

**Ephesians**  
**The Ephesians Overture – Part 2**  
**Ephesians 1:1-2**  
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We turn for the second time to the book of Ephesians. I've been eagerly anticipating our study of this great letter for many months now. I told you it was coming; and I've delighted to read through it many, many times in many different translations; to go through it in the Greek text; to come back to it again and again. And you are in for some great, wonderful times as we go through this letter together. Some of the richest, most profound truth in all of the scripture lies here in this great letter of Paul's.

Until about the last ten years, human history has been recorded through written letters. I say the last ten years, because with the last ten years has come the onslaught of something that I have grown to abhor, and that is email. I'm considering dumping it altogether and returning to letters, but email is convenient, and that's why we use it. It's also, however, often short and terse. It's cold. It's typically littered with grammar errors and misspellings, and it's about as beautiful as a California condor. Emails have about as much life as the computers on which they're written, and that send them. But the letters of the past—if you've ever had a chance to read a collection of various letters from the past—you find that they breathe with life and with humanity. Recently I was reminded that some of the greatest events in history were documented in letters. It was in a letter that Columbus first broke news of the New World back to Spain. It was in a letter that Galileo told his colleagues of the invention of the telescope. It was in a letter that Louis Pasteur first exposed his discovery of the power of inoculation to prevent disease. And it was in a letter to President Roosevelt that Albert Einstein explained why America needed the atom bomb, and how it could be built. Those are certainly some of the great discoveries of the world that affect us all.

But when you think about letters, undoubtedly the greatest letters ever written are those written by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ and recorded for us under the inspiration of the Spirit in

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the New Testament. Each of these letters pulses not only with the great heart of an apostle, but also with the very breath and life of God Himself. Timeless, although written now almost two thousand years ago. And among those New Testament letters, Paul's letter to the Ephesians stands out on the biblical horizon as a kind of Mount Everest of biblical revelation. And last week we began to take what will be a many month—probably a couple of year—journey through its great truth.

We began last week to look at Paul's introduction. I say began, because we only made it through the first phrase. But I want us to come back to it again this morning, and Lord willing, finish this introduction to the letter. Let me remind you of what Paul said as he began, there in chapter 1 verse 1. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." In that simple greeting that follows the form of most greetings in the early and middle part of the first century, Paul provides us with several compelling reasons to read and study this letter together. Why should we take a day—much less weeks, and months, and even years—to study this letter? Well, the reasons are buried here in this brief introduction. And we're examining those reasons together.

Last week we discovered the first reason that we should pore over this book. Because of its ultimate source. We find this in the very first phrase. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." This letter is from none other than Paul. You'll remember we discovered last time that on his third missionary journey Paul had stayed in the city of Ephesus for about three years. About six years later, he wrote them this letter. Can you imagine the excitement when word spread that a man named Tychicus had arrived in Ephesus and that he carried a letter from the apostle Paul? I'm sure word spread quickly through the congregation that after a long silence of six years, they were going to hear from their beloved brother. They all gathered on the Lord's Day, eager to hear what the apostle Paul had written. They would have gathered just like we gather today, and perhaps Tychicus, perhaps one of the elders of the church, would have read the letter that Paul had written them. With great excitement, they would have listened eagerly.

When you and I see the name Paul, it should excite in us the same intensity of enthusiasm that it did in those first century Christians. While we have never met the man personally, we know what beats in his great heart and how God used him so mightily in the early church. But ultimately Paul is not the source of what we will study. He goes beyond that. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus." Paul was saying, "I am an authorized official representative of Jesus Christ, and I stand in that position by the will of God. God chose me to be an official representative of Jesus Christ." We need to study this letter carefully because of its source. It comes to us from the Father and from our Lord through their officially appointed messenger, to give us this truth.

