

# **Ephesians 1: God's Supreme Purpose**

## **Introduction to Ephesians**

*Ephesians 1:1-2*

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# Introduction to Ephesians

## Scripture

Today I would like to begin a new series of sermons. For seven Sundays, I plan to preach through Ephesians 1 in a series I am calling, “God’s Supreme Purpose.” That will take us to the Missions Conference at the end of February. After the Missions Conference, I plan to do a different sermon series until Easter. And then, after Easter, I may return and do another series of sermons on Ephesians 2. My plan for the foreseeable future is to preach shorter series of expositional messages from different parts of Scripture, but we will eventually get through Ephesians!

Let’s begin by reading Paul’s introduction to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:1-2:

**<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:1-2)**

## Introduction

Last week, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting our daughter and son-in-law in the city of Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia. On one of our daily excursions, we visited Monserrate, a mountain that dominates the city center of Bogotá. Monserrate rises 10,407 feet above the sea level, and is about 1,800 feet above the city below. We accessed Monserrate by a funicular on the way up, and descended by a cable car on the way down. While on top of Monserrate we had a magnificent view of downtown Bogotá, south Bogotá, and some sections north of the city. Monserrate is a mountain that is visible from many parts of the city below. It is

easy to see why residents of Bogotá take visitors to the top of Monserrate because it is the place from which one can get the best possible view of Bogotá.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians stands in relation to the rest of his writings rather like Monserrate. It isn't the longest or fullest of his writings, but it offers a breathtaking view of the biblical landscape. From Paul's letter to the Ephesians you get a magnificent view of biblical truth: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, the means of salvation, our position in Christ, our practice as Christians, marriage, family, and spiritual warfare. Like a visitor to Bogota who visits the top of Monserrate, you will be able to see magnificent views of biblical truth in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Over the course of time, I hope to work through the entire letter of Paul to the Ephesians. Ephesians consists of only six chapters. In the pew Bible, it is only four pages long. It contains 155 verses. It will take you only about 20 minutes to read the entire letter aloud. Yet, it is an incredibly powerful letter. Commentator William Barclay calls Ephesians "the queen of the epistles."<sup>1</sup> John Mackay, a former president of Princeton Theological Seminary who was converted at the age of fourteen through reading Ephesians, called it the "greatest... maturest... [and] for our time the most relevant" of all Paul's writings. "This letter is pure music," he said.<sup>2</sup> Missionary Ruth Paxson called Ephesians "the Grand Canyon of Scripture," meaning that it is breathtakingly beautiful and apparently inexhaustible to the one who wants to take it in.<sup>3</sup> And commentator Klyne Snodgrass wrote, "Pound for pound Ephesians may well be the most influential document ever written."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, it is appropriate to ask the question: *Why study*

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 1954), 71, 83.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Mackay, *God's Order: The Ephesian Letter and This Present Time* (New York: Nisbet and Macmillan, 1953), 9-10, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian* (New York: Revell, 1939), 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

## Ephesians 1: God's Supreme Purpose

*Ephesians?* Commentator Tony Merida suggests several reasons for studying Ephesians, which I would like to mention briefly.<sup>5</sup>

*First, Ephesians deepens our understanding of the gospel.* Sadly, shallow Christianity is common in our day. Ephesians helps us to understand “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

*Second, Ephesians magnifies the importance of the church, perhaps more than any other New Testament letter.* We also live in a day in which people do not really value the church. They are inclined to think, “If nothing else is going on this weekend, then I guess I will attend a worship service at church.” Yet when we look at Ephesians, we read how the church is central to God’s supreme purpose; the church is put in eternal perspective. It is through the church that God has chosen to make known his “manifold wisdom” (3:10).

*Third, Ephesians has changed lives forever.* John Mackay, recalled how, at the age of 14, he took his Bible into the hills of Scotland and studied Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. He wrote these words: “I saw a new world... everything was new.... I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything.... I had been ‘quickened.’ I was really alive.”<sup>6</sup> Ephesians can do that today too!

*Fourth, Ephesians may also be the “most contemporary” letter in the New Testament.* Apart from the mention of slavery, this letter “could have been written to a modern church.”<sup>7</sup> That is because Paul did not write to correct a problem in Ephesus. His letter is more reflective and less corrective. Paul did not name false teachers, mention specific problems in the church at Ephesus, or include his travel plans as he did in other letters. As a result, Ephesians resonates with contemporary Christians because it seems Paul could have written the letter to any twenty-first-century church.

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

<sup>6</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 17.

