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# Ephesians

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# Introduction to Ephesians

## EPHESIANS 1:1-2

**Main Idea:** Paul conveys his pastoral heart for the Ephesian believers by writing a letter to them that focuses on who they are in Christ and how they are now to live in light of this new identity.

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### I. Why Study Ephesians?

#### II. The Author (1:1a)

- A. Paul: An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God
- B. Be devoted to the apostles' teaching.

#### III. The Recipients (1:1b)

- A. The struggle in Ephesus
- B. The saints in Ephesus

#### IV. The Greeting (1:2)

#### V. The Message

- A. Our position—who we are in Christ (1:3–3:21)
  - 1. We now have new life in Christ (1:3–2:10).
  - 2. We now have a new community in Christ (2:11–3:21).
- B. Our practice—how we are to live in Christ (4:1–6:24)
  - 1. We must now pursue unity and purity in Christ (4:1–5:14).
  - 2. We must now pursue submissiveness and stability in Christ (5:15–6:24).

#### VI. Don't Lose Your First Love.

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**E**phesians consists of only six chapters. In my particular copy of the Bible, it is only four pages. It contains only 155 verses. It will take you about 20 minutes to read the whole thing out loud. Yet we find divine beauty and power in this little book. To paraphrase Klyne Snodgrass, “Pound for pound, Ephesians may well be the most influential document in history” (Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 17). What makes it so influential? Why should we study it?

### Why Study Ephesians?

*Ephesians deepens our understanding of the gospel.* Unfortunately, we live in a day with much superficial Christianity. Much shallow teaching is going

around, but when you get to Ephesians, you dive into what Paul calls “the incalculable riches of the Messiah” (3:8). It is a great place to dive in deep and discover the true meaning of the gospel.

*Ephesians magnifies the importance of the church, perhaps more than any other New Testament letter.* We also live in a day in which people do not really value the church. They are inclined to think, “If nothing else is going on this weekend, then I guess I will attend a corporate worship service.” Yet when we look in the book of Ephesians, we read how the church is central to God’s eternal purposes; the church is put in eternal perspective. Through the church God has chosen to make known His “multi-faceted wisdom” (3:10).

*Lives have been forever changed by the exploration of this little book.* John Mackay, former president of Princeton Seminary, recalled how, at the age of 14, he took his Bible into the hills of Scotland and studied the book of Ephesians. He wrote these words: “I saw a new world . . . everything was new . . . I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything. . . . I had been ‘quickenened.’ I was really alive” (in Stott, *Ephesians*, 15). May a whole new world be opened up to you also!

*Ephesians may also be the “most contemporary” epistle in the New Testament.* Apart from the mention of slavery, which we will address later, this letter “could have been written to a modern church” (Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 17). This is because Ephesians is not the most situational of letters. Typically when Paul wrote letters, he wrote to correct something, but in Ephesians we encounter little of that. It is more reflective and less corrective. It was a circular letter, distributed and read by the churches in the Asia Minor region and, therefore, comes to us in a general form. Paul does not name particular false teachers, mention specific problems in the church at Ephesus, or include his travel plans as he does in other letters. As a result Ephesians resonates with contemporary Christians because it seems Paul could have written the letter to a twenty-first-century church.

*Ephesians provides grace-filled encouragement.* If you feel tired, discouraged, beat up, lonely, or confused, then welcome to Ephesians! Our souls need to see this description of the glorious grace of God. We need the gospel every day. Yes, Christians need the gospel every day. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to Christian churches, yet he devotes three chapters to telling them what the gospel is. Paul is writing to ordinary people just like us. Some were wealthy. Some were simple employees. Some worked at the port. Some were servants of masters. Some worked

in the small villages. They were Christians living in the world. They first needed to understand who they were and then how to live in that reality, just like us.

*Ephesians offers some practical answers to basic questions about the Christian life.* It is a “mini theology book” every Christian would benefit from studying. Non-Christians, particularly those interested enough to learn what Christians believe, would also benefit from a study in the book of Ephesians. In this book we will address the following questions:

- Why worship? (1:3-14)
- What should we pray for? (1:15-23)
- What is so amazing about grace? (2:1-10)
- Who are we? (2:11-22)
- Why is the church a big deal? (3:1-13)
- What should we pray for? (3:14-21)
- How can we be unified? (4:1-16)
- How do “new” people live? (4:17-32)
- How can we imitate God? (5:1-14)
- What is God’s plan for marriage? (5:15-33)
- How should we parent? (6:1-4)
- How should we see our vocation? (6:5-9)
- How do we fight? (6:10-24)

By way of introduction to the letter, I want to take a look at the first two verses and then look at the message of the letter. We will consider the author, the recipients, the greeting, and the message.

