

Ephesians 1:1 Introduction

This morning we start a new study in the letter to the Ephesian church. Klyne Snodgrass in his commentary on Ephesians states that: "Pound for pound" [this] may well be the most influential document ever written. Within the history of Christianity, only the Psalms, the Gospel of John, and Romans have been so instrumental in shaping the life and thought of Christians...."

He goes on to say, "This letter is the most contemporary book in the Bible. Apart from a few terms and the treatment of slavery, Ephesians could have been written to a modern church. It describes human beings, their predicament, sin, and delusion, but much more it describes God's reaching out to people to recreate and transform them into a new society. It describes the power God's Spirit gives for living. It shows who we really are without Christ and who we become both individually and corporately with Christ."

The first three chapters deal with the grace of God which is bestowed on His people. There's a great deal of doctrine or teaching in these chapters about the way in which God does this, from our salvation to our sanctification. But grace is the over-arching theme as He describes this new life we have in Christ.

EPH 1:7 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace..."

EPH 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

Grace is the unmerited favor which God bestows on sinful men. There is nothing that we deserve from God except His judgment and wrath. He owes us nothing. And yet He has chosen to love and unlovely people as ourselves so that we share in His life and fellowship.

We see this clearly in EPH 2:4-5 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."

This is an amazing letter of hope and encouragement, as well as exhortation, to take this grace and live in that grace to the glory of God, not for our own self-interests.

I would encourage you to read through this entire letter in one sitting at a time, and do it several times over the course of this study, and ask the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds that He would encourage you to see more clearly what Paul speaks of in the following passage.

EPH 3:17-19 "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

This is to be our life; one which sees clearly the God who gives grace, and then to live in that grace day by day depending on Him for everything to His glory.

Over the years some commentators have debated the authorship of this letter; some suggesting that it was not the apostle Paul, but rather a contemporary of Paul who copied much of the letter to the Colossians, since the comparison between the two letters is uncanny.

However, there is no sound biblical evidence that would suggest anyone else but the apostle Paul as the one who penned this letter. As to the destination of this letter, most would agree that the Ephesian church is the recipient. And yet even here there is no little discussion because in the oldest manuscripts the name Ephesus is not included, even though in almost every other manuscript it is.

And so for this reason many believe it to be a circular letter meant to be delivered to all the churches in the Asia Minor area, including all seven churches we see in the book of Revelation; Ephesus being one of those.

And yet most of the early church fathers make reference to this letter being addressed to the Ephesians. This would not preclude it being circulated to the rest of the churches in the area, but we cannot say with any certainty that it was not specifically addressed to these Christians in Ephesus.

The time of the writing of this letter is placed around A.D.60, and Paul was in Rome at the time as a prisoner. In fact in both chapters 3:1 and 4:1 he opens those paragraphs, "I Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus"; "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord".

Paul never stopped doing the work of Christ, despite his circumstances. It's a testimony to how any of us can still serve the Lord even if our circumstances in life would try to stop such work. God can use us wherever we are and in whatever situation we find ourselves. But the grace and strength of God is what we must rely on to accomplish anything for Him.

It should be noted that Paul did have a tie to Ephesus. Between A.D.53-56 Paul spent a little over two years in Ephesus.

ACT 19:1;7-10 "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples..... There were about twelve men in all. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

By the way the phrase "lecture hall" of Tyrannus which the NIV uses would be better translated school; the school of Tyrannus. This was a place where many philosophers and teachers would come and assemble their disciples to learn what they had to teach.

In all likelihood Paul had to rent the space. For those advocates of the church today who want to only meet in homes just as the early church did, here's one instance where the church also met in a rented school for two years. And so meeting in large buildings to accommodate more people is not unbiblical; and neither is meeting in homes.

The city of Ephesus was located in the area of the world we know today as the western tip of Turkey. In those days it was referred to as Asia. R.C. Sproul notes that "The book of Revelation speaks of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodocia. These seven cities were arranged around the urban hub of the province with Ephesus occupying a strategic point.....

Ephesus itself was the gateway to Asia. It was at the mouth of the important Cayster River [which flowed into the Aegean Sea.] Waterways were crucial links of transportation and commerce before the advent of mechanized travel. A highway to Ephesus also served as a hub for caravan travel. In ancient history the Greeks and

the Romans both vied for control of Ephesus because of its strategic military and commercial location.....

.....Ephesus was famous for its great temple, a shrine to the goddess Diana (or Artemis in the Greek). The temple Diana was one of the 7 wonders of the world. It was 425 feet in length. [That's almost one and a half football fields]. Its width was 220 feet. Its chief attraction however was an image of Diana said to have fallen directly from heaven to earth. The temple was so popular among pagans that Ephesus emerged as the religious center of all Asia."