*Fifth, Ephesians provides grace-filled encouragement.* If you feel tired, discouraged, beat up, lonely, or confused, then welcome to Ephesians! Our souls need to see this description of the glorious grace of God. We need the gospel every day. Yes, Christians need the gospel every day. Remember, Paul wrote this letter to a Christian church, yet he devoted three chapters to telling them what the gospel is. Paul wrote to ordinary people just like us. Some were wealthy. Some were employees. Some worked at the port. Some were slaves. Some worked in small villages. They were Christians living in the world. They first needed to understand who they were and then how to live in that reality, just like us.

*And sixth, Ephesians offers practical answers to basic questions about the Christian life.* It is a “mini theology book” every Christian would benefit from studying. Non-Christians, particularly those interested enough to learn what Christians believe, would also benefit from a study of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. As we mentioned earlier, Paul covered topics such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, the means of salvation, our position in Christ, our practice as Christians, marriage, family, and spiritual warfare.

For seven weeks, we are going to look at Paul’s first chapter to the Ephesians. In this first chapter Paul set forth God’s supreme purpose for believers. And it all begins with God’s call.

## Lesson

God’s call as set forth in Ephesians 1:1-2 shows us the beginning of God’s supreme purpose for believers.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. God’s Call to Paul (1:1a-b)
2. God’s Call to Believers (1:1c-2)

### I. God’s Call to Paul (1:1a-b)

First, let’s look at God’s call to Paul.

## Ephesians 1: God's Supreme Purpose

Paul began his letter with these words, **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”** (1:1a-b). Paul’s authorship of Ephesians was universally accepted for the first 17 centuries. Then, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, German scholars began to question Paul’s authorship of Ephesians. However, no credible evidence has been produced to deny Paul’s authorship of Ephesians. A. M. Hunter rightly says that “the burden of proof lies with those who deny Paul’s authorship.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul began his letter with usual opening: the sender, the recipient, and the greeting.

Let us notice two truths about God’s call to Paul.

### *A. To Be an Apostle (1:1a)*

First, God’s call to Paul is to be an apostle.

Paul said in verse 1a, **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus.”** Luke said in his Gospel that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named “apostles” (Luke 6:12–13). Paul claimed the same title as the twelve, because he too was specially chosen, called, and sent by Jesus to proclaim the good news of the gospel (Acts 9:1-19). Paul did not volunteer to be an apostle. The church did not ordain and install him to be an apostle, as it does for its church officers. On the contrary, **Paul was an apostle** because he was specially chosen, called, and sent by **Christ Jesus** to proclaim the gospel.

What that means for us is, as John Stott said, “we must listen to the message of Ephesians with appropriate attention and humility. For we must regard its author neither as a private individual who is ventilating his personal opinions, nor as a gifted but fallible human teacher, nor even as the church’s greatest missionary hero, but as ‘an apostle of Christ Jesus...,’ and therefore as a teacher

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<sup>8</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Galatians to Colossians*, Layman’s Bible Commentaries (1959. SCM, 1960), 45.

whose authority is precisely the authority of Jesus Christ himself, in whose name and by whose inspiration he writes.”<sup>9</sup>

*B. By the Will of God (1:1b)*

And second, God’s call to Paul is by the will of God.

Paul said in verse 1b that he was writing **“by the will of God.”** Paul was incredibly conscious that God’s will is supreme. He was an apostle **by the will of God.** He stated this very explicitly in his letter to the Galatians, where he said that God had set him apart before he was born in order that he might preach Jesus among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15–16). Paul continually emphasized the sovereignty of God. We shall see this over and over as we study his letter to the Ephesians. It is God who chose Paul. It is God who has chosen everyone in Christ who is a Christian. It is God who has predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. Our salvation, like Paul’s, is entirely due to the sovereign will of God. Our calling, like Paul’s, is entirely due to the sovereign will of God. There would be no salvation or calling were it not for the sovereign will of God. There would be no salvation or calling if God had not planned it before the foundation of the world and put it into execution. It is God who “so loved the world” (John 3:16). It is God who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless in him. It is all of God, and according to the purpose of his will.

What does this mean for us? D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “This Epistle tells us throughout that we should always contemplate our salvation in this way. We must not start with ourselves and then ascend to God; we must start with the sovereignty of God, God over all, and then come down to ourselves.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 14.

## II. God's Call to Believers (1:1c-2)

And second, let's look at God's call to believers.

Let us notice two truths about God's call to believers.

### A. *To Be Saints and the Faithful (1:1c)*

First, God's call to believers is to be saints and faithful.

Paul said in verse 1c, **“To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”**

Paul called the believers in Ephesus **“saints.”** These are “persons who belong to God, and as such constitute a religious entity – ‘God’s people.’”<sup>11</sup> **Saints** are not a super-elite group in the church. The Bible calls *all* believers **“saints.”** God's people are called **“saints”** because they have been set apart by God for God. That is, they belong to him, “for the focus is not upon a particular state of holiness, but upon a special relationship with God.”<sup>12</sup>

Who were these **saints**? There were Jewish believers in Ephesus before Paul arrived there, as we read in Acts 18:24-27. Later, however, it seems that the church in Ephesus had many Gentile converts as well. Paul wrote to the Ephesians after an absence of perhaps seven or eight years. One of Paul's instructions to them was about the marvelous unity that the gospel produces among Jews and Gentiles. He said in Ephesians 2:11-16:

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in

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<sup>11</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 124.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 124.



Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

The church should be the one place where people from all kinds of ethnicities, backgrounds, and cultures can be truly united. Let us be sure that we welcome everyone without reservation.

Paul called the believers in Ephesus **“faithful.”** The adjective (*pistis*) can have either an active meaning (“believers”) or a passive meaning (“trustworthy”). Most likely, in this context, the term means “believers” rather than “trustworthy.” They were those who trusted in Christ for their salvation.

While these believers lived physically in Ephesus, they lived spiritually **“in Christ Jesus.”** Ephesians mentions union with Christ and being “in Christ” more than any other letter. In fact, it occurs 36 times in Ephesians, and 164 times in Paul’s 13 letters. This is the heart of Christianity: to be **in Christ Jesus**. Stott says, “To be ‘in Christ’ is to be personally and vitally united to Christ, as branches are to the vine and members to the body, and thereby also to Christ’s people. For it is impossible to be part of the Body without being related to both the Head and the members.”<sup>13</sup>

What does that mean practically? It is only as we are **in Christ Jesus** that we have access to “every spiritual blessing.” If we are **in Christ Jesus**, then, as John MacArthur says, “Christ’s riches are our riches, his resources are our resources, his righteousness is our righteousness, and his power is our power. His position is our position: where he is, we are. His privilege is our privilege: what he is, we are. His possession is our possession: what he has,

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<sup>13</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 22.

## Ephesians 1: God's Supreme Purpose

we have. His practice is our practice: what he does, we do.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the glorious truths about God’s supreme purpose for believers is for us to understand who we are in Christ. Our identity is in Christ, not in our performance, our popularity, our productivity, our power, our possessions, or our prominence.

### B. *To Receive Grace and Peace (1:2)*

And second, God’s call to believers is to receive grace and peace.

Paul said in verse 2, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Although this was Paul’s standard greeting, it was filled with theological meaning. It was far more than a simple, “I hope you are doing well.” Rather, Paul wished that God’s **grace** and **peace** would flood the hearts and lives of the believers in Ephesus.

Paul was, of course, the preeminent theologian of grace. We will learn much of God’s grace in Ephesians. We understand that grace is God’s unmerited favor toward sinners. However, I wonder how many of us really grasp what that means to us personally?

I recently read a blog by Rachel Watson titled, “Sharing Heaven with Serial Killers.”<sup>15</sup> Watson wrote that Pastor Roy Ratcliff visited serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer many times in prison. Dahmer was convicted of 15 murders and sentenced to many lifetimes in prison. Pastor Ratcliff shared the gospel with Dahmer. Dahmer struggled to grasp the depths of God’s grace, which is not hard to understand why. For someone who had committed such heinous acts, God’s grace must have seemed unattainable. But, in 1994 Dahmer said, “I have accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.”

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<sup>14</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 10.

<sup>15</sup> See [https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sharing-heaven-with-serial-killers?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=tcgblog#When:2017-01-05T06:02:00+00:00](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sharing-heaven-with-serial-killers?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=tcgblog#When:2017-01-05T06:02:00+00:00).

Of course, we don't know the sincerity of Dahmer's profession of faith. However, not everyone was happy about Dahmer's conversion. People don't want serious killers like Dahmer to go to heaven. People don't want Hitler to go to heaven. People, however, are quite sure that they themselves deserve to go there. And as soon as we think like that, we don't understand grace.

None of us deserve God's grace. All of us deserve God's wrath, justice, and hell. But, thanks be to God, as Paul teaches us in his letter, it is "by grace we have been saved through faith. And this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed God's call in Ephesians 1:1-2, let us be all the more diligent to confirm our calling and election.

Ephesians 1 tells us about God's supreme purpose for believers. Chapter 1 tells us how God, to the praise of his glorious grace, has blessed us in the Beloved. The emphasis in chapter 1 is not on what we must do but rather on what God has done for us in Christ. We shall learn that:

- We have been chosen and adopted by the Father (1:4-6).
- We have been redeemed by the Son (1:7-12).
- We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13-14).
- We have been given resurrection power (1:19).
- We have been given eyes to see the lordship of Jesus Christ (1:15-23).

We shall examine each of these truths in the coming weeks. I encourage you to read regularly, and even memorize, Ephesian 1 in the coming weeks.

May God help each one of us to be all the more diligent to confirm our calling and election in Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

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