

I. The Background of the book of Ephesians¹

A. Title

The letter is addressed to the church in the city of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor, modern Turkey). Because the name Ephesus is not mentioned in every early manuscript, some scholars believe the letter was an encyclical, intended to be circulated and read among all the churches in Asia Minor and was simply sent first to believers in Ephesus.

B. Author and Date

There is no indication that the authorship of Paul should be in question. He is indicated as author in the opening salutation (1:1; 3:1). The letter was written from prison in Rome (Acts 28:16–31) sometime between A.D. 60–62 and is, therefore, often referred to as a prison epistle (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). It may have been composed almost contemporaneously with Colossians and initially sent with that epistle and Philemon by Tychicus (Eph. 6:21, 22; Col. 4:7, 8). See Introduction to Philippians: Author and Date for a discussion of the city from which Paul wrote.

C. Background and Setting

It is likely that the gospel was first brought to Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila, an exceptionally gifted couple (see Acts 18:26) who were left there by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18, 19). Located at the mouth of the Cayster River, on the east side of the Aegean Sea, the city of Ephesus was perhaps best known for its magnificent temple of Artemis, or Diana, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was also an important political, educational, and commercial center, ranking with Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch of Pisidia, in southern Asia Minor.

The fledgling church begun by Priscilla and Aquila was later firmly established by Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19) and was pastored by him for some 3 years. After Paul left, Timothy pastored the congregation for perhaps a year and a half, primarily to counter the false teaching of a few influential men (such as Hymenaeus and Alexander), who were probably elders in the congregation there (1 Tim. 1:3, 20). Because of those men, the church at Ephesus was plagued by “fables and endless genealogies” (1:4) and by such ascetic and unscriptural ideas as the forbidding of marriage and abstaining from certain foods (4:3). Although those false teachers did not rightly understand Scripture, they propounded their ungodly interpretations with confidence (1:7), which produced in the church harmful “disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1:4). Thirty years or so later, Christ gave to the Apostle John a letter for this church indicating its people had left their first love for Him (Rev. 2:1–7).

D. Historical and Theological Themes

The first 3 chapters are theological, emphasizing NT doctrine, whereas the last 3 chapters are practical and focus on Christian behavior. Perhaps, above all, this is a letter of encouragement and admonition, written to remind believers of their immeasurable blessings in Jesus Christ; and not only to be thankful for those blessings, but also to live in a manner worthy of them. Despite, and partly even because of, a Christian’s great blessings in Jesus Christ, he is sure to be tempted by Satan to self-satisfaction and complacency. It was for that reason that, in the last chapter, Paul reminds believers of the full and sufficient spiritual armor supplied to them through God’s Word and by His Spirit (6:10–17) and of their need for vigilant and persistent prayer (6:18).

A key theme of the letter is the mystery (meaning a heretofore unrevealed truth) of the church, which is “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ

¹ <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB49>

through the gospel” (3:6), a truth completely hidden from the OT saints (cf. 3:5, 9). All believers in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, are equal before the Lord as His children and as citizens of His eternal kingdom, a marvelous truth that only believers of this present age possess. Paul also speaks of the mystery of the church as the bride of Christ (5:32; cf. Rev. 21:9).

A major truth emphasized is that of the church as Christ’s present spiritual, earthly body, also a distinct and formerly unrevealed truth about God’s people. This metaphor depicts the church, not as an organization, but as a living organism composed of mutually related and interdependent parts. Christ is Head of the body and the Holy Spirit is its lifeblood, as it were. The body functions through the faithful use of its members’ various spiritual gifts, sovereignly and uniquely bestowed by the Holy Spirit on each believer.

Other major themes include the riches and fullness of blessing to believers. Paul writes of “the riches of His [God’s] grace (1:7), “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8), and “the riches of His glory” (3:16). Paul admonishes believers to “be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19), to “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13), and to “be filled with the Spirit” (5:18). Their riches in Christ 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). The word “riches” is used 5 times in this letter; “grace” is used 12 times; “glory” 8 times; “fullness” or “filled” 6 times; and the key phrase “in Christ” (or “in Him”) some 12 times.

