

## Ephesians 1:1-2 Epistolary Opening

03/06/99 8:58 PM

### Overview

Basic approach: compare opening of Ephesians with Paul's other letters.

Note how the basic structure of the ancient Greek letter has the same elements as our modern letters, but in a different order.

Modern Letters:

- “Dear Tom” (greeting, person addressed)
- Body of letter
- “Sincerely” (complementary close) (note how this is amplified in French letters: “Please recognize, esteemed sir, my most profound sentiments.”)
- “John” (person sending the letter)

Greek letter: We have a handy example in Acts 23:25-30

- 26, “Claudius Lysias” (person sending the letter)
- 26, “unto the most excellent governor Felix” (person addressed)
- 26, “greeting” (greeting)
- 27-30, Body of letter.
- 30, “Farewell” (complementary close)

So we can compare the “from,” “to,” and “greeting” sections of Paul's letters (handout).

### From

Two things to note: how Paul describes himself, and who else is associated with him in sending the letter.

#### ***Paul's Titles for Himself***

*Survey the options:*

**Apostle of Jesus Christ.**—This is the most common title, in 9/14 epistles. More on it in a moment.

**Servant of God.**—Three times. Literally “bondslave,” emphasizing his utter devotion to the Lord.

**Called One.**—Twice, probably not “called to be an apostle” as AV, but a separate title, emphasizing his fundamental salvation.

**Prisoner.**—Once, to Philemon, reflecting his status at Rome.

**Lacking.**—In the two early epistles to the Thessalonians.

## Ephesians 1:1-2 Epistolary Opening

### *Focus in on “Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God”*

A very common description of himself, but none the less important. Two facets

#### Apostle of Jesus Christ

One sent by Jesus Christ. Distinguish three kinds of “apostles” in the NT:

- There is only one sent by the Father: Jesus Christ himself (Hebrews 3:1)
- The twelve and Paul are those sent personally by Jesus Christ.
- Barnabas (Acts 13), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), and others were apostles of the Holy Spirit through the churches, in a role similar to what we call a “missionary” today.

Paul treasures this title because it ranks him with the Twelve. He is conscious of the considerable responsibility he bears to spread the young faith.

**Application.**—This was Paul’s particular gift (cf. Eph. 4:11). Each of us has our own gift (1 Cor 12:7). None of us is an apostle of the Father or of the Son; some might be sent by the Spirit through the church on a mission of one sort or another, as Antioch sent out Barnabas and Saul. We should rejoice in the gifts God has given us, and cultivate them, as Paul exhorted Timothy (2 Tim 1:6).

#### By the will of God

This is a concise summary of the extended defense he gave in Galatians of his authority. He didn’t look for this job; God assigned it to him. This knowledge encouraged him when the work became difficult, and enabled him to stand when people challenged his efforts.

**Application.**—We will be effective in exercising our gifts only as we are persuaded that we hold them by God’s will, at his appointment.

#### **Associated Persons**

Of all his epistles to churches, only this one and Romans are from Paul alone. In all the others he associates one or more of his partners with him in sending the letter.

NB: he is not alone when he sends Romans and Ephesians.

- We know from the openings of the other prison epistles that Timothy was there. Why didn’t Paul associate him with himself in sending Ephesians, as he did in the other three, and in 1,2 Thess and 2 Cor? This seems particularly strange since we know from 1 Tim 1:3 that Timothy had a special responsibility for Ephesus.
- Note from Rom 16:21 that Timothy is also with Paul when he writes Romans, even though he isn’t named in the opening of that epistle either.

The right way to think about the problem is probably not why Timothy is left out of these two, but why he and others of Paul’s associates are included in so many others, where it is clear that Paul is the main author (cf. 1 Thes 3:1-6, sending and return of Timothy). The other epistles are much more personal and focused on specific issues. Note Anita’s observation, that in spite of the similarity of many themes, she found Colossians easy to memorize, because more personal, than

## Ephesians 1:1-2 Epistolary Opening

Ephesians. (She also liked Timothy.) In Romans and Ephesians, Paul is writing more abstractly than in his other letters.