## The Author

### EPHESIANS 1:1A

The book opens with these words: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will.” While some argue against Pauline authorship, Paul himself says he is the author (1:1; 3:1) and also gives two strong exhortations about “speaking the truth” (4:15,25)! Further, the early church universally accepted Pauline authorship, and it was not challenged until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 4; see also Thielman, *Ephesians*, 1–30 and Akin, “Invading Satan’s Territory”).

While Ephesians is unique in style compared to Paul’s other letters, it is not different enough to cause doubt regarding his authorship. Some critics claim it is too impersonal for a man who spent three years

there, but I think this is a weak argument. Paul could have simply chosen to be reflective. It is also safe to assume he did not know all the believers (especially those out in the villages and those who came to faith after he left). And as previously mentioned, the letter was probably circular and, therefore, general.

Paul follows his usual form in this prologue, providing three elements: the sender, the recipient, and a greeting.

*Paul: An Apostle of Christ Jesus by the Will of God*

Formerly Paul was a persecutor of the church (Acts 9:1-2), but God made him “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13). Paul attributes this conversion and calling to the grace of God (1 Tim 1:15). Before his conversion Paul was breathing murderous threats against Christians, yet he went on to write 13 letters in the New Testament. That is quite the transformation, isn’t it? Paul’s life reminds us that God can radically change anyone. Here we have a man who might formerly have been compared to a terrorist now writing the New Testament.

In Ephesians 3:7-8 Paul highlights the grace of God and his mission to the Gentiles. Paul’s message of grace was something he himself experienced personally. You could say the portrait in 2:1-5 was just like Paul’s experience.

He is “an apostle of Christ Jesus”; that is, his authority came from Jesus Christ. While sometimes the term *apostle* is used in a nontechnical sense, more often than not it is used in a technical way, referring to those whom the risen Christ called and commissioned (O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 84).

Paul says he was an apostle by “God’s will.” God’s will is an important theme in the letter, emphasizing God’s purposes. Paul’s apostleship was not of his own choosing (Gal 1:16). God appointed him from birth.

From where is Paul writing? Three times he mentions imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). I believe Paul wrote this letter near the end of his two-year imprisonment in Rome, about the same time as Colossians and Philemon, approximately AD 62. He was chained to a Roman soldier during this time but free to receive visitors. Of these visitors, one probably included a secretary who took down his words. Paul then sent all three letters with Tychicus, who was with him in Rome.

According to C. L. Mitton (*Epistle*, 57), 26.5 percent of the wording in Colossians appears in Ephesians. It is a good idea to read Colossians as you study Ephesians (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 8).

### *Be Devoted to the Apostles' Teaching*

As an apostle writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul's words have the same weight for us today. Because of this we must listen with humility and attention. Paul is speaking *to us* through this letter by the Spirit. Charles Hodge says, "The epistle reveals itself as the work of the Holy Ghost as clearly as the stars declare their maker to be God" (Hodge, *Ephesians*, xv).

Later Paul says the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone" (2:20). In Acts 2 the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). We too should love the apostle Paul's instruction in this letter. It is a gift from God to us. I encourage you to memorize all or portions of it.

## The Recipients

### EPHESIANS 1:1B

Paul writes "to the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus." There is a lot of discussion about whether "at Ephesus" was part of the original wording here. Although some early documents do include it, others omit it without providing any geographical name in its place, which leaves us with an awkward grammatical construction (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 13; O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 85). It could be that it was simply dropped somehow. F. F. Bruce thinks the churches of Asia Minor were supposed to insert their own name (Bruce, *Ephesians*, 240). O'Brien concludes that it "was a general epistle sent to mainly Gentile believers in Southwestern Asia Minor, and that it was linked with Ephesus at an early stage, perhaps because of its being a strategic church or because it was one of the several cities to which the letter was sent" (O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 86).

