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Books of the Bible: Ephesians



Facade of the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, Turkey

This week the study is a survey of the Apostle Paul's profound letter to the Church at Ephesus.

These six Bible chapters are worth mastering for the sake of personal edification and wisdom in policy making. Within this epistle is the revealed mind of God transmitted to you for the purpose of thinking the way He thinks on complex issues. Be intent on learning the mind of God from His Book!

Read on, friend!

I. NAME

Some of the earlier Greek manuscripts from which our modern English translation of the Bible are derived do not specify the Church at Ephesus as the singular recipient of this epistle. Some scholars therefore believe that this book was intended to be an *encyclical*, a manuscript that first was sent to Ephesus to be circulated and read by all the churches of Asia Minor.

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The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

White House Cabinet and Governors: Wednesdays 8am (EST), light breakfast served

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

House Members: Thursdays 8am, Natural Resources, Longworth 1334, hot breakfast served



VERSE OF THE WEEK



Ephesians 3:16–19

Be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.



The salvation and maturation of the saints—making disciples—compels us to live with an eternally-based internal strength.

Books of the Bible: Ephesians

The Apostle Paul is clearly indicated as the author in the opening salutation (1:1; 3:1). The epistle is written during his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16–31) between A.D. 60–62, along with Philemon, Philipians, and Colossians. This book is included among the four so-called prison epistles (easily remembered by utilizing an acrostic PEPC, with the E standing for Ephesians). The letter was sent from Rome to Ephesus via Tychicus (cf. Ephesians 6:21–22).

II. BACKGROUND

Aquila and Priscilla, a spiritually gifted couple, first brought the Gospel to Ephesus (see Acts 18:26). The Apostle Paul had left them there on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18–19). Later, on Paul's third missionary journey, he would spend three years pastoring and building up the church (Acts 19) to the point that it had its own elders, deacons, and female deacons (1 Timothy 3). Some years after this growth, Paul installed Timothy to be the pastor, and he served the congregation for several years. According to the two books that bear his name, Timothy's job was very difficult as he turned the church around from the heretical teachings of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20). These two men had commandeered the church and led it in an unbiblical direction between the pastorates of Paul and Timothy. These prominent false teachers had nearly ruined the congregation with their pervasive bad doctrine, forbidding marriage, for instance (1 Timothy 4:3). Some 30 years after Timothy had restored the church, it is chastised in the book of Revelation for having left its first love. The congregation remained doctrinally correct, but as individuals they had evidently lost the passion of their personal relationship to Christ and the zeal they once possessed to further of His kingdom throughout the world (Revelation 2:1–7). Paul warned against this tendency somewhat in Ephesians 3:19 when he says,

And to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Once a seaport village, the site of Ephesus is in modern-day Turkey several miles inland from the Aegean Sea; unfortunately, the in-

let had long ago become silted in. Ephesus was the location of the Temple of Artemis or Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

III. EMPHASIS AND THEMES

This epistle is evenly divided between positional and practical truths. In the first three chapters, Paul discusses the profound truths of the believers' position in Christ (see 1:4, 11; 2:1, 13). The remaining three chapters discuss what should be the practical outworking of that reality in a believer's behavior. The pivoting passage, found in 4:1, underscores this idea:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

In essence, the whole of the epistle reasons, "Since the believer has been lavished with blessings by God at the point of salvation, does it not follow that the believer should act out in a commensurate manner?!" By means of validation, the word *fullness* or *filled* appears six times in the letter; *glory*, nine times; *grace*, twelve times; *in Christ*, eleven times; and *riches* appears five times. Believers owe a debt of gratitude to please the One Who saves and empowers them for not only victorious, purposeful living in the present, but eternal security in the future!

The three major themes discussed are as follows.

A. THE BELIEVER'S BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

This book is one of the most important in the Bible in terms of understanding the predetermined destiny of God's called-out ones. In 2:10 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul says:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The believer's position means he or she is the recipient of God's richness and fullness of blessing. This theme is illustrated by the following Scriptures: *the riches of God's grace*



(1:7), *the unfathomable riches of Christ* (3:8), and *the riches of His glory* (3:16). Furthermore, Paul encourages believers to *be filled up to all the fullness of God* (3:19), *attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ* (4:13), and to *be filled with the Spirit* (5:18). These riches of Christ benefitting the believer are based on His grace (1:2, 6, 7; 2:7), His peace (1:2), His will (1:5), His pleasure and purpose (1:9), His glory (1:12, 14), His calling and inheritance (1:18), His power and strength (1:19, 6:10), His love (2:4), His workmanship (2:10), His Holy Spirit (3:16), His offering and sacrifice (5:2), and His armor (6:11, 13). Again, the words, *grace, riches, glory, fullness, filled* and *in Christ* are key words that depict the flavor, direction and emphasis of the letter as they repeatedly appear numerous times throughout the letter.

B. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH AGE

The biblical word for *mystery* in Greek, *mysterion*, meaning “unrevealed truth,” appears six times in the letter. The Church Age was a mystery in the Old Testament (cf. 3:5, 9); this epistle clearly spells out and reveals this mystery. To illustrate, consider a California geographical feature as a metaphor: the Old Testament (OT) saint that Paul reveals in Ephesians is like a tourist who is visiting Sequoia National Park on the west side of the Sierra Nevada. If the visitor were to look to the east, he or she may catch a glimpse of the faraway grand summit of Mount Whitney. What the tourist cannot see from that vantage point is the vast Kern River Valley that lies between. Similarly, the OT saint looked from his perch of OT truths for his coming Messiah—not realizing the Church Age lay before the consummation of God’s kingdom on Earth. This illustration depicts what Paul is referring to relative to the context of his duty as a preacher in Ephesians 3:9:

And to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.

