2-25-18

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul writes this letter to the Ephesians, indeed to all Christians, while a prisoner in Rome. It is a wonderful letter that speaks Christian truths both theologically and practically. Many of Paul’s letters address some particular issue or problem that is taking place in the church he is writing to. This is not the case with the letter to the church at Ephesus. What is said in this letter can be applied to all Christians, regardless of where they are on earth or in time. It applies to this church as much as it did to the one in Ephesus.

Paul starts this letter in the usual manner of letters at the time, with a brief introduction. But Paul manages to pack his introductions with deep meaning, giving the readers things to think about. He follows the standard form of his time, but the words he uses are distinct in their meaning when referring to Christian ideas.

He identifies himself as an apostle and specifically as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is what gives him the authority to write this letter and establishes the truth of what he says here. In this usage, an apostle has the direct authority of the one he is representing; in this case Jesus Christ. In general, apostle means “sent one”. In the Christian context, it means one sent by God, either directly by the Father or by the Son. There are varying levels of intensity applied to this title in the Bible. Jesus Himself is referred to as an Apostle.

Hebrews 3:1

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Jesus is unique as an Apostle. He was sent directly by God the Father. This is verified many times in the New Testament, but one example is what Jesus tells us in:

John 3:17

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

This passage in John points out the uniqueness of Jesus’ apostleship: That the world might be saved through Him. If a person is to be saved, it must be through Jesus. Jesus was sent to save those who believe in Him. He is the only mediator between God and people. No one comes to the Father but by Him. His apostleship was verified by how His message lined up with Scripture and by the miracles He performed. It was finally verified by His resurrection from the dead and by His ascension into Heaven.

There are a few people in the New Testament who are referred to as apostles and it basically means that they preach the Gospel of Christ. Barnabas and Titus are two examples. They had that special call to spread the message of salvation, establish churches, and work with churches to keep them on track and focused on Jesus. They seem to be what we would missionaries today.

The remaining group in the New Testament who are called apostles are those listed as the twelve and Paul. When I refer to the twelve, I am including Matthias who was chosen by lot in Acts 1:26. These men had special characteristics. They were witnesses of the risen Christ, they were chosen by the Holy Spirit, and they had the ability to perform signs and wonders. They were responsible for laying the foundation of the Christian church, with Jesus Christ being the corner stone.

These are often referred to as having the *office* of apostle, this separates them as having the authority to add to Scripture. The office of apostle is no longer active today. The foundation has been laid, there is to be no further modification to Scripture. We must be wary of anyone who claims this office today because the only other type of apostle mentioned in Scripture is the false apostle.

As I mentioned earlier, Paul says that he is specifically an apostle of Jesus Christ. Because of this, he has authority from his Master. He has the authority to preach the good news, the Holy Spirit gives him definite leadings and sometimes prophecy, and in accordance with God’s will, he has the authority to heal sickness and raise the dead. It is because of this apostolic office that we can safely believe what he has written in the Bible.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that he could do everything Jesus could do. Paul did not have the ability to save anyone; he could only point them to Jesus who could. There are accounts of Paul’s associates who were not healed of sickness. God had other plans in those cases. Jesus was the only one who healed infallibly. Paul was still simply a man and made mistakes. There is an account in Acts 15 where he and Barnabas got into such an argument that they parted company. Still God used him in the appointed apostolic office, just as He uses each of us in our ministries even though we are not perfect.

The only place where Paul was inerrant was when he wrote what has come to us in the Bible. He is only inerrant there because what he wrote was breathed out by God. Again, this was part of the office of apostle: To write Scripture that formed the foundation of the Christian church.

Paul then lets us know how he came about being an apostle; it was by the will of God. There were those in Paul’s time, and there are those today who falsely claim apostleship. Perhaps they simply claim it, perhaps they get a really strong “feeling” that they should have that office. Either way, it ends up being a way to get themselves a high office and attention. It is self-centered not Christ centered. In Paul’s case, he was chosen by God.