Expressing a similar position, Daniel Akin says the following, which also expresses my own view:

It is possible (probable) that Ephesians is a circular letter addressed to various churches in Asia Minor in the general vicinity of Ephesus. The circular address of the epistle explains the omission of a city name in the address. During Paul's stay in Ephesus (the bulk of his third missionary journey recorded in Acts 18:23–21:17), the impact of his ministry was felt beyond the boundaries of the city of Ephesus. Consequently, it would be quite natural for him to write to the Christian

communities established during the Ephesian mission. (Akin, “Invading Satan’s Territory”)

A study of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus seems valuable, though he was probably writing to the wider Ephesian region. I agree with Bryan Chapell who says, “The cultural environment of Ephesus in the first century clearly illuminates the type of Asia Minor social context Paul’s audience experienced” (*Ephesians*, 10). In other words, if Ephesians was intended for several churches throughout Asia Minor, then a look at Ephesus will still help us understand the context. In fact, Acts 19 illustrates the connection between Ephesus and Asia Minor. Luke writes that as a result of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, “all the residents of Asia . . . heard the message about the Lord” (Acts 19:10; cf. Acts 20:27).

### *The Struggle in Ephesus*

In 1 Corinthians (a previous letter to another church, written from Ephesus), Paul says, “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me—yet many oppose me” (1 Cor 16:8-9). In Acts 19 Paul mentions his long stay in Ephesus, which was about three years, the longest stay in his missionary journeys—three months in the synagogue, two years in the lecture hall, and “a while” longer (Acts 19:8,10,22).

One reason for the long duration was that he had many great opportunities for ministry. Among them was the daily public teaching in the hall of Tyrannus. Those opportunities involved great opposition, though. In Acts 20:18-19 he says he served in Asia with tears and trials. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 he says he faced wild beasts in Ephesus. This might be a figure of speech, but it is likely a reference to what happened in Acts 19 in the amphitheater.

An important application we can discern from these texts relates to trials and the will of God. Just because something is difficult does not mean you have moved out of the will of God. The will of God does not mean you are free from opposition. In fact, opportunities and opposition are often mingled together.

What made this a difficult region in which to minister? Consider first, **the size of Ephesus**. Ephesus is in modern-day western Turkey. It was a busy port city, the fourth or fifth largest city in the world at that time (Chapell, *Ephesians*, 10). Its massive amphitheater held about 25,000 people. The city hosted athletic events similar to the Olympics. It was at the

junction of four major roads in Asia Minor. Several villages surrounded it. It was the gateway of Asia that became the gateway of the gospel, as Paul's ministry in the city reached out into "all . . . of Asia" (Acts 19:10).

Today much of the world is urban, and the need for churches to be planted in dense, urban areas where there is great diversity is massive. Picture a missionary today moving somewhere like Manhattan or Istanbul (another gateway city)—massive cities with great need for the gospel and local churches.

Second, consider the **spiritual warfare in Ephesus**. If the size of this city alone was not enough to overwhelm a missionary, there was also tremendous spiritual warfare in Ephesus. The city was known for different forms of paganism. Some were more sophisticated, others quite sleazy. The sophisticated types embraced the Greek notion of true enlightenment, which involved rising to high levels of mysterious knowledge. This knowledge was obtained not just by learning but by experience, through both erotic and ascetic practices (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-4). As an example of the sleaziness of Ephesus, a sign carved in stone remains today on the streets coming from the ancient dock; it used to direct sailors to brothels (Chapell, *Ephesians*, 19). The culture was steeped in materialism, sensuality, and perverted idolatrous practices.

Ephesus was also home to the Roman emperor cult. The worship of the emperor was a prominent feature of life at all levels in Asia at this time. Caesar Augustus was spoken of as the "Savior." His birth was hailed as "the beginning of good tidings to the world," and the calendar was adjusted in light of his birth (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 21). So there was a "gospel conflict." Coins, statues, temples, and other items proclaimed the gospel of Augustus, but the church was proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

Today you can see the statue of the Roman emperor Trajan among the ruins in Ephesus. He ruled after Paul's lifetime, but you can catch the spirit of Roman rulers at his time. The statue shows Trajan's foot on top of the world, giving the idea that he was a god. Now compare this picture with 1:21-22. Only One has all things under His feet: the Lord Jesus. When Christians said, "Jesus is Lord," they were saying that Caesar is not.

Ephesus was also the headquarters for the cult of the Roman goddess Diana (or Greek "Artemis"), whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Once four times as large as the Parthenon, today only the scant remains of a pillar survive. It is about a mile from the ancient amphitheater, which is still standing. Paul's Ephesian ministry

threatened the commerce of those who made silver models of Diana (cf. Acts 19:23-41).

