

GOSPEL of *Grace*
FELLOWSHIP

Ephesians

Jesus Christ, Our All in All

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December 16, 2020

F - L - I - G - H - T

F – The apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians (1:1). Along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, Ephesians is one of the four aptly named prison letters Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome for preaching Christ (Acts 28).

Paul was first imprisoned in Rome between AD 60 and 61. This particular letter was delivered to the Ephesian church by a man named Tychicus, a companion with Paul on his missionary journeys (6:21-22).

That Ephesians is an authentic Pauline letter is the traditional view, but in modern times this has been widely denied. The view that Paul wrote it is supported by the following arguments:

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Authorship

Internal Evidence: The internal evidence that Paul wrote this book is very strong. (1) There is the explicit claim in two places in the book that Paul is the author (1:1;3:1). (2) The theology of the book is Pauline, stressing the exalted Christ, unity in the church, and the grace of God. (3) The vocabulary is Pauline, with minor deviations fitting the theme of the book. In fact the style is more Pauline than any imitators could have been. The use of a pseudonym was not practiced by early Christians. (4) Ephesians has close similarities to Colossians, which also has strong evidence for Pauline authorship.

External Evidence: The evidence from other sources also supports Paul's authorship. The earliest manuscripts of the book all bear Paul's name, indicating it was accepted into the cannon of Scripture as a work of Paul. The early Fathers support Paul's authorship. Citations from this book with Paul's name on it are found in both Ignatius and Polycarp among the earliest Fathers and all the other main Fathers from Irenaeus to Augustine after them.

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Views of Time & Place

There are three views as to the place & time of writing of Ephesians: during the Caesarea incarceration, during the Ephesian imprisonment, or while Paul was at Rome.

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Caesarea Incarceration (Acts 24:23)

Problems: This view has several difficulties:

- Paul was at liberty to preach during his later Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31; Eph. 6:19), but there is no such indication of this in Caesarea.
- If it was Caesarea, he would have been likely to seek contact with some of his churches there, but he did not.
- There was no promise of release in Caesarea, as there was in Rome (Philem. 22).
- The slave Onesimus would not have had access to Paul in Caesarea, which was possible in the more informal setting of Rome (Acts 28:30-31).

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Ephesian Imprisonment

In 1 Cor. 15:32, written when Paul was in Ephesus, Paul speaks of fighting "wild beasts" there; 2 Cor. 1:8-10 speaks of a "sentence of death"; 2 Cor. 11:23 refers to being often in prison.

- **Problems:** There is no statement that specifically links Paul to prison in Ephesus.
- His close companion Luke (in Acts) said nothing of an imprisonment in Ephesus.
- "Wild beasts" is figurative of a spiritual struggle (see Acts 20:29).
- Even if it could be established that Paul was in prison in Ephesus, there is no evidence he wrote Ephesians there.
- The reference to "chains" (6:20) suggests Rome as the place of origin.

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At Rome

Paul's writing the letter to the Ephesians from (Acts 28) fits the situation better than the other possibilities, because:

- He speaks of a palace guard (Phil. 1:13).
- He refers to Caesar's household (Phil. 1:13; 4:22).
- He has freedom to preach there (Acts 28:30-31; Eph. 6:20; Phil. 1:12-18)
- The conditions of disunity in the church (4:1-6) fit this period.
- The ecclesiological emphasis fits with Colossians, which was written at the same time.

At Rome

- The prison epistles don't feature as prominently Paul's earlier salvation emphasis in Galatians & Romans.
- Since the same general material is in both Ephesians & Colossians, both books were undoubtedly written at this time. Indeed, the same person (Tychicus) carried both Colossians (4:7) & Ephesians (6:21) to their destinations. And the same companions (Tychicus & Onesimus) are in Ephesians, Colossians, & Philemon (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7,9; Philem. 10), so Philemon was probably written at this same time.
- Many scholars believe this imprisonment is to be distinguished from Paul's later (second) imprisonment in Rome, since he had the hope of release here (Philem. 22), but later he looked forward only to martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

F-L-I-G-H-T

L – Second only to the book Romans, Ephesians is perhaps the most thoughtfully written work of Christian theology in the NT. It addresses a group of believers who were ignorant of their wealth in Jesus Christ and were living as spiritually impoverished beggars. Paul wrote to motivate them to draw upon that wealth in their daily living, explaining their identity in Jesus Christ and the awe-inspiring gifts they had through him. Paul also spoke of God's indestructible purposes, Jesus as the center of the universe and the focus of history, the living church, the new family of God, and Christian conduct.