Paul explicitly states in Ephesians that before the OT believer experiences the Messi-

anic kingdom and shares in God’s eventual earthly and then heavenly kingdom, there first exists the Church Age during which the Gentiles will be grafted in (cf. 3:6).

C. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

In Christ’s resurrected and ascended absence, God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit to empower the Church to be Christ’s present spiritual body on the Earth. The Church consists of God’s called-out individuals who are truly saved, they have trusted in Christ for salvation (2:8–9). The Church properly understood is not an organization, but a living organism composed of men and women who know Christ as Savior and Lord and are mutually interdependent through the use and practice of each member’s unique but limited spiritual gifts, which are bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation.

Additionally, Ephesians 4:11–12 states that God gave pastor-teachers to His body in His absence to coach and disciple His team to maturity.

IV. CHALLENGING PASSAGES

This book is a benchmark on one of the aspects of the doctrine of salvation: predestination. There is no way around it. At the same time, it does not support hyper-Calvinism¹ in that 1:13 states:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.

The most challenging passage, therefore, is 2:8–9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Specifically, to what does the phrase, *and that not of yourselves* relate? It relates to both grace and faith. Each is a gift from God that somehow comes to bear on human will without violating its existence (evident in Ephesians 1:13 and Genesis 3:6, 17). We choose—via the grace and faith given to us by God—to trust in Christ.

Predestination and human will, which are elements apparent in salvation as seen in this epistle, are antinomies to the finite human mind (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29, 1 Corinthians 13:12) but not to the infinite omniscient understanding of the One Who penned them.

Ephesians is remarkable and profound, chock-full of life-transforming truths that can revolutionize a person’s life. It is a book worthy of diligent study.

V. APPLICATION TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

A. TO THE PERSON

As a believer, this epistle states that you are a member of the body of Christ and should identify with other believers—not only in your home district, but also to the place He has called you to be a missionary—on the Hill! For believers to come to D.C. week in and week out and shun involvement with other believers is incongruous and spiritually hazardous! Such an attitude runs counter to the thesis of this book (4:7–16).

Furthermore, God designed His body to be led by the spiritual coaches He gave (4:11) between His first and second advent to equip you relative to your ultimate spiritual calling. These spiritual coaches (pastor-teachers) are assigned the responsibility by God of helping other called-out ones to mature in Christ. It makes no sense for believers to avoid Bible studies and Bible teachers when on the Hill. Not only is D.C. where you have been sent to minister, it is where you live over half the year! Make good use of the Bible teachers and studies He has provided while away from home, but make sure they teach the *whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27)! Dr. Bill Bright, who founded Campus Crusade for Christ, said, “Several logs burn brightly together; place one by itself on a cold hearth, and it soon goes out.”

B. TO THE POSITION

In the “how you ought to walk” section of the book (Chapters 4–6), 5:17 introduces a subsection on walking in wisdom (wisdom:



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Books of the Bible: Ephesians

the skill at living life for God's glory). This is the context in which Paul lists three separate authority-submission relationships: the husband to the wife (5:22–33), the parents to the children (6:1–4), and the employer to the employee (6:5–9). In 1 Peter 2:13 the Apostle Peter terms these relationships as *institutions*, in Greek, *anthropinos ktisis*, (Lit: “for man created”). (Peter goes on to list the institutions of civil government, family, commerce, and marriage [2:13–3:7]).

Scripture speaks of five separate institutions in all—marriage, family, commerce, government and the Church (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15)—as God's ordained authority-submis-

sion structures that currently must exist prior to His coming earthly, perfect rule. These structures are necessary in a fallen world. Accordingly, the governing authority must defend and fight for an unencumbered existence for these institutions in his or her policy positions. It is fair to say that Ephesians implies that any country that doesn't have these functional institutions will only accelerate its internal degradation. Therefore, representing these institutions on the Hill as specifically defined by Scripture is critically important.

May God bless your life as you work to master Ephesians in the days and years ahead!

1. Hyper-Calvinism takes certain biblical truths that are soundly and repeatedly taught throughout the Bible and reasons them to an extreme at the expense of other biblical truths. Hyper-Calvinists take the unconditional election of God, the sovereign grace of God in conversion, and when they combine those truths to the reality of the spiritual deadness of man they falsely conclude “When God desires to convert a person, He can do it and He will do it without my help.” That may seem logical, but it leaves out another biblical truth in doing so. That truth is alluded to here in Ephesians 1:13 and shouted out in 2 Corinthians 5:20: *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* God appoints His called-out ones ambassadors and relative to this passage, He explicitly expects them to make an appeal to the lost on His behalf. Further to this point, in the apostolic preaching of the first century church elucidated in the book of Acts, there are numerous examples of God's disciples proclaiming to the unrepentant masses, “repent,” “come to Christ,” “believe in Him!” This is the norm. This preaching is God's way of converting the lost, of calling home the predestined. Yes, God does unconditionally elect. Yes, God does sovereignly convert. Yes, all have sinned and apart from Christ are dead in their trespasses and sin. But Scripture also states repeatedly, in many ways, that God uses believers in the process. He expects His followers to be willingly used by Him in the process of salvation. He expects His called-out-ones to proclaim the Gospel to the masses—many of whom (we find out) at the end of the day, are not elect! This is the position of John Calvin and historical Calvinism as compared to hyper-Calvinism which is heretical.

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