

Series on the Book of Ephesians  
Ephesians 1:1-2  
Sermon #1  
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FROM DIANA TO CHRIST  
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Alright. Take your Bibles and turn to the Book of Ephesians.

I asked Mr. Tinkler to read the nineteenth chapter of Acts, this morning, because it gives us the background of Paul's connections with the church at Ephesus. He first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey. We read of his arrival there in the eighteenth chapter. If you have your Bible open to that passage you will notice that in verse 19 of Acts 18 he ministered there for just a brief time and then left for Cesarea and then eventually returned to Antioch which was his home base. Then, the eighteenth chapter tells us (you will see the point in my mentioning this in just a moment) that after Paul left Ephesus on that first visit, Apollos, whose name I am sure most of us are familiar with, came to Ephesus. The account of his ministry there is given in verses 24 - 28. He is spoken of as a man who is eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. But there was a couple there whose names are also familiar to anyone who is familiar with the life of Paul, a couple by the name of Aquilla and Priscilla, who were more mature in their faith and in their understanding of the truth than even Apollos was. Acts 18:26 tells us that they, Aquilla and Priscilla took him, Apollos, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. He was a good teacher, but he was not as good as he needed to be. Then, the twenty-seventh verse of that eighteenth chapter tells us that Apollos went on from Ephesus to Achaia, and that the brethren (notice that statement) of Ephesus wrote to the disciples of Achaia to receive Apollos when he came.

All of this means, and here is my point in mentioning this, that there was a work of the Lord already going on in Ephesus before Paul came there, and certainly before his two year ministry about which we have heard this morning from the nineteenth chapter which took place on his third missionary journey. Acts 19:1 tells us that Paul found certain disciples when he got to Ephesus. So we know from this that Paul did not found the Ephesian church as he did many of the churches that are mentioned in the New Testament. Who did, we do not really know. Paul did become very close to the believers there. When you get on into Acts 20, you remember that very touching scene when Paul was concluding his third missionary journey and was going back to Jerusalem. He took his farewell with the elders of Ephesus when he met them at Miletus. As far as we can tell it must have been about the year 54 A.D. that Paul was in Ephesus-- when he went there. He wrote the Ephesian Epistle probably eight or nine years later. These are just approximate dates. It was in perhaps the early sixties that he wrote to the Ephesian church when he was a prisoner in Rome. So the Ephesian letter is one of the four New Testament letters written by Paul that we call the Prison Epistles. These are Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and the Book of Ephesians.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. When you read in the New Testament about Asia, do not think of the continent of Asia, but this is that little area that is occupied by the country of Turkey today. Jewish believers had been dispersed, or scattered, to this area because of persecution in Jerusalem and this was probably how the church got started. It was to these believers that even Peter wrote his epistle, because, if you remember back to our consideration of 1 and 2 Peter you will remember that as Peter identifies the various areas where his epistles were to be circulated he mentions Asia. Of course, the main part of that area, as far as the Lord's work was concerned was really the city of Ephesus.

Acts 19 tells us that in Ephesus there was the temple of the great goddess Diana. In reading through that chapter, if you listened carefully this morning, you notice that the Gospel had made such an impact--Paul's ministry had made such an impact upon the city of Ephesus with many of the Ephesians turning to Christ that these silversmiths and these craftsmen who were making the shrines

of the goddess Diana felt that their livelihood was being threatened. Too many people were being saved. These shrines were sent all over the Empire because Diana was not only worshipped in Ephesus, but all through Asia, and really, in all parts of the Empire.

As Acts 19:35 tells us, Diana was supposed to have fallen to the earth from Jupiter. Her home was in nature. She was considered to be the mother of all living things. If you have been to Ephesus, or to any of those cities of turkey, perhaps you have seen images of Diana. The upper part of her body was covered with breasts to signify that she was the mother of all living things. So she really had a place of being the god of gods in the minds of the Ephesians.

