

Ephesians

INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? A big-picture view of Jesus, the church, our place in Christ, and how to reflect Christ's life in our own relationships.

✦ **WHO WROTE IT?** The apostle Paul.

✦ **WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?** Around A.D. 60.

✦ **WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT?** Paul wrote this book while imprisoned in Rome.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1–2: Who we are in Christ
- Chapter 3: Gentiles are full members of the church
- Chapter 4: Unity and growth in the church
- Chapters 5–6: Living as Christians

KEY CONCEPTS

- Jesus Christ
- Grace
- Prayer
- Church
- Light

READING TIME

301
IN HOURS :30 1:00 1:30 2:00 2:30

WHAT'S THE POINT OF
Ephesians?
+++
Your potential
is huge.
Reach for it.

WORTH MEMORIZING

- **2:8-10** God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.
- **3:20-21** Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.
- **4:4-6** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.
- **THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE**
• **INSTRUCTION.** This book contains the Bible's most direct teaching to husbands (5:21-33).

BACKGROUND

A port city, Ephesus was one of the five major cities in the Roman Empire. The apostle Paul visited Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19–21). During his third missionary journey, Paul remained in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19:1–41). On his way back to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey, Paul stopped in Ephesus to say good-bye to the elders of the church for what he knew would be the last time (Acts 20:17–38). He addresses this letter to the saints "at Ephesus" as well as to the "faithful in Christ Jesus," possibly implying a wider audience (1:1). Paul identifies himself as the author of Ephesians in 1:1, 3:1, and more indirectly throughout.

MESSAGE

This Pauline letter doesn't focus on any particular heresy, church problem, or

OUTLINE

- I. The Christian in Christ
 - A. The Trinity's work in believers
 - B. Paul's prayer
 - C. Made alive in Christ
 - II. Paul's Ministry
 - III. The Christian in the Body
 - IV. The Christian in the World
 - A. Children of light
 - B. Advice in relationships
 - C. Wear God's armor
 - V. Final Greetings
- 1:1–14
1:15–23
2:1–22
3:1–21
4:1–32
5:1–20
5:21–6:9
6:10–18
6:19–24

dysfunction. Paul simply wants to encourage the churches in that region (now western Turkey). Paul's advice here is practical, and yet he repeatedly uses the phrases "heavenly places" (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10) and "high places" (6:12). His overriding theme is the relationship between Jesus exalted in his heavenly kingdom and the body of Christ—his church on earth. The fullness of the Spirit is available to the church united with Jesus as its head. Notably, Paul encourages believers to put on the armor of God—protection from the snares of the evil one.

TIME

Ephesians was most likely written early in Paul's first Roman imprisonment (A.D. 60–62). He mentions his imprisonment in 3:1: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles . . ." (see also 4:1).



From year to year, depending on the ebb and flow of the global economy, several people vie for the title: The Richest Person in the World. These people—multi-billionaires—have more money than they can spend, for the earnings and interest on their fortunes exceed all possible expenditure. Yet the richest person on earth is only one heartbeat away from losing everything.

If you want to know who is really the richest on earth, read the book of Ephesians. This Pauline letter catalogues the endless wealth and wondrous riches of God's people. Ephesians tells us about the riches of God's grace, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, His rich mercy, and of our unsearchable riches in Christ.

Ephesians divides into two parts. The first three chapters stress doctrinal truths, and the last three explain how we should live because of those truths. In other words, chapters 1 through 3 explain why we're rich; and chapters 4 through 6 describe how rich people live—the lifestyle of those who are spiritually wealthy. This includes appreciating the value and unity of His body, the Church.

Because Paul intended Ephesians to circulate among neighboring churches, everything in the book applies to Christians in any place or time, including you and me. From the first words of Ephesians, Paul details the spiritual blessings of every Christian. The entire epistle records the blessings we have in heavenly places, and the incredible difference those blessings make in our lives each day.



KEY THOUGHT:

The riches of God's grace provide an eternal inheritance for His children, an endless wealth of blessings, compelling them to live a life worthy of the calling they have received.

KEY VERSES:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
Ephesians 2:8-9



KEY ACTION:

Walk in love and be filled with the Spirit
(see Ephesians 5:2, 18).



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, may I walk in love and be filled with the Spirit so that my life will be a shining testament to You.

BASIC SURVEY

EPHESIANS

AUTHOR: The apostle Paul (1:1).

DATE: Around AD 62, when under house arrest in Rome.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Christians are all members of Jesus' "body," the Church.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Paul had started the church in Ephesus (Acts 19) and now explains in detail the church members' relationship to Jesus Christ—so that they "may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (4:15 KJV). Through Jesus, God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself (2:11–18). This new life should result in pure, honest living in the Church and in the home (chapters 4–6).

QUOTABLE

- > For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (2:8–9 NKJV).
- > Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil (6:11 NASB).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Paul tells servants (slaves, in today's language) to "be obedient to them that are your masters" (6:5 KJV). Why? Because God will reward such behavior (6:8).

SO WHAT?

"Through [Jesus] you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit" (2:22 NLT).

READ EPHESIANS 1 AND PSALMS 81–82.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 231. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 231. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 229. →

CLOSER LOOK

NOT GRACE AND WORKS

Paul taught that our salvation is a free gift from God, dependent completely upon His good graces and not upon our personal merit or righteous deeds. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9 NIV).