And so it should be little wonder that when Paul showed up in Ephesus in the early 50's that he met with such opposition from the locals as he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which stated in no uncertain terms, there are no gods but one and that is the God revealed in Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully man and who rose bodily from the dead.

Keep in mind that Ephesus had a great thing going. In many ways it was a tourist town as people from all over Asia came to pay homage to Diana. They would buy statues and trinkets related to Diana. It was an entrepreneurs dream. There were merchants all over the city selling anything and everything related to Diana.

When Paul came to town the Lord used him to miraculously heal people and cast out demons and many came to believe in this Savior, Jesus Christ; and so, many of these Ephesian merchants thought they were going to be put out of business.

ACT 19:23-28 "About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

It turned into a pep-rally for Artemis, or Diana, and these people got so worked up that they were starting a riot in the streets of

Ephesus. I might add that today in the area of ancient Ephesus, the temple of Diana, one of the former 7 wonders of the world, is nothing more than ruins which have been excavated along with the city of Ephesus.

And so we begin our adventure through the letter to the Ephesians who lived in the very midst of this pagan city and had to contend earnestly for the faith as they dealt with many oppositions and hardships for their stance on the one true God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

EPH 1:1-2 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful (Or believers who are) in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Our writer identifies himself as Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Few could deny that this would be the same Paul who personally met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus as he was going there to destroy Christians. It was there that he embraced the Lord Jesus as the One who gave him life eternal.

It was also there that he discovered that he was called out by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

ACT 9:10-12 "In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Ananias was a little tentative, to say the least, since everyone in the region knew of the Pharisee named Saul who was out to destroy the church, but we read in ACT 9:15 "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

And Paul himself, understood that this was a specific calling to the Gentile world. We read in ROM 11:13 "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, ..."

This is why Paul could say in the first verse that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. We'll touch on that in a moment. First, let me comment on what an apostle is. The word apostle in

the Greek is apostolos, and it means one sent on a mission. Officially, a commissioner of Christ.

Now, of course, this is something every believer is commanded by Christ to be. This was our Lord's commission to us as well as the disciples in MAT 28:18-20 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

All of us are commissioners of Christ, who have been sent on a mission for Him to bring the good news of salvation to the world, starting right here in Port Charlotte. But, the kind of apostle Paul was, included much more responsibility and authority.

Paul describes an apostle of his degree as one who personally saw the risen Christ and who was empowered by the Holy Spirit with, what would appear to be, all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as we see in Corinthians and Ephesians.

Paul did in fact encounter the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. 1CO 9:1 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?"

1CO 15:8-9 "and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

It was Paul who said to these same Corinthians in 2CO 12:12 "The things that mark an apostle -signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance." He was the one who performed all of these things as God gifted him and empowered him for such a work.

One of the main functions of an apostle was also to be used by God to deliver the very word of God we have in our hands. This word is complete, as it was inspired of the Holy Spirit. It is inerrant and infallible, in other words it is without fault and will accomplish what God desires to use it for in our lives. It is reliable.

Paul speaks of those agents of God used in both the O.T. and N.T. who gave us the words from God to reveal His will and His Son. EPH 2:19 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

But so as to encourage his readers in Ephesus, Paul tells them that being an apostle was not his will, nor was it an office he assumed because he thought it would be a good idea or a good career move.

No, he says it was by the will of God. That was an encouragement to these, primarily Gentile Christians, because for years the Gentiles were excluded from the grace of God as our Lord was working principally through the nation of Israel.

In these last days we see that all of the world is meant to be a part of this new covenant found in Christ alone. This didn't mean that Gentiles had never been called out by God to be a part of His grace in the O.T., but they had a tendency to be the exception rather than the rule.

The Ninevites and the Gibeonites come to mind in the O.T. But now, not only are the Gentiles seen to be a part of God's plan, but He chooses an apostle, among the rest of the apostles, to be their commissioner from God Himself.

It was the will of God to use Paul in a way where he would go the Gentile world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to also teach and instruct them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord; thus the very letters we see in the N.T. are those letters which are addressed to churches which were made up of predominantly Gentile believers.

Klyne Snodgrass in his commentary on Ephesians says that "if [Paul] was an apostle by the will of God, what he wrote must be seen as communication from God." This is God's letter to the Ephesians, as well as all saints, that we might see that God is personally desiring us to know His will and walk in His ways in the power of His Spirit.

