

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Introduction

This Epistle, along with Colossians, emphasizes the truth that the Church is the body of which Christ is the Head. While Paul has addressed this same truth earlier in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, he develops it more fully here.

There is no greater point of revelation than is reached in this epistle which shows the believer as seated with Christ in the heavenlies and exhorts the Christian to live in accordance with their high calling.

The Epistle can be divided as follows:

- What the Believer is in Christ (Chapters 1-3).
- What the Believer is now to do because they are in Christ (Chapters 4-6).

Statistics:

(6) Chapters, (155) Verses, and (3,039) words

Author:

The testimony of the church fathers is unanimous in favor of Pauline authorship. The letter itself refers twice to Paul as the author (1:1; 3:1). However, in recent years some have disputed this claiming that the epistle was written under a false name. (also, called Pseudonymous) The argument for this opinion includes claims that vocabulary, style, and doctrine are quite different from Paul's. But these differences can be explained by the different subject matter, temperament, and circumstances behind the writing of the letter.

Besides, Christians did not practice pseudonymous writing in the early church. Also, the epistle has a close affinity with Colossians which is considered Pauline. There is no strong reason to question the traditional view of Pauline authorship for Ephesians.

Date of the Writing:

Paul is clearly a prisoner as he writes (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Some have postulated this was his Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 24:27) and place the date at A.D. 57-59.

However, Paul's Roman imprisonment is most likely the background for the letter (Acts 28:30). Since he gives no hint of his release as in Philippians 1:19-26 and Philemon 22, it may have been in the early part of his interment, or about A.D. 60, while he was under house arrest in Rome.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Ephesians is therefore one of the four prison epistles along with the others which mention his imprisonment: Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (Philippians 1:7; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 9).

Purpose of Writing:

After Paul explains the believer's heavenly position in Christ (chapters 1-3), he appeals for the Ephesians to walk worthy of their position in Christ (chapters 4-6; Cf. 4:1). His purpose is to provide the Ephesians with an understanding of God's program and the believer's position in Christ so that they will conduct themselves accordingly in the love and unity of Christ and thus be protected against false teachers and erroneous doctrines (4:14).

Key Verses:

Ephesians 1:4-7; 1:11-14; 2:1-2; 2:8-9; 3:17-19; 4:4-6; 4:11-12; 5:21-25; 5:31, and 6:12-13

Destination:

The designation "at Ephesus" in 1:1 would settle the discussion of the destination, except that it is missing from several Alexandrian Greek manuscripts. This has led to the theory that the epistle was a circular letter intended for churches in Asia or elsewhere.

Also, it is argued, Paul does not greet individual believers, which seems strange considering his three year ministry in Ephesus. But in reply, it should be noted that most manuscripts do say "at Ephesus," and all bear the title "To the Ephesians."

Also, it is typical of all of Paul's letters to mention their designations. As for the lack of personal greetings, it seems reasonable that after a three year stay Paul would have known so many people that he couldn't single out a few without appearing to show favoritism.

In writing to other churches where he knew the whole group, Paul did not add personal greetings (Cf. Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Thessalonians). Still, the epistle could have had a circular design, which would explain the absence of personal greetings. Ephesus may have been the primary destination. It is possible that this letter had been circulated and was in Laodicea when Paul wrote to the Colossians (Colossians 4:16).

Ephesus was a strategic commercial and religious center in Asia Minor. Its port at the mouth of the Cayster River, though problematically silted, allowed Ephesus to become one of the major trading cities in Paul's day. The temple of the Roman goddess Diana (Greek Artemis), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located there. Business and magic prospered under the worship of the goddess (Acts 19:13-27).

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

The origin of the church in Ephesus could possibly be attributed to Jews from Asia who returned there after being present at Pentecost (Acts 2:9), but it is most likely a result of Paul's ministry. On the return trip of his second missionary journey Paul stopped there only briefly and left Aquila and Priscilla as he continued on to Antioch (Acts 18: 18-22).

By the time Apollos visited Ephesus and left for Achaia, there were Christians in Ephesus who wrote a letter of commendation for him (Acts 18:24-27). But the church surely had its organizational beginnings during Paul's three year stay there on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:31).

Timothy later ministered to the church in Ephesus in Paul's place (1 Timothy 1:3). Also, tradition records that the apostle John became bishop and spent his remaining years there

The church was most likely composed of a majority of Gentiles (2:11) with a number of Jews. Paul's argument about the two groups becoming one in Christ may indicate this (2:11-18).

The Occasion:

There is no specific problem raised and addressed in the book that presents a clear occasion for Paul to write. He may have wanted to use the occasion of Tychicus' visit to them to send the letter (6:21-22). However, the themes of the epistle suggest a likely purpose.