Some people think, however, that God's grace *plus* our good deeds save us, but Paul asserted that it's either one or the other, not a mixture of the two. "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:6 NKJV).

Yet James said, "If someone says he has faith but does not have works . . . can faith save him? . . . Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14, 17 NKJV). There's no contradiction, however. When you truly believe in Jesus, you don't just believe that He exists. After all, even the devils believe that much (James 2:19). Rather, you must make Jesus the center of your life. You must sincerely love God, and when you love God you obey Him (1 John 5:1–3). "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6 NIV).

So although good deeds can't save you, if you have true faith it will cause you to do good works. That's the proof that you have genuine faith.

READ EPHESIANS 2-3.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 231. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

God approves of humor and laughter and merriment, but Christians are to know the difference between wholesome and unacceptable speech. Paul tells us, "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. . . . Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God" (Ephesians



As Christians, we must guard our tongues. We must avoid obscene speech and focus on wholesome words that praise God.

4:29; 5:4 NIV). In another epistle, he writes, "Put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth" (Colossians 3:8 NASB). The following verse gives the reason for watching what we say: "Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly" (2 Timothy 2:16 NIV).

READ EPHESIANS 4-5.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Paul tells us that we're fighting "against spiritual hosts of wickedness" and urges us twice, "Put on the *whole* armor of God." Ephesians 6:14-18 describes the separate, individual pieces of armor and weaponry, and you need *every* piece of them so "that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:11, 13 NKJV, emphasis added). You need truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. It's not enough to have the sword of the Spirit but to lack the shield of faith. You need the *whole* armor of God if you are to withstand the enemy's attacks.

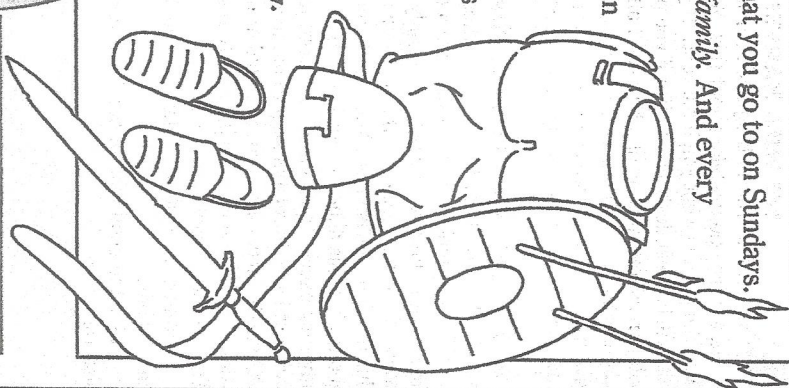
READ EPHESIANS 6 AND PSALM 84.

AN INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is all about being part of Christ's church. Paul explained in this letter that the church is not just a building that you go to on Sundays.

The church is a family: *God's family*. And every Christian is an important part of that family. Being a Christian means that you never have to be alone. Wherever you go, you'll find brothers and sisters in Christ who will love and support you!

WHAT IS THE ARMOR THAT GOD GIVES US? SEE EPHESIANS 6:10-17.



What's
In It
For Me?

BEING PART OF GOD'S
FAMILY MEANS . . .

FOR EACH OF US.

WITH EACH OTHER.

WITH EACH OTHER.

WITH EACH OTHER.

Headlines

GOD PLANNED IT ALL!

Ephesians 1:3-14, page 1591

PEACE DECLARED

Ephesians 2:11-22, page 1592

HUSBANDS TO LOVE WIVES

Ephesians 5:25-33, page 1596

OBEDIENCE LENGTHENS LIFE

Ephesians 6:1-3, page 1596

Ephesians

BOOK INTRODUCTION

Mighty warrior of the faith that he was, Paul found himself facing an all-too-human dilemma: Sailing south across the Aegean Sea from Macedonia, he yearned to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. To do so, however, meant sailing right by Ephesus.

Bypass Ephesus? How could he do that? He had lived, ministered, prayed, and fought fierce battles on behalf of those believers for more than two years. They were dear to him. And yet it seemed crucial to attend Pentecost. What should he do? Paul sailed to Miletus, 30 miles south of Ephesus. He then sent word for the elders of the Ephesian church to join him for a brief meeting on the beach before his departure to Jerusalem.

Why the urgency to see that little band of church elders? Paul could not guarantee that he would see them again. Now that he was heading toward Jerusalem, he must have felt his constant peril keenly. Not only had there been a Jewish murder plot against him already, but the Jews loathed what he—a former Pharisee—had become: a passionate spokesman for Jesus of Nazareth. And his presence in Jerusalem would only increase the danger.

Though Paul had said, “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13), this was most certainly a tender moment with his friends from Ephesus. And for good reason. As Paul would later say to other believers: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers” (1 Cor. 4:15).

Paul was the Ephesians’ father in the faith—the one who had explained salvation by grace through faith to them (2:8, 9; Acts 19:1–7). The idea that they might never see or hear from him again shook the young church’s leaders to the core. In God’s grace and kindness, however, they would not only see Paul one more time but would receive a letter from him some five years later.

