

# Ephesians

## Authorship

The author names himself as Paul twice (1:1; 3:1) though there are some who dispute it as the apostle's. It has close affinities with Colossians and was clearly acknowledged by the early church to be Paul's writing.<sup>1</sup>

## Date

According to internal reference the author was a prisoner at the time of writing (cf. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). It is debated as to whether this was during his detainment at Caesarea (Acts 24) or Rome (Acts 28). The Roman imprisonment, which occurred in A.D. 60-62, is more likely. Since there is no indication of his expected release, as there seems to be in Philippians (cf. Phil. 2:23-24), it may be assumed that it was written early in Paul's incarceration, perhaps in A.D. 60/61.<sup>2</sup>

## Original Readers

The destination of this letter has been questioned on the basis of the absence of the phrase "in Ephesus" in the introductory greeting, the seeming lack of familiarity with the readership, and the absence of any reference to specific individuals.<sup>3</sup> It has also been hypothesized that Ephesians was a circular letter. The strength of textual evidence and the lack of a viable alternative favor an Ephesian destination. Paul, then, was writing to the church that he had visited on several separate occasions and had spent over three years shepherding (Acts 19).

## Occasion

There is no overt reference to a specific situation that may have given rise to Paul's desire to address this church. There was always a need to warn against false teaching and to encourage believers to remain faithful. It has been suggested that Paul may have been

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the arguments for and against Pauline authorship see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. revised (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 496-528.

<sup>2</sup> See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 536 and Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 301; see also the Supplement: Dating of the Captivity Epistles.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *Introduction*, 528-33.

concerned over “the vibrancy of [the church’s] first love for Christ” as perhaps reflected in Revelation 2:4 and Paul’s words to Timothy about the goal of his instruction (1 Tim. 1:5).<sup>4</sup>

### Message

Believers are called to and equipped for an earthly walk for Christ that is reflective of their heavenly spiritual wealth in Christ.

### Outline

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| I.  | Introductory Greeting: Paul the apostle writes to the faithful saints in Ephesus.              | 1:1-2    |
| II. | Exposition of the believer’s wealth in Christ.   | 1:3–3:21 |
|     | A. The believer has been spiritually blessed in Christ in the heavenly places.                 | 1:3-23   |
|     | 1. Paul propounds the believer’s new heavenly possessions.                                     | 1:3-14   |
|     | a. Paul summarizes the believer’s spiritual blessing.  | 1:3      |
|     | b. The believer has been chosen for adoption as a son.   | 1:4-6    |
|     | c. The believer has been redeemed for the obtaining of an inheritance.                         | 1:7-12   |
|     | d. The believer has been sealed with the Spirit of promise as a guarantee.                     | 1:13-14  |
|     | 2. Paul prays for the believer’s spiritual apprehension of Christ as the Supernal Person.      | 1:15-23  |
|     | a. Paul gives thanks for their faith and love.   | 1:15-16  |
|     | b. Paul makes petition for their insight into Christ.  | 1:17-23  |
|     | 1) He asks the Father to open their eyes.  | 1:17-18a |
|     | 2) He desires them to know the hope of their calling.  | 1:18b    |
|     | 3) He desires them to know the extent of their inheritance.                                    | 1:18c    |
|     | 4) He desires them to know the greatness of His power.   | 1:19-23  |
|     | a) It is the power of resurrection and exaltation.   | 1:19-21  |
|     | b) It is the power of authority and rule.  | 1:22-23  |
|     | B. The believer is built into Christ for a habitation in the world.                            | 2:1–3:21 |
|     | 1. Paul propounds the believer’s new earthly association.                                      | 2:1–3:13 |
|     | a. Gentile believers have been saved into a new realm.   | 2:1-10   |
|     | b. Gentile believers have been drawn into a new association.                                   | 2:11-13  |
|     | c. Gentile believers have been made part of a new man.   | 2:14-18  |
|     | d. Gentile believers are being built into a new habitation.                                    | 2:19-22  |
|     | 2. Paul prays for the believer’s practical realization of Christ in His supernatural presence. | 3:1-21   |
|     | a. Paul prefaces the nature of his Gentile ministry.   | 3:1-13   |
|     | 1) He has received the ministry of the mystery.  | 3:1-7    |
|     | a) It is a stewardship of grace.   | 3:1-2    |

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament edition* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 614.