We may wonder why God chose Paul. I’m sure Paul wondered that himself. Remember who Paul was. He was a Pharisee. He was confident in his own ability to get himself into heaven. He believed that he was righteous. But he was able to see later that he was an idolater, holding his works and the law above God. He was full of pride when God makes it very clear that He wants humility. As if that wasn’t enough, he rejected Israel’s Saviour, the Messiah of God, and murdered those who accepted Jesus. In spite of this, Jesus got his attention in a dramatic way and he received the office of apostle.

Why? Because that was God’s will. His ways are above our ways, His thoughts are above our thoughts. God does reveal many things to us, but not everything. There are things that are simply beyond our understanding. That is because He is God, and we are not. Sometimes our concept of God is skewed; we think of Him as being like us, but perhaps a little stronger and smarter. God is not like us, He is far, far above us in every way. He is Spirit and creator, we are flesh with a spirit and created. The concept of God is One who exceeds us in every way; if we could figure Him out, He wouldn’t really be God.

We will see that the primary focus of the book of Ephesians is God, with focus of Jesus Christ right next to that. That should be a good adjustment for us. The natural human tendency is to focus on ourselves. That is the natural man, that is our carnal nature. Now we as Christians have the Holy Spirit and our own spirits have come alive being reborn by God. But the human nature is still there and fights against our spiritual nature.

Galatians 5:17

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

And so, we have this continual battle going on in our emotions and in our minds. The pull of the flesh against the pull of the spirit. This battle will continue until we pass from this life and enter eternal life with Christ. Really, the battle is good for us. The Holy Spirit uses the conflict for our sanctification. Additionally, each time the spirit wins the fight, it brings glory to God. His children have overcome the evil one. That’s a good motivation to keep in mind: By simply following the commands of Jesus, we bring glory to God. Each time, it is a defeat for satan.

Because it is our nature to be self-centered, it requires work on our part to put God and others ahead of ourselves. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit helps us with this. It is so important for us to consider that little part of verse 1, “the will of God”. We need to be concerned about that, we need to be concerned about what the will of God is. We find the will of God in our Bibles. That is why it is so important to read and study our Bibles. Far too often, people and churches are led by feelings. We hear, “I feel like this is what God wants me to do.” That’s a big red flag.

Our feelings are part of our carnal nature and cannot be trusted. At best, they tend to be what we want; then if we say it is from God, who is going to argue? At worst, they may be whisperings from evil. Perhaps the will of God for our lives will start off as a feeling or an unction. The first place to look is Scripture. If it is against the word of God in any way, it is not from Him, no matter how good it may seem or how good the end result may look. It requires prayer and looking deeply and honestly into the motive. Is the motive for God, or is it to somehow raise ourselves up. This can be tough to figure out sometimes. This is where a close Christian brother or sister can help by being a sounding board and by praying.

Although none of us have the office of apostle, each of us is sent by Jesus. We are familiar with the great commission that Jesus gave, not only to the apostles, but to the disciples. We as disciples have ministries given to us by God, and we are all told to spread the Gospel. If each of us looks back over our lives, we can be amazed that God will use us. We all have had our own idols and pride and rebelled against God. Still, our loving God is willing to use us in His eternal plans.

What an awesome privilege, to be used by God. What an awesome responsibility. We must always keep in mind the parables of the talents and the minas. We have been given abilities and we have been given the Gospel. Our master will have us give account of these things one day. He is merciful, just make sure you haven’t hidden them in the ground.

Prayer

Lord God, may Your will be done and may Your Kingdom come. We praise our King and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We believe Your word that says He will come back one day to reign in power. We look forward to the establishment of His Kingdom.

We offer You praise for Your wisdom. Jesus came to begin the church, to be its corner stone. You provided men in that first generation after Him to establish the foundation. They were endowed with special gifts in the Holy Spirit to establish the strength of Your church such that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

Now we, as the building blocks of Your church, can be confident in the fact that the foundation is secure and needs nothing further. We can concentrate on remaining in Your word and simply building; adding the living stones that You desire. Be with us and guide us that we may build with sturdy and everlasting materials.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen