

Ephesians

I. Introduction

Ephesians is the 10th book of the New Testament and 5th among those authored by Paul.

Ephesians is part of the books most commonly called “Epistles” a word meaning “letter.”

- These books constitute the major doctrinal section of the NT
- Each of these books was written to a church or individuals to instruct them in who God is, and how to effectively live for Him and serve Him

Ephesians begins a series of shorter letters that can easily be read in one sitting over a cup of coffee.

Ephesians is one of the least personal of all Paul's letters. It contains a very brief introduction, and very little personal information regarding the author or the recipients. We are able to piece together a few key points.

A. Regarding the author

1. 1:1 – Written by Paul
2. 1:16 & 3:14 – Paul prayed passionately for the Ephesians
His prayers reveal his deep desires for them to grow in Christ
3. 3:7 – Paul refers to himself as a minister of Christ
4. 3:13 – Paul refers to suffering tribulation during the writing of this letter.
 - a. 3:1, 4:1 & 6:20 – Specifically, his tribulation was incarceration

Since Ephesians is one of the most amazing of all the NT books it is encouraging to note that great things can be accomplished for the Kingdom of God, even during severe trials and with limited resources.

John Bunyan's “Pilgrims Progress” was also written from behind bars

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5. 6:19 – Paul asked for prayer for he had an expectation that he would be released from prison and continue ministry.

Paul did not have the same expectation when he wrote 2 Timothy

B. Regarding the readers

1. 1:1 – Written to faithful saints who lived in Ephesus
 - a. Some ancient manuscripts leave out the word “Ephesus” causing many to conclude that this letter was not designed for only one church but to be a circuit letter that was passed from church to church throughout Asia Minor
 - b. Same thing was true of the letter to the Colossians

Colossians 4:16

“After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.”

- c. These letters would have been passed from church to church along the postal route that connected the cities in Asia Minor.
- d. This same route was followed to deliver the letters written by Jesus and recorded in Revelation chapters 2-3.
- e. 1:1 We know that they were believers who were:
 - 1:1 Faithful
 - 1:15 Loved others
 - 2:11 Had been gentiles
 - 4:14 Had struggled with false teaching
 - 4:17 Had struggled to give up old life to follow Christ
 - 6:22 Were deeply concerned for Paul’s well being

II. Setting

To best understand the teaching of Ephesians, three texts must be kept in mind

- Acts 19 – tells the details of Paul’s travels to Ephesus and the birthing of the church
- Ephesians itself

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- Revelation 2:1-7 – records the outcome of the church

A. We begin with the book of Acts

1. As Paul's 2nd missionary trip comes to an end, he travels from Corinth through Ephesus en route to his home church in Antioch, then to celebrate a feast in Jerusalem.
 - Acts 18:19 - He remained in Ephesus for a short time reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue.
 - This was the fulfillment of a desire Paul had back in Acts 16:6.
 - We learn that there are times when God says no to our desires; not because they are evil but because it is not the right time.
 - Acts 18:24 – After Paul's departure, Apollos remained in Ephesus and taught the believers
2. On his 3rd journey, after a brief stop in Galatia to encourage the churches, Paul moved on to Ephesus to continue the ministry he had begun. His tenure in Ephesus was longer than any other. He remained almost 3 years preaching the gospel, teaching the word and encouraging the saints.

From the church in Ephesus many other churches were birthed.

- It seems probable that all of the churches listed in Revelation 2-3 were extensions of the ministry in Ephesus.
 - Colossi was also an extension of the ministry in Ephesus
3. While the church in Ephesus was vibrant and had great impact on the world they had fallen into difficult times.
 - They faced severe persecution that resulted in Paul evacuating the city
 - Much worse, Jesus indicted them for "Leaving their first love."

Revelation 2:4

I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

- Jesus also provided the solution to their problem

Revelation 2:5

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

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4. They were told to Remember, Repent and Redo their first works. First works are the cure to returning to the Lord. Fortunately, Acts 19 records the first works for the church in Ephesus

- a. 19:2 – Baptism of the Holy Spirit

If they were to continue with the Lord they must continue to walk in the Spirit

- b. 19:9 – coupled with 20:27 – We understand that Paul placed a huge emphasis upon the WORD. They met daily and studied Scripture.