WHAT IT SAYS | *Parting Words*

Some regard the epistle to the Ephesians as the most profound and influential letter ever penned, second only to Romans in its theological and practical scope. Even so, Paul did not know he would live to write it when he said his goodbyes that day in Miletus.

The prospect of Paul’s imprisonment or death in Jerusalem must have left those church leaders with deep apprehensions. How would they go forward without apostolic oversight? Paul knew all too well

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that such a leadership vacuum would allow “savage wolves” to attack the flock and “draw away the disciples” (Acts 20:29, 30). At this meeting on the beach, then, the apostle had a serious charge to deliver. The Ephesian elders needed to remain alert and watchful shepherds, defending the flock and building up the body of Christ in their city—themes Paul returned to in his landmark letter (4:1–16; 6:10–20).

When Paul reached Jerusalem, he would be attacked and then put under house arrest in Rome for two years. During this interval, he would write the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon—the so-called “prison epistles.” But on this tearful day on the beach, having commended the elders “to God and to the word of His grace” (Acts 20:32), the apostle of grace sailed into a future certain of only one thing: grace is with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (6:24).

WHAT IT MEANS | *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*

Because Paul likely intended for Ephesians to circulate among neighboring churches, almost everything in the letter applies to Christians in any place or time. The book is easily divided into matters of doctrine (1–3) and matters of Christian living (4–6). Although Ephesians makes no reference to specific issues concerning the church at Ephesus, it is not difficult to see connections between Paul’s own experiences in Ephesus, his relationship to the elders, and the subjects he covers in his letter.

- **Riches of the Gospel of Grace:** Paul mentions grace 12 times in this letter as he declares God’s calling and purpose for every believer. He catalogues God’s many rich blessings through Christ—blessings that should strengthen every Christian’s confidence and endurance.
- **Building Up the Church:** Paul warned the Ephesian elders about the danger of division and the need for unity. In 4:1–16, he explains how to maintain unity as leaders work to teach and equip the saints. Elsewhere, he encourages believers to use their gifts to serve, remembering they have been created for good works (2:8–10).
- **Spiritual Warfare and God’s Power:** Satan had no intention of lightly ceding territory to the gospel in Asia. At times, the spiritual battles flamed white-hot. In 6:10–20, this seasoned missionary-warrior goes into great detail about the spiritual armor given to believers for fighting the Lord’s battles. In 3:14–21, he prays that every Christian in Ephesus would understand and experience God’s power.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU | *You Have Everything in Christ*

From the very first words of Ephesians, Paul details the spiritual blessings of every Christian. In fact, the entire epistle records one blessing after another and the incredible difference those blessings can make in our service, confidence, and fellowship with other believers.

We are not just chosen by God; in His grace, we are adopted, accepted, redeemed, sealed, and secured in Christ. We did not come begging to God; God came after us and made us His own. And now we can know beyond all doubt that we are His. From eternity past to eternity future, we are in Christ.

But there is even more to be thankful for. Through Jesus we have peace; we enjoy membership in a living, impact-making organism—the body of Christ; we have gifts with which to serve that body; and we are empowered to walk in unity, love, light, and wisdom, and to stand against the enemy. In other words, through Him we have absolutely everything we need to accomplish the work God has prepared for each of us and be secure in our standing with Him. It is time we started living like it!

Ephesians

Church fights, church splits, denominational struggles, “worship wars,” name-calling and so on—these have become an all-too-common part of contemporary church life. They are a black eye on the body of Christ and a major reason non-Christians think poorly of the church or avoid it altogether. It may surprise you, but our ancestors in the faith had to contend with some of the same kinds of problems.

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that just the opposite should be the case, that the church should in fact be characterized by unity. We are united in Christ—Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, etc.—and we should demonstrate this harmony in the body of Christ. It should be one of the leading distinguishing characteristics of God’s people.

In Ephesians 4:1-5 Paul wrote, “Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. There is *one* body and *one* Spirit—just as you were called to *one* hope at your calling—*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (emphasis added).

Did you notice the number of times the word *one* occurs? Do you think Paul was sending a message? Further, the night before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus Himself prayed: “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by Your name that You have given Me, so that they may be *one* as We are *one*” (John 17:11, emphasis added).

If unity was important enough for Jesus to pray about the night before His death, it is important enough for us to try to live it.

Unity is not the same as agreement. We do not



have to agree on everything; in fact, it is unrealistic and unnecessary to believe that we should. But the list of things that are truly worth dividing over is pretty short: things like

- The authority of the Bible
- Salvation by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone
- A sincere desire to live lives of holiness, integrity and repentance
- Love for God and one another above all

These are some of the foundational truths of the Christian faith and must be preserved at all costs. But when we do disagree—over worship style, length and time of worship service, ministry emphases, use of ministry funds, etc.—it is imperative that we disagree with respect and a desire to work out our differences while “diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us” (Eph 4:3).

The church is a family made up of brothers and sisters in Christ, all of us adopted sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Like any parent, it grieves the heart of God when His children fight. Let us attempt to live in such a way that we put a smile on His face instead.

Author: Paul (Saul of Tarsus)

Date: Written around A.D. 60 in Rome while imprisoned

What in the world is going on?

