

# Ephesians Introduction and Chapter 1

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Greetings everyone and hope your holidays went well. Nice to have a few weeks off, but yes I want to get back to what God called me to do! I believe He wants me to teach two of Paul's letters, (Ephesians and Galatians) next, so now you know the plan for next 12 weeks. As most of you know, I love doing this. I'm positive the bible is inspired by a source outside of time and space as we know it.

As far as Ephesians, I consider it the best Bible book on what it means to be a Christian, explaining our relationship with God and how that affects our eternal destiny. The first 3 chapters focuses on what our relationship to God is like. Chapters 4-6 then ask in effect what we're to do about it! This is old ground for us veterans. I realize we can never exhaust what we learn from studying a bible book. OK I'll focus on Chapter 1 in a bit: First a few things about the who, what, where's and why's of this book! That will give us a better appreciation for Ephesians.

First let's talk about the "where". At the time Paul wrote this letter, Ephesus may have been considered the second most important city in the Roman Empire after Rome itself. Ephesus is on the Aegean Sea, a large body of water that separates Turkey from Greece. Today Ephesus is mostly ruins, and it's just a tourist spot in Turkey. It "died" when silt filled their harbor that flowed, so that city could no longer be a port! Paul founded the church there and in Acts 19 it says Paul did spend three years preaching Jesus from there! The Gospel spread a lot from Paul's preaching there. I should also add that about 30 years later, the Apostle John was based there in his later years. Note that Revelation Chapter 2, Jesus penned a short letter to the Ephesian church stating that "they left its first love!"! Jesus also had positive things to say about that church. Anyway, Paul had a long history with Ephesus, and he knew many Christians there. Still, there's no "greetings to this guy or that guy" in this letter. Therefore some scholars think it was meant to be circulated among the churches in that area.

That leads to the when: In the latter part of the book of Acts, Paul was arrested for his belief that Jesus is God. In the last chapter of the book of Acts (not the end of Paul's life) he was in Rome, as he waited for his trial for being a Christian. My point is Ephesians with a few other of Paul's letters were penned during that time (62-64AD). Given that history and the fact Paul's name is in the letter it's obvious he's the author. That covers the who, what and where. The rest of this lesson will cover the "why" which is the main reason we should study our bible in the first place!

If I had to summarize Chapter 1, I'd say it's about understanding what it means to be "in" Jesus. I'll just say it's a complicated issue, and Paul spends the better part of three chapters trying to explain what that means. Remember Paul was writing this letter to people who already believed Jesus is God so why the detailed explanation of what that entails? Maybe it's because Paul had decades to think about what that means and wanted to share that knowledge with the readers of his letters! The reason for studying it is it teaches (or reminds us) about how blessed we are to be believers!

That leads to a classic debate in Christianity about God's sovereignty versus our free will! Personally it hasn't bothered me as much as it has others. I start with the assumption God knows all things and can't learn! If God can learn then He's capable of mistakes! I refuse to believe that a perfect God is capable of making mistakes. The bible states God knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). It means He knows who's saved and who isn't because He's perfect. Is it fair He only chooses some people to be with Him forever? It's His world so He makes the rules. God gave us free-will and some choose to not

accept His free gift of salvation. For the naïve, I'll let God judge people for the decisions they make as that's His responsibility! We don't know who is saved, as we don't have perfect knowledge.

Charles Spurgeon (a famous 19th Century pastor said, "I'm glad God choose me before the foundation of the world (as stated in this chapter) because if God choose me now, He might change His mind!" I am paraphrasing a little. Again, the purpose of this lesson is to grasp what is our relationship with God and in the latter chapters of this book, we have to deal with what he got to do about it! OK time to take on this chapter to give us a flavor of it!

First thing Paul says that he's an apostle of Jesus because it's God's will! One thing I've accepted is it is hard to resist God's will. As the old joke goes, "Our arms are too short to box with God!" Then he says this letter is to all who are faithful in (that's a key word) Jesus! Paul will spend much of this chapter on the topic of what it means to be "in" Jesus! The opening greeting as many of Paul's letters includes the word "grace". It refers to God's unearned favor to believers and also means peace in a Jewish sense of an overall sense of peace. It's literally what we receive when we accept the fact God has blessed us. I'd add that Paul is literally warming up in what it means to be blessed by God!

Verse 3 in effect states what I've already stated: To realize from His perspective He has already blessed us since we are "in" Jesus. The idea of blessing is far more than the fact we're alive to be a witness for Him! We may not be rich, but we're blessed far more than we can ever realize! It includes the idea that we're saved and can't lose that. The real way we are blessed isn't just that we accept it, is that we get to understand why: It's got nothing to do with how good or bad of a person we are! It is because we care about our salvation that we can grasp why God picked people to spend eternity with Him!

To put it another way, the one thing not revealed in the Old Testament is there is a "subset" of all those in heaven. That is what we call the Christian church! Whether we like it or not even the lowest person in the church has a greater status in heaven than all Old Testament saints! That leads to the question of why did God bother? My view is if God is perfect and He is full of love, He desires to express His love on people! I believe naïve people (think babies) plus many others are saved, but the church is still more special that all those! The mystery Paul reveals here is how special it is to be part of that church! I got no idea what we'll do for eternity, but I know it won't be boring! We must accept God chose us despite our faults, He loves us and chose us to be part of the church before the foundation of the world! I think some will appreciate heaven more than others, which is why He wants us to study His word and realize about what it means to be a part of the church! Is it fair that a great person who believed in God that is not a Christian (lived before then) gets less status than a Christian? Again, God makes the rules so that is that!

A point made in Verses 11-14 is that we who were the "first" to hear of this salvation are to be for His praise! That gets me back to what's in it for God. He doesn't have a big ego and needs to hear us pray or praise Him. God realizes the best way to go through life is to honor Him as God and put life in that perspective! The text also means the Holy Spirit. Among His jobs, is to remind us of those truths and convince of us the truths of who God and Jesus is and why He bothered? So why did God bother? He wants us to be a "prize" for Jesus! Have you ever stopped to consider the reason Jesus had to die to do His will is there can't be a "Last will and Testament" without death! A will can't be executed until that person dies! The will of God the Father is that Jesus inherits many people to be His gift to execute that will! It's God the Father's will to have a special group of people, collectively called the church in effect as a present for Jesus for executing that will of dying for our sakes!

I am the first to admit I'm barely scratching the surface of what this chapter covers. In fact, I'm going to discuss the last nine verses in the next lesson. The main thing I wanted to point out in this lesson is what it means to be "in" Jesus and how that effects our eternal destiny. Hope this idea gives us things to think about this week. Thanks as always for reading.