There is a great emphasis on the believer's heavenly calling and the place of the church in God's universal program. There is also an emphasis on love and unity in Christ. References to love in Ephesians comprise one-sixth of Paul's total references in all the letters.

The theme of unity is seen throughout (2:11-22; 3:6; 4:3-6, 13-16, 25 etc.). Paul is writing with a preventative design that would encourage growth and maturity to ward off false doctrine and teachers (Cf. Acts 20:29-30).

Key Words:

There are several key words and phrases in Ephesians that instantly provide us with an immediate grasp of its content.

“Grace.” If any word stands out as the main key, it is this one, which appears a total of twelve times (1:2,6,7; 2:5,7,8; 3:2,7,8; 4:7,29;6:24). It is an amazing fact that grace is spoken of more in Ephesians than in any other New Testament book, even more than in Romans!

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Ephesians has been described as “The Epistle of Grace” and rightly so. It is a misunderstanding of grace that is at the very root of all false doctrine concerning salvation. All such teaching tries to mix grace with works, which immediately negates grace. Ephesians details what grace really means (e.g., 2:4-9).

“Riches.” This word appears five times in Ephesians, all of which occur in the first half of the book (1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8,16). Why? Because, the thrust of the first half of Ephesians is our wealth in Christ. Right in line with this is the next key word.

“Walk.” This word, along with “walked,” appears seven times 2:2,10; 4:1,17; 2:2,8,15) Amazingly, just as “riches” appears five times in the first half of Ephesians, appears five times in the second half. Why? Because, the thrust in the second half of the book is our walk in Christ.

“In Christ.” The phrase “in Christ” (or “in Him”) occurs twelve times (1:1,3,4,10 [twice], 12,20; 2:6,10,13; 3:6,11). It shows us that we are in Christ, that we are in His Body and all we have is because we are in Him.

“Heavenly places” (or “high places”). Here is a truly fascinating phrase that appears five glorious times in this letter and nowhere else in the New Testament.

The first occurrence (1:3) tells us that the riches the Christian has in Christ are “in heavenly places.” The riches we claim are not earthly; they are heavenly.

The second occurrence (1:20) declares that Christ is now “in the heavenly places.” We also read in 4:8-10 that Christ ascended into heaven.

The third occurrence (2:6) affirms that the Christian is also “in Heavenly places.” Not only are we on this earth, but we are also in the heavenlies right now; our place there is already set. We are not yet there physically, but we are there positionally. Our position is “in Christ in the heavenlies.”

The fourth occurrence (3:10) speaks of the holy angels who dwell “in Heavenly places.”

The fifth and final occurrence (6:12) shows that evil angels, to some degree, have access to the heavenlies. An example of this is when Satan came before God to accuse Job (Job1:6-11).

What a marvelous phrase this is! It is used in Ephesians to contrast that which is earthly from that which is heavenly. Paul speaks here of glorious things, things that transcend this earth.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

But he doesn't leave us "up in the clouds" in some "mystical trance," as some view spirituality in our day. No, he brings us crashing back to earth in Chapters 4-6 with the practical application of these spiritual truths. True spirituality is always practical.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Argument:

Paul's concern with the Ephesian Christians' position is evident in the introductory address. There he calls them "saints," a designation of consecrated position to God (1:1). The first half of the letter explains in tremendous depth the position of the church in the heavenlies (1:3-3:21), which is used later as a basis of appeal for the practice of the church on earth (4:1-6:20).

The position of the church is due to God's planned redemption, thus Paul begins with the praise of this redemption (1:3-14). The Father's part in redemption (1:3-6) brings Christians into every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3). He does this through His sovereign election and predestination of those who will be His sons (1:4-6).

Paul then moves to the Son's part in redemption (1:7-12). In Christ is the forgiveness of sins according to grace, the gathering of all things in heaven and earth, and the believer's inheritance. Finally, it is the Holy Spirit's part to seal the believer as a guarantee of the inheritance in Christ (1:13-14).

The lofty thought of God's blessings in Christ causes Paul to pray for the realization of these blessings in the Ephesians (1:15-23). He is already motivated to pray by the report of their faith and love (1:15-16). Therefore, he prays for them to have spiritual insight to realize their riches in Christ and the greatness of God's power (1:17-19).

This power is demonstrated in Christ's resurrection, exaltation, and present authority over all powers (1:20-22). This exalted and powerful Christ is the head of the church, which is His body (1:23). Paul has thus far described the blessings in Christ and the authority of Christ for the church. Now he will explain in more detail the exact relationship of believers to the church.

