

## The Author: Paul

**“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” (Eph. 1:1).**

As Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians, he immediately refers to himself as an “apostle.” In the kind of Greek Paul wrote in, this word carries the idea of being an ambassador, an envoy, or a messenger, certainly an apt title to describe the life and ministry of Paul, who, indeed, had a message to deliver.

In the Gospels, the word *apostle* is used almost exclusively in reference to the Twelve whom Jesus called and sent out, known, of course, as the Twelve Apostles (see *Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16*). Though not part of the original Twelve, Paul uses the term here in Ephesians and in numerous other places in reference to himself, because he was sure of his calling.

### **How** and why does Paul defend his apostolic authority?

*Acts 26:9-19*

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*1 Cor. 9:1, 2*

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*Gal. 1:1*

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*Gal. 1:11-17*

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Paul never had any doubt about his call to apostleship. The Damascus Road experience had a profound effect on him, and it is in that encounter with Jesus that he received his call, chosen as a special vessel to the Gentiles (*Acts 9:15, 22:21*). From that moment on, he was not his own; he belonged to Jesus. It was God’s will that he be an apostle, an ambassador, a sent one, a messenger of Jesus Christ. It was a calling Paul accepted with all his heart. His life was never the same after that experience. Neither the church nor the world were either.

**Paul had a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Not many people who are called have had such a dramatic encounter with God. Nevertheless, God still calls people today. How have you experienced God’s call in your life? If someone were to ask you, What has God called you to do? what would you say?**

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**Key Text:** *Ephesians 1:3*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that all believers are assured of their calling and salvation in Christ.
2. To understand the reasons for the particular focus and emphasis of the book of Ephesians.
3. To grasp the need for unity among believers as expressed by the book of Ephesians.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Paul's Calling and Ours (*Eph. 1:1*)

- A. Although Paul is never associated with the 12 original apostles of Christ, he never doubts his own calling as an apostle.
- B. Paul based his confidence on his Damascus Road experience, which was a direct call from God.
- C. Paul's calling as an apostle, like ours as saints, is an act of God, not recognition of special moral/spiritual rectitude on his or our part.

#### II. Ephesians' Focus (*Eph. 1:7-12*)

- A. The book of Ephesians, unlike other Epistles of Paul, was not intended to address specific issues of the historical church in Ephesus.
- B. Tradition and scholarship are reliable in their assumption that the letter was, nonetheless, addressed to that church.
- C. While the letter was addressed to the Ephesians, its main purpose was to address points of faith and doctrine important to the Christian church as a whole.

#### III. Grace, Peace, Unity (*Eph. 1:2*)

- A. While Paul's wish of grace and peace to his hearers was on one hand a routine greeting, it also introduces the major themes of the book.
- B. True grace and peace are accessible only through God as He appears in Christ.
- C. Unity is a result of our common affiliation with Christ.

**Summary:** Paul, as an individual, was not especially worthy to become, perhaps, the most influential apostle. Nor are we worthy to be called saints, yet, here we are. Ephesians points us toward complete dependence on God's grace for our righteousness and salvation.

## COMMENTARY

From the solitude of Caesar's jail, Paul wrote four letters, commonly known as prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. The letter to the Ephesians is a concise but comprehensive presentation of the gospel, filled with wonder and awe at the mystery and majesty of unity that God had accomplished

## The Recipients: The Saints in Ephesus

The letter is addressed “to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (*Eph. 1:1, NKJV*). The early church almost universally accepted that the Epistle was written to the church at Ephesus, but some important ancient manuscripts omit the phrase “in Ephesus,” and hence the problem of whether the Epistle was originally written to Ephesians. Conservative scholarship generally accepts that the Epistle was addressed to Ephesus as a letter to be circulated among other churches in Asia. That explains why Paul omitted any reference to local persons or problems but, rather, celebrated Christ’s work from a cosmic perspective, embracing God’s work in “heavenly places,” Christ’s work on the cross, and the church’s warfare with “principalities and powers” (*Eph. 6:12*).

**Paul uses the word *saints* quite frequently in his Epistles. Of the 61 times the word is used in the New Testament, 39 are found in Paul’s writings. Listed below are five such usages. Study each one and note its implication as to the meaning of saints. *1 Cor. 1:2, Eph. 4:12, 5:3, Col. 1:26, Rev. 14:12.***

*Saint* does not refer to any spiritually elite group but, rather, to all believers. It literally means “set apart”—and here, set apart in Christ Jesus to be “faithful” in Him. The common notion that saints are sinless and morally perfect is foreign to the New Testament use of the word. While saints are to “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*), the emphasis is not so much on moral perfection as on faithfulness to Jesus. A saint is a sinner saved by God’s grace.