- 600 B.C. Ephesus is founded
- 412 B.C. Ephesus allies with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War
- A.D. 26–30 Years of Jesus’ ministry
- A.D. 33 Saul of Tarsus converts and is later known as Paul
- A.D. 47–48 Paul and Barnabas visit Galatia during their first missionary journey
- ca A.D. 49–52 Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia and visits there for the first time during his second missionary journey; Timothy travels with Paul and Silas
- ca A.D. 50–52 Paul visits Corinth for the first time on his second missionary journey
- ca A.D. 51 Luke joins Paul, Silas, and Timothy during Paul’s second missionary journey
- A.D. 52–54 Paul teaches in Ephesus
- A.D. 52 Emperor Claudius installs Felix as procurator of Judea
- A.D. 52–62 Paul defends his faith before Roman procurators Felix (A.D. 52–60) and Festus (A.D. 60–62)
- A.D. 54–68 Nero rules the Roman Empire



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EPHESIANS IS ADDRESSED TO A group of believers who are rich beyond measure in Jesus Christ, yet living as beggars, and only because they are ignorant of their wealth. Paul begins by describing in chapters 1—3 the contents of the Christian's heavenly "bank account": adoption, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, inheritance, the seal of the Holy Spirit, life, grace, citizenship—in short, every spiritual blessing. In chapters 4—6 the Christian learns a spiritual walk rooted in his spiritual wealth. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [1—3] for good works, . . . that we should walk in them [4—6]" (2:10).

The traditional title of this epistle is *Pros Ephesious*, "To the Ephesians." Many ancient manuscripts, however, omit *en Epheso*, "in Ephesus," in 1:1. This has led a number of scholars to challenge the traditional view that this message was directed specifically to the Ephesians. The encyclical theory proposes that it was a circular letter sent by Paul to the churches of Asia. It is argued that Ephesians is really a Christian treatise designed for general use: it involves no controversy and deals with no specific problems in any particular church. Some scholars accept an ancient tradition that Ephesians is Paul's letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16), but there is no way to be sure. If Ephesians began as a circular letter, it eventually became associated with Ephesus, the foremost of the Asian churches. Another plausible option is that this epistle was directly addressed to the Ephesians, but written in such a way as to make it helpful for all the churches in Asia.

WATCH WORDS

- **praise** (extol, commend, honor)—1:6 (also 1:12, 14)
- **purpose** (intention or plan; laying out beforehand)—1:11
- **dispensation** (management, administration)—3:2 (also 1:10)
- **equipping** (making fit; preparing fully)—4:12
- **ruler** (a supernatural being that influences human affairs)—6:12

>WORD|study

5:1 Submitting (cf. *hypotaxis*), "holding oneself up under") is in the present tense and middle voice, thus suggesting the idea of continuing in submission and clearly noting that the action is by personal choice. The word definitely expresses the idea of voluntarily giving up your own rights and bowing your own will to another. In the Greek culture, the word was often used in military terminology in the sense of soldiers standing under the authority of a commanding officer.

Ephesians

Timeline	AD 52	AD 54	AD 54
World Events	Paul travels through Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey.	Apollos comes to Ephesus and is mentored by Aquila and Priscilla.	Paul returns to Ephesus during his third missionary journey.
Biblical Events			Paul teaches in the synagogue in Ephesus.

"Walk worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1b).

Who wrote Ephesians?

Paul named himself as the author of the letter (1:1; 3:1).

Who were the recipients?

The letter was addressed to the church that Paul founded in Ephesus, and likely this epistle was intended to circulate among churches in Asia Minor.

When was Ephesians written?

This letter was probably written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome A.D. 60–62 (Ac 28:30–31).

Where did it happen?

While imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote this letter to the believers in the church at Ephesus, the influential capital of the Roman province of Asia located on the eastern portion of the Aegean Sea in what is now Turkey.

What is Ephesians about?

The church as the Body of Christ. For the young church, this revelation

was crucial to understanding God's marvelous plan of working in and through His people to accomplish His worldwide eternal purposes.

Unity. Paul spent time explaining the importance of unity in the family as well as among believers in varied situations.

Why should women read Ephesians?

Many consider this epistle to hold some of the greatest Pauline theology, coupled with practical truths for living, and the brief letter continues to influence the church today. Women can especially appreciate the passage on understanding God's design for marriage found in Ephesians.

How do you read Ephesians?

The book of Ephesians is framed as a letter and, like other letters of the ancient Greco-Roman world and of the Pauline corpus, opens with the typical identification of author and recipients followed by greetings. In terms of content, the letter follows more closely the form of a sermon or homily with a greater emphasis on doctrinal and ethical issues than on particular ecclesiastical problems or issues relating to church polity.