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|-----|---|----------|
| 1.  | Basic exhortation: Wisdom in conduct is the will of the Lord.       | 5:15-17  |
| 2.  | Key to implementation: Fullness in spirit will a selfless response. | 5:18     |
| 3.  | Spirit filled manifestation:  | 5:19-21  |
| a.  | It will result in mutual melody.                                    | 5:19     |
| b.  | It will result in continual thankfulness.                           | 5:20     |
| c.  | It will result in mutual submission.                                | 5:21     |
| 4.  | Specific application: Submission is defined by God's design.        | 5:22-6:9 |
| a.  | Wives and husbands: honor God's design for marriage!                | 5:22-33  |
| 1)  | Wives must submit to husbands as the church submits to Christ.      | 5:22-24  |
| 2)  | Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church.          | 5:25-33  |
| b.  | Children and parents: honor God's design for the family!            | 6:1-4    |
| 1)  | Children should obey their parents in the Lord.                     | 6:1-3    |
| 2)  | Fathers should train their children in the Lord.                    | 6:4      |
| c.  | Servants and masters: honor God's design for authorities!           | 6:5-9    |
| 1)  | Servants must obey their masters as to the Lord.                    | 6:5-8    |
| 2)  | Masters must respect their servants as to the Lord.                 | 6:9      |
| F.  | Stand in spiritual warfare!   | 6:10-20  |
| 1.  | The believer must stand against the devices of the devil.           | 6:10-12  |
| 2.  | The believer must take up the full armor of God.                    | 6:13-17  |
| 3.  | The believer must persevere in prayer.                              | 6:18-20  |
| IV. | Concluding Greeting: Paul commends his messenger and blesses them.  | 6:21-24  |
| A.  | Paul presents Tychicus as his messenger.                            | 6:21-22  |
| B.  | Paul wishes the church peace, love and faith.                       | 6:23     |
| C.  | Paul commends the church to God's grace.                            | 6:24     |

### Argument

The Book of Ephesians concerns the exalted position of the believer, especially the Gentile believer. The Christian's identity is completely and inextricably bound up with Christ in his exalted state, and with His body, the church. There are heavenly realities to this relationship (chapters 1-3) as well as earthly ramifications (chapters 4-6).<sup>5</sup> The heavenly realities span eternity past and eternity future and concern things that we cannot begin to fully understand in time. The earthly ramifications, while shrouded in mystery until Christ, have now been clearly set forth and are to be vitally engaged. However, this is only possible through a deep abiding in the truths of our position in Christ in the heavenly places. This is the message of Ephesians.

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<sup>5</sup> This distinction should **never** be thought of as theoretical vs. practical or theological vs applicational. There is nothing more profoundly practical than a knowledge of my position and destiny in Jesus Christ. Ephesians should **never** be preached beginning with chapter 4.

### I. Introductory Greeting: Paul the apostle writes to the faithful saints in Ephesus (1:1-2).

With the authority of an apostle, Paul writes to the faithful at Ephesus concerning their great privilege in Christ.

### II. Exposition of the believer's wealth in Christ (1:3–3:21).

The first half of the letter focuses on the great benefits belonging to the Christian by virtue of his or her union with Jesus Christ. These will include both individual and corporate aspects.

#### A. The believer has been spiritually blessed in Christ in the heavenly places (1:3-23).

Paul is effusive in his praise to God for the blessings enjoyed by believers by virtue of their union with Christ (1:3). By the three occurrences of the phrase “to the praise of the/his glory. . .” (1:6, 12, 14). Paul is summarizing three great areas of blessing. First, every believer has been chosen by God for the privilege of sonship, that is, to enjoy the full rights of being a member of the family of God (1:4-6). Second, through Christ's redemption the believer has been selected to receive an inheritance (1:7-12). Finally, Paul assures believers of their security by virtue of the sealing of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). All of this not only greatly benefits the believer, it also brings praise to the glory of God, all by grace (cf. 1:6).

Having propounded the believer's great spiritual blessings and privileges, Paul prays that they might become truly cognizant of such benefits since this will increase their appreciation of the ultimate source, Jesus Christ (1:15-23).

#### B. The believer is built into Christ for a habitation in the world (2:1–3:21).

The focus shifts from heavenly blessings of the individual to more present and corporate ramifications (not that heaven ever completely disappears—cf. 2:6).

1. Paul propounds the believer's new earthly association (2:1–3:13). As Gentile believers (cf. 2:11; 31) theirs had been the lot of death under sin (2:1-3) and exclusion from the covenants of promise (2:12). As a result of Christ's work on the cross they have been saved from judgment and seated in a new realm, the heavenly places, and suited for works appropriate to their new station (2:1-10). Not only that, they have become associated with the God of covenant through his Son by virtue of his sacrificial death (2:11-13). This means that they are now part of a new entity, the new man or body of Christ (2:14-18). Estranged and desperate humanity is now able to be united by the Spirit on the basis of the peace of

reconciliation provided by Jesus Christ. The purpose for this new creation lies in God's desire to dwell upon the earth in a building uniquely suited to display his holiness (2:19-22).

2. Paul prays for the believer's practical realization of Christ in His supernatural presence (3:1-21). Following the pattern set in the first chapter, Paul prays that believers might fully realize God's strategy of making them his earthly dwelling (cp. 2:22 with 3:17). However, before he can actually disclose his prayer (3:14-19) he finds himself compelled to expound upon the mystery of the church (3:1-13).

