

**Ephesians 1:1-3<sup>1</sup>**

- I. The Calling of the Church ([1:1-3:21](#))  
A. Prologue ([1:1-2](#))

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.  
<sup>2</sup>May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

**Notes****[1:1](#)**

**This letter is from Paul.**—As with other Pauline letters, Ephesians follows the normal pattern of Hellenistic letters with respect to its opening, body, and closing. The opening is similar to openings of other letters by Paul. As discussed in the Introduction, there has been considerable debate in recent centuries as to whether or not Paul is truly the author of this epistle. Although some differences exist when compared to the other Pauline letters, there is no reason to doubt Pauline authorship, which has the earliest attestation among the church fathers concerning any New Testament book.

**chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.**—This statement is in keeping with other Pauline literature; it affirms that Paul was not self-appointed.

**I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus.**—"God's holy people" is rendered "saints" in other translations. It refers to people who have put their trust in Christ Jesus. The word "saints" (*hagiois*) does not imply inherent goodness but rather separateness, that is, people set aside to serve God. As indicated in the Introduction (see "Audience"), many scholars have questioned the reading "in Ephesus," because the words are lacking in the three earliest mss (□46 ~~8~~ B) and the tone of the letter is very impersonal, strongly suggesting it was an encyclical (Comfort 2005:345-346). However, the words "in Ephesus" have decent manuscript support with widespread geographical attestation (~~8~~<sup>2</sup> A B<sup>2</sup> D F G 0278 33 it syr cop) and are included in most English versions (KJV, NASB, NEB, NIV, NRSV, NLT). Notably, the letter is not addressed to a church in Ephesus, but to the saints in that city, and this may well mean that there were many congregations within the city and also that it may have been read by many churches started by Paul or his converts in the surrounding area, namely, western Asia Minor.

**who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.**—This may appear to imply that only faithful believers are being addressed. Actually in the Greek text it is not the relative pronoun "who" that introduces these words but the conjunction *kai* [<sup>TG</sup> <G2532>, <sup>ZG</sup> 2779] (and), which could be translated "that is," and the word "faithful" could be translated "believers"; the resulting translation would be "that is, believers in Christ Jesus." Hence, "God's holy people in Ephesus" are further defined as "believers in Christ Jesus."

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1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 27-31.

## 1:2

**May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.**—This is a greeting that is not unlike other Pauline letters ([Rom 1:7](#); [1 Cor 1:3](#); [2 Cor 1:2](#); [Gal 1:3](#); [Phil 1:2](#); [Col 1:2](#); [2 Thess 1:2](#); [1 Tim 1:2](#); [2 Tim 1:2](#); [Titus 1:4](#); [Phlm 1:3](#)).

### Commentary

The writer of this letter immediately identifies himself as Paul, an apostle, belonging to and sent by Christ Jesus. The greeting is typical of letters in Paul's day. In modern Western culture, a letter begins with the address followed by the date of writing, then we greet the recipient: "Dear \_\_\_\_." The body of the letter follows with our name signed at the end. In Paul's day the writer began the letter by identifying himself or herself. Translating the Greek text literally, the letter begins, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus." Here the sender is identified as Paul the apostle of Christ, and the recipients are identified as the saints who reside in Ephesus. The fact that he presents himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ gives Paul authority. An apostle is one who is sent as a messenger and who represents the full authority of the one who sent him or her. It is similar to a present-day ambassador who represents his or her country with the full authority of that country's government. Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, had the full authority of Christ himself; therefore, he needed to be heard. To further enhance his claim as an apostle of Christ, Paul stated that this appointment was made through the will of God and not by self-appointment. As an ambassador is appointed by the head of state, so Paul was appointed by God to be his representative.

The recipients of the letter are "God's holy people" or literally "the saints." The Greek term for "saint" (*hagios* [<sup>TC</sup><G40>/A, <sup>ZG</sup>41]) can be translated "holy" and is used with reference to things, places, and persons. The term "holy" or "saint" did not indicate inherent goodness but rather that which was set aside for service. In fact, the related Hebrew root *qadash* [<sup>TH</sup><H6942>, <sup>ZH</sup>7727] was even used of foreign cult prostitutes (*qadash* [<sup>TH</sup><H6945>, <sup>ZH</sup>7728]; cf. [Deut 23:17](#); [1 Kgs 14:24](#); [15:12](#); [22:46](#)) that were set aside for "service" in temple ritual (TDOT 12.524). Today the term "saint" is used by some to identify those thought to have earned the title by holy living. However, the New Testament teaches that all who become believers in Christ are saints—that is, ones set apart for God's service. It is because of this position as saints that believers should live saintly lives. The fact that saints are not inherently holy is substantiated in Paul's letters, including Ephesians, where he exhorts saints to live holy lives. If saints were inherently holy, there would be no need for the exhortations. Paul further describes the saints as ones "who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus" or better "believers in Christ Jesus." Later ([2:1-10](#)) Paul writes that they were at one time unbelievers who were part of the world system, but by God's grace they were saved by faith. While the Ephesian believers were geographically located in Ephesus, they were spiritually positioned "in Christ." Paul used "in Christ Jesus," "in Christ," or "in him/whom" 11 times in [1:1-14](#). This applies to all Christians whether they live in Ephesus, Paris, Trivandrum, or San Francisco.

