusion’. This too is our inheritance in Christ Jesus.

## Conclusions

How do you see yourself this morning? Are you a saint or a sinner? No matter how you see yourself, you are a saint, a holy one. When God looks at you, he does not see you as you think of yourself; he sees you as you are in Christ.

The enemy will try to make you think of yourself as a sinner. That automatically brands you as a failure. It keeps you looking inward and feeling miserable. This morning, you don’t have to be miserable; you don’t have to feel like a failure. God has done everything to lift you out of that place. You just have to choose to believe that the way God sees you is how you really are. You are a saint! Now! You don’t have to wait until you die. It is already an established fact.

You can also live now in the grace and peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christ. He wants to pour that out upon us and to fill our lives with that sense of wellbeing. Receive it now by faith in him.

Are you confused or in commotion? Receive the grace and peace of God.