

Ephesians – Introduction

A. Introducing Ephesians

- Ephesians has been called the crown and climax of Paul's writings and the most comprehensive statement of the Christian faith ever penned.
- If we reverently absorb the teaching of this letter it will change our lives.
- Paul wrote Ephesians from prison (1:1; 3:1; 6:20). He had been a religious terrorist, but Christ broke into his life and called him to be an Apostle and sent him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.
- Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was a wealthy, religious and self-confident city. Dominated by the temple of Diana and steeped in witchcraft, it was both intellectually proud and morally corrupt.
- Paul planted the church there and stayed for three years (Acts 19:1-22).
- The Christians were under extreme pressure, because the gospel had impacted the economy of the city (Acts 19:23-41).
- Ephesus was a hub church and other churches were planted from there.
- Paul expected Ephesians to be read in these daughter churches.
- The letter is written to strengthen and encourage Gentile Christians living at the heart of a pagan society (6:22).
- Paul cannot visit, but he prays for them (1:15-22; 3:14-19) and writes this letter.

❖ **1:1-2 – Greetings**

❖ **1:3-3:21 – Spiritual blessings in Christ - Wealth**

- ⇒ **1:3-14** – Praise for God's triune blessings in Christ.
- ⇒ **1:15-23** – First prayer – God's power
- ⇒ **2:1-10** – Salvation by grace alone.
- ⇒ **2:11-22** – The Gentiles included in one Body.
- ⇒ **3:1-13** – Paul's stewardship of the Gospel.
- ⇒ **3:14-21** – Second prayer – God's love

❖ **4:1-6:20 – Living out the implications of the gospel - Walk**

- ⇒ **4:1-16** – Living as the church – Unity
- ⇒ **4:17-5:20** – Living in the world – Purity
- ⇒ **5:21-6:4** – Living in the home – Harmony
- ⇒ **6:5-9** – Living in the workplace – Integrity

❖ **6:10-20 – Spiritual weapons - Warfare**

❖ **6:21-24 – Final Greetings**

B. 1:1-2 – Greetings

- Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.
- He describes the Christians he is writing to as *in* Ephesus and *in* Christ. All the blessings of God come to us through their union with Christ.
- Grace and peace summarize the salvation we receive in Christ. Grace is God's unconditional good will and unmerited love in action. Peace is the result of grace.

C. 1:3-3:21 – Spiritual blessings in Christ

1) 1:3-14 – Praise for God's triune blessings in Christ.

- This 202-word sentence is a rhapsody of praise and a song of salvation.
- *Salvation is far richer than you think:*
 - ⇒ It is the eternal purpose of the triune God.
 - ⇒ 1:3-6 - It is planned and administered by the Father.
 - ⇒ 1:7-12 - It is purchased and accomplished by the Son.
 - ⇒ 1:13-14 - It is applied and communicated by the Holy Spirit.
- *Salvation is far older than you imagine:*
 - ⇒ 1:4 - It originated in eternity.
 - ⇒ 1:10,14 - It stretches forward to future time when all things are united under the rule of King Jesus.
- *Salvation is far bigger than you can comprehend:*
 - ⇒ 1:9-10 - It concerns individuals, the church and the cosmos.

2) 1:15-23 – First prayer – God's power

- Contemplating God leads Paul to prayer.
- **1:15** – He has heard of their faith and love.
- It is an encouragement to Paul as he sits in prison to realize that God is at work among these Christians.
- The prayer consists of three requests.
- **1:17** - The first request is for a deeper knowledge of God. Notice once again the emphasis on the Trinity. Do you long for your knowledge of God to grow? Do you pray this for yourself? Do you pray it for others?
- **1:18** – The second request is that they may have a fuller grasp of their hope and of the inheritance that God has prepared for them. Hope is unconditional certainty. The resurrection makes it a living hope (1 Peter 1:3-5). It is an anchor for our souls in the choppy waters of life (Hebrews 6:19).
- **1:19-23** - Paul's third request is that the Ephesian Christians might know the greatness of God's power exercised in and for those who believe. He uses four different words to describe this power. Christ's lordship is exercised on behalf of the church. The church is at the centre of all God's purposes. One day the scaffolding of history will be removed, and the church will be seen in all its glory.