Paul's discussion turns to those who make up the church, Christ's body (2:1-22). He describes the new position of individuals in Christ (2:1-10). Whereas both Jew and Gentile were dead in sins and trespasses (2:1-3), all were made alive in Christ (2:4-10).

This new life is a result of God's love and mercy and places the believer with Christ positionally in the heavenly realm (2:4-6). This salvation has an eternal purpose in magnifying God's grace (2:7), thus it is accomplished by the grace of God through faith, not works (2:8-10).

The eternal purpose of God in salvation is designed that Gentiles would enjoy a new union with Jews in the body of Christ (2:11-22). The Gentiles, who were once separated from God's blessings (2:11-12), have become one body with the Jews through Jesus Christ, Who removed the partition of the law (2:14-15).

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

They have also been given access to the Jewish promises through Christ's sacrifice which reconciled both groups to God (2:16-18). Gentiles are now in God's household, the church, and are growing into a holy temple of God (2:19-22). Paul has made a powerful argument for the church's unity based on the work of God in Christ.

Again Paul is prompted to pray (Cf. 3:1,14) but is diverted by his explanation of the mystery of the new body (3:1-13). His reference to himself as the "prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (3:1) reminds of the mystery that was revealed to him in relation to the Gentiles. He explains the reception of this mystery through a totally new revelation of God (3:3-5).

The mystery is that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs of the promise with the Jews in one body (3:6). The ministry committed to his charge is to preach Christ to the Gentiles in accordance with this mystery in order to display God's infinite wisdom (3:8-12).

Having now explained the mystery, Paul resumes his prayer for the Ephesians. He prays for them to experience the inner strength and love available in Christ (3:14-21). The prayer moves from God's strength to God's love, both of which are found in the fullness of God available in Christ as he dwells in the heart by faith.

His prayer and this half of the letter end with a doxology of praise for God's power and glory displayed in the church (3:19-20).

Paul has demonstrated the Christian's blessed and heavenly position in Christ, as well as his union with all believers in the one body of Christ. This will form the basis for his appeal for the Ephesians' conduct in the church.

The position of the church in heaven is the impetus for the practice of the church on earth (4:1-6:20). The recurring word Paul uses to depict the practice of the members of the church is "walk."

Believers in Christ must walk as those separated to God (4:1-5:21). The appeal of 4:1 appropriately ties this section to the previous three chapters by referring to the believer's calling as the basis proper conduct.

The first distinction of the believer's walk should be unity (4:1-16). The appeal for unity (4:1-3) is exemplified by the unity in the Godhead which is the basis of the Christian's experience. The means of unity is found in the gifts Christ bestowed at His ascension (4:7-16).

The four foundational gifts are listed in particular as those which equip and edify the church (4:11-12). The result is that the members of the church grow together in unity as they

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

become one perfect man in Christ (4:13). This spiritual maturity brings discernment that protects against deceitful men and doctrine which could invade the church (4:14).

Such a mention of the preventative nature of proper Christian understanding and maturity suggests Paul may have written the elevated doctrines of chapters 1-3 to fill out the Ephesians' knowledge and experience (chapters 4-6) in order to keep error from the church.

The alternative to error in the church is the truth spoken in love which also builds the body of Christ as each member works to edify the church (4:15-16). The unity in the body presented here is the practical expression of the theological unity explained in 2:11-22 and 3:6. Unity is one of the major themes of Ephesians.

Believers should not only walk in unity, they should walk in newness of life (4:17-32). Paul sets forth the contrast between the old life and the new (4:17-24). The new believers have no reason to walk in ignorance as the Gentiles walk in alienation from God, for Paul has already demonstrated how the Gentiles have obtained access to God and His promises (4:17-19; Cf. 2:11-18).

Instead, they are to reject the old life in favor of a new life that is consistent with their position in the new man God has created in Christ's body (4:20-24). This life should be characterized with behavior that reflects "righteousness and true holiness" (4:24), including truthful speech, no sinful anger, sharing instead of stealing, helpful speech, and kindness (4:25-32).

Love must also control the believer's walk (5:1-7). This love is expected of those who are God's children and is exemplified in Christ (5:1-2). The catalog of sins are those found in a loveless life, and these not fit believers who are set apart to God as His children (5:3). Rather, these sins characterize those excluded from the kingdom of God and Christ (5:5). As is seen in these exhortations, Paul is consistent in appealing to the Christians' spiritual position and privilege in Christ as motivation.

Furthermore, believers should also walk in righteousness (5:8-14). This is the significance of the metaphorical expression "children of light" (5:8-10). The nature of light makes it mutually exclusive of darkness and exposing of darkness (5:11-13) as is seen when Christ's light disperses the darkness of sin's sleep from a person upon salvation (5:14).

