

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

Ephesians

What? A letter (epistle) from the apostle Paul to God's church in the city of Ephesus and to faithful Christians everywhere.

When? While Paul was imprisoned late in his life, about A.D. 60

Where? Tenth book in the New Testament, between Galatians and Philippians.

Theme? "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8).

Wealthy walk! Paul sees salvation as wealth ("riches," 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16) and the Christian life as a journey ("walk," 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). In this epistle, we may walk through some of the Bible's richest passages:

- 1:3-14, blessed by God
- 2:1-10, saved by grace
- 3:14-21, prayer unlimited
- 4:1-6, preeminent unity
- 5:15-21, appeal to life
- 6:10-20, armor of God

Half 'n half: The six chapters of Ephesians divide evenly into two sections.

The first half of the letter (chs. 1–3) is theology, or "doctrine." Here, in marvelous terms, Paul sets forth the loving purpose of God and the exalted position of God's people, who have been redeemed and reconciled through the grace of Jesus Christ (1:5, 7, 9, 11; 2:4-7, 13-18).

Not previously understood, this salvation plan is called "the mystery" (1:9; 3:1-12). Now it has been revealed by the Spirit and presented by the apostles and prophets, including Paul (3:4, 5). This revealed mystery involves

- God's pre-determined plan (1:4, 5, 11)
- our adoption as sons (1:5)

- our redemption, initial and final (1:7, 14)
- our regeneration from death, elevation, and seating in heaven (2:1-7)

More specifically, the mystery is the reconciliation of all things and the unification of all God's people, accomplished in Christ (1:9-10; 2:11-22; 3:6).

This little phrase *in Christ* (i.e., "in Him," etc.) is found nearly 20 times in this first section alone. It is the quintessential Pauline phrase, gathering up all the riches of the gospel into two words. To be "in Christ" is to be blessed with all that God has for His people, now and forever.

The second half of the letter (chs. 4–6) is practice, or "lifestyle." In everyday terms,

Paul sets forth how God's people should walk when they have known the grace of Jesus Christ. It addresses many practical issues:

- unity and service in the church (4:1-16)
- personal speech (4:15, 25, 29, 31; 5:4, 12, 19)
- human relationships (4:31-32; 5:21)
 - husbands and wives (5:22-33)
 - parents and children (6:1-4)
 - servants and masters (6:5-9)
- moral purity (4:17-20, 28; 5:3-12)
 - against covetousness (4:28; 5:3, 5)
 - against drunkenness (5:18)

In the second half, we may "pick" many fruits of the Spirit:

- lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, forbearance (4:2)
- kindness, tenderness, forgiveness (4:32)
- goodness, righteousness, truth (5:9)
- love, peace, grace, faith (6:23, 24)

Love is the preeminent fruit. Called, rooted, and grounded in love, we bear with one another in love, speak the truth in love, and walk in love. In this way, the body of Christ will be built up in love (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2).

We are warned to avoid works of the flesh:

- lewdness, uncleanness, greediness (4:19)
- bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil-speaking, malice (4:31)
- fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, coarse jesting (5:3, 4)

Ephesians in a sentence

God, whose gracious purpose is our redemption through Jesus Christ and the eternal reconciliation of all things in Him, calls us to stand in God's strong provision and to walk in spiritual unity, obedient holiness, and submissive love.

In understanding the gospel and explaining it to others, we should keep the first half of Ephesians before the second half. The moral commands and standards of the Christian life always spring out of the theological (doctrinal) truths about God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, not the other way round.

The first half is mostly in the indicative mood, stating what "God did" and what "we are." It reports the status and benefits that are ours "in Christ."

The second half is more in the imperative mood, commanding what "you ought" to do now. It sets forth the ethical standards that all God's people should pursue.

In the first half, Jesus Christ is mentioned constantly (over 40), but less often in the last half (about 25). The Holy Spirit has more mentions in the second half (8) than in the first (5 or 6).

Twin letter? The Colossians letter reflects much of Ephesians. Both epistles present the same two-part structure and many of the same truths. The difference? Colossians is brief, local, personal, controversial, and polemic — a soldier in battle. Ephesians tends to be more complete, universal, impersonal, rhetorical, and placid — a builder at rest.

Power team: God's "power," His "might," and His "strength." The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work in believers (1:19-21; 3:20). It made Paul a gospel minister and makes us stand against the evil enemy (3:7; 6:10-13). By God's might, our inner man is strengthened and our requests are over-exceeded (3:16, 20). In a final charge, Paul mentions the entire team: "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (6:10).

Unity and diversity

Paul saw diversity in God's creation and in Christ's church:

- all things; every name (1:10, 21-23)
- all ages; all generations (1:21; 3:5, 21)
- various spiritual powers (1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12)
- Jews, Gentiles, aliens, strangers, foreigners (2:12, 13, 19)
- many-sided wisdom of God (3:10)
- the whole family in heaven and earth (3:15)
- descent and ascent of Christ (4:8-10)
- various offices in church (4:11)
- every joint and part of the body (4:16)
- husbands, wives, children, servants, masters (5:22—6:9)

There is divine diversity also:

- the purpose and plan of God (ch. 1). A Father lode of gospel truth, mixing "grace," "pleasure," "His will," "praise," and "glory" with the names of Jesus Christ to describe eternal redemption in richest terms. Note the frequent personal pronouns *He*, *His*, etc. (1:3—2:10), mostly referring to our Father God.
- the reconciling work of Jesus (chs. 2, 3). The Son's death brings God's people into one family of faith, and thus into fellowship with one another. The personal pronouns in 2:11-22 refer mostly to Jesus. Other pictures of Christ:
 - His work in creation (3:9)
 - His coming to earth (2:17; 4:9b)
 - His crucifixion (1:7; 2:13-16; 5:2, 25)
 - His resurrection (1:20; 2:5)
 - His ascension (1:20-23, 4:8-10)
- the various work of the Holy Spirit (chs. 4—6). All that Christians are and do is achieved within the realm of the Spirit, which
 - seals us (1:13, 14; 4:30)
 - gives access to God (2:18)
 - reveals truth (3:5)
 - unifies us (2:21, 22; 4:3)
 - is grieved by sin (4:30)
 - fills believers with fruit (5:9, 18)

Pictures of the Church

Paul describes the church in three ways:

- as a building, or temple (2:19-22), with the apostles and prophets as foundation, all believers incorporated into the superstructure, and Jesus Christ as chief cornerstone. We should see personal growth and holiness in the church (2:21).
- as a bride, or wife (5:23-32), who respects her one husband, Jesus Christ, and willingly follows His loving leadership. We should see divine glory in the church (3:21; 5:27).
- as a body (1:22, 23; 4:12, 15, 16; 5:23), composed of many parts serving under one head, Jesus Christ. We should see specialization, exercise, and coordination in the church (4:12, 15).

- uses the Word in warfare (6:17)
- provides arena for prayer (6:18)

The unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in providing salvation makes the diversity of their work seem small. In a similar way, the unity to which believers are called means that we can view the many differences among God's people as less important than what unites us: redemption and reconciliation through the gospel. This is **unity within diversity**, written large in Ephesians:

- unity — destiny of all things (1:10)
- unity — claimed in the church (2:11-22; 3:6)
- unity — practiced in humility and love (4:1-3, 31, 32; 5:21)
- unity — its basis in fact (4:4-6)
- unity — diversity not ignored (4:7-12)
- unity — growing toward the goal (4:13-16)