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Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 1:1-2

The Apostle Paul always considered himself an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. It was not an office he sought for himself. God chose him on the road to Damascus and gave him his marching orders. It was a mission that was given to him

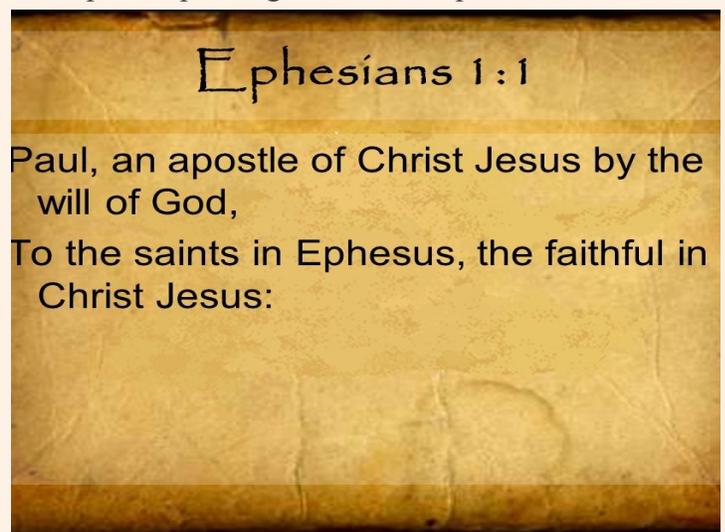
by God, and he was compelled to fulfill it.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:15-18). Paul was a steward of the Gospel, and he was determined to give a good accounting to God.

The letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians divides evenly into two sections. The first three chapters discuss our position in Christ. In this section Paul lays the foundation of our beliefs in Christ and the privileges we enjoy as Christians. We might say that this is Paul’s theory of the church of Christ. He talks about who we are in Christ, and what it means to be a Christian.

In the last three chapters Paul demonstrates how this theory of the church works out in the practical, everyday life of the Christian. He deals in this section with Christian behavior. He discusses our responsibilities as followers of Christ. The first section is the philosophical ground for the practical behavior that should develop. Any theory is only as strong as the application that we make of it.

Some say this was a circular letter and not written to any specific congregation. The phrase “To Ephesians” is missing in some ancient manuscripts. There are no specific problems addressed in the letter that we might expect if Paul was writing to just one congregation. What we have in Ephesians are just general principles for all Christians. The theme deals with who we are in Christ and what that means for us in our daily lives.



Paul identifies himself in the very first word of the epistle, and this is one of four prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome around 60-62 A.D.

Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. There were twelve other men who were chosen as apostles before Paul ever came to know the Lord. What does the Bible say about these men, and how does the Apostle Paul fit into God's purpose and plan?

It was by the Lord's choice that Paul became an apostle.

It was by the Lord's choice that Paul became an apostle. This is also true of all the apostles. Luke tells us this about the choice of the twelve: "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor" (Lk. 6:12-16).

Out of all his disciples, Jesus chose twelve whom he named apostles. These men were to have a special work in the establishment of the church. One of them would be a traitor, but even Judas Iscariot played a role in the purpose of God. After the Lord's ascension to heaven, the eleven apostles still living decide to choose a successor for Judas Iscariot. They finally choose Matthias, and he is numbered with the eleven (Acts 1:26). Some have speculated that the eleven made their choice of Matthias, but the Lord later made his choice of Paul. Matthias was chosen by the casting of lots, but the Lord handpicked Paul on the road to

Damascus. If we believe that Matthias was not really the one the Lord wanted, his joining the eleven in no way hindered the Lord's choice of Paul to accomplish his purposes.

During his personal ministry on the earth, Jesus called the twelve, including Judas Iscariot, and gave them the power to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of sickness and diseases. Then Jesus sent them out to the "lost sheep of Israel" preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus even gave them a commission to raise the dead. He told them not to take money or clothing for their journey because a worker is "worthy of his food." (Matt. 10) This work was done by the "twelve whom he had chosen" and not by all the disciples of Christ. The apostles were chosen by Jesus for a special work and empowered to do that work.

The apostles were chosen by Jesus for a special work and empowered to do that work.

After the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he further explained to the apostles some of the work that he had chosen them to do. Jesus appeared to the apostles in Jerusalem and Luke records this conversation:

Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44-49)

The apostles were going to be witnesses of the Lord’s ministry, his death, burial, and resurrection. They would begin this work in the city of Jerusalem, and they were to wait in Jerusalem for God’s power to come upon them.

Jesus further explained to the apostles some truths about their work just before he ascended back to heaven: “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’” (Acts 1:6-8).

The apostles were still a little confused about the nature of the Lord’s kingdom.