When Paul wrote this epistle, he was writing to many who had come from Diana to Christ. That is where I have taken my subject this morning. Yet, in the reading of Acts 19:37 you will see that when Paul went into the city of Ephesus, he did not go in there to attack the worshippers of Diana and to tell them specifically how false she was as a goddess, in other word: to blaspheme her; but he had gone in there specifically to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What happened in Ephesus happened in many of these places that are mentioned in the New Testament. I could not help but think of Paul's introductory remarks to the church at Thessalonica when he said, ". . . "how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). This should lead us to see that if people are to be turned from idolatry and from all the other sins connected with idolatry, all it takes is the simple preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of the grace of God.

As we come to this epistle, let me give you one other word about the background of this epistle before we look at the beginning of this important letter. It has to do with the words "at Ephesus." Perhaps you may have a note in your Bible to the effect that these words are not in many of the manuscripts, so that the first verse would simply read: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 1-2). Apparently, in some of the manuscripts there was even a blank there. This has led to the belief that this letter, though primarily addressed to the Ephesians, because Ephesus does appear in many of the manuscripts, was to be circulated among a number of churches. You remember that when the Apostle John wrote the Book of the Revelation he addressed it primarily to the church at Ephesus, but he mentions all of those other churches in the vicinity of Ephesus. So it is very possible that when Paul wrote this epistle he wrote to the very same churches that the Apostle John wrote the Book of the Revelation for. We need to think of this as a circular epistle. This should not really bother us because, though the Word of God was originally written to different groups, yet we all know that it is written for us as well and for all the people of God from that day until this. It does not detract anything at all from the epistle to say that it was written to the believers in more than one city and that Paul had more than one church in mind.

So we come to this epistle in which we are going to see, I think, what Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls "the glory and grandeur of the Gospel." We need to realize that in this area there were not only Jews, but there were Gentiles, and that Paul was writing as he always did to establish the believers in the truth of the Gospel and, of course, exhorting them to lead lives that would glorify God and Jesus Christ, their Lord.

Today, as we begin this epistle, I had hoped to take up the first two verses, but I am just going to get to the second verse this morning. Since there are 155 verses, if we go at the rate of one verse a Sunday it is probably going to take 3 and 1/2 years to get through this epistle. Dr. Lockwood was being very optimistic when he spoke of possibly a year. I am not going to go that slow so do not any of you leave this morning thinking that I am going to do that. But I wanted to give you those words of background so that we could be introduced to this epistle in a proper way.

Let us look at verse one and notice what the Apostle Paul has to say here.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

He does two things in this first verse. He identifies himself as the writer and he identifies the people who are going to receive this letter. It is interesting for us to see how he identifies himself and how he identifies them. As far as his identification, you will notice that it is in the first part of the verse: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Let us really get acquainted, to this extent anyway, to the Apostle Paul this morning. There may be somebody here who does not know a great deal about Paul. In those days, they had a habit that I think we could do well to get back to today. That is, the writer of a letter would always mention himself first so you would not have to turn to the end of the letter to find out who the letter was from. So Paul puts his name here as well as the name of those who are receiving it. It would not appear presumptuous to anyone to find his name appearing right at the beginning. You see his name again, do you not, in chapter 3 verse 1 where he identifies himself not as an apostle of Jesus Christ, but the prisoner of Jesus Christ.

If you are familiar with the story of Paul's conversion, you will know that originally his name was Saul. There have been many, many attempts to try to explain why the change from Saul to Paul. I ran across one writer who felt that since Saul was born as a Roman citizen that he may have had both of these names right from the very beginning. Saul was a Jewish name, Paul was a Gentile name. Paul was actually a Roman name. We run into the change for the first time in the Book of Acts in Acts 13:9 when Paul and Barnabas were first setting out on their missionary journey. They were, you know, going into these areas that were predominantly Gentile, though there was a mixture of people in each one of these places. Whatever the reason might be, we know that the name Paul will always be an indication of a change, a marvelous change that had taken place in the life of Saul of Tarsus when on the road to Damascus he personally was transformed when he met Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. This also would be an indication--remember that he was a very devout Jew, a very faithful Jew. A Jew was inclined to look down upon people who were Gentiles. He felt that a man who was a Jew had special preference as far as God was concerned. But the Gospel that he was preaching was a Gospel in which he emphasized again and again . . . Let me read a couple of these for you.