Also, the saints in Ephesus are “in Christ Jesus.” All those who have accepted Christ have two addresses: in Ephesus and in Christ, in this world and in the world to come.

“A little girl who attended worship in a place with a lot of stained-glass windows was asked what a saint was. ‘A saint is a person the light shines through,’ she replied. A saint is someone whose life—speech, actions, attitudes, relationships—points to Jesus.”—*Life Application Bible Commentary: Ephesians* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996), p. 4. How well have your actions or words in the past day pointed to Jesus? If you could do something over, what would it be?

through Christ. This week’s lesson speaks of the author, the recipients, and the message of the Epistle.

### **I. The Epistle: Its Author**

The author is identified right at the outset: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (*Eph. 1:1*). Only since the nineteenth century has the Epistle’s authorship been questioned, and that is because of the Epistle’s vocabulary, its impersonal nature, and its resemblance to the book of Colossians.

True, Ephesians has some seventy Greek words not found in any other Pauline letter, but who are we to limit the mind of a genius such as Paul in using new words and expressions, particularly when he was writing without the pressures of travel and work? True, also, is the fact that Paul does not mention anyone by name except Tychicus (*Eph. 6:21*), and this is strange because the apostle had spent nearly three years in Ephesus and must have made many friends. But then, is it possible that Paul viewed that the Epistle’s content deserved a wider audience, and he wanted the letter to be circulated to several churches that surrounded Ephesus?

Yes, Ephesians and Colossians have much in common: Some fifty-five verses are almost the same. This commonness need not lead to the conclusion that someone else used Colossians to come up with Ephesians. Instead, why not see just the opposite: a common author? Who could that be other than Paul, who announced himself as the author (*Eph. 1:1*) and described his status as a prisoner (*Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20*)?

Besides authorship, Paul affirms his authority to write such a profound Epistle: He is “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (*Eph. 1:1*). Though not one of the original Twelve, Paul laid claim to apostleship, not because of self-exaltation but because of the Damascus Road experience in which the risen Jesus personally called him for a special task: “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (*Acts 9:15; see also Acts 22:21*). Paul did not seek to be an apostle; but God chose him. And as an apostle “by the will of God,” he wrote this Epistle.

### **II. The Epistle: Its Recipients**

The Epistle was addressed “to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (*Eph. 1:1*). Note three things about the Ephesian believers. *First, they are saints.* Church history and tradition have often warped the meaning of the word *saint* to suggest that a saint is a special person able to do things that other believers cannot. In the original New Testament usage, *saint* simply means “separated from,” “set apart” for a special purpose—in this case, set apart for Jesus, set apart for holiness. The latter does not imply sinlessness or moral perfection but faithfulness to Jesus.

## Grace and Peace

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 1:2, NKJV*).

Paul used “grace . . . and peace” as part of his customary greeting in most of his Epistles (*Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, etc.*). The word for “grace” used here is distinct from the common Greek form of greeting, which generally expresses a wish for health and prosperity. Instead of greeting his readers with a call for health and good wishes, Paul employed a word for “grace” that was beginning to acquire a new meaning in Christian faith, emphasizing God’s unmerited favor toward sinners. It is through God’s initiative and love alone that anyone can be saved from sin, a thought Paul will later emphasize: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (*Eph. 2:8, NKJV*).

In addition to grace, Paul wished for his readers “peace.”

**The death and resurrection of Christ brought new meaning to the idea of “peace” and opened wide doors of new experience and relationship between humans and God, and among humans themselves. Read the following verses: John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14, 15; 6:15. How do you understand the concept of “peace” expressed here?**

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The source of both grace and peace are “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 1:2, NKJV*). The verse places Christ and the Father in a position of equality, thus recognizing the divinity of Jesus. Without Jesus, God’s grace could not have been made manifest to humanity; nor could peace between God and sinners have been possible. Hence, the focus of the Epistle is on what God has done in Christ. He is our redemption. We are saved because of His grace. He is our peace. He is the basis of our new relationship with the Lord.

**What has been your own experience of God’s peace? How does it differ from the kind of peace you find only in the world? What might you need to do in order to better know and experience the kind of peace God offers us?**

A saint is a sinner saved by God’s grace. Paul seems to shout out the believer’s privilege and duty in Christ: *Every Christian is a saint! And every Christian’s vocation is holiness.*

*Second, believers are faithful.* Being faithful to Jesus and His way is nonnegotiable in the Christian life and teaching. It is an absolute concept of all or nothing. One cannot be faithful in some areas of life and be the opposite in other areas. A genuine Christian is one who believes in Christ and is believable and trustworthy.

