

EPHESIANS – AN INTRODUCTION

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul presents a powerful summary of Christian doctrine and duty – a clear picture of faith and life. Paul marvels at the wonder of God’s grace, his plan of salvation, the great privilege of belonging to Christ’s church and the life transforming power of the Gospel. This was John Calvin’s favourite letter. Samuel Taylor Coleridge described it as “the divinest composition of man.” In a city of pagan idolatry, Paul emphasizes the truth – the truth of God and the truth of the Gospel. Ephesians is one of the richest New Testament sources on the church – the new community that God is building in Christ. Paul emphasises the exaltation of Christ which explains his use of “**in the heavenly realms**” (1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12) which is unique to Ephesians. **The majestic scope of Paul’s letter is summed up in 1:9 – 10:** “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

WHO

The **Apostle Paul** wrote this letter (“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” 1:1) most likely from a Roman prison (3:1, 4:1) – Paul’s four prison letters are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. This letter was written at the same time as Colossians with which Ephesians shares many similarities. Though imprisoned, Paul asks for boldness to proclaim the Gospel, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” 6:19 – 20.

TO WHOM

“To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus” 1:2. Thus, Paul sees all believers as **saints, faithful** and **in Christ Jesus**. They are part of His body - the church (e.g. 1:21 –22).

WHEN

The date of the letter is approximately 60a.d. around the same time Paul wrote Colossians.

BACKGROUND – PAUL IN EPHESUS

Ephesus was the most important city in Western Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Ephesus had a population of 300,000 and a theatre that could accommodate up to 50,000 people (see Acts 19:28 – 34). It was a commercial centre (a major inland port), a multi-cultural city (a centre of Emperor worship) and a tourist attraction of first order! Here was the great Temple of Artemis (Diana) – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Hence the chant, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:34). During his second missionary journey, Paul was resident in Ephesus for about three years (53 – 55 a.d.). **During this time:**

Paul preached to Jews & Gentiles: Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Acts 19:8 - 10

Ephesus became a base for Gospel outreach: “This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” Acts 19:10, “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” Acts 19:20

The Silversmiths of Ephesus opposed Paul: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the

goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." Acts 19:25 - 27

Paul served the Lord & Helped the People: "When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Acts 20: 18-21

WHY

Unlike other New Testament letters, Paul is not refuting heresy or reprimanding sin. He is providing this young church in Ephesus with the knowledge and encouragement to stand firm in the faith in the face of opposition and persecution and to grow in their appreciation of Christ.

HOW

Ephesians is divided into two parts: chapters 1 – 3 deal with exposition while chapters 4 – 6 deal with exhortation. In short, Paul states the truth and then applies the truth.

Thematic Outline (From John Stott, Ephesians)

1. The New Life which God has given us in Christ (1:3 – 2:10)
2. The New Society which God has created through Christ (2:11 – 3:21)
3. The New Standards which God expects from his new society, especially unity and purity (4:1 – 5:21)
4. The new relationships into which God has brought us – harmony in the home and hostility to the devil (5:21 – 6:24)

Detailed Outline

Introduction (1:1 – 2)

Our Blessings in Christ (1:3 – 14) [This is one long sentence in Greek!]

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians (1): Knowing God's purpose and power (1:15– 23)

Saved by Christ (2:1 – 10)

United by Christ (2:11 – 22)

Commissioned by Christ to preach to the Gentiles (3:1 – 13)

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians (2): Knowing God's riches and fullness (3:14 – 21)

United in Christ (4:1 – 16)

Transformed by Christ: General Principles (4:17 – 5: 21) & Case Studies:

Wives & Husbands (5:22 – 33)

Children & Parents (6:1 – 4)

Slaves & Masters (6:5 – 9)

Prepared for Conflict: the Armour of God (6:10 – 20)

Conclusion & Benediction (6:21 –24)

WHAT

What is Scripture? The Bible is God's special revelation to us. It is an account of God's divine activity and God's divine word.

What is Scripture's view of Scripture?

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1: 20–21)

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17).

What is Jesus' view of Scripture: "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) and, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17 – 18).

The value of Scripture for us today, "The holy scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

The Shorter Catechism: Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to **believe** concerning God, and what **duty** God requires of man.

KEY THEMES: GRACE & PEACE

From the beginning of the letter: "**Grace** and **peace** to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." 1:2, to the end of the Epistle, "**Peace** to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Grace** to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love." 6:23 – 24, Paul concentrates on these key themes (cp. John 1:17). We are:

- **Saved By Grace, 2:1 - 10**
- **United By Grace, 2: 11 – 22, 4:1 – 16**
- **Transformed By Grace, 4:17 – 5:21**

KEY VERSES

Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." 1: 3

Prayer for Greater Knowledge of Christ

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." 1: 17

Our Faith in Christ:

- **The Gospel of Jesus**

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." 2:8 – 10

- **The Trinity**

"He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." 2:17 - 18

- **The Power of Prayer**

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." 3:20 - 21

Our Life in Christ:

- **A Life of Unity & Diversity**

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." 4:4–7

- **A New Life**

“Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” 4:21 - 24

- **A Life of Love**

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 4:31–5:2

- **A Life of Light**

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” 5:8 - 11

- **A Life of Wisdom**

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 5:15 – 17

- **A Life of Thanksgiving**

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 5:19 - 20

- **A Life of Submission**

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” 5:21

- **A Life of Battle**

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 6:10 - 13

- **A Life of Prayer**

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” 6:18

KEY SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Introductory Commentaries:

Ferguson, Sinclair B., Let's Study Ephesians (Banner of Truth Trust, 2005)

Stott, John R. W., The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society (IVP, The Bible Speaks Today, 1999)

For a more detailed discussion:

Hendriksen, William, Galatians & Ephesians (Banner of Truth Trust, 1990)

O'Brien, Peter T., The Letter to the Ephesians (The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, 1999)

Very Helpful Website: <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

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