The greeting in [verse 2](#) is not normal Greek style, but it accords with Paul's style in other letters (cf. [Rom 1:7](#); [1 Cor 1:3](#); [2 Cor 1:2](#); [Gal 1:3](#); [Phil 1:2](#); [2 Thess 1:2](#); [Phlm 1:3](#)). Instead of the normal Greek greeting "rejoice," Paul uses "grace" and "peace" which had become a distinctively Christian greeting (cf. [1 Pet 1:2](#); [2 Pet 1:2](#); [2 John 1:3](#); [Rev 1:4](#)). Grace speaks of God's favor in providing salvation for sinners through Christ's sacrificial death (e.g., [1:7](#); [2:8](#); [Rom 3:23-24](#)) and his empowering of the believer to lead a holy life ([4:7](#), [29](#); [1 Cor 15:10](#)). Peace was used as a common greeting in the Semitic world (*shalom* [<sup>TH</sup><H7965>, <sup>ZH</sup>8934]; [Gen 43:23](#); [Judg 19:20](#) [KJV]; [1 Sam 25:6](#)), denoting the idea of "well-being" ([Gen 29:6](#); [43:27](#); [2 Sam 18:29](#)). In Ephesians it may signify the sinner's peace with God (e.g., [2:14](#), [17](#)) and the believer's peace with others (e.g., [2:15](#); [4:3](#)). Thus, grace expresses the motivation behind God's gracious work, and peace, the effect of God's work. Characteristic of Paul, these words of greetings are followed by "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. [Rom 1:7](#); [1 Cor 1:3](#); [2 Cor 1:3](#); [Gal 1:3](#); [Phil 1:2](#); [2 Thess 1:2](#); [Phlm 1:3](#)), indicating the source of grace and peace.

God is not only called Father but “our” Father to denote personal relationship. Furthermore, grace and peace come not only from God but also from the Lord Jesus Christ. Since only one preposition is used to denote the source of grace and peace, from both the Father and the Son, it strongly implies that the Father and Son are equal and thus Jesus Christ is divine. In conclusion, then, believers are to appreciate and appropriate the grace that brought salvation and its resulting peace, both of which come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## B. Praise for God’s Planned Spiritual Blessings (1:3-14)

### 1. The provision of spiritual blessings (1:3)

<sup>3</sup>All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

## Notes

### 1:3

**who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.**—The term “blessed” (*eulogeō* [<sup>TG</sup><G2127>, <sup>ZG</sup>2328]) is rather vague in English. In OT usage, to be blessed by God meant to receive benefits from God such as possessions, prosperity, or power. The term is used over 40 times in the NT, and though many times it is used when people “praise” God (e.g., [Luke 1:64](#); [Jas 3:9](#)) or Jesus ([Matt 21:9](#); [Mark 11:9-10](#); [Luke 19:38](#); [John 12:13](#)) and invoke God’s enabling power ([Luke 2:34](#); [24:50, 51](#); [Heb 7:1, 6](#)), it is also used, as in the present context, where God is the subject who “provides benefits” to the recipients ([Matt 25:34](#); [Acts 3:25, 26](#); [Gal 3:9](#); [Heb 6:14](#)). This is followed with a cognate noun “blessing” (*eulogia* [<sup>TG</sup><G2129>, <sup>ZG</sup>2330]), which conveys the idea of “benefits” both in the OT ([Gen 27:35-36](#), [38](#), [41](#); [49:25-26](#); [Isa 44:3](#)) and in the NT ([Rom 15:29](#); [Gal 3:14](#); [Heb 6:7](#); [12:17](#); [1 Pet 3:9](#)). Such usage is fitting in the present context. The nature of the enrichment or benefit is “spiritual.” The sense, therefore, is that God has enriched us with every spiritual benefit necessary for our spiritual well-being.

**in the heavenly realms.**—The heavenly realms (traditionally, “heavenlies”) in classical Greek can refer to the place where the gods dwell and from which they come. This word appears in the LXX 5 times but only once in the canonical books (Ps 67:15; numbered [68:14](#) in English Bible) where it refers to the Almighty or possibly to God’s rule. In the NT it occurs 19 times, 5 of which are in Ephesians ([1:3](#), [20](#); [2:6](#); [3:10](#); [6:12](#)). It has a local sense, denoting the place where the exalted Christ is and the place from which believers derive their spiritual blessings. Later Paul mentions evil hosts in the heavenly realms ([3:10](#)) and the believer’s struggle with them in the present day ([6:12](#)). The spiritual benefits for the believers are from the heavenly realms and the unbelievers’ opposition to the believers finds its source in wicked spiritual leaders who also reside in the heavenly realms ([6:12](#)). In other words, the struggles in the heavenlies are also played out on earth. Hence, the believers reside on earth having been enriched with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms necessary for their spiritual well-being.