Paul has received, for the primary benefit of the Gentiles, a stewardship of grace, according to which he is to make known the previously unrevealed strategy by which God is going to manifest himself to all of creation during the time of Israel's removal from covenant privilege (3:1-12). This has been eternally predetermined and is now being realized through Jesus Christ who has provided confident access to the Father (3:11-12). Such an exalted privilege utterly transforms any associated hardship (3:13).

On this basis Paul petitions God for supernatural enablement in experiencing the effectual presence of Christ, the motivation and goal of which is love (3:14-19). In this way God will be manifested. In a kind of doxology, Paul praises God for His ability to accomplish in the church far more than is humanly conceivable (3:20-21).

### III. Exhortation regarding the believer's walk in Christ (4:1-6:20).

Now that the heavenly realities of Christ's work have been set forth as the basis for the believer's identity, resource, and purpose, Paul may exhort them with respect to specific ministry and behavior. This makes up the rest of the book. The repetition of the command to "walk," which has the idea of the practical conduct of life, provides the structure marker for dividing this section.

#### A. Walk worthy of your calling!(4:1-16).

The calling of the church is to be a united witness to the glory of God. This exalted responsibility and privilege requires attention to the body's make-up and functioning. Unity is of the utmost importance, based not on human convention but upon divinely wrought realities (4:1-6). This is possible only because of the grace extended in the person of

Christ, who has descended from heaven to procure mankind's salvation, before ascending back to His Father's realm.<sup>6</sup>

Christ's gifting work will be evident in his providing the church with grace enabled individuals, given for the equipping of every believer to carry on the building up of the body in love (4:11-16). This is the only way that true unity (4:13) and stability (4:14) may be achieved. Truth spoken in love will be the mighty demonstration of the life of Christ working in the proper functioning of every individual part of the body (4:15-16).

B. Walk as a new man! (4:17-32).

Life in Christ, as a contributing member of his body, the church, is entirely different from the way Gentiles live by nature (4:17-19). The Ephesian believers had put off the old man when they learned about Christ (4:20-22) and had put on the new so that their present experience is one of the renewing of the inner person (4:23-24). Therefore, they can now be involved in wholesome and edifying interaction with each other instead of the old, negative, destructive behavior that had so characterized them outside Christ (4:25-32).

C. Walk in love! (5:1-7).

With respect to their relationship with the Father, love is to be the governing factor that will motivate them to live life as a pleasing offering to the Lord rather than a life of defilement and covetousness, so characteristic of those who can only look forward to eternal judgment. Why cast away their inheritance by living like those who do not even belong to the kingdom!

D. Walk as children of light! (5:8-14).

Rather than participate in the things of darkness, in which they formerly lived, believers have the distinct privilege of manifesting the light of Christ. In this way others would have opportunity to come under its saving influence as well.

E. Walk in wisdom! (5:15-6:9).

The final exhortation with respect to daily living includes a basic admonition to live life wisely, that is according to the design and direction given by the Lord (5:15-17). In order to implement such living it is crucial that the believer's spirit be overflowing with the fullness that is sourced in God rather than with the self-absorption produced by physical

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<sup>6</sup> This cannot refer to a *descensus ad inferos*. For a detailed analysis of the history of the interpretation of this passage see H. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and traditional Hebrew imagery* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

intoxication (5:18).<sup>7</sup> A full (or filled) spirit will overflow with worship, edification and thanksgiving (5:19-20). It will also result in proper deference to one another out of respect for the Lord (5:21).

Wise conduct is spelled out for specific relationship contexts, including wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters (5:22–6:9). In these relationship pairings the motivation for conduct, and in some cases the pattern for conduct, is traced back to God.

F. Stand in spiritual warfare! (6:10-20).

One last exhortation is needful, namely, the importance of standing firm against the devices of the devil (6:10-11). Paul knows that the unseen forces of spiritual wickedness are the greatest foes of consistent Christian living (6:12). Fortunately the believer has been provided with all the weapons necessary to successfully counter the unseen enemy (6:14-17), not least of which is perseverance in prayer (6:18-20).

IV. Concluding Greeting: Paul commends his messenger and blesses them (6:21-24).

In typical pastoral fashion, Paul concludes with a statement of his concern for the Ephesian believers' comfort, for which purpose he is sending his companion (6:21-22), wishing them peace, love with faith, and grace.

#### SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<sup>7</sup> The common teaching on the filling of the Holy Spirit seems to go quite beyond the information derivable from this passage. However the phrase is to be understood, it is clear that there are two opposite, and competing, powers of influence available to the believer. One results in dissipation (lack of self-control and focused action), the other results in an appropriate spiritual response to others and to God.