Outline

- I. Salvation (1:1–2)
 - A. The Favor of the Beloved (1:3–6)
 - B. The Glorious Redemption (1:7–14)
 - C. Paul's Prayer for Believers (1:15–23)
 - D. Those Dead in Trespasses (2:1–10)
- II. Unity in the Body of Christ (2:11–4:16)
 - A. Unity of the Body Through Christ's Sacrifice (2:11–22)
 - B. Ministry to the Gentiles in the Body (3:1–13)
 - C. Paul's Prayer (3:14–21)
 - D. Unity in the Body Through the Spirit (4:1–6)
- III. Walking like Christ (4:17–5:21)
 - A. A Warning Not to Walk in Your Former Life (4:17–32)
 - B. An Admonition to Walk in Love (5:1–21)
 - C. Relationships in Christ (5:22–6:9)
- IV. Walking like Christ (4:17–5:21)
 - A. Between Husband and Wife (5:22–33)
 - B. Between Parent and Child (6:1–4)
 - C. Between Employee and Employer (6:5–9)
- V. Strength in Christ (6:10–20)
 - A. Between Parent and Child (6:1–4)
 - B. Between Employee and Employer (6:5–9)
- VI. Benediction (6:21–24)

4:31–32 Spiritual renewal involves a commitment to know God

better through prayer and meditation on His Word. In examining our lives, we realize just how exacting God's standards for righteous living are. But we need not despair since it is God's grace that helps us conform to His will. As we obey Him, He will teach us humbly and help us forgive the people who have hurt us. God wants to heal our relationships. When we do things God's way, we can begin to reconcile with our alienated

friends and build a solid foundation for further spiritual growth.

5:1–7 God wants us to follow His will for our lives and be like Jesus Christ. As we look at Jesus' life, we can see how God would like us to think and act. We must love our enemies, just as Jesus did. We should also avoid sexual impurity, greed and obscene speech since they stand counter to the character of God. As difficult as following Christ's example might sound, anything is possible with God's powerful help.

EPHESIANS

THE BIG PICTURE

Paul planted the Ephesian church (see Acts 18:19–21) and ministered there for a few years (see Acts 19:1–10; 20:31). This church thrived in a city renowned as a center for the worship of the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana). While Paul was ministering there, the Ephesian believers maintained a strong attachment to him. And when Paul moved on, the believers openly expressed their sorrow.

How could the Ephesian church survive in its hostile environment? They could not depend on Paul's presence forever; they would have to learn to stand on their own, with God's help. Paul wrote this letter to remind the Ephesian believers to place their faith in the only solid foundation for healthy living—God in Jesus Christ.

How can we maintain our spiritual growth in a hostile environment? Not one of us has the resources or strength to initiate and sustain our spiritual growth alone. But Paul understood one important fact: Our transformation is possible only on God's terms. We must break with our former ways of life and depend on God's power to help us change. While our own efforts and those of supportive people are helpful, lasting spiritual growth will only happen when we recognize our need for God—the God who created us and sustains our lives.

Belief in God, repentance from sin and continuing obedience to God's will are keys to genuine, stable spiritual growth. If our attitudes and actions reflect God's truth and we adopt a new attitude of submission to God's authority and care, we will indeed make progress. If we ignore God, as he has revealed himself in the Bible, or choose to create a "god" to our liking, our spiritual renewal is doomed to failure. True and lasting spiritual renewal comes only as we submit ourselves to the righteous rule of the true and living God.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

GOD'S DESIRE FOR OUR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

God's plan for us doesn't include our bondage to sin or the past. God wants us to have a relationship with him so we can enjoy his love and presence. He wants this even more than we do! Some of us have distorted images of God based on painful images of authority figures from our past. The book of Ephesians shows us that God is a Father who has loved us from the beginning of time. He will continue to love us, no matter what we do.

A. GREETINGS (1:1–2)

B. ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL (1:3–3:21)

C. ACCEPTANCE OF OUR SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY (4:1–6:9)

D. AWARENESS OF OUR ROLE IN SPIRITUAL WARRFARE (6:10–20)

E. CLOSING REMARKS (6:21–24)

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To strengthen the believers in Ephesus in their relationship with God and with each other.

AUTHOR:

The apostle Paul.

AUDIENCE:

The believers in Ephesus, a city in western Asia Minor, and all believers everywhere.

DATE WRITTEN:

Around AD 60, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

SETTING:

This letter was a somewhat personal message from Paul to some close and dear friends in the main church of Asia. Paul probably intended this to be a circular letter passed from church to church for the believers' encouragement.

KEY VERSE:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (6:10).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Paul with Tychicus and with his close friends in the Ephesian church.

Picture This

True Unity • 4:1–6

This is the only chapter in the NT that mentions the word *unity* (4:3, 13). Paul, using the word *one*, describes Christian unity in seven ways. Believers are united in:

- one body, made up of all believers everywhere (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12).
- one spirit, who indwells each believer (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).
- one hope, which is Christ's promise to return to take his followers to heaven (1:14; Col. 1:27; Titus 2:13).
- one Lord, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by His blood (1:7; 1 Cor. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).
- one faith, once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).
- one baptism, referring primarily to the baptism of the Spirit (Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 12:13).
- one Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the heavenly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mal. 2:10).

THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

In the New Testament, and especially in Ephesians, Jesus Christ is exalted as the focus of all history and as the only means for experiencing a meaningful life. Only through God in Jesus Christ can the power of sin be overcome. This letter urges us to keep Jesus Christ at the center of all we do, maintaining a love relationship with him on a daily basis.

TRUE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL LEADS TO WISE CONDUCT

We sometimes think of spiritual renewal only in terms of stopping destructive habits or breaking cycles of sin. But often the best way to stop destructive habits is to build constructive ones with which to replace them. When we repent, seek God, and surrender our lives to him each day, the Holy Spirit empowers us to lay aside destructive habits and break the cycle of sin. As we begin to live out God's will for our lives, we will find our old ways of life passing away and every aspect of our lives being renewed.