Today we come to the second reason that a letter written almost two thousand years ago is worthy of our time and study, not only because of its ultimate source, but secondly, because of its intended readers. "To the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." You and I should receive this letter because it was written to believers just like we are, in the first century. And ultimately, as we know, it was written to us as well. Now this brief line that ends verse 1 is not as simple as it appears in English. There are several questions in it actually, about the destination of this letter, because the words in English "at Ephesus" do not appear in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts. Those manuscripts simply read, "To those who are saints and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." There's another problem. If Paul is writing to a group of people that he spent three years with, why aren't there more personal references to friends and co-workers in this letter, as there are in others of his letters? Those observations might lead us to conclude that maybe Paul didn't originally write this letter to the church in Ephesus. But on the other hand, there is evidence that that's exactly what he did, because most of the manuscripts that we have—the majority of the ancient manuscripts—do have the phrase "at Ephesus" included. And most of the early church fathers identify Ephesus as the destination of this letter. So how do we reconcile all of that? Most scholars now agree—and I think this is a very good hypothesis as I'll show you in a moment—that this letter was originally intended to be a circular letter, distributed to a number of churches in the area of Asia Minor. And without question the church in Ephesus, where Paul ministered for those three years, was one of the churches he intended to receive this letter. But since Ephesus was the largest city in the entire region, and because it was probably, therefore, the largest church in the entire region, most of the early church came to call this letter

“the letter to the Ephesians.” It was probably written at the same time as two other Prison Epistles: Colossians and Philemon. Paul, you remember, was in prison, his first of two Roman imprisonments. And he was in prison in Rome for two full years, the last two verses of Acts 28 tell us. And during those two years he was in his own rented quarters, able to receive others; but he was essentially under house arrest. And during those two years, probably toward the end of those two years, he writes these three letters, probably together. And they were probably delivered—all three letters, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—they were probably all delivered by a man named Tychicus at the same time.

Turn to the end of Ephesians—Ephesians chapter 6—you meet this man. Ephesians chapter 6 verse 21. Paul says, “But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your heart.”

So, Paul sent this letter with Tychicus, and with a personal report about his own condition, to the church at Ephesus and the surrounding churches. Turn to Colossians and you will see a similar reference. Colossians chapter 4. Colossians chapter 4, and notice verse 7. “As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.” You recognize the similarities between the two expressions? Undoubtedly Paul wrote these two letters at the same time, sent them with this man to the region of Asia Minor. Now notice verse 9. We see the third letter that would have been included with Tychicus. Verse 9 says “and with him [Tychicus, I’m also sending] Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.” So, Paul is sending these letters with Tychicus, along with Tychicus he’s sending Onesimus. You remember the runaway slave of Philemon, and therefore probably also sending the letter to Philemon accompanying them as well. So Tychicus arrives with these letters. And he arrives with the letter to the Ephesians. This letter, then, was sent to the Christians in the church in Ephesus, but also to a number of other smaller churches in that

region as well. Now why is that important? Well, it means that even in the first century, this letter was intended for the benefit of a large number of believers, and not simply one local church. And of course, we know, because it's in the New Testament, the Spirit intended this letter to, by design, be for all of us. As Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 3, Paul's letters are scripture. He says there are some who pervert or twist Paul's letters as they do the rest of scripture. So, this letter then was intended for all the Christians in the region of Asia Minor starting with the church in Ephesus and radiating out to the smaller surrounding cities and towns. And ultimately, it was intended for all Christians, including you. Do you understand that? Do you believe that? That God intended in the first century when Paul wrote this letter, He ultimately intended to save you, and that you would receive this letter to benefit from the truth that's here.

As Paul begins this letter, notice how he identifies the true Christians that were there in Ephesus and in the surrounding area. He uses two very insightful descriptions. He says, "to the saints." Now if you had known the people in Ephesus just a few years before, "saint" would have been the very last word that would have come to your mind about these people. Let me give you a little background on the city of Ephesus. I had the opportunity a number of years ago to travel there. In the ancient world, it was—by all accounts—a huge city. Some two hundred thousand people lived in the city of Ephesus. It was politically influential. It was the capital of the province. It was the home of the Roman governor. It was also economically prosperous. It was situated on a major trade route, and had access, in addition, to the Mediterranean Sea through the Aegean Sea. It was outwardly, by all intents and purposes, an attractive, prosperous ancient city. But there was also a dark side to the city of Ephesus. You can see traces of it even today. In fact, one of our members who was in the first hour told me that he had visited there when he was stationed in Turkey, when he was there. And he said, "You know, you can't even talk about some of the things that you see in the museum there." And that's exactly right. It had a dark and sordid side.