The final exhortation concerning the believer's walk is to walk in wisdom (5:15-21). This involves some specific obligations, A believer walking in wisdom is able to make the most of opportunities with an awareness of the nature of the times (5:16). He is able to understand God's will (5:17) and be controlled by God's Spirit (5:18) so that his life

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

becomes an expression of worship, thanksgiving, and submission to others out of reverence for God (5:19-21).

The obligation to be filled with the Spirit, and the results of such a life, are controlling factors in living the kind of life Paul has exhorted and is about to exhort. Paul has stated an important result, submission to one another (5:21), and now uses it as the determining concept behind his exhortations about the duties of believers in God's family (5:22-6:9).

He first discusses the duties of wives and husbands (5:22-33). His exhortations to both are rooted in the theology of the church as the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. Husband and wife are organically unified just as Christ and the church.

As Christ is the head of the church, so the man is the head of the marital union (5:23-24). Therefore, the husband must love and cherish his wife as his own body (5:28). Once more it is illustrated how positional truth affects practical behavior in Paul's thinking.

Paul continues with appeals to children and parents (6:1-3) and to servants and masters (6:5-9). One's relationship and accountability to God is the implied or stated motivation for following these commands.

Paul closes with instructions about the warfare of believers as God's soldiers (6:10-20). Not only is the believer's position in Christ a place of privilege and power, it is also a place of protection. Thus, a Christian can be strong only "in the Lord" (6:10-11).

Paul issues a call to battle against the devil (6:10-11) and explains that the struggle is in the spiritual realm (6:12), the same realm in which the Christian is positioned with blessing (1:3ff).

The Christian's armor is a mature realization of the provision of Christ which forms an able defense and offense (6:13-17). Paul may be suggesting that the Ephesians can protect themselves by close attention to the position and practice of the Christian as found in his letter.

A final exhortation to pray for themselves and him remind the Ephesians that the power is of God, not self (6:18-20). Paul closes with a word about the visit of Tychicus and his benediction (6:21-24).

In this letter, Paul has set forth the high calling of the Christian, and the equally high moral behavior which should reflect that position. Should the Ephesians be diligent in appreciating their privileged position and equally diligent in living in light of this position, they will have a strong defense against error and the devil's schemes.

OUTLINE:

INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)

1. DOCTRINE: OUR RICHES IN CHRIST (1:3-3:21)

A. OUR SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST (1:3-14)

1. From the Father (1:4-6)
2. From the Son (1:7-12)
3. From the Spirit (1:13-14)
- First Prayer: for enlightenment (1:15-23)

B. OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION IN CHRIST (2:1-22)

1. Raised and seated on the throne (2:1-10)
2. Reconciled and set into the temple (2:11-22)
- Second Prayer: for enablement (3:1-21; with verses 2-13 as a parenthesis)

11. DUTY: OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN CHRIST (4:1-6:20)

A. A CALL TO WALK IN UNITY (4:1-16)

1. Preserving the unity of the Spirit with proper attitudes
2. Edifying the body of Christ by the grace given us (4:8-16)

B. A CALL TO WALK IN PURITY (4:17-5:21)

1. Walk not as other Gentiles (4:17-32)
2. Walk in love (5:1-6)
3. Walk as children of light (5:7-14)
4. Walk as wise (5:15-21)

C. A CALL TO WALK IN HARMONY (5:22-6:9)

1. Husbands and wives (5:22-33)
2. Parents and children (6:1-4)
3. Masters and servants (6:5-9)

D. A CALL TO WALK IN VICTORY (6:10-20)

1. Standing strong in the power of the Lord (6:10-13)
2. Equipped with the whole armor of God (6:14-20)

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. The Epistle of Ephesians emphasizes the truth that the _____ is the body of which _____ is the head.
2. How is the Epistle divided:

3. Paul's _____ is likely the background of the letter.
4. And you hath he _____ who were dead in trespasses and _____; Wherein in time past ye _____ according to the course of this _____, according to the prince of the power of the _____, the spirit that now worketh in the children of _____.
5. The theme is _____
6. Key words are: _____ In _____ places

QUIZ: Closed note (this is for fun just to see how much you remember) does not affect your grade!

1. Have you read at least once through the New Testament? _____
2. Roughly how many prophecies are fulfilled in the four Gospels? _____
3. Name the three so called land mines in the New Testament?

4. Acts is what kind of Book? _____
5. The book of Romans was called the _____ handbook for the child of God.
6. First Corinthians is a _____ Epistle.