Perhaps this spiritually conflicted context of the Ephesians prompted Paul to write in the particular style he uses in this letter. He uses words like “authorities,” “power,” and “spiritual forces,” and he emphasizes Jesus’ lordship over all. Ephesus seems to have been obsessed with demons, magic, and idolatry, particularly the worship of Diana.

Third, consider **a glimpse of warfare in Ephesus** (Acts 19:9-20). Paul had a short stay in Ephesus during which he proclaimed Christ in the synagogues (Acts 18:19-20). Then we get a flavor of the spiritual climate in Ephesus in Acts 19. We read about Paul’s teaching ministry:

*But when some became hardened and would not believe, slandering the Way in front of the crowd, he withdrew from them and met separately with the disciples, conducting discussions every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. And this went on for two years, so that all the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message about the Lord. (Acts 19:9-10)*

Paul began in the synagogue, speaking for three months. Then he went to the hall of Tyrannus, where he taught for two years. Paul was in a public auditorium or lecture hall where lectures were given during the midday “siesta” period. (Paul also probably took a break from his trade.)

By way of application, remember we can gather anywhere to teach the Bible. We do not need a temple or spectacular building. You might compare the hall of Tyrannus to a modern community center where classes are offered on a variety of subjects. Our church gathers in a generic facility and will probably continue to do so unless someone wants to give us a church building!

Like Paul we too should find ways to share the gospel within our daily context. Paul is using the typical siesta period to teach. This can look like doing a Bible study with colleagues before work begins, or a businessmen’s luncheon, or a student starting something at school during breaks. Paul’s teaching eventually spilled out from the hall into the villages!

Then we read about the demonic opposition in Ephesus:

*God was performing extraordinary miracles by Paul’s hands, so that even facecloths or work aprons that had touched his skin were brought*

*to the sick, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.*

*Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I command you by the Jesus that Paul preaches!" Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. The evil spirit answered them, "I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul—but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them all, and prevailed against them, so that they ran out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to everyone who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. Then fear fell on all of them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had become believers came confessing and disclosing their practices, while many of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them in front of everyone. So they calculated their value and found it to be 50,000 pieces of silver. In this way the Lord's message flourished and prevailed. (Acts 19:11-20)*

Paul performed miracles that confirmed his message, but we need to be careful in applying this account. Acts is a narrative, and narratives are descriptive, not prescriptive, meaning Luke is simply describing what happened; he is not prescribing we do this. We are not to go start an apron ministry! We should certainly apply the narratives, but they are different from epistles, which give us clear exhortations.

Simply consider the result of Paul's ministry here. It was marked by awe, confession and repentance, and the exaltation of Jesus. This dramatic account culminates with the burning of books, which probably contained spells, incantations, and other cultish practices. It was a spiritual awakening. Can you imagine those wrapped up in false religions, cults, and superstition burning their books and worshiping Jesus?

Not everyone was thrilled with this movement, however. Luke mentions that Paul "stayed in Asia for a while," and then he writes, "During that time there was a major disturbance about the Way" (Acts 19:22-23). These Christians were turning "the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) in Ephesus. I have been asking these questions: Is that said about our local church? Are we impacting the city? Let us pray that we can make a holy disturbance.

Notice that Christianity was referred to early on as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4). It was a new way of life. It was entirely different

from other religions. It was centered on Jesus, who said He was “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

This holy disturbance led to some serious opposition. As you look at the next verses in Acts, you see that Paul now faces opposition from another source: the silversmiths. This highlights the materialistic, as well as superstitious, culture of Ephesus. One silversmith in particular, Demetrius, is named. He was upset because the gospel was affecting the socioeconomic system. Luke records his words:

*Men, you know that our prosperity is derived from this business. You both see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this man Paul has persuaded and misled a considerable number of people by saying that gods made by hand are not gods! So not only do we run a risk that our business may be discredited, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be despised and her magnificence come to the verge of ruin—the very one all of Asia and the world adore. (Acts 19:25-27)*

Because many Ephesians were turning to Christ, they no longer wanted to buy silver statues. This created a massive eruption in Ephesus. As a result they dragged Paul and his companions into the amphitheater where they were all but killed (Acts 19:28-41).

