

This morning we are starting a new series of sermons on St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

I am going to introduce the letter to you some of the background and context. To help us really understand what we are looking at over the coming weeks. Then we are going to look at what we've just heard from the end of Chapter 3.

You might want to open a bible to Ephesians 1.

**Ephesians 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."**

Paul, an Apostle of Christ.

Who is Paul? Paul is such a significant figure in church history. When you flick through your bible and the New Testament specifically you will discover 13 letters written by Paul. Which means out of 27 books in the New Testament Paul wrote just under half. St. Luke who wrote Luke's Gospel and Acts wrote the majority of the words in the New Testament. But Paul is only slightly behind. Where Luke recorded history – Jesus' Ministry and the early church. Paul mainly wrote theology.

According to the New Testament Paul was born in Tarsus. Tarsus is on the south coast of Modern day Turkey. Tarsus was a sort of Tax haven and so it attracted the very wealthy. Paul was a Roman Citizen which would have given him a lot of power and status within the empire. As Roman Citizenship wasn't given to anyone, it was so powerful that on one occasion Paul used his citizenship to escape imprisonment.

Whilst Paul was born in Tarsus he at some stage during his childhood or early teens moved to Jerusalem. Paul himself was a Jew and so he grew up in both the Greek and Jewish cultures. Racial inclusion and actually inclusion in general in the Church is a big theme in Paul's letters. In Galatians 3:28 Paul writes **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**

Whilst Paul had this dual heritage he was also very Jewish

In his letter to the Philippians he writes

Philippians 3:4–5

**“though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; (ESV)”**

Basically, all of those things made Paul almost an exemplar of being Jewish. He was basically the Jewish Grandson that a Jewish Grandma might dream of. As we have just heard he was a pharisee. Jesus interacts with two groups in the gospels the Sadducees and the pharisees. Paul was a member of the Pharisees and they were extremely well educated in the scriptures and also in the traditions that were added later on.

Paul was also a proud persecutor of the Christian Church. But this changed when he had an encounter with the ascended Jesus on the road to Damascus Paul was made blind temporarily by Christ. He was instructed by Jesus to seek out a Christian. Who healed him. After these events Pauls essentially went from Christian killer to church builder. Paul travelled around preaching and teaching about Jesus.

Ok that's Paul's Biography.

Let's zoom in on Ephesians still chapter one verse one

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

Let's start there I encourage all of you to read Ephesians this week it's quite short. But if you want to go deeper; you might like to either invest in a study bible or a commentary. Most commentaries will say something about the authorship of Ephesians I'm just pointing this out, so you don't get surprised when you get there.

Who wrote St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians? Sounds like a trick question, right? Well the traditional view and the view I hold says it is St. Paul and I'll explain why in a second. However, there are some scholars who say that the style of Ephesians is somewhat different from other letters that we are certain that Paul himself wrote. The other reason is we are certain that Paul wrote Colossians. And

Colossians and Ephesians are very similar. Some would argue that someone got a copy of Colossians, thought this is rather good, and then used it to write a Paul style letter to the Ephesians.

So that's a quick summary of the arguments for it not being written by Paul. Here's why I and the majority of Christians, historically, think the other way.

1. I assume that Ephesians is scripture – It is the word of God and is trustworthy, it claims to be written by Paul.
2. The stylistic variation isn't that big 90-95% similarity with other Pauline texts
3. Paul uses less new words in this letter than in his other undisputed letters
4. Similarity with Colossians – Paul may well have decided to use the same letter as a basis for messages to other churches.

### **“To the saints who are in Ephesus,”**

So briefly Ephesus is in the west of Modern Turkey. It was a significant harbour and a hub of culture. It boasted a huge site of pagan worship and was probably home to very wealthy people. How the majority of residents were the slaves and servants who served the people of Ephesus. It seems likely that the church would have also been made up of slaves. We get a hint of that in chapter 6 which we won't actually cover in this series. Paul gives instructions on how slaves should live under their masters. Some people have taken this to be proof that the Bible supports slavery. I think that's a very narrow reading. These are slaves who have no power to change the systemic issues that allow their situation to exist, further Christianity is very much a minority group. Paul then isn't asking questions about abolishing slavery, they have now power to really make that impact. He's more asking how can the church in Ephesus be Christian in their situations? So that is the Church in Ephesus- A multi-ethnic, minority group, proclaiming Christ in a pagan city.

That's enough introduction let's take a look at chapter 3

3:14 **“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.”** If you are reading your Bible and you came across a phrase like for this reason or in order that. Do go back a bit and see what the reason is.

What is the reason Paul is moved to bow the knee? From Chapter one Paul has been expounding the glory of the gospel. Ephesians is a very general letter it doesn't really have one theme. The first half is quite theological with this explanation of the gospel and the second half is more practical.

In Chapter one Paul celebrates that God's plan to redeem the creation that was set and determined in eternity past has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Chapter 2 Paul unpacks the gospel further that at one time without Christ we were spiritually dead but the only solution to the problem has been provided through Christ's death as a free gift to you and the only way you can receive it is through faith which

is the gift of God. Then he celebrates that the gospel is not for one people group but for all ethnicities. He concludes at the end of chapter 2 by saying

**(Ephesians 2:19–22) “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)”**

Paul is saying your citizenship is no longer Jew or Ephesian or Roman. But heaven is your home, the kingdom of God is your home. You are citizens with the saints all one in Christ Jesus.

Chapter one: God’s plan is fulfilled in Christ

Chapter 2: We receive freedom by grace through faith. This gift is available to all people groups.

Ephesians 3:1

**“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ”**

3:1 Paul begins to make his point but then gets briefly distracted. By mentioning that he is actually in prison most likely in Rome. The year is 62AD. Paul was greatly persecuted for his faith in Jesus Christ and so spent many occasions being beaten or imprisoned or both. That’s why I have heard a picture by Rembrandt Paul in prison. Notice this picture that really captures something of the captivity that Paul faced. He is seated here writing. Also notice the sword which often appears in images of the Apostle which indicates the kind of death he faced. According to Christian tradition Paul was beheaded in Rome in 67AD.

Then at the beginning of our reading Paul returns to his point.

Ephesians 3:14

**“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father”**

Paul bows his knees before the Father because Jesus Christ is saving people for his glory from every nation and tribe and tongue. Bringing them together to one body unified in Christ. Citizens of heaven.

When was the last time you were moved to worship because there are Black Christians or white Christians or South American Christians or Asian Christians?

The Apostle Paul is moved to worship for this reason. In prison in a foreign country. Because God is bringing people of all people groups together in Christ.

And his desire is for more! More for the Church in Ephesus!

**“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,”**

All who have accepted Christ through faith have the Holy Spirit in them but what Paul is praying here for the Ephesian Christians is that they like him would be given the power of the Holy Spirit, who would give them a deeper knowledge and passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ. A passion for the reconciliation in Christ of all people from every nation and tribe and tongue. Do you want a deeper passion for the gospel and the reconciliation of all who believe to God?

So, Paul prays that they would have a deeper knowledge of God a knowledge that verse 17 is **“grounded in love”**. Love is the root of the knowledge of God that causes a passion for his glory and therefore a passion for God’s saving action for people of every nation tribe and tongue in Jesus Christ.

I cannot give you steps to achieving this knowledge. Other than it comes through the Holy Spirit and through prayer. As Paul described. But what I can tell you is that this knowledge is the knowledge of

**“breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”**

I am going to lead us in Pauls words of worship and then I am going to pray that we would receive the Holy Spirit.

If you’re able I would invite you to kneel and, in your heart, begin to adore God for all his wonderful works.

**“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”**