3) 2:1-10 – *Salvation by grace alone.*

- God's ultimate purpose is to transform the whole cosmos (1:9-10).
- This must take great power – the transforming power seen in the Resurrection and Ascension and Enthronement of Christ (1:19-23).
- Paul now wants to help us to understand that this power is at work in our lives as individuals (2:1-10) and corporately in the church (2:11-22).
- **2:1-3** - We must understand the depths of our need. Before we were saved, we were spiritually dead, enslaved and condemned. We were all under God's wrath - his settled, personal, righteous and consistent hatred and hostility to all that defies his will, spoils his creation and destroys our well-being.
- **2:4-7** - Having plumbed the depths Paul now lifts us up to the heights by reminding us of our position in Christ.
 - ⇒ He made us alive (2:5).
 - ⇒ He saved us from the wrath of God by the blood of Jesus (2:7). Salvation involves forgiveness but is so much more. We have been received every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3).
 - ⇒ He raised us up and seated us with Christ (2:6). This is a place of victory, destiny and security
- **2:8-9** – How do we receive this blessing
 - ⇒ We are saved by grace alone (2:4, 5, 7, 8-9).
 - ⇒ We are saved by faith alone (2:4, 6, 7, 10).
- **2:10** - God is now transforming us. We are saved **by** God and **for** God. We are his "poem" - a "*walking work of art*".

4) 2:11-22 – *The Gentiles included in one Body.*

- **2:11-12** - The majority of the believers in Ephesus were converted Gentiles. Before the coming of Christ, they were alienated from God. They were Christ-less, state-less, friend-less, hope-less, God-less.
- **2:13-16** – Jesus has removed the alienation and brought them near.
- The alienation of the Gentiles was graphically symbolized by the wall of separation which existed in the Temple in Jerusalem. Through the death of Jesus everything has changed. The tearing of the curtain from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-54) represented the abolition of the old system of religious taboos. Gentiles can now enjoy friendship with God (2:13-15). God brought them near through the blood of Christ. He is our peace (2:14-15). God has created a new humanity (2:15).
- **2:17-18** – Jesus preached this message of peace and we now have an intimate relationship with the triune God.
- **2:19-23** - Gentiles have been reconciled to God and to each other.
- They have been brought into the fellowship of the church.
- He describes the church in three ways:
 - ⇒ It is kingdom of which we have become citizens.
 - ⇒ It is family or household. We have God as our Father, Christ as our older brother and all other believers as our siblings.

- ⇒ It is a spiritual temple. The most exciting thing about being among God's people is that God is there. The Bible creates the church and keeps it healthy. God dwells among his people in the church, filling the church with his Spirit.

5) 3:1-13 – Paul's stewardship of the Gospel.

- **3:1** – Paul prepares to pray for the church, but before he gets down to it he focuses on some of the challenges of his ministry.
- **3:2-14** - This section is an aside in which Paul tells his readers that he is in prison for the sake of the Gentiles (3:1) and is suffering for them (3:3).
- It is his commitment to the gospel of grace which has brought here.
- **3:2-6** - The gospel of grace as a "*mystery*" which he received from God (3:2-3) and focuses on Christ (3:4) and brings blessings to Gentiles (3:5-6)
- **3:7-9** - Paul's chains did not invalidate his ministry or frustrate God's purposes. He was called by grace and he preaches "*the boundless riches of Christ*" to all people.
- **3:10-12** - God's ultimate purpose for this fractured world is to unite everything under the headship of Christ (1:9-10). The unity of the Church is a foretaste or demonstration of this eternal purpose in the present age. This display is for the invisible spiritual powers of the angelic world. God says "*Look at my Church! Look at her access to me! Look at the unity which she displays. One day the whole cosmos will display this unity under the headship of Christ*". The unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church is like a movie trailer.

6) 3:14-21 – Second prayer – God's love

- **3:14-15** – Paul returns to the prayer he began in 3:1. His prayer is passionate, personal and particular.
- **3:16-17** – His first request is that they may be strengthened so that Christ may dwell permanently in their lives so that they are utterly transformed.
- **3:17-19** – His second request is that they might know the full dimensions of God's love. "*God loves you more than you can possibly imagine, and He wants you to know it.*"
- **3:19** - His third request is that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. This means to be controlled by God, transformed by God and satisfied with God.
- **3:20-21** – Paul's prayer might seem impossibly great and overwhelming. Paul ends by reminding them that God can do whatever they ask. This final doxology looks back on all the blessings that the triune God has poured into their lives. It also looks forward to what comes next. If these things are true, we must live lives that are different from the world around us. This is daunting and difficult, but God's grace and power are sufficient.