ADOPTION INTO GOD'S FAMILY

Some of us retain painful memories from the past, particularly if we experienced unpleasant family situations. The letter to the Ephesians reminds us that God adopts us into a new family when we surrender our lives to him. In this family, God is our perfect and loving Father. On this earth God's family, the church, has its limitations and imperfections. But our Father in heaven is perfect. Becoming a part of his family initiates the process of spiritual growth.

You Are Not Your Own

Ephesians 5:21-33

MARRIAGE INVOLVES HUNDREDS of small sacrifices. It interrupts your time and privacy. It means tolerating your spouse's imperfections. It includes giving up your own preferences so you and your partner can make choices together. It may even threaten your control of the television remote!

But what if you were told that these sacrifices didn't even begin to explain your role in marriage? Suppose someone said that the real prerequisite to success as a couple is crucifixion—giving up your very life for your spouse.

That's precisely what Paul conveys in this famous passage about the role of mutual submission in marriage. If your summary of marriage is enjoying plenty of home-cooked meals, getting a back rub whenever you want, and having a companion who will constantly cheer you on and even laugh at your miserable jokes, it's time for a reality check.

According to Paul, your primary role in your marriage is to give up your life for your wife. Explaining the instruction to "submit to one another" (Ephesians 5:21), he writes, "For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her" (5:25). Does this sound like a demanding and all-consuming task? It is. But the best part is that your wife isn't the only person in your relationship who will benefit from your sacrifice. Paul elaborated, "A man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself" (5:28).

Paul asked wives to make big sacrifices, too. But your task as a husband is not to evaluate how well your wife is living up to her end of the bargain. In fact, there's no bargaining about it. Your responsibility is as simple as it is profound: Just as Christ gave his life for his bride, the church, you are called to lay down your life for your wife.

The Full Life

Ephesians 5:3-20

EVER SINCE GOD gave the Ten Commandments, some have been tempted to think he enjoys making people miserable and taking away their happiness by denying them earthly pleasures.

The truth is, God wants to give us something much better. But in order for us to receive it, we need to clear some room in our lives. Often, that means getting rid of sins or bad habits that are using up the space God wants to claim. Instead of filling our lives with sexual immorality, impurity, greed, and obscene stories (Ephesians 5:3-4), God wants us to be full of thankfulness. Instead of drunkenness (5:18), God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Suppose you're walking along the beach and find an old treasure chest. But when you pry it open, it's full of sand, not gold coins. Now suppose someone else comes along and offers to give you as much gold as you can fit into the chest. Sounds great, right? Except for one problem: The chest is already full. In order to accept the gold, you'd have to dump out the sand. You'd need to make as much room as possible for the more valuable treasure. Unless you get rid of the sand, the chest will never hold anything of value.

The same goes for the sins in our lives—the sand in the treasure chest. They may provide temporary pleasure, but they won't deliver lasting fulfillment. Sexual promiscuity may provide an immediate thrill, but the long-term results are catastrophic—it will never provide real happiness. On the other hand, true love for another person and for God can fill us up to overflowing. Drunkenness provides a temporary giddiness or forgetfulness, but it's nothing like the true peace and joy that come from knowing and loving God. It's our choice. We can fill up our lives with whatever silly or sinful things we choose, or we can let God fill us up with the things that will bring ultimate fulfillment.

BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD Submission in Marriage

Both men and women were created to display the image of God, and the Old and New Testaments affirm an equal value, coupled with a differentiation in roles between men and women. The idea of equal value with differing responsibility is easy to understand by looking at the example of God Himself in the Trinity. While the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally God, holy and perfect, each also fulfills a different function. Each member of the Trinity has the same worth and importance, but each carries out a function in order to accomplish their unified purpose. For instance, Scripture notes that Jesus was totally submissive to the will of the Father (Lk 22; Jn 5). Jesus did not have an identity crisis; rather, He perfectly understood His role and the importance of His responsibility. Similarly, men and women can have equal value and importance before the Lord and still carry out different functions. Some view this principle as degrading; however, the complementarity between women and men accurately reflects the need each gender has for the other.

Submission to the Lord calls a woman to understand her role of modeling submission in the home and church, and Paul offers a clear explanation for submission: Paul is encouraging women to look beyond this life and instead consider the eternal implications of their behavior in marriage with the wife's joyful submission to her husband and a husband's love for his wife just as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). Such a marriage becomes a vibrant witness to the lost world concerning Christ's relationship to believers.

(5:32). Marriage is a model for the church. Jesus Christ is the loving head, or authority, of the church (5:23). Husbands are to represent this loving headship in their families. Wives represent the response of the church to Jesus Christ by submitting to and respecting the leadership of their respective husbands.

When a Christian woman marries, she should understand that while she is her husband's equal in personhood and in her spiritual accountability to God, she is called to submit herself willingly to her husband's leadership. Wives must yield to their husbands in love. The wife's submission is voluntary (see Word Study, p. 1517), not a response to the threat or demand of the husband. Just as Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the desire of the Father, so women choose submission to their own husbands over personal independence. Submission is also to a specific authority (to your own husbands, v. 22)—not to every man.