*Third, the believers are in Christ.* This expression, key to the entire Epistle, appears in the very first verse. It is impossible to be a saint or a faithful believer without being *in Christ*. That is the ultimate residence of every Christian, regardless of other addresses one may have. It is not important whether one lives in Ephesus or Calcutta or Shanghai or New York or Lima. But it is crucial that one lives in Christ. To be in Christ is to accept Him as the final focus of life, work, worship, and hope.

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Acts 26:9-19; Galatians 1:11-17; Ephesians 3:11, 12; Colossians 1:20, 21; Revelation 12:7*

❶ When your mother called you home for supper, most of the time you likely came running. God calls people to salvation and service. For Paul, this call was a dramatic encounter with Jesus that knocked him to the ground and, for a time, left him blind (*Acts 26:13, 14*). Why is God so abrupt with some and so gentle with others? Discuss why both types of experience are valid. Ask class members to share their conversion story.

❷ Mysteries invite exploration in order to discover their secrets. Paul continually presents the profound mystery of unity as reflected in Christ and, potentially, in us. Read Ephesians 1:9, 10 in as many translations as your class members have. Discuss the impact unity is to have on Christ’s remnant church. What attitudes prevent unity? What attitudes foster unity? How is it possible for sinful humans to acquire the attitudes that foster unity?

❸ People store their valuable items in cedar chests, jewelry boxes, fireproof safes, and safety-deposit boxes. Our brains, the center of our personalities and intelligence, are “stored” in our heads. God has “blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (*Eph. 1:3, NIV*). How can we personally and completely be *in Christ*? How would you describe the benefits of an *in-Christ* experience to a friend or neighbor?

## The Theme: Unity

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (*Eph. 1:9, 10, RSV*).

**Read** the above two verses. Notice the basic theme there: unity. Whom does the Lord plan to unify? How does your understanding of the great controversy, including the fall of Lucifer and humanity, help you understand the need for this unity? See *Isa. 14:12; Col. 1:20, 21; Rev. 12:7*.

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In these two verses, Paul sets forth unity as the central theme of the Epistle. “He was writing to a church . . . consisting of Jews and Gentiles, Asiatics and Europeans, slaves and freemen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. This would necessitate unity of person, family, church, and . . . unity of God’s universe.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 995.

Paul’s concept of unity has two dimensions. The first is dealing with the church, in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in one body. The second is universal, in which all things in heaven and earth move toward an ultimate unity in Christ.

The source, the motive, and the means of this unity among humans and in the universe must not be located in human needs and ability or in any evolutionary or historic or mechanical process in nature. The book of Ephesians points to a higher and surer way. It talks about ultimate unity in the universe in the mind and will of God. All things move in accordance with “His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself” (*Eph. 1:9, NKJV*).

A small replica of that universal unity, Paul tells the Ephesians, must be seen now and here in the Christian church.

**Why is unity in the church so important? What happens when there are disunity, discord, and dissension? Who is hurt? What is impacted? In what practical ways can you, as an individual, promote an atmosphere of unity in the church?**

### III. The Epistle: Its Message

Ephesians 1:2 provides an introduction and a summary to the basic message of the Epistle: “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Grace and peace may be seen as words of customary greetings, but nothing from the apostle’s pen is just incidental. The Pauline usage of *grace* lays the foundation of his understanding of the gospel. The good news of salvation is a result of God’s free, saving initiative through the life and ministry of Jesus and the fact that no one can be saved except through acceptance of that gracious provision (*Eph. 2:8, 9*). God’s grace became operative in the *heavenly places* long before sin began, and it is on the basis of this grace that God has accepted us as His children (*Eph. 1:4-7*).

## Witnessing

God’s remnant church is blessed with dynamic, spirit-filled preachers who, like the apostle Paul, are able to prepare the most stubborn of hearts to receive the Holy Spirit. Many precious souls have been won to Jesus through the efforts of ministers and evangelists who have responded to God’s call.

Others, however, have been led to Christ through less formal methods. Often, Christ’s most effective missionaries live quiet lifestyles according to God’s Word and, by daily example, reveal to those around them His love, compassion, and way of life. How do the children of God reveal His character to others? One way is by sharing their spiritual gifts that He has bestowed.

The gift of hospitality pours out kindness and warmth to others at all times, but especially when someone is alone or in personal need. Whether it is inviting a stranger from church into one’s home for Sabbath dinner, bringing the daily newspaper and mail to the elderly widow down the street, or planning a surprise birthday party for a neighbor’s eight-year-old, the sharing of one’s time in a loving and cheerful way mirrors Christ’s own approach to people when He was here on earth.

Individuals who are blessed with the ability to establish nurturing learning environments, whether in formal classroom settings, Sabbath School rooms, Pathfinder meetings, or inner-city tutoring sessions, have the opportunity to not only positively influence children’s earthly environment but help prepare them for the new earth. What greater gift is there than leading a young life, through actions and words, to Jesus Christ?