And now Paul begins this letter in a way to confirm this as he says, I am an apostle, by the will of God for you who are in Ephesus. These Ephesian believers knew who Paul was. Keep in mind he was used of God to plant that church in Ephesus with only 12 disciples.

By this he means that this letter is addressed to believers in the church at Ephesus. This is what the last part of the first verse says as well. To those "who are faithful in Christ Jesus:" This is basically the way the KJV puts it together with the NKJV and the NAS.

But the idea here is not just that these people were practicing faithfulness to the Lord, but that they were full of faith. In other words they had a true faith in the One true Savior sent from the Father, Jesus Christ. And so it's not as though Paul was only writing to "faithful" Christians, he was writing to all the Christians in Ephesus, even those who may have been weak in the faith, who were not as faithful as they should have been.

But the term Paul uses in the beginning when addressing these Christians is interesting and instructive. He uses the word saints. He calls these Ephesians saints, which of course would include you and me as well.

Having grown up in the Roman Catholic Church, I was always told that only those who lived a stellar life could have been included in this list of saints. And only after their death, and with the Vatican's blessing, could they truly be called saints since they now are residing in the presence of Christ.

The truth is that the word saint in the Greek is hagios and it means sacred and set apart for a special work or purpose. This is how God sees us. We are His people called out to be set apart for His special purpose. That purpose is to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. That purpose demonstrates itself in a life devoted wholly to Him to bring Him glory in all that we do.

Does that mean we can only bring glory to God if we're in Bible study 24 hours a day, or in prayer every waking moment? Of course not. You can give glory to God by cutting sheet metal at the shop at which you work. You can give glory to God by spending time with your children, loving them and nurturing them, not only spiritually, but physically as well as you meet their needs.

You can give glory to God by thanking Him for providing all your needs. Give us this day our daily bread, Jesus encourages us to pray. All of life, even the mundane things which have to be done to carry on in this physical existence can and should be done to represent Him in this world.

It's the way we do them. Do we go to work grumbling? Do we serve others only if it's convenient? Do we thank God for the roof He's placed over our heads and the food He's given us as well as the job He's provided to meet those needs?

All of these areas of life are also meant to be an act of worship together with those times we come to Him in prayer, and fellowship, and Bible study and worship. When Paul spoke to the Corinthians about eating meat sacrificed to idols he said this...

1CO 10:27-31 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Paul sets the standard by which we are to do all for the Lord, whether mundane things or things to promote our Lord in Savior in word or deed.

COL 3:16-17 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Again, all of life is meant to be used to the glory of God as we are saints or people set apart in this world to represent our Lord and Savior. When Paul was addressing things like slaves being faithful to their masters he was encouraging them to be the best slaves they could be.

You mean slaves were meant to be saints, or people set apart by Christ, even in their functions as slaves? You bet.

COL 3:22-23 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not

for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

This is the mark of a true saint. It's not a person who only performs in a "religious environment", but a person whose whole life is dedicated to Christ. Butcher, baker, candle stick maker; all can be used of God. I've heard tell that even people who ride Harley's can be used by God in that venue, imagine that.

The will of God for Paul may have been to be the apostle to the Gentiles, but the implication is that God has a will for each one of us. We've all been called to be His ambassador. How that works itself out in our own lives is something He reveals to us and something we should seek after.

But God's will is always in opposition to the world's ways.

ROM 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

There's a great difference between being in this world and even enjoying certain things in this world and being conformed to this world. Peter talks about this conforming and he identifies what it means.

1PE 1:14-16 "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Being in the world and partaking of things in this world are not necessarily the same thing as conforming to the evil desire we had when we lived in ignorance. Everything must be tested according to God's word, but we must never think that since we have certain liberties that we should take advantage of those things to the detriment of the testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we must have before the world.

What is God's will for you and me? Well, it may be that He wants you to be serving in some particular capacity. But, that's something you need to seek Him on, but one thing I know for certain is this. 1TH 4:3 "It is God's will that you should be sanctified:"

The word sanctified in the Greek is hagioσmos which is similar to the word for saints in Eph.1:1 which is hagioσ. We are all saints in

Christ and we are all called to be sanctified, made holy, set apart, through the word of God in the power of the Spirit. That is God's will for all of us. As we are pursuing that will of God, He will fill in the blanks as to what His will for us will be in the specifics of life. May we seek Him diligently.

Well, we got through verse one. I can see we'll be flying through this study. Hey, it's okay, the Lord has some great things for all of us to learn. May we all be doers of the Word and not hearers only to His glory as we represent Him each day.