

# Ephesians

## Ephesians 1:1-2 - What God loves

Ephesians starts off with a bang, because right off the bat in **verse 1** Paul says he's "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." That's quite a statement, because his use of the term "apostle" means he was sent by Jesus, with the authority of Jesus, to be Jesus' personal representative. It was Paul's job, then, to explain to people who Jesus was, who Jesus is, and why Jesus is the centre and focus of every human life.

And it was "by the will of God" too, so it was God who chose Paul, God who appointed him, and God who fit Paul into his purpose and plan. This was a highly personal and very specific calling by God himself. But how on earth did Paul know all this? What evidence could he give that God was truly the one directing his life in this way?

We could ask the same question of ourselves too, because how do we know it was God who directed us to where WE are now? Well, Paul offers us a very encouraging and very convincing answer in **Galatians 1:13**. He talks of his previous life "in Judaism" and trying to wreck "the church of God," and in **verse 14**, that "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers." So Paul was set in his ways and in one direction, advancing himself through the ranks by being the top dog in his class too.

But then, suddenly, out of the blue, **verse 15**, "God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased," **verse 16**, "to reveal his Son in me." The Greek word for "reveal" here means "to cause something be fully known," so God had chosen Paul to make Jesus real to people.

And we could say the same of ourselves, that we too were very much set in our ways and in one direction, totally wrapped up in whatever attractive things the culture offered, like making money, career advancement, being well thought of, and buying, eating and doing whatever tickled our senses. But then, suddenly, out of the blue, it became very important to us what God thought and what the Bible said. And gradually through our clogged up brains the importance of Jesus took on some real shape too. Why? Because God set us apart to reveal his Son in us too. And like Paul we know that happened to us, because it totally changed the direction of our lives, just like it did his.

Paul did wonder though, “Why did God choose me?” - as we’ve probably asked ourselves too - but Paul **realized** why God had chosen him. It was purely because of God’s grace and mercy, first of all, **1 Timothy 1:14 and 16**, because there was nothing about Paul himself worth a hoot, as Paul himself admitted in **verse 15**. But the reason God showed him mercy was “so that **IN ME**, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might **DISPLAY** his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life,” **verse 16**. And there we have the reason for why God chose us too, so that in us, despite what we were as well, Jesus can “display” (reveal, bring to light, and cause it to be fully known) what he is like to make himself real to people.

And the purpose for Jesus doing that is to help people see the contrast between what he’s like and what this world is like, so that they “**believe on him and receive eternal life**” (verse 16). Or, as Jesus phrased it to Paul in **Acts 26:16**, “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of **what you have seen of me and what I will show you (of me)**,” because, **verse 18**, “I’m sending you to **open their eyes** and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and **a place among those** who are sanctified by faith in me.”

So that was the goal of God revealing his Son in Paul, it was to give people “a place among” those who got the picture that **in Jesus** there is guaranteed forgiveness for even the worst of sinners, and in Jesus there is power - far greater than any other power on this planet - that really can give us a life beyond this one, the seeds of which we can actually experience now too. And when that dawns on people, that God provided all this in his Son, that’s when their life’s journey takes on a whole new direction - as did ours - away from dependence on the things of this temporary physical life, to an ever increasing understanding of what God has provided for us in his Son.

So when Paul arrives in Ephesus, this is what he’s there for, to reveal what God had provided for them in his Son. Which was quite the challenge, because Ephesus was a major commercial, money focused centre, and most of its population of 250,000 were obsessed with her “divine majesty” the Greek goddess Artemis. For many tradesmen in the city Artemis had been a lucrative source of cash too, so the gods were held in high regard. Ephesus seemed like an impossible nut to crack, therefore, but Jesus did promise the apostles the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to make him known.

Which is exactly what happened in Ephesus, because for two years Paul spoke daily in a lecture hall, “so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia **heard the word of the Lord**,” **Acts 19:9-10**.