As Christ is the spiritual head of the church, so husbands ought to be the spiritual heads of their homes, modeled after the loving and serving Savior. Husbands are accountable to God Himself. He is a loving and protective Father who deeply cares for His daughters. A man who is under the authority of Jesus will be reminded of his own responsibility to care sacrificially for his wife. A healthy family is characterized by a husband and father who considers even his life less important than meeting the needs of his family and a wife who willingly allows her husband to lead, thus supporting the structure created by God.

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Did Paul hate women?

Much has been said about the Apostle Paul's attitude toward women. In fact, some feminist theologians have reacted so strongly against Paul's words that they have simply rejected the words penned by Paul in Scripture. Feminist theologians suggest that Jesus loved women but that Paul was speaking under the influence of his own culture. In other words: Jesus spoke for God, but Paul spoke only for himself. A brief look at Paul's historical context shows that nothing could be further from the truth.

Paul undoubtedly had been immersed in an atmosphere in which the understanding was that women were not as valuable to society as men. However, this historical reality actually makes Paul's words of encouragement toward women more profound. While some interpret Paul's words toward women as pejorative, the truth is that Paul was not reflecting his culture; he was reacting against it. His strong stand on divorce (1Co 7), his encouragement of the women who ministered to and with him (Lydia, Ac 16; Phoebe, Rm 16; Priscilla, Rm 16:3), and even the way he encouraged women who were great participants and patrons for world missions (Priscilla, Ac 18)—all illustrate that Paul was bringing to his world a new way of thinking about the value of women within the context of Christianity and about their usefulness in the spreading of the gospel. In Eph 5:25-30 Paul makes three revolutionary statements about women. First, Paul's teaching style illustrates that men and women are equal. He gives instructions to both. Second, Paul commands the men to love their wives as their own bodies (v. 26, 28). The verb (*ekagapao*) indicates continuous and habitual action (5:25). Third, this love leads to a man's nourishing and cherishing his wife.

HARD QUESTION

WARFARE PRAYER

Ephesians 6:10-18

Troubles and spiritual battles are a way of life for Jesus' followers (see John 16:33). Far from excluding us from temptation, spiritual growth often stirs spiritual opposition. When we commit our lives to Christ, we enter the arena of spiritual warfare for our own souls.

Paul uses the analogy of armor and warfare to teach us about the essential equipment needed for standing against temptation and spiritual attacks. His words remind us that we are not simply fighting a physical battle but rather a spiritual one. We must rely on God's power rather than our own to fight these battles. This dependence on God is strengthened through prayer.

As we look at the armor we notice that we first must put on the belt of truth. Satan is "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He is constantly trying to deceive and trap us. In contrast, our armor is held together by truth, which comes from the Father of all truth.

Next, we put on the breastplate of God's righteousness. Though there are many levels of meaning to this phrase, the primary one is that we are not protected by our own righteousness; we need the righteousness of God. Our forgiveness and acceptance through faith in Jesus Christ shields us against Satan's accusations that we are guilty and unworthy.

We are called to put on the shoes of the gospel of peace. This peace carries us along to spread the Good News to people everywhere.

We are also given the shield of faith to protect us against Satan's accusations and persecutions. We cling to our hope in Christ and refuse to believe Satan's lies. Prayer leads us to this faith, keeping our vision clear when circumstances cloud our way.

Paul urges us to put on salvation as our helmet. In addition to protecting the wearer, a helmet identifies a soldier's allegiance. We belong to the company of Christ. We have been saved from destruction and restored to new life. As our helmet of salvation protects us, we also acknowledge that we belong to the God who has made us whole again.

Finally, we are armed with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The sword is our only offensive weapon. The Holy Spirit communicates God's message to others, exposing their sin and opening their hearts to God (see Hebrews 4:12-13).

Warfare prayer is a matter of claiming our authority in Christ. Because we are secure in Christ, we are to stand our ground against Satan's attacks, and we will overcome him (see 1 Corinthians 10:12-13; James 4:7).

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Are you facing a spiritual battle right now? Are there strong temptations, interpersonal conflicts or difficult circumstances disrupting your spiritual progress? Think about the various pieces of God's armor. What piece do you need to remember to hold onto and use? Pray for God to help you take up this armor so that he can give you the victory over your struggle.

For more on prayer, turn to Philipians 1.

1192 ■ EPHESIANS 4:23

SEE THE TRUTH

Growing Up in Truth

Ephesians 4:12-27

When the truth about ourselves makes us feel guilty, we often simply rationalize it away. But if we are to experience spiritual renewal, we must see the whole truth about ourselves. In order to see the truth we must grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ and measure our lives by his standard for truth.

The apostle Paul instructed the church that those who believed in Christ were to function like a single body, with each member contributing in a special way to help God's people grow and mature in their understanding of the Lord (see Ephesians 4:11-13). Once we reach maturity in our knowledge of Christ "we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

God wants us to grow spiritually. That means growing to understand what is true. In the past we may have measured truth against whatever sounded right to us at the time. But now we must look to Jesus Christ, who is the truth. We must reevaluate our beliefs to conform them to his image.

Turn to Philipians 4.

MARRIAGE: A MOST INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP

Ephesians 5:21-33

Marriage can be one of the most fulfilling spiritual friendships in life if it is continually cultivated. Many couples have never taken the time to nurture the spiritual life of their marriage by praying, studying God's Word and sharing together. This passage weaves the relationship of marriage and the church into a moving testimony of love and presents a number of specific principles for developing spiritual vitality.