To continue with the Lord we must place a high value on the word of God in our daily lives. Not just reading it but living it

- c. 19:19 – they burned up the things that had once been idols to them. Paul warned the Galatians against getting tangled up again with things they had once been set free from

III. Situation

Since this letter carries very little personal info, and because it shows evidence of being a circuit letter, there does not seem to be a specific situation that drove the writing. We know Paul had a personal relationship with many who attended the church in Ephesus and his desire was for them to grow in Christ.

It is possible, since Paul spends so much time developing doctrine within Ephesians and the warning he gives to the leaders in Acts 20:29-30, that this letter was written to either correct or guard the church against false teaching.

- A. It is also possible that false teaching was one of the primary causes of them leaving their first love.

1 Timothy 6:3

*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which **accords with godliness,***

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1. False doctrine always leads to false living
2. We must be careful not to embrace doctrines that are impotent

IV. Outline

The book of Ephesians is one of the simplest to outline. It can be divided into two equal parts:

Chapters 1-3 Doctrine
Chapters 4-6 Practice

(More detailed outline)

A. Chapters 1-3 Doctrine

1. 1:1-2 Intro
2. 1:3- 14 A hymn of praise
3. 1:15- 23 Prayer for the Saints
4. 2:1-13 Doctrine of salvation by grace
5. 2:14-3:13 Doctrine of the church
6. 3:14-21 2nd Prayer for the saints

B. Chapters 4-6 Practice

1. 4:1-16 Your place in the church
2. 4:17- 32 Putting off and putting on
3. 5:1-7 Walk in love
4. 5:8-14 Walk in the light
5. 5:15- 21 Walk circumspectly
6. 5:22-33 Marriage
7. 6:1-4 Parenting
8. 6:5-9 Working
9. 6:10-20 Warfare
10. 6:21-24 Conclusions

V. Doctrines

With the remainder of our time I want to look at the major doctrines Paul presents in the book of Ephesians. Obviously, we do not have time to touch on all of the principles, but will focus on some of the most prominent

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This will leave you with the responsibility of looking more carefully on your own to uncover the rest.

A. The Doctrine of worship

I am calling it this because Paul breaks out in one of the longest NT expressions of worship. This doxology is one that expresses the heart of the apostles for the spiritual benefits connected with knowing Christ. This song is rooted in deep theology. In it we find:

1. 1:4 – Election
2. 1:5 – Predestination
3. 1:7 – Redemption
4. 1:8 – forgiveness
5. 1:13 – The work of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

In it we learn that true worship will be an expression of good teaching. Jesus said the Father is looking for those who will worship in Spirit and in Truth

We also learn key things about each of these doctrines

1. Election –
 - We were chosen before we were holy
 - We were chosen to become holy and blameless
2. Predestination – Word means to mark out boundaries in advance. The boundaries are set to make us sons and daughters of God
3. Redemption – is to be purchased back and the purchase price is the blood of God
4. Forgiveness – is an extension of His grace
6. The work of the Spirit – The Holy Spirit in us is the true mark of being a child of God. He serves as a down payment guaranteeing that we will one day be fully redeemed.
- 7.

B. The Doctrine of Prayer –

This short letter records two prayers by the apostle for the saints. Since prayer reflects the deepest desires of the heart, it is fair to say the things represented in his prayer are the most important elements for a believer's walk with Christ.