F-L-I-G-H-T

L – One of the letter's major themes is how to build up the spiritual body of Christ. Paul spoke of the body as a bride (5:25-27), a temple (2:19-22), and a soldier (6:10-18). These images point to the importance of unity within the church and how the whole body must work together to achieve a common goal. Each member of the body must help must help, not hinder, God's work. From a practical standpoint this means eliminating backbiting, gossip, unnecessarily negative criticism, envy, anger, and bitterness, as these things hurt the church.

F-L-I-G-H-T

L – Paul explained how God, through the church, is building up a family, a new society with new standards, values, and relationships. As members of that family, we must go on beyond merely reading or hearing God's Word and put it into action. Ephesians has been called both the crown jewel and the Grand Canyon of the NT for its depiction of the depth and breadth of God's rich plan of love, mercy, and salvation.

F-L-I-G-H-T

- I** –
- The Believer's Wealth (1-3)
- The Believer's Walk (4:1-6:9)
- The Believer's Warfare (6:10-24)

F - L - I - G - H - T

G – The book of Ephesians focuses on how God is building a spiritual family and a new society based on the truth of the gospel – and this society includes Jews as well as Gentiles. Paul summarized the basis for this new family early on in his letter: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* (1:3). In that verse, we see the wealth of the inheritance in Jesus, in whom we have everything we’ll ever need – because of the salvation Christ purchased for us on the cross and the wonder of what it means to be adopted by God.

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G – Throughout the rest of his letter, Paul expounded on that theme, preaching what he called *“the unsearchable riches of Christ”* (3:8). Though these unsearchable riches are something you have to take on faith, Paul made it clear that people come into the family of God *“according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him”* (3:11-12).

The wonder and wealth of faith in Christ includes these simple but mind-blowing facts: God chose you, adopted you, and redeemed you. Because he picked you and then he placed you in his new community, you have eternal life to look forward to, as well as abundant spiritual life available to you right now.

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F - L - I - G - H - T

H – The city of Ephesus was a great Roman commercial port along the coast of the Aegean Sea, located in what is now the country of Turkey. Ephesus boasted theaters, a library, a school of philosophy, and the Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul visited Ephesus during his second missionary journey and stayed for almost three years, and then his protégé Timothy stayed for another year and a half.

Jesus wrote a little postcard to the Ephesian church through the apostle John in Revelation 2:1-7, stating that though they had tested false apostles and persevered, they had *“left [their] first love”* (Rev. 2:4). By the time Christianity had become the region’s dominant religion, Ephesus had lost most of its power and influence in the Roman Empire.

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Ephesus Region

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City of Ephesus

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City of Ephesus

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T – **Members of the body of Christ are wealthy for three reasons: God’s fatherhood, God’s great forgiveness, and ou new spiritual family – the believers with whom we share our lives.** It can sometimes be challenging to work with other Christians, but what an amazing comfort and resource God has given us in each other! Through Christ we are able to love, pray for encourage, commiserate with, and hold each other accountable. Jesus is our foundation, strength, and unity (2:14-20).

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T – **Walking with Christ means leaving your old life behind.** More than just leave the old crowd you used to run with, you must start at the root of the problem and transform the way you think about the world in general. *“For you were once darkness,”* Ephesians 5:8 says, *“but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”*

Submission is the oil that makes the gears of relationships – especially family relationships – run smoothly. In Ephesians 5, Paul laid out the hierarchy of a godly marriage: a wife submits to her husband, and a husband sacrifices his life for his wife (vv. 22-23). The key to this marriage relationship, however, is found in both parties *“submitting to one another in the fear of God”* (v. 21). And that’s the key to any Christian relationship: To love like Jesus, you need to voluntarily put other people first.