**because we are united with Christ.**—The phrase “in Christ” (or “in the Lord”) occurs 36 times in Ephesians. It may convey the idea of instrumentality (“through Christ”), but surely it can have the local sense of “the place” in whom the believers are. It speaks of a definite union between the believer and Christ. Thus, it has the local sense of the believer being incorporated in Christ. The believer, who is united with Christ who is in heaven, partakes of the spiritual benefits from the heavenly realms.

## Commentary

Usually after the greeting Paul would give an introductory thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. However, in this letter he first offered a paean of praise for God’s benefits to the believers ([1:3-14](#)), which is then followed by thanksgiving ([1:15-23](#)). In the Greek text, [verses 3-14](#) are one long sentence of 202 words,

considered by one scholar to be the most monstrous sentence in the Greek language (Norden 1913:253). This is the first of eight lengthy sentences in the book ([1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [2:1-7](#); [3:2-13](#), [14-19](#); [4:1-6](#), [11-16](#); [6:14-20](#)). Three of these ([1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [3:14-19](#)) are praise and prayer, for which it is not unusual to have lengthy sentences. Even in present times, it is not uncommon in extemporaneous praise and prayer to have long, complicated sentences, with many subordinate clauses and phrases.

In the last hundred years there has been much discussion on the form and structure of this passage. In the final analysis, it appears that [1:3-14](#) is a eulogy (literally, “a well-speaking of,” not reserved just for funerals) whose style accords with other Jewish-Hellenistic eulogies, but its content goes beyond them. In the abundance of descriptive words in this long, complicated sentence regarding God’s purpose, plan, and action, there is form and development of thought. The form is demonstrated by the refrain “praise and glory to God” ([1:12](#); see also [1:6](#), [14](#)), which is given after mentioning each person of the Trinity in the order of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The development is demonstrated by the progression from a pronouncement of praise to God ([1:3](#)), to a description of God’s great plan and action ([1:4-12](#)), and finally to its application to the believers ([1:13-14](#)). This eulogy is a very fitting introduction to the letter as a whole.

In this eulogy, Paul calls upon the believers to praise “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Praise means “to speak well of,” and the one to be praised is the eternal God, who is further described as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the title “Father” is rarely used to describe God, whereas in the New Testament more than 50 percent of the occurrences of the word “father” refer to God (250 times out of 413 total). Paul says God is the Father of “our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Jesus” is his personal name, and the designation “Lord” indicates his status as master and his identity with Yahweh (“Jesus is Lord” was an early confession of the church—[Acts 2:36](#); [8:16](#); [10:36](#); [11:17](#); [19:5](#); [Rom 10:9](#); [14:9](#); [1 Cor 12:3](#); [2 Cor 4:5](#); [Phil 2:11](#)). His designation “Christ” is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word *messiah*; it denotes that he is the promised, anointed one who would bring salvation.

The reason to praise God is twofold: for who he is—the eternal God—and for what he has done—having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. The verb “to bless” is rarely used in Greek literature, but, as stated above, it is frequently used in the Old Testament, where God is said to enrich his people with possessions, prosperity, or power. It is the opposite of a curse, which signifies a pronouncement of destruction. The nature of these God-given benefits is spiritual, having their source in the Spirit of God; they are supernatural, in contrast to that which is natural—originating from an earthly source. These spiritual benefits enable believers to live effectively here on earth by God’s empowerment and enrichment. The number of benefits is indicated by the word “every,” signifying the complete adequacy of these blessings for the believer’s spiritual well-being. Also, the location of the source is significant because these spiritual benefits issue from the believers’ union with Christ, with whom they are seated in the heavenly realms ([2:6](#)).

The text indicates that this provision of every spiritual benefit has already been made available, although the appropriation of them occurs during the course of the believer’s lifetime. An analogy of this is God’s promise to Joshua ([Josh 1:3](#)) that every place in the Promised Land on which he placed his foot had already been given to him, in accordance with God’s promise to Moses. Although it had been given, it was not a reality until he placed his foot on it. It would have been unnecessary for Joshua to pray for land that already had been given to him. He was to place his foot on it by faith. Likewise, it is unnecessary for believers to pray for spiritual blessings already provided for them. The reason why believers do not receive spiritual benefits is not because God is stingy or they have not prayed for them, but because they are not appropriating by faith what God has already given to them. Every spiritual benefit is at our disposal for our spiritual well-being.