It was known for the occult. You see a little glimpse of that even in the book of Acts. Turn back to Acts chapter 19. Here's where the account occurs of all that happened in Ephesus. We looked at this some, last time. You remember in chapter 19 verse 1, on a third missionary journey, Paul

comes to Ephesus. And there were some people there who were confused—who still embraced John's baptism of repentance but hadn't come to fully understand all that came with Christ—and Paul teaches them and baptizes them. He goes, verse 8, into the synagogues there in Ephesus, and was speaking boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God, and eventually departed into the school of Tyrannus and taught there for two years. Verse 10 says "so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." So that great city of Ephesus was like the hub and the word went out from there. Paul, by God's power, was performing some extraordinary miracles, verse 11 says, "so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out." But there were also some Jewish exorcists involved in the occult, who went from place to place. And they attempted to name over those who had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of one Sceva the Jewish chief priest were doing this." And you remember the answer. The evil spirit said, "Listen, I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Verse 16 says, "And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." He probably gave up that line of work. "This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified." There was the occult. Even those dabbling in it through the name of Jesus.

But it was also a city known for its connections to magic. In fact, in the ancient world, books of incantations—of spells if you would—were called Ephesian writings, it was so common. You see this as well in the book of Acts. Look at verse 18 of chapter 19.

Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Think about that. Just those in Ephesus who were converted from the practice of magic had a collection of books worth fifty thousand Greek drachmas. One drachma equaled one day's pay. Fifty thousand days' pay. At an average of two hundred and fifty workdays a year, that amounts to two hundred years of wages just in books of magical incantations.

But by far the thing that Ephesus was most famous for was the great structure, the temple of Artemis, or Diana. Paul and his companions were also confronted by those in this great city who worshiped Artemis, or Diana. You see in verse 23 and following, "About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith," probably the head of the guild of those "who made [these little] shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;" he gathered them together and said listen, "We're going to lose our business because of Paul." And a riot practically ensues. They begin crying out— verse 28—"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The [whole] city was filled with confusion." They rushed into the theater. I had the chance to actually visit that theater. We had a service there. We set up a service where there were some three hundred of us singing to God, singing to Christ; and John preached. It was a wonderful time. But they gathered in this theater shouting for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" until they are finally broken up. It's quite an amazing structure—the temple of Diana that was there in Ephesus. It was listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Picture this for a moment. Leading from the city to the temple, which was about a mile outside the city, there was a thirty-five-foot-wide marble road—a thirty-five-foot-wide marble road leading from the city for a mile out to the temple of Diana. The temple of Diana, as I said, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; and the man who documented those seven wonders for us said that when he saw this one, it overshadowed all the others, its glory was so great. The temple itself was larger than a football field. The roof was supported by 117 marble columns. Each column was six feet in diameter and sixty feet high—almost three times higher than the ceiling of this worship center. Huge, magnificent structure, all of marble. It was a beautiful building. Today, only a single column pieced together from various pieces stands. But while it may have been a beautiful building, it was an absolutely disgusting place. As I said, there were things that happened there that can't be discussed in polite

company. Artemis was the mother goddess of fertility, and so there were scores of priests and priestesses with rooms in the temple for religious prostitution. It was a wicked, wicked place.

That is the cultural context in which these Ephesians had grown up. It was what they had embraced. It was what their lives looked like. Listen to how Paul describes their spiritual autobiography. Go to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1. He says this is what you were. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked" and you walked "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." He says, "Listen, you were controlled by, directed by, dominated by Satan himself." Among them, verse 3 says "we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." That's what the Ephesians were. Turn to chapter 4. You see a little more of their biography. Ephesians 4 verse 17. He says, I don't want you to walk like the Gentiles, that is, how you used to walk "in the futility of [your] mind, being darkened in [your] understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that [was in you] because of the hardness of [your] heart." And some of you became callous and gave yourselves over to "sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." Greedy for more. Never satisfied. He says, that's what you used to be. But now, Paul—some fewer than ten years later—calls these people saints. To the saints.