You do not need to turn to these. When he wrote to the Galatian churches he said something that marked a radical difference from the way he thought about people and their relationship to God because he said that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek to God because he said, "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: but ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). That means that if you were a Gentile this did not put you in an inferior position as far as the Gospel and salvation were concerned; if you were a Jew it did not give you a special place of preference; or if you contrast a person who is a slave as compared with a free man, this is a Gospel that is preached to all and it is a message from a God Who is no respecter of persons. One person does not have any preference above any other person. But, as we are drawn to Christ we are all one in Him.

When he wrote to the Colossian church he said along the same line, "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, Circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). This was an amazing thing for the Apostle Paul to say. A change that the Lord Jesus Christ had made in his life. He knew that he had no special claim upon God because he was a Jew, nor was it a detriment to be a Jew. God deals with all men in grace and He never saves anybody because of what they are according to the flesh. Paul, taking a Gentile name to indicate this transformation in his own attitude that had taken place. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

Now, let us look at his title: an apostle of Jesus Christ. Perhaps somebody would say, "well, what right did Paul have to write an epistle like this?" Here is our answer right at the beginning. It is

important for the readers to see this because this was his commission. He had his appointment from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This was apparent from the very beginning of God's dealings with him (that is, when we were conscious that God was dealing with him) when the Lord sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus after, you remember, he had lost his sight when he received that vision from heaven. Ananias was very, very hesitant about going to see Saul of Tarsus because he knew why Saul had come to Damascus. But the Lord said this to Ananias, "Go thy way (and then speaking of Saul of Tarsus he said): for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Gentiles and Jews. He is a chosen one to Me. He is an apostle. He is being appointed as an apostle. Paul wrote this epistle with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ behind him. He wrote as a personal representative of Jesus Christ and he was commissioned to speak and write on behalf of the Lord Jesus. His ministry was to tell people about Jesus Christ, to glorify Jesus Christ, to win people to Jesus Christ, to build up believers in Jesus Christ. Here is a good place for you to know the meaning of the word "Paul" because the name Paul that I have been discussing with you is a Gentile word which means "little," a Gentile word which means "little." So here is a little man, little in stature he was, but little in his own sight, having seen himself as a worthless, hopeless sinner, raised by the grace of God, commissioned as an apostle to go through the known world of the Roman Empire telling people everywhere about Jesus Christ. He was not preaching himself, as he said on one occasion, "but we preach Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake."

Then, to cap it all he says that I have this commission not just from Jesus Christ, but this is "the will of God." What he wants us to know is not only that he is an apostle with the authority to speak as an apostle, but he has not chosen this place for himself. He had not been elected by the other apostles, although that would not have been necessarily wrong, but in a very special sense he was an apostle by the will of God. Not only had the Lord Jesus chosen him for this ministry, but it was all the outworking of the eternal and infinitely important will of God.

I believe that again it was Martyn Lloyd-Jones who points out in his commentary on the Book of Ephesians that it was characteristic of Paul in his writings to bring his readers immediately and directly into contact with God. Notice how this begins here. He says: "An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God . . . Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . saving us from our sins. What a place of distinction and honor this little Jew had, in the plan and purpose in God when the Lord redeemed him and commissioned him to spread the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. He did it with the assurance that this was the will of God for him.

Now, for whom did he write?

Well, he said, "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." There was a day in Ephesus when there were no saints there. Then, by the grace of God there were some saints there--maybe they moved there from Jerusalem. Then there were more saints and more saints until from the circumstances that we read about in Scripture it seems that there were many saints there.