E. Interpretive Challenges

The general theology of Ephesians is direct, unambiguous, and presents no ideas or interpretations whose meanings are seriously contended. There are, however, some texts that require careful thought to rightly interpret, namely: 1) 2:8, in which one must decide if the salvation or the faith is the gift; 2) 4:5, in which the type of baptism must be discerned; and 3) 4:8, in its relationship to Ps. 68:18.

F. Outline

I. Salutation (1:1, 2)

II. God’s Purpose for the Church (1:3–3:13)

- A. Predestination in Christ (1:3–6a)
- B. Redemption in Christ (1:6b-10)
- C. Inheritance in Christ (1:11–14)
- D. Resources in Christ (1:15–23)
- E. New Life in Christ (2:1–10)
- F. Unity in Christ (2:11–3:13)

III. God’s Fullness for the Church (3:14–21)

IV. God’s Plan for Faithful Living in the Church (4:1–6)

V. God’s Son Endows and Builds the Church (4:7–16)

VI. God’s Pattern and Principles for Members of the Church (4:17–32)

VII. God’s Standards for Faithfulness in the Church (5:1–21)

- A. Walking in Love (5:1–7)
- B. Living in Light (5:8–14)
- C. Walking in Wisdom and Sobriety (5:15–18a)
- D. Filled with God’s Spirit (5:18b-21)

VIII. God’s Standards for Authority and Submission in the Church (5:22–6:9)

- A. Husbands and Wives (5:22–33)
- B. Parents and Children (6:1–4)
- C. Employers and Employees (6:5–9)

IX. God’s Provision for His Children’s Spiritual Battles (6:10–17)

- A. The Believer's Warfare (6:10–13)
- B. The Believer's Armor (6:14–17)
- X. God's Appeal for Prayer in the Church (6:18–20)**
- XI. Benediction (6:21–24)**

I. The Background of the book of Ephesians

II. General Lessons from the book of Ephesians

- A. God used a variety of people to protect His church.
 1. Paul (Ephesians 1:3 & 3:1; Acts 19:1-10): Paul taught the truth. (for approximately 3 years...3 months [vs.8] + 2 years [vs. 10] + content of the remaining verses in chapter 19): Paul instructed the church.
 2. Timothy (I Timothy 1:2-3 & 2 Timothy 1:2): Timothy shepherded the church.
 3. John (Revelation 2:1-7): John confronted the church.

- B. God uses a variety of people to establish His church.
 1. Apollos (Acts 18:24-26a): Apollos proclaimed the truth.
 - a. He was a gifted communicator. (24-26) [eloquent man (24), fervent in spirit (25a), he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus (25b), he began to speak boldly in the synagogue (26)]
 - b. He was a diligent student of the Word. (24 - competent in Scriptures; Ezra 7:6; 25)
 - c. He was a work in progress. (25 – instructed in the way of the Lord... but he knew only the baptism of John)

 2. Priscilla & Aquila (Acts 18:26b): Priscilla & Aquila corrected the truth.
 - Aquila (husband) / Priscilla (wife) – Acts 18:2
 - Priscilla always mentioned before her husband throughout the rest of Scripture (18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; I Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19; 2 Tim. 4:19)
 - They explained to him **the way of God** more accurately

Jesus was known for presenting a “new perspective” on the Way (see Matthew 22:16)

Jesus Himself claimed to be THE WAY (John 14:6).

Aquila and Priscilla spent time with Paul making tents and no doubt talking about THE WAY, THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, AND THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. (Acts 18:1-4)

THE WAY: A term commonly used to identify the believers during the first century

- Acts 9:2 – Saul sought to persecute “any belonging to the Way...”
- Acts 16:17 – the way of salvation
- Acts 18:25-26 – instructed in the way of the Lord
- Acts 19:9, 23 – but when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way
- Acts 22:4 – I persecuted this Way to death
- Acts 24:14, 22 – But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the prophets (14)... But Felix, having a more accurate knowledge of the Way...