Touching lives through personal (often unobtrusive) contact is how Jesus would have others learn of Him. Not everyone can be mighty preachers in His name; but *all* believers can model daily His method of reaching people through ministering to physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.



## The Key: “In Christ”

“In Christ” and its variations appear some two hundred times in Paul’s writings. In Ephesians, it is a key phrase that demonstrates the depth of Paul’s understanding of what God has accomplished for us and the fallen universe through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. “In Christ,” along with “in Him” and “in whom,” appears more than thirty times in the Epistle. A majority of these references are used in a way that shows that God’s eternal purposes in Creation, history, redemption, and restoration are worked out through Christ. He is the key to everything we have from God.

Thus, Paul not only recognizes the significance of Christ in His incarnate mission but boldly affirms that apart from Christ we would have no salvation, no adoption, no forgiveness of sin, no access to God, no revelation of His love, no church, no cosmic restoration, and no future. Thus, in every way Ephesians is a Christ-centered Epistle: It is a hymn to Jesus, without whom we would be “aliens” and “strangers” (*Eph. 2:12*).

**According** to the following texts, what has been accomplished for us “in Christ”? *2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:7, 10, 11; 3:11, 12; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:10.*

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Everything we have, or can hope for, as Christians, we can find only “in Christ.” He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. That’s why we owe Him everything; that’s why He must come first in our lives; that’s why we must surrender our wills to Him; that’s why it’s so unpardonable to reject Him and what He is to us, for by rejecting Him we reject life itself.

**Because Christ is all-important and all-sufficient, He must have the central place in our lives. Our homes, our work, our values, and our worship must have Him as the focus. “In Christ” God has made all things possible.**

**“Christ in us” makes that possibility a reality. What practical changes do you need to make in your personal life to keep God central and in focus?**

If grace is the operative mode of God toward us, Ephesians insists that peace is a result of that operation. To those of us alienated from God, Jesus Himself is *our peace* by making that peace possible through His Cross (*Eph. 2:15*). Hence, His gospel is a gospel of peace (*Eph. 6:15*), a gospel that built and healed all broken relationships between God and humans, among humans themselves, between Jews and Gentiles, between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between masters and slaves.

What better summary of the message of Ephesians can we find than this: *In Christ Jesus* all things have become possible. The Lord Jesus Christ—the reconciling and unifying ministry of His grace and the resultant relationship of peace—dominates the Epistle through and through.

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Did you have a dress-up box at home when you were little? In it might have been clothes, hats, and shoes so you could pretend to be a princess or a cowboy, a scientist or a plumber. Share who your favorite dress-up character was. Paul tells us in Galatians 1:11, 12 that his calling and message were not “made up” or “from any man” (*NIV*). He was not playing dress-up. Why is it important that the origins of our message and mission be from God? How does this origin empower and compel our ministry to others?

### Thought Question:

Stories awaken and captivate our imagination, involving us in another person’s life. Paul shares his personal conversion story in Acts 26:9-19. Consider the impact of Paul’s witness. What is your personal testimony? If you recorded it in an article, picture, song, or poem, how might it impact others? What hinders us from sharing? Ask God to give you courage to tell your story to a close friend this week.

### Application Question:

What happens when a high-ranking government official comes to your town? What protocols and procedures are imposed both for their safety and to symbolize respect? A major theme of Paul’s message is God’s provision for us to approach Him. What hinders us from going to Him with “freedom and confidence”? (*Eph. 3:12, NIV*). How can God help us change busyness and restraint to intentionality and anticipation? Covenant with God to spend daily time with Him, seeking the answers to this question.

**Further Study:** *Paul's apostleship.* "Paul ably vindicated his position as an apostle of Christ. He declared himself to be an apostle, 'not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.' Not from men, but from the highest Authority in heaven, had he received his commission. And his position had been acknowledged by a general council at Jerusalem, with the decisions of which Paul had complied in all his labors among the Gentiles."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 387.

*Unity.* "When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

*Christ's work.* "Through Christ's redeeming work the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan's charges are refuted, and his character unveiled. Rebellion can never again arise. Sin can never again enter the universe. Through eternal ages all are secure from apostasy. By love's self-sacrifice, the inhabitants of earth and heaven are bound to their Creator in bonds of indissoluble union."—Page 26.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What can you say to someone who says, "I gave my heart to Christ, I have accepted His atoning death in my behalf, and I seek to obey Him to the best of my God-given ability, but I still feel no peace"?
- ❷ Are there any issues dividing your local church? If so, what can you do, as a class, to help foster unity?
- ❸ As a class, go back over the verses listed in Thursday's lesson about what has been done for us "in Christ." Have each person pick one aspect that means the most to them and explain why they deem it so important.