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1. 1:15- 23 This prayer contains 4 requests

- a. Request for a deeper understanding of who God is
 - Knowledge – Epi-gnosis – a fuller deeper knowledge
 - They trusted Christ for salvation and as a result knew God. They had walked with him and even expressed love for others by serving him, but Paul desires for them to know Him better. It is important for every Christian to realize that there is more of Christ to experience than what we have experienced thus far
- b. Request to know what God has called us to
 - We are ALL called to be part of His work in furthering the kingdom of heaven
- c. Request to know what is His inheritance
 - It is important to note that it is His inheritance not ours that Paul is referring to. His inheritance speaks of what He gets for the work on the cross; namely us.
- d. Request for more of His power
 - The same power that raised Christ from the dead and that raised us from death to life

2. 3:14 – 20 This prayer also contains 4 requests

- a. Request for the power of God to strengthen your inner man
- b. Request that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith
- c. Request that they might be able to comprehend the incomprehensible love of God
- d. Request to be filled with the fullness of God.
 - Obviously, God is bigger than us, if we are filled with Him, our cup runs over
 - David spoke of his cup running over in the 23rd Psalm
 -

C. Doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith

In one of the clearest expressions of the way of salvation, Paul describes how we are dead apart from Christ, and we can only come alive to God when we place trust in Christ for salvation. This salvation results in our being made alive. We are translated out of the kingdom of darkness, and begin living for

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the things God intended for us; experiencing the riches of His grace for all eternity

D. Doctrine of the Church

Paul explains that there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile. Once a person comes to Christ, they are no longer Jewish or Roman, pagan or prince, even male or female; they are now simply Christian.

In Chapter 4 Paul picks up the subject once again and explains the gifts that are given to the church to perform the ministry. These to the church include Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor teachers.

The key for an effective church is that the Leadership is properly nurturing the saints so that they can effectively do ministry and reach the world for Christ's kingdom

VI. Practices

Because half of the letter focuses on how to live out the Christian life, it is worth taking the time to highlight a few of the main exhortation.

A. The first command in the book is found in Chapter 2; Paul exhorts the saints to "Remember that they were..."

1. It is valuable for both our personal walk and our effectiveness in service that we remember who we were before we came to Christ.

a. A. Much of Israel's failure in the wilderness was due to losing sight of what Egypt was really like.

b. We can also become very self-righteous toward the lost if we forget how lost we actually were

B. Exhortations to walk

1. 4:1 Walk worthy

a. With humility and love for others

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i. Love is expressed by bearing with one another, not to put up with one another, but to hold up

2. 4:17 Walk unlike the world around you

a. The Christian should live differently from the world

i. Vs 22 – Put off certain behaviors

ii. Vs 24 – Put on others; the illustration is that of getting dressed for the day.

3. 5:1 Walk in love

a. Love is contrasted with fornication

4. 5:8 Walk in the light

a. And stay out of the darkness

b. Anything you need to 'private browse' or erase from history is probably dark

5. 5:15 Walk circumspectly

C. Exhortations for Family Life

1. Marriage

In one of four NT texts, where the primary subject is marriage, Paul lays out the responsibility of both husband and wife in the marriage contract.

a. Husbands are to love their wives with the same love that Christ has expressed for His church.

- This love is both self-sacrificing and unconditional
- This love was expressed long before it was earned
- This love is unending and does not differ based upon the daily behavior of the church

b. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ.

- This submission is willing and allows the church to become what God intends for it to be

c. Parenting

a. Children are to be taught proper obedience and respect for authority.

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b. Parents are to guard against putting standards that are too high upon the children

- I have seen over the years, many times in the church, adults place expectations on the youth group that they do not keep themselves. If ever a teenager talks during worship, they are rebuked, yet the adults justify these same actions when they do them.
- One of the best ways to not provoke children to wrath is to live out the standard you are expecting from them

2. Occupation

The working class within the Roman Empire was predominantly slaves. Many who attended church were part of this working class; Paul instructs them how to serve their masters as though they were serving the Lord.

This practice when applied today can turn the workplace into a mission field.

3. Spiritual Warfare

Paul's writings on the subject of the armor of God are some of the clearest insights in Scripture to the ways in which the believer is to respond to spiritual attacks.

Satan and his forces attack the mind of the Christian with fiery darts. These darts no doubt take the form of fear, anxiety, doubt, lust, anger and the like. The believer is to respond by using the truths of God like a suit of armor.

It is worth noting that the offensive weapons include the Word of God and prayer.