This is Paul's normal way of referring to Christians. This is not a title for some special group of Christians, but for all Christians. Our view of what constitutes a saint has probably been terribly skewed by the Roman Catholic Church. The amazing truth, and what the scripture teaches, is that every genuine believer is a saint. If you are in Christ, you are a saint, regardless of what your spouse may think. But how can we, who still struggle constantly with sin, be called saints? It's because of something that happened at the moment of your salvation. Theologians call that event, or that declaration, definitive sanctification. We all know about progressive sanctification, the process by which we are made progressively more like Christ. That's a process through our entire lives. But definitive sanctification was an event that occurred at the moment of our salvation when God set us apart from sin to Himself. It does not have to do with our spiritual



progress but with our spiritual position. We have been set apart—we were set apart from sin unto God. Paul puts it this way to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 11. He says some of you were like this, and he has this long litany of sins. And then he says, "but you were washed, but you were sanctified." It happened in a moment of time. Robert Raymond, in his *Systematic Theology*, describes this definitive sanctification like this. He says

Every Christian, the moment he becomes a Christian, by virtue of his union with Christ, is instantly constituted a saint, [called a saint; titled a saint] and enters into a new relationship with respect to the former reign of sin in his life, and with God Himself, in which new relationship he ceases to be a slave to sin, and becomes a servant of Christ and of God.

You see, becoming a saint is a work of God's grace in which the dominion and rule of sin in our lives is broken. We are given a new power to overcome both the acts of sin—individual acts—as well as the pattern and habits of sin. We are given a new ability to obey God and pursue righteousness. God effects a change in our desires. No longer do we have a dominating, enslaving love for sin. Instead we have both the desire and the capacity to present ourselves to God. You can't decide to be a saint. You can't just make up your mind you're going to be a saint, it's God's decision about our position before Him; and in that decision, He breaks the power of cancelled sin, as the song says. Sets the prisoner free. Don't misunderstand. It's not just the decision about our position. Those whom God calls saints, by an act of His grace, are then expected to live saintly lives. Look at Ephesians chapter 5 verse 3. Paul puts it like this. He says, I've called you saints, but listen, "immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints." I've called you saints; live like it! Now, while we say the power of sin has been broken, don't misunderstand. At the same time, this freedom from slavery to sin is not the end of your war with sin. In some ways, it's just the beginning. For although we have died to sin, as Paul says; sin has not died to us. We still have sin in our lives. But there's a big difference in our relationship to sin. As John Murray in his excellent book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* observed, there is a huge difference between an enemy's army controlling a capital city—or a few bands of a defeated army causing problems in the

countryside. There's a huge difference between those two. And if you're in Christ, the army no longer controls your heart. It no longer has the central capital city. It's now, as it were, roving bands of defeated soldiers causing you trouble. But the army that you belong to has won. Christ, the captain, is victorious. And some day that will all be changed, and we will be changed to be like Him.

All true Christians can legitimately be called saints. How does that happen? By an act of God's grace alone. God sets us apart to Himself as His own special possession. Think about that for a moment. God, if you're in Christ, God has set you apart from sin to Himself as His own special possession. Sheila will tell you that I have a couple of weaknesses. I love pens, (and I have other weaknesses besides these) but I love pens and I love watches. Not necessarily expensive watches—just watches. And so, I was looking through my watch drawer back about a year ago, and I came across my father's old wristwatch. Now, my grandfather's old railroad watch I have put in a little display case and it's sitting on the mantel in my den. But my dad's old wristwatch was really nothing special and I'd worn it many times. Sometimes even doing hard work where I got sweaty and it got dirty, and so forth. But about a year ago as I was going through my drawer and I came across my dad's wristwatch, I made a decision. I said, "You know, it's not especially attractive, and it's certainly not expensive, but it was my dad's watch." And so, I decided to retire it from active use, and to preserve it. In biblical terms, I sanctified it. I changed—it's true, this is what definitive sanctification is—I changed its position from an ordinary watch that I use, to a special watch that I keep and protect and display. I set it apart from the mundane, every day, to a very special place. If you're in Jesus Christ, that's what God did for you in the moment of salvation. He took you and He set you apart from sin to Himself. Therefore, we are saints.

Look at the second way that Paul describes all true Christians. He says there in verse 1, "who are faithful in Christ Jesus." Faithful can mean either to exercise faith, that is, to believe, so the saints are believing in Christ Jesus; or it can mean to be faithful in the sense of trustworthy—in the sense of being obedient and following after Christ. It may be here that Paul intends a word play and means to imply both. I think he probably does because the two are not that far apart. I think he's saying this: true Christians believe in Christ, and they are faithful to keep on believing