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F - L - I - G - H - T

T – **Christianity is a battleground, not a playground.** Regardless of your political or philosophical thoughts about war, you cannot be a spiritual pacifist or you will fall. You need to realize that when you became a believer, you defected from the kingdom of darkness and made the devil your enemy. The good news is that God himself has provided you with spiritual weapons to use against that enemy (6:10-18).

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Contrast With Colossians

Colossians	Ephesians
polemical	irenic
Christ over the cosmos	Christ over the church
about heresy emphasis on the head	about unity emphasis on the body

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Contrasts

Contrast With the Gospels

Gospels – the physical body of Christ – his humiliation

Ephesians – the mystical body of Christ (the church) – his glorification

Contrast With Corinthians

Corinthians – the local church (visible)

Ephesians – the universal church (invisible)

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Universal Church & Local Church

Universal Church	Local Church
one church	many churches
an organism	an organization
only saved members	saved & unsaved members
dead & living members	only living members
whole body of Christ	only part of the body of Christ
Christ is the visible head (in heaven)	Christ is the invisible head (on earth)
no elders or deacons	elders & deacons
no ordinances	two ordinances
no denominations	many denominations
indestructible	destructible

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4 Bodily Positions of the Believer

Seated in Christ (chaps. 1-2) – “and raised us up together, and made us **sit** together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6)

Kneeling before Christ (chap. 3) – “for this reason I **bow my knees** to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (3:14)

Walking for Christ (chaps. 4-5) – “I beseech you to **walk** worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1)

Standing for Christ (chap. 6) – “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil” (6:11,13)

To Whom Written?

Ephesians was written to the church at Ephesus in Asia Minor and probably to the surrounding area as well. Some say its original destiny was only the church of Ephesus because of the statement “in Ephesus”(1:1). Others say it was a circular letter for churches in Asia minor because the phrase “in Ephesus” is not in some early manuscripts and there are no personal references to the church Paul served for three years (Acts 20:31).

Purposes of Ephesians

Several reasons for the writing of this Epistle can be discerned from the text.

- Paul wanted to inform believers of their exalted position of blessings in Christ (1:3).
- He wished to urge them to maintain unity in Christ (4:1-6).
- He hoped to encourage believers in the love of Christ (the verb *agapō* is used 9 times in the book out of 23 times in the NT).
- Paul desired to encourage believers to stand for Christ (6:11-14).
- He wanted to set forth the divine purposes in Christ (1:9-10) of the mystery involving the Christ (3:1-7).

Theme of Ephesians

Exaltation in Christ:

Unlike most of Paul’s letters, Ephesians seems not to have been written in response to a particular circumstance or controversy.

Key Verse:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3).

Heavenly Blessings

After a greeting (1:1-2) Paul launches into a doxology of praise to God for spiritual blessings in Christ “in the heavenly realms” (1:3-14). That is to say, the union of believers with Christ entails a share in his heavenly exaltation as well as in his earthly death, burial, and resurrection.

The doxology delineates the parts played in salvation by all three members of the Trinity:

- The Father chose believers (the doctrine of election, 1:4).
- The Son redeemed them (1:7).
- The Holy Spirit “sealed” them; that is, the gift of the Spirit is God’s down payment or guarantee, that he will complete their salvation at the return of Christ (1:13-14).

Heavenly Blessings

Following the doxology is a thanksgiving and prayer that believers may comprehend and appreciate the immensity of God’s grace and wisdom (1:15-23).

Divine Grace

To help his audience the immensity of God's grace, Paul contrasts their domination by sin before conversion and their freedom from that tyranny after conversion. He also emphasizes that salvation is wholly unearned; it comes by God's grace, through faith, and apart from meritorious good works. God's action does produce good works, but they are a consequence rather than a means of salvation. His grace reveals itself especially in the redemption of Gentiles from paganism and in their unity with Jews in the church.

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Divine Grace

The dividing wall of hostility between the two groups, symbolized by the wall in the temple courtyards beyond which Gentiles were not allowed to go, does not exist in the church. Alternatively, the dividing wall represents the old barrier between God and human beings, now broken down by Christ.