D. 4:1-6:20 – Living out the implications of the gospel

1) 4:1-16 – Living as the church – Unity

- **4:1** - In the second half of Ephesians we move from belief to behaviour. Paul will describe the Christian life as a walk (4:1,17; 5:2,8,15). It is progressive and deliberate.
- **4:1-16** – He begins with the church which is a foretaste of the unity that will one day exist in the universe when it is united under the lordship of Christ (3:10-11).
- **4:1-6** - It is important that the church displays this unity now.
 - ⇒ **4:1-3** - We must guard our hearts and be both humble and gentle.
 - ⇒ **4:4-6** – We must also remember the seven foundations on which the unity of the church is built.
- **4:7-16** - What will this unity look like? Does it mean that we will all be identical in our experiences, gifts and Christian service? Are Christians just clones with no variety, diversity or variability? No - every Christian is unique and valuable. The Church is a body with many parts – each of them fulfilling their God-given, unique function. Each of us is to be committed to the church and we are to use our spiritual gifts for its health and growth. This is the only way for the church to reach maturity.

2) 4:17-5:20 – Living in the world – Purity

- **4:17-5:14** - One of the dangers in reading Ephesians is that we forget that the first three chapters come before the last three!
 - ⇒ The first half of Ephesians is a breath-taking description of our glorious salvation (Ephesians 1-3).
 - ⇒ When Paul moves on to the practical outworking of this salvation (Ephesians 4-6) it is easy to turn this into a kind of legalistic man-centred obedience.
 - ⇒ A holy life is vital, but it flows out of the experience of grace, it is not a means of securing God's approval.
 - ⇒ All of us are legalists at heart and we naturally share this performance mentality.
 - ⇒ Here Paul instructs the Christians in Ephesus on how they should behave in a pagan world and calls them to live holy lives. We are to be different from the world in our conduct, passions and goals. A holy life flows from the gratitude of a grace-captivated heart.
- **4:17-24** - Paul begins with some general principles.
 - ⇒ **4:17-19** - If we are to live holy lives, we must remember what we have been saved from – a futile, darkened and reckless life.
 - ⇒ **4:20-24** – We must also remember what we have been saved for. We must put off the old nature and be spiritually renewed as we put on the new nature.

- **4:25-5:20** – He now applies it in very practical areas.
 - a) **4:25-32** - Our words must be truthful (25), gentle (26-28), wholesome or health giving (29) and kind and compassionate (32).
 - b) **5:1-7** – We must walk in love and purity. As Christians we are dearly loved children. We are to follow God's example and pour out our lives in love for each other (1-2). We must avoid sexual sin (3-4), remembering what God has saved us from (5-7).
 - c) **5:8-14** – We must walk as children of the light (vv. 8-14). As children of the light, we must produce the "fruit of light" (8-10) and let our light shine (11-14).
 - d) **5:15-17** - We must walk in wisdom. The wise person is careful (15), purposeful (16) and sensitive (17).
 - e) **5:18-20** – We can only do this in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3) **5:20-6:4 – Living in the home – Harmony**

- **5:21-6:4** - Paul now tells us how to live the Christians life in the home. The immediate context reminds us that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit if we are to create godly homes (5:8-21).
- a) **Husbands and wives (5:21-33)**
 - In 5:31 Paul reminds us of God's blueprint for marriage. It is not a human invention but a divine revelation (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5). Marriage is the primary relationship, a permanent relationship and a physical relationship.
 - It is in this context that Paul describes the role of the wife and the husband.
 - We must submit to each other (5:20), but there are clearly different roles for men and women.
 - ⇒ The wife is to honour, affirm, receive and nurture her husband's loving leadership (5:22-24). This is not an unconditional submission – the wife's first calling is to obey God.
 - ⇒ The husband is to provide loving leadership, sacrificing his own pleasures and desires to promote his wife's well-being (5:25-28). He is responsible for leading, providing and protecting his wife. His model is Christ, and his motive is obedience to God. When his wife is happy, he will be happy (5:28-30). The love of Christ is sacrificial (25), intentional (26) and victorious (27).
- b) **Parents and children (6:1-4)**
 - **6:1-4** - Paul moves from marriage to the relationship between parents and children.
 - ⇒ Children must obey and honour their parents (1-3). This is right and wise.
 - ⇒ Fathers must not exasperate their children with a discipline which is too harsh or capricious so that the child is crushed. Nor must we be too indulgent so that the child is spoilt. We should avoid ridicule, sarcasm, favouritism, neglect or over protection. We must allow our children to be children. We must nourish and nurture them.