What is a saint? Saints are simply the Lord's people. The word "saint" means that they are a holy people, that they are a people set apart by the Lord, set apart from all other people, set apart for the Lord Himself. We are going to see as we move on in this chapter that they were a chosen people, chosen before the foundation of the world. They were people who have been redeemed and forgiven. They were members of God's family. They might look just like anybody else, but you soon find out that their hearts are different. They have been changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So they are saints.

He also identifies them as "faithful in Christ Jesus." This is not two groups: saints and, on the other

hand, faithful in Christ Jesus; but these are two ways of describing the same group. As you might expect, even from our English translation, the word "faithful" comes from the word "faith". This word would suggest that these saints are people who believe something. The One they believe is Jesus Christ. Paul calls them faithful because they continue to believe in Jesus Christ. It is not something that was true of them yesterday, but is not true of them today; they have believed and they continue to believe. This is the evidence that they have really believed, that their profession is genuine, that it is real, because they continue to believe. You see, when he says that they are faithful in Christ Jesus it does not just mean that they believe in Him, but it means that they are faithful because they are in Christ Jesus.

All of us are like Paul: We are little, we are insignificant, we are unworthy of being saved. If the Lord left us to ourselves why we would continually fail Him. There would not be any such thing as persevering in the faith. But, you see, when we are saved--and we are going to learn more about this as we go on in Ephesians--we are placed in Christ Jesus. When that miraculous work of salvation takes place in any person's heart, he is going to be faithful. He not only initially believes in Christ, but he is going to continue to believe in Christ.

It is amazing to see what Christ had become, but it is just as amazing to see what those special people in Ephesus were. Let me ask you as I conclude this morning, "Have you joined them?" I am thankful and I praise God for His grace to be able to say that I have, and I know that most of you, if you had the opportunity to say so would say that you have. Portland has its saints. These saints are at the same time those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. We got into the family of God, did we not, just exactly the same way Paul got in and the way these Ephesians got in. It is not that we deserve to get in, but it was because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and because of what He has done in our hearts. There is no other way for a person to become a saint and saintly in his behaviour except through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only One Who is worth talking about. We may love our church and love our fellowship, but we cannot help each other as far as salvation is concerned except to spread this wonderful message of salvation. Christ is the One Who died that our sins might be forgiven. If you are here this morning without Jesus Christ as your Saviour, I would just plead with you to come to Him. Do as these Ephesians did so many, many years ago. They heard the Gospel proclaimed. They heard of Jesus Christ Who came and took upon Himself the likeness of our sinful flesh and bore our sins in His own body on the tree and suffered and died in order that we might be forgiven and that we might have eternal life. There has been no change in the Gospel from Paul's day to this day. In fact, there has been no change in the Gospel from the first time the Gospel was proclaimed in the Old Testament down to the present hour. Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of Old Testament saints and He is the Saviour of New Testament saints. He can be your Saviour this morning if you in simple faith come acknowledging your sins and your unworthiness, but trusting in the grace of God and putting your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. This is the Gospel that we are going to be learning about as we go on in this wonderful epistle. The Gospel that is going to leave us like it left the Apostle Paul because after this brief prayer which I want to consider with you next Sunday, the Lord willing, you notice that as Paul speaks of salvation starting with verse 3 and as he begins to unfold some of these wonderful spiritual blessings that are all a part of our salvation and all belong to every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he begins this by saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ." You see, it has come as

a blessing from God, not because we deserve it because there has never been a person turned to the Lord who deserved to be saved; but we bless God and we bless the Lord Jesus Christ because in their marvelous grace they provided something for us that we could never do for ourselves, nobody else could do for us. There is only One Who could come. As this message was proclaimed in Ephesus and the Spirit of God was using this message there were multitudes of people there who came to the realization that it is not Diana that I need, it is not Diana that is going to help me, but it is Jesus Christ. If you could come this morning to that discovery and you have never made that discovery as far as your own heart is concerned you will be praising God for all eternity that He brought you

to the place to see that the One that you need and the only One who can save you from your sins is Jesus Christ the blessed Son of God.