**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Introduction and Overview**

Ephesians 1:1-2

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Big Idea for 1:1-2: Paul identifies himself, the recipients, and his prayer in writing.

We are starting our series in Paul’s letter to Ephesians so turn to Ephesians 1:1-2. Today I want to introduce the author, the recipients, his prayer in writing, and then give a summary of the letter.

**The Author: The Source of His Authority (1a)**

The letter opens with Paul identifying himself as the author. In those days, the author did this at the beginning of letters rather than the end as we do. He writes as one with authority to instruct the church and this authority qualifies him to write. His authority is twofold: he is an apostle and he is an apostle by God’s will. An apostle in a broad sense is a messenger sent with good news. But in a narrower sense, an apostle was limited to one of the twelve disciples specifically chosen by Christ and associated with him (Matt 3:17). They witnessed his life and ministry (1 John 1:1-3); his resurrection (Mat 28:1-10; Acts 1:22, 10:41; 1 Cor 9:1) and finally, his ascension (Acts 1:9-13).[[1]](#footnote-1) Paul was not one of the twelve but he was chosen and appointed by the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:4) and had the same authority as the twelve (Gal 1:11-17; 2 Cor 12:11-12). This means there are no apostles today in the narrow sense.

Paul’s second source of authority is that he is an apostle by God’s will. Paul did not just choose to be an apostle (Gal 1:1). Rather, God set him apart before birth and called him by grace to preach the gospel to Gentiles (Gal 1:15). Some think that God only calls pastors and missionaries to some specific task. So, Paul had two sources of authority, he was an apostle and this was by God’s will.

**The Recipients: Three Characteristics of the Ephesian Saints (1b)**

The recipients are saints or literally, holy ones. This is Old Testament language used for God’s Old Covenant people, those whom he chose and set apart for his own possession and purpose (Ex 19:5-6). Saints are not a special or select class of people but includes everyone who puts their faith in Jesus. The New Testament writers take the Old Testament language describing Israel and apply it to the church, believing Jews and Gentiles, because they saw the church as the fulfillment of Israel. As saints, we belong to God, we are his people and he has bound himself to us by covenant commitment. Notice that saints is plural. Saints are those who are part of a specific local church. Paul would have thought it bizarre for someone to claim to be a Christian and not be connected to a local church. Then Paul describes the saints with three characteristics: they are in Ephesus, they are faithful, and they are in Christ Jesus.

First, they are saints who are in Ephesus. This letter was probably circulated to the churches in cities across southwestern Asia Minor along the Aegean Sea (modern Turkey) but associated with Ephesus because it was the most prominent city and church in the region. This tells us that we are citizens of two kingdoms, the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. Our primary loyalty is to God’s kingdom. Don’t confuse the two. The saints in Ephesus are also described as faithful. This has a dual meaning. First, they are actively believing in Jesus Christ. They have said yes to the gospel. But they are also faithful to Jesus Christ, meaning, they are faithful to living out his teaching. Faith in Christ leads to faithfulness to Christ. Faith in Christ is like a root and faithfulness to Christ is the fruit. You cannot have fruit without the root. Third, the saints are described as in Christ Jesus. Paul loves this phrase, using it 164 times in his writings; 32 times in Ephesians alone! In Christ describes our union with Christ, being spiritually united to his person. Union with Christ makes us alive to Christ and connects us to God’s own life. We saw a picture of this union in John 15 in the grape vine metaphor. God the Father is the Gardner, Jesus is the vine, and those who have trusted Jesus are the branches. The branches are fruitful by their connection to the vine. The upshot of this is that you do not live the Christin life in your own power but by faith in his power through you. This union also unites us with others saints so that we are spiritually united to his church.

**The Greeting: The Twofold Blessing (1:2)**

Paul begins his letter with a prayer for divine favor and power in the lives of the saints in Ephesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Paul’s hope that the letter itself be a means of grace and peace in their lives. As they read and understand the letter, he wants God’s grace to fill their lives so that their faith in Christ becomes stronger and the peace of Christ rule their hearts and lives. Grace and peace flow from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Come each week expecting to receive grace and peace from God. God wants nothing more than you to be strengthened by grace and have his peace rule your hearts.

**Summary of Ephesians: Our Position and Our Practice**

***Our Position— What God has done for us in Christ (1–3)***

God is to be praised for giving us every blessing in Christ. We have been chosen and adopted by God the Father. We have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, through Jesus Christ. And we have been sealed by the Spirit, securing our inheritance. This is the beginning of his eternal plan to reconcile all creation to himself (1:3-14). Then Paul prays that we know the hope we have in this eternal plan, God’s glorious inheritance in us, and the greatness of his power for us. We are spiritually dead because of sin and therefore under God’s judgment. Yet God graciously brought us to life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by works but we are saved for good works which he has already planned for us (2:1-10).

When God brings us to life, he brings us together in a new community, the church. He has reconciled enemies, Jews and Gentiles, by Christ’s death. God is building his church into the true temple and dwelling place of God. All this was a mystery in the old covenant but God has now made it clear. This is why Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles. Then Paul prays that we be strengthened so that Christ rules in our hearts to know God’s love and be filled with him (3:1-21).

***Our Practice—How We Are to Live in Christ (4–6)***

Christians, the church, is to walk out this new life and maintain the unity of the Spirit. This unity is strengthened in the diversity of gifts given to equip the saints to build up the church so that we are united in our faith (4:1-16). Since God made us alive in Christ, put on the new way of living in Christ (4:17-32). Walk in love and light and wisdom like Jesus Christ did when he sacrificed his life for us (5:1-16). We have the power to live this way by being filled with Spirit to maintain our unity (5:17-6:9). Finally, since maintaining unity is a spiritual battle, we need to be strong in the Lord and in his strength by putting on the armor of God (6:10-20).

Ephesians summed up: God’s eternal plan to reconcile all creation in Christ begins by reconciling Jews and Gentiles in Christ and into the church (1-3). Therefore, believers must walk in the knowledge of Jesus Christ to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4-6).

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What are Paul’s two sources of authority to write this letter and why is it important for us?
2. Why does Paul call Christians in Ephesus saints instead of something else?
3. What are the three characteristics of the Ephesian believers?
4. What does it mean to be in Christ? What does this mean for our daily life?
5. How are grace and peace related? Why are they central to the gospel and our lives?
6. How does Paul want us to experience grace and peace?
7. Can you summarize Ephesians 1-3 and 4-6 in two sentences?
8. How is God speaking you through this passage?

1. This excludes Judas who betrayed him. There are more qualifications for apostles, see a brief summary at <https://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/ephesians-1:1-2>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)