4) 6:5-9 – *Living in the workplace – Integrity*

- **6:5-9** - Although much of this section is helpful in thinking about work and employment, we are still in the realm of the home.
- We live in a very different world which recognizes the evil of slavery. This change has been brought about by the influence of the Bible and the gospel. Christians should be at the forefront of the battle against modern day slavery.
- With these provisos we can apply some of the principles here to the world of work.
 - ⇒ **6:5-8** - Paul addresses Christian slaves and encourages them to allow their Christian faith to mould their attitude to their labours (vv. 5-8). Their diligence is to flow from their discipleship, their love for Christ and their hope of heaven.
 - ⇒ **6:9** – What Paul says to masters is an amazing. In Roman society there were no constraints on the way in which masters treated their slaves. But Paul says that masters must treat their slaves in the same way that slaves treat their masters. This was revolutionary. What made all the difference? It was the fact that they both served a higher Master. Paul does not openly oppose the institution of slavery, but his teaching on the equality of all believers in Christ so undermined it that it was bound to collapse (Galatians 3:28).

E. 6:10-20 – *Spiritual weapons*

- Paul has dealt with the believer's *wealth* (Ephesians 1-3) and *walk* (Ephesians 4-6) and now he deals with the believer's *warfare*.
- **6:10-13** – We must know our enemy. The devil is real, powerful, malicious and resourceful. We therefore need to stand firm with confidence in God's strength.
- **6:14-17** - We must put on the armour which God supplies.
 - a) *The Belt of Truth* refers to integrity of heart and the unerring Word of God.
 - b) *The Breastplate of Righteousness* reminds us of the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us.
 - c) *The Boots of Peace* speak of mobility as we move out with the gospel.
 - d) *The Shield of Faith* points to the Scripture-fuelled faith which defends us against temptation.
 - e) *The Helmet of Salvation* encourages us to fill our minds with the truths of our multi-dimensional salvation.
 - f) *The Sword of the Spirit* refers to the Scriptures which contain all that God intends us to know to be saved and to live a life that pleases him.
- **6:18-20** - We are to supplement our armour with prayer. We are to pray with all kinds of prayer, with all perseverance, for all of God's people and in all circumstances. Paul ends by requesting prayer for himself. Even though he is

in prison, he is still an “*ambassador in chains*” (20). Did God give Paul the boldness to preach in prison? For the answer look at Philippians 1:12-18.

F. 6:21-24 – Final Greetings

- **6:21-22** - Paul expresses his fellowship with them by sending Tychicus as his postman.
- **6:23-24** - Paul concludes as he began, by referring to God’s grace and peace.
- **6:24** - Paul describes them as those “*who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*” . There is a challenge here as well. About thirty years later Jesus could say to the same church, “*I hold this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first.*” (Revelation 2:4)

G. The Holy Spirit in Ephesians

- 1) **1:13-14** – The Holy Spirit seals us
- 2) **1:17** – The Holy Spirit enlightens us
- 3) **2:1-10** – The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life
- 4) **1:19-22** – The Holy Spirit lives in the Church
- 5) **3:17-21** – The Holy Spirit reveals God’s love
- 6) **4:1-6** – The Holy Spirit gives unity and gifts to the church
- 7) **4:30** – The Holy Spirit enables us to be holy
- 8) **5:18** – The Holy Spirit fills us
- 9) **6:17** – The Holy Spirit helps us in spiritual warfare
- 10) **2:18; 6:18** – The Holy Spirit helps us to pray