The apostles were still a little confused about the nature of the Lord’s kingdom. They were expecting him to ascend the throne of David in Jerusalem and lead the nation of Israel immediately in triumph over Rome. They expected Israel to take Rome’s place as ruler of all the world. However, the apostles were not called to be conquering soldiers over a foreign power, they were called to be witnesses. They would receive power from God to accomplish this mission that would begin in Jerusalem and spread from there to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. As we follow the apostles through the Book of Acts, this is exactly the way their mission of preaching progresses. They were witnesses of a spiritual

kingdom and not an earthly, material kingdom.

We notice this truth that is revealed through the Apostle Peter’s sermon at the household of Cornelius. Peter says that Jesus did not appear to everyone, but to certain witnesses who had been chosen beforehand: ““And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the How does the Apostle Paul fit into this plan of God?”

dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:39-43).

Peter reveals several truths about the work of the apostles whom the Lord had chosen. They were witnesses of the ministry of Jesus and of his death, burial, and resurrection. He did not appear to everyone but rather to those witnesses (apostles) whom he had chosen beforehand. The apostles were commanded to preach to the people that Jesus was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. The apostles testified to the truth that the prophets foretold that in Jesus there is remission of sins for those who believe.

How does the Apostle Paul fit into this plan of God? Was Paul really an apostle? When the eleven chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot, one of the qualifications for filling this office was that the man must be someone who had seen the Lord (Acts 1:21-22).

Paul often had to defend his apostleship. “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen

Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Cor. 9:1-2). Paul affirms in this passage that he had, indeed, seen the Lord. He states it in the form of a rhetorical question: “Have I not seen the Lord?” The obvious answer to this question is, “Yes.” So, the Apostle Paul passes this test that the eleven proposed one must pass to fill the office of an apostle.

After Paul and Barnabas made their first missionary journey among the Gentile people, they were called in question by some men who came to Antioch from Judea and proclaimed, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). They went up to Jerusalem and met with the apostles and elders. During their discussions, Peter affirmed that the Lord chose him to go to the house of Cornelius and “...that the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe...and he made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7, 9).

During this conference in Jerusalem the preaching of Paul and Barnabas was approved.

The Apostle James also defended the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles pointing to the fact that this development was in keeping with what the Prophets taught (Acts 15:13-21). During this conference in Jerusalem the preaching of Paul and Barnabas was approved. They sent a delegation along with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch along with a letter to affirm that the Gentiles were not required to be circumcised and further approving the work of the Apostle Paul among the Gentiles.

Paul defends his apostleship in his letter to the Galatians where he writes:

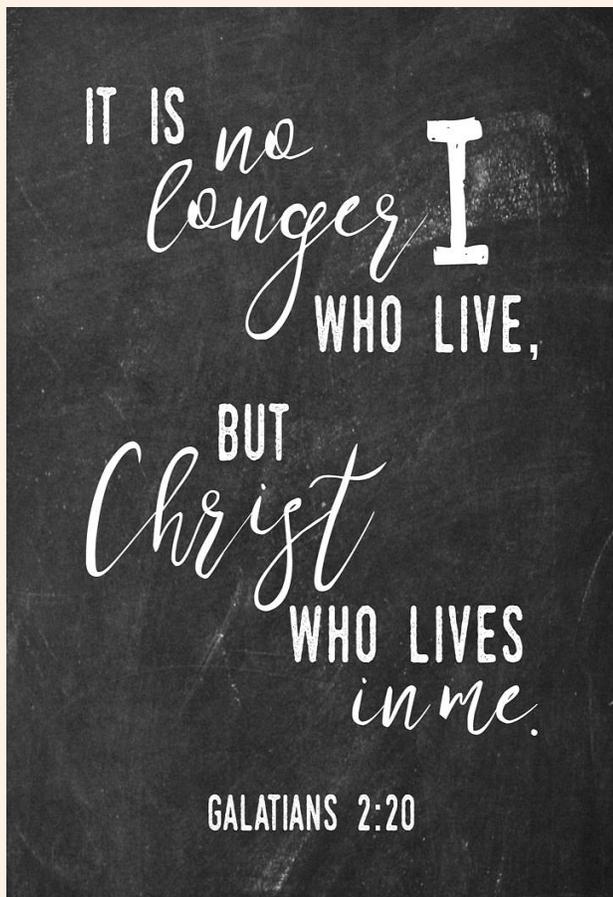
For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God in me.

In this passage Paul affirms that he did not receive the message of the gospel from Peter, James, or any other man. Paul says that he received it by revelation directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. In Galatians chapter 2 Paul even confronts the Apostle Peter and calls him in question over his behavior regarding eating with the Gentiles before certain men came to Antioch from James, but after their arrival Peter would not eat with the Gentiles. Paul says that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy, but they were to be blamed;

they were wrong. Paul goes on to affirm, “that we are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.” (Gal. 2:1-16) So, we have the Apostle Paul confronting the Apostle Peter on this occasion. Paul’s action on this occasion is an important step in the development of the early church. This is another affirmation of Paul’s apostleship.

