

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Introduction

Except for the book of Romans, the book of Ephesians is the most carefully written presentation of Christian theology in the New Testament. Paul wrote this epistle to make Christians more aware of the riches they have in Christ and to motivate them to draw upon these spiritual resources in daily living.

Author

The name Paul occurs at 1:1 and 3:1 as the author of this book, and the ancient tradition of the church supports this claim. Some have argued, however, that Ephesians differs in vocabulary and style, and that the view of the universal church as the body of Christ represents a later theological development. Arguments from vocabulary and style are notoriously subjective, however, and the richness of the theology in Ephesians is better attributed to Paul's own growth and meditation on the nature of the church.

Date

As one of Paul's "Prison Epistles" (the name given collectively to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), the letter would be dated to the period A.D. 60–63, corresponding to the time of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (cf. Acts 28:16–31). It was probably written at about the same time as Colossians.

The destination of the epistle is less certain. Because the phrase "in Ephesus" (1:1) was omitted in some early Greek manuscripts, some have suggested that the epistle was a circular letter addressed to the churches of Asia Minor as a whole and forwarded from church to church. Some scholars believe that this theory explains Paul's reference in Colossians 4:16, where he requested that the epistle to the Colossians be read along with the "epistle from Laodicea." This may refer to a copy of Ephesians with the name "Laodicea" inserted in a blank space so that the circular letter might also be read there.

Themes and Literary Structure

The first half of Ephesians lists the believer's heavenly possessions in Christ Jesus: adoption, redemption, inheritance, power, life, grace, citizenship, and the love of Christ. There are no imperatives in chapters 1–3, which focus on the divine gifts to the believer. But chapters 4–6 include thirty-five directives that speak of believers' responsibility to conduct themselves according to their calling. Thus, the two main divisions of the book are: the position of the Christian (chs. 1–3), and the practice of the Christian (chs. 4–6).

The wonderful news of salvation in Ephesians is directed toward the goal of "the praise of His glory" (1:6, 12, 14). The word "glory" occurs eight times and refers to the exceeding excellence of God's love, His wisdom, and His power. God's glory is particularly revealed in

His commitment to build a glorious, mature, and ministering church, “not having spot or wrinkle” (5:27).

The “heavenly” character of the believer’s calling is stressed in Ephesians (1:3). Although previously dead in sin, the Christian has been raised with Christ and seated with Him in the “heavenly places” (2:6). This “heavenly” calling, in turn, provides the means and empowerment of the believer’s life of obedience on earth (4:1, 7–10).

The City of Ephesus

At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18–21). Returning to the city on his third missionary journey, Paul spent nearly three years there (Acts 18:23–19:41). Paul’s effective ministry began seriously to hurt the traffic in magic and images, leading to an uproar in the huge Ephesian theater. Paul then left for Macedonia, but afterward he met with the Ephesian elders while on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17–38).

Our Blessings in Christ

Paul’s important phrase “in Christ” (or its equivalent) appears about thirty-five times, more than in any other New Testament book. Furthermore, the salvation of the believer is ensured by the work of all three Persons of the Trinity—the loving choice of the Father (1:3–6), the redeeming work of the Son (1:7–12), and the sealing of the Holy Spirit (1:13, 14). 1

1Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

OUTLINE OF EPHESIANS

PART ONE: WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US

I. 1:1-14

Introduction

1:1-2 Address & Salutation

1:3-14 God's blessing's and plans in Christ

II. 1:15-3:21

The Church in Christ

1:15-23 Prayer for wisdom, & revelation

2:1-22 Salvation in Christ

3:1-21 Paul's revelation of the mystery

PART TWO: WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO

I. 4:1-16

Walk in unity

4:1-3 Exhortation to unity

4:4-6 Seven unifying traits

4:7-16 The unity of the body of Christ

II. 4:17-6:9

Walk in holiness

4:17-24 Put on the new man

4:25-32 Be kind to one another

5:1-7 Walk in love

5:8-14 Walk in the light

5:15-21 Walk in wisdom

III. 6:10-24

Walk in battle

6:10-20 Put on the armor of God

6:21-24 Final greetings

Lesson 1 - Ephesians 1:1-14

OPEN IT

1. What blessings have you received recently?

EXPLORE IT

2. How was Paul made an apostle? (1:1)
3. How has God blessed believers? (1:3)
4. When did God choose us in Him? (1:4)
5. What is the purpose of God choosing us? (1:4)
6. What did God determine beforehand for us? (1:5)
7. What is the goal of God's predestination? (1:6)
8. What is redemption? How are we redeemed(1:7)
9. What has God done for the those in Him? (1:7-11)
10. What was the plan for those who first believed? (1:12)
11. What happens to those who hear the words of truth and believe? (1:13)
12. What is the Holy Spirit to us in Christ? (1:14)

APPLY IT

13. How can you say thank you to God for the blessings he has given you?
14. How can you share with other people those blessings God has given you?

Lesson 2 - Ephesians 1:15-2:10

OPEN IT

1. For what do you thank God on a daily basis?

EXPLORE IT

2. Why did Paul continually thank God for the Ephesians? (1:15-16)
3. What did Paul ask God to give to the Ephesian Christians? (1:17)
4. Why did Paul ask that the Ephesians' hearts would continue to be enlightened? (1:18-19)
5. When did God work His mighty power? (1:20-21)
6. What is the church's relationship to Christ? (1:22-23)
7. Before they believed, what was the spiritual condition of the Ephesians? (2:1)
8. How had all Paul and the rest who believed once walked? (2:2-3)
9. Why did God make those who were dead alive with Christ? (2:4-5)
10. What position has God given Christians in Christ? (2:6)
11. What will God show in the ages to come? (2:7)
12. Why can no one boast in his own salvation? (2:8-9)
13. What is the purpose of God's workmanship? (2:10)

APPLY IT

14. What people in need could you remember in your prayers this week?

Lesson 3 - Ephesians 2:11-22

OPEN IT

1. Can you remember a time when you were an outsider and then someone brought you in?

EXPLORE IT

2. What did Paul command the Gentiles to remember? (2:11-12)
3. What did the blood of Christ do for the condition of the Gentiles? (2:13)
4. Who brought peace to Jewish and Gentile believers? (2:14)
5. How did the enmity between Jews and Gentiles come to an end? (2:14-16)
6. What is the result of believing the message preached by Christ? (2:17-18)
7. What is the result of this work Christ has done? (2:19)
8. What is the foundation these new members of God's household are built? (2:20)
9. What is this household of God's growing into? (2:21)
10. For what purpose were the Ephesians being built together? (2:22)

APPLY IT

11. How can you show the hope and love of God to an "outsider"?

Lesson 4 - Ephesians 3:1-21

OPEN IT

1. What kinds of things do you ask God for when praying for others?

EXPLORE IT

2. What was Paul made a steward of? (3:2-3)
3. How can we understand the mystery of Christ? (3:3-4)
4. When was the mystery of Christ disclosed? (3:5)
5. What mystery does Paul reveal here? (3:6)
6. By whose power is Paul working? (3:7)
7. For what purpose was Paul given this grace? (3:8-9)
8. What was the intent of having Paul make known the mystery? (3:10-12)
9. Why were Paul's sufferings the glory of the Ephesians? (3:13)
10. What did Paul request of the Father? (3:16)
11. How would Christ dwell in the believers' hearts? (3:17)
12. Why did Paul want the Ephesians to be rooted and established in love? (3:17-19)
13. How much is God able to do? According to what power? (3:20)