- Most of the others are motivated by some specific problem or challenge in the church, and he writes to rebuke, challenge, and correct. Perhaps he involves some of his helpers with him in the letter on the principle of “at the mouth of two or three witnesses.” These helpers had worked with the people in the church, and their association would strengthen his claims. He is not rendering individual judgment, but has discussed the case with them and they have permitted him to associate their names with his in delivering the needed correction.
- Romans was written to introduce his teaching to a church he intended to visit; Ephesians, to provide a synopsis to a church where he had already labored for two years. He is not correcting or challenging the saints here as he is in other letters, and does not require the extra witnesses.

**Application.**—Nurturing the people of God requires both problem-focused correction and systematic teaching. Cf. Eph. 4:11, with the twin roles of “pastors and teachers,” where “teacher” perhaps focuses more on the systematic instruction while the “pastor” or “shepherd” is responsible for the daily care of the sheep with their myriad problems.

This isn’t the only similarity between the two epistles. Both of them treat the same three subjects, in the same order:

	Romans	Ephesians
Salvation	Ch. 1-8	1:20-2:10
Relation of Jew and Gentile in Christ	Ch. 9-11	2:11-ch.3
Practical Implications of these two themes	Ch. 12-16	Ch. 4-6

So we naturally ask why the Spirit of God has given us both of them. A clue to the answer may be in the relative frequency of the term “church” in the two books, and indeed throughout Paul’s epistles. The following table shows the epistles ranked by occurrence of the word (singular or plural) per chapter. (Second row excludes any address in the first verse or two “to the church”)

2 Tim	Phm	1 Th	Rom	2 Th	Gal	Titus	Phil	1 Tim	2 Cor	Col	1 Cor	Eph
0	1.00	0.40	0.25	0.66	0.50	0.33	0.50	0.50	0.69	1.00	1.38	1.50
0	0	0.20	0.25	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.50	0.50	0.62	1.00	1.31	1.50

Romans mentions “church” only in the greetings in ch. 16, in exchanging greetings among the churches. Ephesians contains the densest references to “church” of any epistle. Romans focuses on the plan of God for the *individual believer*; Ephesians, on his program for the *church*. Think of Galatians as practical application of Romans; 1 Cor as practical application of Ephesians.

### To

Two titles:

**“to the saints which are at Ephesus”.**—“Saint” = “holy one,” “separated one.” This term has special reference to the worldly environment *from* which they are separated. They live in Ephesus, but they are not part of that sinful society. They have been separated from it.

## Ephesians 1:1-2 Epistolary Opening

**“and to the faithful in Christ Jesus”**.—“Faithful” = “those who believe.” The following “in Christ Jesus” might define the object of their faith, or (more likely, in view of the theme of ch. 1) their position in Christ, and thus the spiritual environment *in which* they now live.

Note that the two titles are identified with one another. Rome is not willing to declare someone a saint until years after their death, on the basis of evidence that they have heard prayers addressed to them. Paul is bold to call those still living “saints,” on the basis of their faith in the Lord Jesus.

**Application.**—Notice the change in position implied by these titles. They have been separated out of the world, and placed in the Lord Jesus. This notion of our spiritual position is an important one for Paul. We saw it throughout Colossians, and shall see it again in Ephesians. Do not think that as a believer, you are free to live as the world lives. You are different now, and your life should reflect that difference.

### Greeting

Paul wishes them “grace and peace,” as the root and its fruit.

- Grace, God’s unmerited favor where his wrath is deserved. Ephesians will emphasize for us as few other scriptures that it is God who saves sinners, not their own works (cr. 2:8-10). Our salvation is undeserved, unearned, resting entirely on this marvelous character of our great God.
- Peace, the relation we now enjoy with him, replacing the state of enmity that existed before as the result of our sin (2:15).

These great gifts he traces to the work of the Father and the Son. Meditate on the role of each of them:

	Father	Son
Grace	Chooses us. This is his characteristic—if he were not intrinsically gracious, we could not enjoy grace. 1 Pet 5:10, “the God of all grace”	Provides the redemption that makes God’s grace “legal,” permitting him to be both “just and the justifier,” Rom 3:26
Peace	He is the one from whom we were alienated by our sin, and with whom we now enjoy peace, Rom 5:1.	2:14 “he is our peace,” because he has destroyed the enmity.

**Application.**—We are entitled to rest in God’s grace and peace. There is much reason for upset in the world around us, but when we realize that we are at peace with our creator, and that on the basis not of our own works but of his own unlimited love toward us, we can rest secure. “If God be for us, who can be against us?”