Notice it's the "word of the Lord" too. It was the **facts about Jesus** that Paul was preaching. So every day for two whole years Paul was making Jesus real to people. His critics accused him of preaching "that man-made gods are no gods at all," **verse 26**, a clear sign that Paul wasn't holding back on showing the obvious contrast between their gods and Jesus. It caused a real stir too, including a riot that put Paul's life at risk, but "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul," **verse 11**, so that "**the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour,**" **verse 17**.

Because this is what God loves. He loves revealing his Son, so that people honour and trust him, because when they see what his Son is all about it's going to make a huge difference in their lives. In Ephesus, for instance, "many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas," **verses 18-19**. That was like fifty thousand days of wages going up in smoke, but on learning about Jesus they were willing to dump all their occult stuff, and in public view too.

So what happened to make them do that? Well, God did amazing miracles through Paul (verses 11-12) so that people could see the power of his Son compared to their gods. It was the **contrast** that did it. Which begs the question, "Well, couldn't God do miracles for that same reason today, then?" If he really does love revealing his Son and making his power real, why not a few miracles to prove it today as well?

And aren't we in the same situation as Ephesus, where people need miracles to get their eyes open to the existence and power of Jesus? And aren't people just as hooked on gods today that are nothing compared to Jesus? So how does God make that **contrast** clear between his Son and the gods of our culture?

There's a clue in the second part of **Ephesians 1:1**, where Paul addresses his letter "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus." Now **that was a miracle**, because here in the middle of this occult city of Ephesus, there were "saints," meaning "holy people," who were holy because they were "IN" Christ. Well, what a huge contrast that was to the relationship the Ephesians had with their gods. They had no personal "in" relationship with their gods, or any sense of belonging to them. They lived in a constant state of anxiety wondering what the gods might do to them if they didn't comply with their demands. But being "in Jesus," by comparison, meant a constant flow of "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," **verse 2** - a clear and obvious contrast to the demanding gods of the culture.

It's a clear and obvious contrast in our culture today too, because grace and peace are hardly anywhere to be found. New phrases have become common place like "cancel culture," "virtue signalling," "blaming and shaming," "gaslighting," and "victimhood" (defined as "a low willingness to forgive and an increased desire for revenge"), all of which are the exact opposite to grace and peace. Instead of grace, life nowadays is more about finding fault, and lashing out if one's feelings are upset. And instead of peace, there is division and people tearing each other apart, witness the families wrecked by disagreement over vaccinating children during the pandemic. And who admits to being wrong? Who says "sorry" for telling blatant lies? Who among the 'powers that be' even care that people have lost trust in them?

But in this awful world God has "saints" in whom he reveals the vast contrast between his Son and the gods of the culture. Perhaps that's why Jesus is letting this world get crazier by the minute, so that people wake up to how hollow and empty every promise of a better world or a 'great reset' by the elite and the rich is, and how all utopian visions by great empires eventually implode and collapse under their own corruption and greed.

It hit me, therefore, that never in my lifetime has there been such a chance for Christians to **show the contrast** between Jesus and the gods of the culture - and the miracle it offers too, in the massive change of direction it creates in people who see the contrast. Because it happened in Ephesus. People there saw the contrast. Given a blazingly clear picture of Jesus, who he was, who he is, and what God resurrected him back from the dead for, and it resulted in thousands of Ephesians willingly admitting how empty and wrong their gods were by comparison, and they dumped the whole lot.

And into their lives came the power of grace and peace. In grace they realized they'd been totally forgiven for being so easily deceived. And what peace that then gave them, that no longer did the gods of the culture rule their lives. They were free of them, free of depending on them, free of the fear of them, and free to dump them without worrying what might happen to them. And did that ever have an impact in their world, because "the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power," **Acts 19:20**. Given the facts about Jesus it has a way of spreading.

What happened in Ephesus, then, tells us what God loves doing: he loves revealing his Son, But it's how he does it that is meaningful to us, because he reveals his Son through his saints, his chosen ones in every age, whose lives display the two great gifts of grace and peace that the Father and Jesus would love us all to experience. What's needed most of all, then, is Christians giving an accurate picture of Jesus, which is what's coming up next in Ephesians.....