THE WAY: A term used throughout the OT to describe the spiritual and moral standards God required His people to observe.

- Gen. 18:19 – doing righteousness and justice (Angel of the Lord to Abraham)
- Judg. 2:22 – take care to walk in the way of the Lord (God to Israel)
- I Sam. 12:23 – the good and right way (Samuel to King Saul)
- 2 Sam. 22:22 – I have kept the ways of the Lord (Song of David)
- 2 Kings 21:22 – Did not walk in the ways of the Lord (King Amon of Judah)
- 2 Chron. 17:6 – His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord (description of Jehoshaphat in Judah)
- Psalm 18:21 – for I have kept the ways of the Lord (David)
- Psalm 25:8-9 – instructs sinners in the way (8); teaches the humble his way (9)
- Psalm 138:5 – sing of the ways of the Lord (David)
- Proverbs 10:29 – a stronghold to the blameless (Solomon)
- Hosea 14:9 – the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them (Hosea to the nation of Israel before exile)
- Jeremiah 5:4-5 – the justice of God (Jeremiah to the nation of Judah before exile)
- Ezekiel 18:25, 29; 33:17, 20 – the justice of God (Ezekiel to all the Jews during exile)
- Isaiah 35:1-10 – the Way of Holiness (vs. 8)
- Isaiah 40:3 – prepare the way of the Lord

THE TEACHINGS ABOUT “THE WAY”: Did not necessarily hinder people from believing in Jesus (Acts 18:25 – He (Apollos) spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus...

THE TEACHINGS ABOUT “THE WAY” APART FROM THE REVELATION ABOUT THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS, did keep some from placing their faith in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:1-7)

THE TEACHINGS ABOUT “THE WAY” APART FROM THE REVELATION ABOUT THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS, did create confusion among the believers in Ephesus regarding the means of their salvation and sanctification.

● **KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

C. God uses a variety of approaches to motivate His church.

1. He encourages sound doctrine. **[ORTHODOXY] (Ephesians 1-3)**

- The glory of salvation
 - Election (1:3-4)
 - Adoption (1:5-6)
 - Redemption (1:7)
 - Unification (1:8-10)
 - Regeneration (2:1-10)
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit
 - Sealing work (1:11-14)
 - Revealing work (1:15-23)
 - Building work (2:22)
- The mystery of the church
 - Gentiles are fellow recipients of the gospel (3:1-6)
 - Gentiles are fellow laborers in the gospel (3:7-13)
 - The church (comprised of Jews and Gentiles) enjoys the benefits of the gospel. (3:14-20)

2. He encourages sound practice. **[ORTHOPRAXY] (Ephesians 4-6)**

- Walk in unity (4:1-16)
- Walk in purity (4:17-32)
- Walk in love (5:1-8a)
- Walk in light (5:8b-14)

- Walk in wisdom (5:15-6:9)
- Walk in warfare (6:10-24)

3. **He encourages proper affections. [ORTHOPATHY]** Based on God's great love for you (2:4) and on your great love for God (3:17)...
- You must walk in love toward others (5:2)
 - You must worship God out of love (6:23-24)

Application:

- **Endure sound doctrine.** (2 Timothy 4:1-4)
- **Embrace your role in building up the church.**
 - Teacher
 - Administrator
 - Encourager
 - Supporter
- **Evaluate the way you interact with others in the body (the church)**
 - Are you eager to maintain unity? (4:3)
 - Are you zealous in your personal practice of righteousness and holiness? (4:22-23)
 - Are you ready to forgive? (4:23)
 - Are you willing to submit? (5:21)
 - Are you upholding one another in prayer? (6:18)
- **Examine your motivation.** (Ephesians 5:1-2; Revelation 2:4-5)