APPLY IT

14. What are you supposed to do with this knowledge of the mystery of Christ?

Lesson 5 - Ephesians 4:1-16

OPEN IT

1. What keeps sports teams unified?

EXPLORE IT

2. What did Paul urge the Ephesians to do? (4:1)
3. What attitudes promote unity among Christians? (4:2)
4. What are the seven elements that unite Christians? What should we do with them? (4:3-6)
5. How has each of us (all Christians) been given grace? (4:7)
6. What commentary did Paul make on the Old Testament passage he quoted? Why? (4:8-10)
7. With what kind of gifts does Christ give the church? (4:11)
8. Were these gifts all measured out equally? (4:11)
9. What is the purpose of these gifts? (4:12-13)
10. What results does God want for the church from these gifts? (4:14-16)

APPLY IT

11. What service can you supply to another member this week?

Lesson 6 - Ephesians 4:17-32

OPEN IT

1. What do you do with your worn-out clothing?

EXPLORE IT

2. In what way were Ephesian believers instructed not to live as Gentiles? (4:17-19)
3. How did Paul contrast the Ephesian Christians with the Gentiles? (4:20-21)
4. In what way does God want Christians to change? (4:22-24)
5. What should Christians stop doing? (4:22)
6. How can we accomplish this? (4:23)
7. What should Christians begin doing? (4:24)
8. How can we put into practice this process concerning lying, anger, and stealing? (4:25-28)
9. How should believers speak to others? (4:29)
10. How can we hurt the Holy Spirit? (4:29-30)
11. What attitudes and speech should believers rid themselves of? (4:31)
12. Instead of evil attitudes and speech towards each other what did we do? (4:32)

APPLY IT

13. What would be the first step for you in changing an old pattern of behavior?

Lesson 7 - Ephesians 5:1-21

OPEN IT

1. What has someone done to you recently that you ought to forgive them for?

EXPLORE IT

2. What relationship do followers of God have with Him? (5:1)
3. How are Christians to imitate Christ? (5:2)
4. What practices should Christians have no part in? (5:3-6)
5. Whom do we need to avoid? When? Why? (5:5-7)
6. Why should Christians not become partners with non-Christians? (5:7-8)
7. To walk as children of light what must we do? (5:8-10)
8. Instead of joining with the sons of disobedience what should we do? (5:11-13)
9. To walk in wisdom what must you do? (5:15-17)
10. What four things should result from being filled with the Spirit? (5:18-21)
11. How should believers relate to one another? (5:21)

APPLY IT

12. What opportunities might come up this week that you can take advantage of to do the will of the Lord?

Lesson 8 - Ephesians 5:22-6:9

OPEN IT

1. In your view, what one quality or ability most sustains a relationship?

EXPLORE IT

2. What should wives render to their Husbands as they should to the Lord? (5:22)
3. How is the relationship of the church to Christ an example to wives? (5:23-24)
4. How are husbands commanded to love their wives? (5:25-28)
5. How should husbands love their wives? (5:28-30)
6. What are the responsibilities of the husband and wife toward each other? (5:33)
7. Why is a child's obedience to his or her parents pleasing to the Lord? (6:1)
8. What does it mean to "honor your father and mother"? (6:2-3)
9. Why does God only tell fathers not to provoke children to wrath? (6:4)
10. What does God want fathers to do? (6:4)
11. What responsibilities did slaves have to their masters? (6:5-8)
12. What reward for proper service could the slave expect? (6:7-8)
13. What directives did Paul give slave owners? (6:9)

APPLY IT

14. How can you remember to serve all people wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord?

Lesson 9 - Ephesians 6:10-24

OPEN IT

1. If you were a police officer, what extra precautions would you take to guard against danger?

EXPLORE IT

2. Finally, what did Paul exhort his audience to do? (6:10-11)
3. Why do Christians need to put on God's armor? (6:11-12)
4. What can Christians dressed in the full armor of God expect? (6:13)
5. How should Christians be armed for battle? (6:14-17)
6. What one thing ties all the armor of God together? (6:14-17)
7. What last two things did Paul tell all Christians to do? (6:18)
8. Why did Paul ask the Ephesians to pray for him? (6:19-20)
9. How would Tychicus help the Ephesians? (6:21-22)
10. What final pleas does Paul make for the Ephesians? (6:23-24)

APPLY IT

11. What one thing can you do this week to put on your armor?