in Christ, and faithful to obey Him in the process. Look again then at verse 1 with that in mind. Those two expressions in the second half of the verse, together form a definition of what it means to be a Christian. Lloyd Jones put it this way: "We have here what we may call the irreducible minimum of what constitutes a Christian. All Christians, every Christian can be described as a saint and as faithful in Christ Jesus." How do you know if you're a Christian? It's not about praying a prayer or walking an aisle or signing a card. None of that makes you a Christian. And not everybody who claims to be a Christian is, so how do you know? Ask yourself "Are you a saint?" Have you been set apart from sin to God? Has the rule of sin been broken in your life? Do you demonstrate a new power to overcome the habits and acts of sin? Are you faithful to Jesus Christ? Do you seek to follow and obey Him? Do you love Him? And when you fall into sin, do you lay there and wallow, or do you get back up again? This letter is written to the saints, and the faithful in Christ Jesus. In other words, it's written to Christians. Why should we study this book? Because of its ultimate source, and because of its intended readers. It's us. It's to us! God intended this letter for you.

Thirdly, we should pore over this book and give ourselves to it because of its promised benefits. Look at verse 2. Its promised benefits. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." When you received a letter in the first century, it was rolled up as a scroll, and as you unrolled that scroll the very first information that would be there would be who the letter was from, and to whom it was addressed. And that was always followed, or typically followed, by a basic greeting. Paul uses that same basic form but as he always does, he fills his greeting with rich spiritual blessing. Notice that Paul here uses two words to describe the blessing that he wants God to give us, "I want God to give you grace, and I want God to give you peace." It's his prayer, that God will mediate these blessings to us—how? Through this letter. We're going to get grace, and we're going to get peace as we study this letter. You say, "How do you know that? How do you know that's what he intended?" Turn back to Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20 You remember, a few months after he left the Ephesians, he was nearby, and he sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. And he gives them a sort of farewell address here in Acts chapter 20. Notice what he says to them in verse 32 as he nears the end of this discussion. He says, "and now I commend you to God and [I commend you] to the word of His grace, which

is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." He could mean, "I commend you to the message about God's grace." But, because of the phrases that follow, most commentators would agree that here he means to imply "the word which dispenses grace to you," "And is able to build you up, and to give you inheritance among all those who are sanctified." You see, God dispenses grace to us through His word. Paul wants us to have grace and he wants us to have peace. How do those blessings become ours? Through God's Word. So, verse 2 then, really records the wonderful benefits that come to us from studying and reading this letter.

Notice the blessing. The first blessing is grace. Grace to you. It's an interesting word play in the Greek text because most of the letters in the first century began with the Greek word that meant greetings. Very simple word. Comes from the word joy, and just meant greetings. It was *chairein*. Instead of "*chairein* to you," greetings to you, Paul says "*charis* to you"—grace to you. You know what Paul's saying? Literally he means "may God continue to treat you with the kind of overwhelming kindness and favor that he shows toward those who deserve exactly the opposite." Paul says, "Listen, I know what you deserve. I know what I deserve too. But my prayer for you is that God would show you exactly the opposite of what you deserve. He adds to grace, the traditional Hebrew greeting *shalom*. "Peace" as it's translated in English. And he uses the Greek word for "peace" here. Here he refers not to the objective peace of Ephesians, or excuse me, of Romans 5. You know, "therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God." That means "the end of the war with God." But rather, here, he's talking about the subjective peace of heart that follows the end of the war. Paul chooses his word order carefully. Grace comes first, then peace. Grace, as one commentator said, is the fountain, and peace is the stream that flows from that fountain. God gives His grace, and we have forgiveness, and we have objective peace with God—the war is over—and then we have peace in our hearts.

Obviously, if we are Christians, like the Ephesians we have already experienced God's grace and peace. But Paul here wants us to understand these blessings and experience them in even greater and deeper ways. You never get beyond needing God's grace. In fact, Paul's prayer for us, and my prayer for you, and for me as well, is that we would experience God's grace in greater ways

than we have ever experienced it before. That's what Paul is saying. It's my hope and prayer that God would continue to grant you His grace and that as a result you would have peace. Notice these wonderful gifts come to us from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the titles used for God identify the change in our relationship. The First Person of the Trinity is now our Father; and the Second Person of the Trinity is now our Lord. These two great blessings come to us from God. And listen carefully. They come to us through the word of His grace, including this letter. That's the amazing thing. As we study this letter together, if you really think about it, if you seek to understand it, if you pray for God's insight, if you seek to obey it and apply it in your own life; God will through that, dispense grace and peace to you. We should read and study this book because in its true spiritual apprehension we will enjoy more of God's grace and more of His peace. What an amazing beginning.