Was the Apostle Paul a bonafide, genuine, true Apostle of Jesus Christ? According to what the scriptures teach, yes Paul was a real apostle. He could write with confidence, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” We should be thankful for Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles and the contribution that he makes as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

...L Scott Gage
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Reflections of the Psalms

Psalm 2

If it wasn't so pathetic, the first three verses of Psalm 2 would be very funny. "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!'" The picture that comes to mind is like a very small dog challenging a full-grown lion. The small dog runs around busily barking and baring its' fangs, while the lion lays in the shade ignoring the antics of the foolish dog. The lion can end the entire situation with a simple snap of its jaws, but the dog seems to be completely unaware of the peril.

The same holds true for any nation, any movement, any power base that pretends that it can challenge the power and authority of God. Verses 4-5 clearly show the futility of resistance, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying..." People, even Christians, need to be reminded that the opposition to God is not a civil war where the outcome is in doubt. God is, and has always been, the Victor. Those opposed to God have already lost!

The god of this world is the Devil, and the power of the Devil and his forces can seem to be so unstoppable. And yes, there are times when the forces of the Devil seem to be winning, but those times are never permanent. The Devil is already defeated, but he is completely evil, and his goal is to try to pull down as many with him as possible. Note four descriptive words in verses 4-5: laughs, scoffs, anger, and fury. The image vividly shows God's patience coming to an end, and the final result is judgment and destruction for those opposed to the Will of God.

The assurance of God's victory is not simply an abstraction. In His great Plan, God provided a focus, a person, for people to see and understand. God provided a means for sinful men and women to gain forgiveness and eternal life. The focus of God's Plan is, or course, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When did Jesus Christ come into the world? When did the Gospel spread quickly? It was not

during a utopia-like peace and benevolence.

The events described in the New Testament occurred in a world that was held in the tight grip of a highly effective military empire. The birth of Jesus literally took place at a time of great danger, and in a world that was dominated by paganism and immorality. The plans of the Devil seemed to be supreme, but what happened? The world was changed! The final stage of God's Plan of Redemption was enacted, and the mystery of the ages was revealed through the Good News - the Gospel.

The Psalmist wrote in verses 5-9, "Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, but as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware.'" Different writers have tried to dissect this passage to prove who the writer was describing, but there is no question that the ultimate figure was to be "the Anointed One", "the Messiah", "the Christ; the Son of the Living God".

The kingdom has been established, and the King sits on His throne at the right hand of the Father. Now is a time for the church to mobilize and rescue those that are lost. The hymn, "Rescue the Perishing," describes the work of Christians today, and there is no better time.

Can this work be successful in a hostile nation or a hostile social and political environment? Of course it can. Will the Devil attempt to distract Christians from their roles by inner dissention? Yes, of course he will. Divide and conquer has always been an effective tactic in war. Will he use complacency or discouragement to get Christians to quit serving the Lord? Again, the answer is yes. What better way to drain the energy out of commitment and focus than the attitude that "everything's going fine, let's not 'rock the boat'". If that doesn't work, then "We can't do that" can always be used to defuse a threat to the Devil's plans.

So, what are Christians to do? The New Testament is very clear. Paul wrote to put on the whole armor of God. Christians are warned to stay on the alert because the Devil is like a 'prowling lion'. Chris-

tians are to grow in knowledge in order to grow in spirit, and to better understand how everything in the Bible fits together. Mature Christians have a purifying impact upon society. Their quiet service, faith and knowledge will make Christians fishers of men!

The final words of the Psalm are both a promise and warning, "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled, how blessed are all who take refuge in Him!"

...Jim Shelburn

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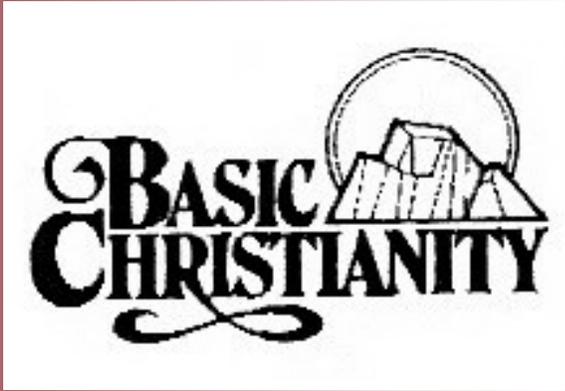
Quotations from the Apostle Paul

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." 2 Cor. 9:6

"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:11-13

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Rom. 13:8-9

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31



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