Note that Paul urges husbands and wives to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. They should value each other and serve each other, not only because of their devotion to each other, but also because of their devotion to Christ. Some have defined submission as "getting under and lifting up." This image of submission is not a picture of domination or subjugation. Instead, it is an image of gracious, sacrificial service. Both husband and wife support each other so that both people become all that God created them to be.

It is also important that the Lord becomes the model for the entire marriage relationship. Husbands and wives cannot look only to human models, which so often fail in one way or another. Instead, they should follow Jesus' model and lay down their lives for their spouses. When they find their security in Christ, marriage partners will also find the freedom to risk loving sacrificially as he loves.

The goal of a married couple should be to have a relationship that is without spot, wrinkle or blemish. Their marriage relationship should be an ongoing experience of grace and forgiveness. While no marriage will be perfect, the couple learns to face failure with confession and forgiveness, uprooting the weeds of bitterness and contention before they take firm root. Their marriage relationship establishes an environment in which it is safe to take risks for God, safe to fail, safe to dream and safe to rest.

A marriage relationship will always have an element of mystery. Spiritual growth brings a sense of wonder at the unsearchable riches of life in Christ. No one can fully fathom the depths of God's wisdom and grace.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

If you are married, how has your marriage contributed to your spiritual growth? In what ways would you like your marriage to be a means of spiritual renewal? Do you see spiritual friendship as an element of your marriage? Consider how you can take steps to make this a reality.

For more on spiritual friendship, turn to Genesis 2.

EPHESIANS 2:7

TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

Fulfilling Our God-Given Purpose

Ephesians 2:1-13

Once we ask God to transform our lives, we are able to discover the vital role he intends for us to fill in his master plan. When God created us, he gave us gifts and abilities that fit with his purpose for our lives. As he transforms our lives, we are able to use our gifts in keeping with the purpose for which God created us.

Paul attested that God has a grand design for all of us, declaring "we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Paul also said, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:4-5).

As members of Christ's body, the church, God has given each of us certain gifts and abilities. It is only when the members are connected to the body in their appointed place and fulfilling their appointed functions that their usefulness is realized. In light of this truth, we must seek to discover our spiritual gifts and find a place where our talents and abilities can be used to help others. Then the entire church can experience spiritual growth.

Turn to 2 Timothy 4.

Following Up

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, where he had spent over two years preaching and arguing the gospel in both the synagogue and in other meeting locations.

BY THE NUMBERS

6 CHAPTERS
155 VERSES
3,077 WORDS

EPHESIANS

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

Paul wrote this book while chained in prison for his preaching and mission.

MIRACLES!

New believers in Ephesus who previously practiced sorcery publicly burned their scrolls, collectively valued at over 50,000 days' wages (see Acts 19:19).

The church in Ephesus experienced many miracles such as recorded in Acts 19:11-12: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them."

In the Word

Paul followed a theme of supernatural power and spiritual warfare for victorious believers, referencing the word heaven nine times.

LIFE LESSONS: God requires believers to respect their family members (6:1-4).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW EPHESIANS?

EPHESIANS IN REVIEW

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
1. What does Paul say is the seal with which we were marked in Christ?
 - A. The blood of Christ
 - B. The title Christian
 - C. The Holy Spirit
 - D. The knowledge from the Word of God

- WHO SAID IT?**
2. "In your anger do not sin." Who originally said this?

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
3. What did God prepare "in advance for us to do"?

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
4. Paul says he has not stopped praying for the Ephesians. What does he keep asking God for so they would know God better?
 - A. Peace in their suffering
 - B. The Spirit of wisdom and revelation
 - C. Forgiveness
 - D. Faith

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
5. What does Paul say we should give thanks to God for in Ephesians 5:20?

- TIME TRAVELER**
6. You are what Paul asks the Ephesians not to be discouraged about. What are you?
 - A. A false prophet
 - B. The crumbling temple walls
 - C. Unbelieving ears
 - D. Paul's suffering

- HOT SEAT**
7. I am Paul. What do I describe as "less than the least of all the Lord's people"?
 - A. Satan among angels
 - B. Myself (Paul)
 - C. He who discriminates against the Gentiles
 - D. He who proclaims Christ with his mouth yet denies him by his works

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
8. "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." What book does this quote originally come from?

- WHO DUNNIT?**
9. According to Paul, what people have "lost all sensitivity"?

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
10. What does Paul say there should be instead of "obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place"?

- TIME TRAVELER**
11. At the end of his book, Paul said he would send you to the Ephesians. Who are you?

- MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY**
12. Paul says not to be partners with those who _____ .
(Fill in the blank.)
 - A. Refuse to show you hospitality
 - B. Are disobedient
 - C. Keep secrets
 - D. Refuse to sing

ANSWERS:

1. C (1:13)
2. David (4:26; see Psalm 110)
3. Good books (2:10)
4. B (1:16)
5. Everything (9:10)
6. D (3:13)
7. B (3:14)
8. Psalms (46)
9. The Gentiles (4:17-19)
10. Holy Spirit (5:19)
11. Tychicus (6:21-22)
12. B (6:9)