But however grand the plan of salvation, Paul and his audience face the unpleasant reality of present persecution. He writes that his awareness of divine grace and of his privilege in spreading the good news prevents discouragement. Similar awareness on the part of his audience will also prevent their discouragement. The section therefore closes with another doxology and prayer that the audience may be stabilized by increased spiritual knowledge. (2:1-3:21)

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Unity and Diversity

The practical exhortations begin with a plea for outward unity growing out of the already existing spiritual unity of the church. Yet this unity includes a diversity of function for the growth of the body, or church. Each believer has a ministerial function. Leaders in the church are to equip other believers for the carrying out of their various functions. (4:1-16)

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Holy Conduct

Miscellaneous instructions on holiness follow:

- Tell the truth.
- Be righteously indignant when necessary, but do not sin by failing to control your anger.
- Do not steal.
- Avoid obscene speech and risqué humor.

The section (4:17-5:14) closes with a metrical triplet that may have come from an early baptismal hymn, sung at the moment of rising from the water:

- Awake, sleeper,
- And rise from the dead,
- And the Christ will shine on you.

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Filling with the Spirit

Paul's exhortation to be filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that such a filling will show itself in avoiding drunkenness (contrast the drunken orgies of Hellenistic cults) and in joyful singing, witnessing, and submission to one another. In particular, **wives** should submit themselves to their husbands as the church is submissive to Christ its head. **Husbands** should love their wives as Christ loved the church his body. **Children** should obey their parents. **Fathers** should be reasonable with their children. **Slaves** should obey their masters. And **masters** should be kind to their slaves.

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Filling with the Spirit

Paul unites the metaphors of head and body with a picture of the church as the **bride** and **wife** of Christ, who is the groom and husband. Just as husband and wife become physically one ("**one flesh**") in the relationship of marriage, so Christ and the church are **one in the Spirit**. ()

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The Armor of God

Before saying farewell, Paul urges his audience to don the spiritual armor provided by God and to fight the satanic powers that dominate the world. Perhaps the sight of the soldier to whom Paul is chained while dictating Ephesians in his house-prison suggests “the full armor of God.” The word for “shield” denotes the large kind that covers the whole body, not the small circular shield used by Greeks. “Flaming arrows” refers to darts and arrows dipped in pitch or some other combustible material, set aflame, and hurled or shot toward the enemy. (5:15-6:24)

Descent into Hell?

Ephesians 4:9 – Did Jesus descend into hell?

Paul says here that Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth.” And the Apostles’ Creed declares that after Jesus died, he “descended into hell.” What does that mean?

Some believe that during the three days between crucifixion & resurrection Jesus spoke to the “spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18-19) who were in a temporary holding place until he came & “led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8), that is, took them to heaven.

Descent into Hell?

In response to this understanding:

- “Descending into the lower parts of the earth” is not a reference to hell but to the grave. Even a woman’s womb is described as “lowest parts of the earth” (Ps. 139:15). The phrase simply means caves, graves, or enclosures on the earth, as opposed to higher parts, like mountains.
- The phrase “descended into hell” was not in the earliest Apostles’ Creed. It was not added until the fourth century. And, as a creed, it is not inspired – it is only a human confession of faith.
- The term “spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18-19) refers to fallen angels, not to human beings.
- When Christ “led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8), he was not leading friends into heaven, but bringing foes into bondage. It is a reference to his conquering the forces of evil. Christians are not “captives” in heaven.

Contribution of Ephesians

The letter begins with a section putting strong emphasis on the divine action in bringing salvation. Paul refers to the spiritual blessings in Christ that believers enjoy & goes on to speak of God as having chosen these believers before the creation of the world (1:4,11). Their salvation did not take place because they earned it but because God planned it, a truth that is otherwise expressed in terms of predestination that is linked with God’s will & pleasure (1:5) & again with his plan (1:11). This opening also includes references to sonship through Christ, redemption through his blood, & sealing with the Holy Spirit (1:5,7,13). This massive emphasis on the place of the divine is expanded with continuing references to grace.