Now, let's step back from those two verses just briefly. Let me give you a couple of spiritual lessons that just seem to jump out of these verses—a couple of observations that seem to loom large in these first two verses. First of all, it illustrates for us—this introduction does—a God-centered approach to the Christian life and experience. As one commentator said, at the outset of the letter, Paul's thought is theocentric—God-centered—emphasizing God's activity in Christ. In these very first verses, Paul turns our modern twenty-first century preoccupation with man and man-centeredness on its head. Because he begins with God. He points us instead to God and His sovereign grace. He drives home that the reason—Paul does—the reason he was a Christian, and the reason he was an apostle, and the reason he was writing, was all about grace. It was all about God's grace in his life. And he reminds the Ephesians that the reason they have a new relationship to God and can properly be called saints is because of God's grace. Don't misunderstand Ephesians. This is not a letter filled with principles that we need, under our own steam, to try to obey—try to live up to. No, what we need is to understand God and what He has done and respond to that. That's why the first three chapters are all about God's great eternal plan. What He's done. He doesn't get to the commands until chapter four. And he says, “In light of all you've learned, live worthy. Walk worthy of the calling with which you've been called.” “Understand God,” he said, “start with God. Stop contemplating your own spiritual navel, and get your eyes up to God, and what He's done, and how you fit in to that great eternal plan.”

There's a second lesson here, and this introduction also highlights the gravity of human need. Think about it for a moment. Our situation as human beings is so bad, that what we need from God is grace and peace. That means that what we deserve is punishment and wrath. And it means that what we have is war and unrest. But God, in grace, acts to forgive. He gives us objective peace with Him. In other words, He declares an end to the war. The war's over. If you're here this morning and you're not in Christ, let me tell you that you may not know there's a war between you and God. You may not sense that at all. You may think you're a pretty good person, and you may pray, and you may think God likes you. But the Bible says, if you're not in Christ, God is angry with you, and that His wrath hangs over your head like a dark cloud. That's what the Bible says. You need peace with God. He's at war with you, because you've rejected His Son. Someday that war will be obvious. But when God acts in grace to forgive, He gives us objective peace—the end of the war—and then we gain an inner sense of peace. And then that peace radiates out to our relationships with others, and we can have peace with them too. But before God acts, none of those things is possible. You can only get that grace and peace from God and from His Son, Jesus Christ, and coming in repentance and faith and embracing Him as Lord and Savior.

There's a third lesson here. And that's, in this introduction we're reminded of God's grace in our lives. His sovereign grace in our lives and the need to give Him praise for it. You see, I don't know about you, but I was as unlikely to be a saint as the Ephesians were, and my guess is, that's true about you as well. But God acted. Our spiritual biographies were every bit as sordid as theirs. But God did what's described in Ephesians chapter 2 in spite of what we used to be. I love that little expression in Ephesians chapter 2 where it says, "but God." You see, God intervened, and you and I should spend our thoughts and our breath and our praise and our energy giving Him thanks, even the sacrifice of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

Paul spent three years with the Ephesians, and about six years later, he wrote them and the nearby sister churches this letter. They needed to be reminded of these things. How important these truths must be if Paul the apostle, who spent three years with these people says, "I need to

tell them these things.” Undoubtedly some of them he'd told them before but he's reminding them of here. And we are compelled to study this letter, and to study it carefully because of its ultimate source. Paul, an official messenger of Jesus Christ, chosen by God to give us these words. Because of its intended readers—us. It was intended for us—for you— by God Himself. And because of its promised benefits. God will, through our study of this great letter, dispense grace and peace to our souls.

Let's pray together. Our Father, thank You for the richness of Your Word; and Father, we join with the apostle and pray that You would through our time of study together, through our diligent efforts to understand and to apply and through the illumination of Your Spirit, Father dispense to us grace and peace through our study of this great letter. Father, I pray that You would start by changing our thinking about You and about Your great eternal plan. Help us to get our eyes off of ourselves and on to You and what You are about and what You are seeking to accomplish in the world in time and eternity. Father, we can never give You adequate thanks for Your sovereign grace in our lives just as it was in the life of the apostle and the lives of those Ephesians believers, those believers there in Asia Minor. Father, I pray that You would help keep us near Christ. Keep us Christ centered. Keep us cross-centered. Father, may we always give You praise and thanks. May we live lives of praise. For it's in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.