

Ephesians

Session 1

The letter to the Christians in Ephesus is an amazingly concise yet comprehensive summary of the Gospel and its implication. It is really hard to read it and not be moved to awe and worship and challenged to deeper levels of spiritual maturity.

Some have called Ephesians the “queen of the epistles.” It is regarded by many as the crown of all of Paul’s letters. In its six chapters, the word *riches* is used six times; *grace*, twelve times; *glory*, eight times; *fullness*, *filled up*, *fills*, six times and the key phrase *in Christ*, fifteen times. Paul’s message throughout the letter is that believers might understand and experience more fully all the blessings given to them by God.

Over the next six weeks, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us in our journey through this letter. May our minds be energized by Him as we look close at the text and may our hearts be open to the voice of God.

The Structure

Introduction to the Letter (1:1-2)

New Life

- Every spiritual blessing (1:3-14)
- A prayer for knowledge (1:15-23)
- Resurrected with Christ (2:1-10)

New Society

- A single new humanity (2:11-22)
- Paul’s unique privilege (3:1-13)
- Confidence in God’s power (3:14-21)

New Standards

- Unity and diversity in the church (4:1-16)
- A new set of clothes (4:17-5:4)
- Incentives to righteous living (5:5-16)

New Power

- Be filled with the Spirit (5:17-21)
- Spirit-filled relationships at home and at work (5:22-6:9)
- Spirit-filled victory over the powers of darkness (6:10-20)

Conclusion (6:21-24)

Introduction – 1:1-2

The author: Paul

A former antagonist and persecutor of the church, known as Saul of Tarsus



Converted to Christ while traveling to Damascus, Syria, to imprison Christians (Acts 9:1-18) 32 AD

His initial witness in Damascus is met with astonishment. (Acts 9:20-22) 32 AD

His three-year seclusion in the Arabian Desert (Galatians 1:15-17) 32 AD

His trip to Jerusalem, meeting with Peter and James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-20; Acts 9:26-30) 35 AD

His return to Tarsus (Galatians 1:21-24; Acts 9:30) 35 AD

Barnabas brings him to Antioch from Tarsus to assist in the spiritual development of the growing Gentile church. (Acts 11:19-25) 46 AD

Fourteen years after his conversion, he, along with Barnabas, makes a second trip to meet with the Apostles in Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30) 46 AD

He returns to Antioch and is sent out along with Barnabas by the church on the first of his three missionary journeys. (Acts 13:1-3) 47 AD

Three major influences in Paul's life:

Greek Culture

Roman Citizenship

Jewish Religion (Philippians 3:5-6)

He was trained in the rabbinic school of Gamaliel from the age of 13. (Acts 22:3)

He was a respected leader, possibly a member of the Sanhedrin Court (see Acts 26:9-10), and a notable teacher of the Law.

He was an apostle – someone chosen, called, and sent to speak with authority – by the will of God.

The Recipients of the Letter

The "saints" (Greek – *hagios*)

A proper designation of every follower of Christ

It means "holy ones", those *set apart* to belong to God.

The "faithful" (Greek – *pistos*)

A better translation to consider is "those of faith..."

"In Christ Jesus"

The first of 15 times this special phrase will be used in this letter.

To be a Christian is in essence to be “in Christ” – one with Him in spirit and in covenant.

“in Ephesus”

As followers of Christ, they have two “homes” – *in Christ* and *in Ephesus*.

Many spiritual troubles occur when followers of Christ pursue Christ and withdraw from the world or become preoccupied with the world and forget that we are also in Christ.

Ephesus

The city

A major seacoast town – population during First Century of about 300,000

Because of its natural harbor, it was the center of commerce.

The Temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana) – one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient world – was in Ephesus.

Magical arts – astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, etc – were practiced extensively in Ephesus. (Acts 19:13-19).

The church

Near the end of Paul’s second missionary journey, his return to Antioch takes him through Ephesus (Acts 18:18-22).

During this brief visit, he taught in the Jewish synagogue. (Acts 18:18-22)

He leaves his trusted partners, Priscilla and Aquila, there to carry on the work.

Apollos, a gifted speaker from Alexandria, visits Ephesus. (Acts 18:24-28)

On his third missionary journey (54-58 AD), Paul returns to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20:1).

Many miraculous signs and wonders were performed though Paul's ministry.

Many people turned to Christ and destroyed massive amounts of their magic books.

The sales of the images of Artemis began to fall, and a riot broke out.

After three years in Ephesus, Paul leaves for Macedonia.

While in Ephesus, Paul writes his two of his letters – Galatians and 1 Corinthians.

Toward the end of his third missionary journey, Paul meets the Ephesian elders on the Island of Melitus for a tearful farewell. (Acts 20:13-38)

Paul would later appoint Timothy to be the pastor (some say bishop) of the church at Ephesus, and writes two pastoral letters to him (1 and 2 Timothy).

Near the end of the First Century, the Apostle John lived in Ephesus and addressed the book of Revelation to this church and six other churches in Asia Minor.

The Characteristics of the Letter

It is a prison epistle.

While in Jerusalem during the Feast of Pentecost (59 AD), he is falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin Court. (Acts 21:17-23:22)

Following a near riot in the city, a fight among the Sanhedrin, and a secret plot to kill Paul, he is transferred to Roman control in Caesarea and remained there for two years.

Paul, as a Roman citizen, appealed his case to Caesar (Nero) and was sent to Rome where he was imprisoned (61-63 AD).

While under Roman guard, Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

His letter to the church at Ephesus was delivered by Tychicus, a trusted fellow laborer with Paul. (Ephesians 6:21-22)

It is an encyclical letter, intended to be shared among the churches in the surrounding area of Ephesus.

It is not a problem-solving letter; it is a letter of affirmation, prayer and worship to the Divine Trinity for the multiplied spiritual blessings He has bestowed on his people. It draws the reader's attention to the glory of God.

Greeting

Grace – Greek *charis*

Grace describes a gift which would have been impossible for a person to obtain on his own and which is in no way deserved.

It is a central idea of the Gospel.

Peace – Greek *eirēnē*

Equivalent to the traditional Hebrew greeting *shalom*

It is an inner quality that is independent of outside circumstances.

Questions for Table Conversation

1. If the Apostle Paul were sitting at your table tonight, what do you think you would notice about him? What questions would you like to ask him and why?
2. Are there any similarities between the culture of Ephesus and our culture in the United States today?
3. What challenges do you think the church in Ephesus faced?

Before Our Next Session

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-2:10 – once a day would be great!
2. Use the following questions to assist you as you reflect on your reading:
 - According to verses 1:3-6, what blessings are ours from the Father?
 - What other blessings, according to verses 1:7-12, do we have in Jesus Christ?
 - What additional blessings do we receive through the Holy Spirit (1:13-14)?
 - How does Paul emphasize the tremendous power available "for us who believe" (1:19)?
 - How is the church, the body of believers, central to God's plan for the universe (1:22-23)?
 - In verses 2:2-3, Paul mentions three negative influences on our lives. According to Paul, how did each of these affect our lives as non-Christians?
 - What do you learn about God's grace from 2:4-10?