Contribution of Ephesians

Christ’s saving work is stressed in the opening, a work that has significant implications for Christology. This emphasis persists throughout the letter; it is plain everywhere that who Christ is & what he does is at the heart of the Christian way. It is he who brings about the reconciliation of Jew & Gentile in the church in the notable section on the breaking down of hostility & the making of peace between them (2:11-22). Christ “himself is our peace” (2:14).

This is more than the overcoming of human hostility. Part of Christ’s work is “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (1:10). The powers in the heavenly realms are to know “the manifold wisdom of God” through the church (3:10). There is an importance in Christ’s saving work that we cannot fathom, and there is an importance in the very existence of the church that we are not able fully to comprehend.

Contribution of Ephesians

Ephesians emphasizes the importance of the Christian’s growth in knowledge. This is expressed in a variety of ways. Sometimes it comes out in simple statements about knowledge, as when Paul says that God “made known to us the mystery” (1:9; “the mystery of the gospel,” 6:19). “Mystery” (*mustērion*) does not mean something difficult to work out (as in our use of the term) but something impossible to work out until God discloses it. What we could never work out for ourselves God has now made known (3:3 & the making known of God’s “manifold wisdom” [3:10]). It is significant that the word *mustērion* occurs more often in Ephesians than in any other book of the NT; this book emphasizes the divine disclosure.

Contribution of Ephesians

The same basic idea may be conveyed with the concept of enlightenment: *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know..."* (1:18), which is to be seen against the background of the darkness of the Gentiles (4:18). The readers are *"light in the Lord"* & they are to live as *"children of light"* & *"find out what pleases the Lord"* (5:8-10); they are to *"understand what the Lord's will is"* (5:17). No one who has grappled with the thought of this letter can doubt the importance of growing in knowledge.

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Contribution of Ephesians

One of the important things that the readers must know is expressed in the prayer that they may be *"rooted and established in love"* & be able *"to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge"* (3:17-19). The word *agapē* ("love") occurs more often in this book than in any other in the NT except 1 Corinthians & 1 John. The reader sees the wonderful thing that Christian love is & the importance of living in love in a world that knows so little of it.

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Contribution of Ephesians

The church is *"a holy temple in the Lord,"* a building in which Christ is *"the chief cornerstone"* & in which *"God lives by his Spirit"* (2:20-22). From another point of view, church members are both *"fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household"* (2:19; 1:5), a household that derives its name from the Father & that has members in heaven as well as on earth (3:14-15). The bringing of Gentiles as well as Jews into membership of the one body is explained as a mystery (3:4-6), a deep & hidden truth that none of us could have worked out but that has now been revealed by God.

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Contribution of Ephesians

There is a unity that believers should strive to preserve (4:3); indeed, Paul draws attention to a whole series of unities, including one Spirit, one Lord, one God & Father, one body & one hope, one faith, one baptism, (4:4-6), even though there are diverse gifts of apostles, prophets, and others in the church (4:11-13). Clearly, Paul wants his readers to catch the splendid vision of one church, thoroughly united in the Lord, though it contains members of various races & is equipped by God to render significant service in this world.

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Contribution of Ephesians

A considerable section of the letter is given over to an emphasis on the importance of lives lived in conformity with the salvation that God has given to believers. The kind of life the Gentiles live is contrasted with the new believers' life (4:17-5:21); the darkness of the old way is set over against the light there is in the Lord (5:8). This has important entailments for specific groups – wives & husbands, children & parents, slaves & masters (5:22-6:9). While wives are to be subject to their husbands, Paul has much more to say about the obligations marriage lays on husbands: they are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church – which, at the least, must mean self-sacrificially & for their good.

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Contribution of Ephesians

Such a love prevails over other ties, such as those that previously bound a man to his parents. This kind of love leads Paul to speak of *"a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church"* (5:32). The section on the Christian's armor is a further incentive to wholehearted Christian service as well, as a reminder that there is full provision made for those who engage in Christian service (6:10-18).

In this letter we cannot miss the supreme place of God, who brings salvation despite the unworthiness of sinners. Nor can we overlook the greatness of Christ or the fact that the church, his body, occupies an important place in God's working out of his great purpose.

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