Finally, if you add to the list of these trials the “plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19), then you have an incredibly difficult place to minister! Yet, amazingly, Paul spent about three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), probably around AD 52–54 (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 16). He had great success there, especially among the Gentiles, but it was not without opposition.

The church in Ephesus was birthed, in large part, in the midst of opposition. If you plan on planting a church or going to a tough city, and I pray many of you will, remember this pattern. It will be a struggle. You may bleed, but take comfort in Paul’s journey. Be prepared for war, but be confident in the Lord.

Though few of you will move to a massive population center, filled almost entirely with unconverted people, remember that many of us still live in a culture filled with idolatry, superstition and the occult, demonic activity, public sexual immorality, materialism, a love for education devoid of God, and the worship of political leaders. Remember, the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to break through these forces and bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one Lord. Proclaim Him with boldness.

### *The Saints in Ephesus*

In the middle of this culture were “the saints.” The word *saint* (1:15,18; 3:8,18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18) has its roots in the Old Testament, which speaks of God choosing a people from among the nations to be “My kingdom of priests and My holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6). Christ has made us into a holy people (Eph 5:26). Positionally, we are holy because we are united with Christ. Now we must live in a manner that is consistent with this position. Personal holiness is about becoming in practice what we are in position.

Who were these saints? Some Jewish believers were in Ephesus before Paul’s arrival (Acts 18:24-27), but later it seems that the churches were primarily Gentile. The Ephesian churches were perhaps made up of about 30 to 40 people, meeting in homes (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 27). But these churches had experienced about a seven- to eight-year absence from Paul by the time the book of Ephesians was written. They needed instruction. There may have been a lack of unity among the pre-Paul converts and those who came later, as well as division between the Jewish and Gentile groups.

Ephesians, then, provides some critically important truths about the nature of the gospel and how we are unified. Ephesians is like Romans in this regard. In Romans Paul is also trying to unite the church, Jew and Gentile, around the gospel.

Paul also calls the Ephesians “faithful.” This term most likely means “believers” rather than “trustworthy.” They were those who trusted Christ for salvation (1:13). While they lived physically in Ephesus, the saints were spiritually “in Christ.” They lived in union with Christ.

Ephesians mentions union with Christ and being “in Christ” more than any other letter, about 36 times (Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 39). This phrase occurs some 164 times in Paul’s 13 epistles. This is the heart of Christianity: to be united to Jesus Christ. Christians are people who are in Christ. You are united in His death and His resurrection (2:5-7).

Only by being “in” Christ can one have access to “every spiritual blessing.” If you are in Christ, then “Christ’s riches are your riches, His resources are your resources, His righteousness is your righteousness, His power is your power. His position is our position: where He is, we are . . . what He has, we have” (MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 10). And because we are in Christ, though opposition surrounds us on every side, we are secure in Him. Your identity, therefore, is in Christ, not in your performance, your popularity, your productivity, or your prominence.

## The Greeting

### EPHESIANS 1:2

Paul writes, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This greeting is the same type of greeting Paul uses for his other letters. By saying “Grace,” Paul is not saying “Hello” but is rather giving a prayer wish for grace to come to the Ephesians. Paul is the theologian of grace. Grace runs through this letter, appearing 12 times (1:6-8; 2:4-9; 4:7; 4:29). The same is true for “peace”: Paul was praying for God to bring peace to his readers. We learn much about God’s peace in Ephesians: “[Christ] is our peace” (2:14); “He proclaimed the good news of peace” (2:17); “keeping . . . the peace that binds us” (4:3); “the gospel of peace” (6:15).

This prayer wish introduces the letter, which would have been read aloud in corporate worship (cf. Col 4:16). This grace and peace comes from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” What a magnificent picture of the Father is in this letter (see also 1:17; 4:6). It also has a majestic picture of the Lord Jesus as the cosmic King of all. Jesus fills the mind of Paul. Notice the end of the letter in 6:23-24: Paul prays again for peace and grace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus for “all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.”

## The Message

The key thought in Ephesians is the phrase “in Christ.” Ephesians shows us that God is forming a new humanity through Christ, by the Spirit. It describes how Jesus Christ died for sinners, was raised, is exalted above all His competitors, and is now the head of the cosmos and the church. Through our union with Christ, we share in these same events—we are raised with Christ and seated with Him (2:5-7). This great salvation is owing to the grace of God (2:8-10).

Observe also these “formerly . . . but now” expressions:

- We were dead in sin, but now we are “alive with the Messiah” (2:4).
- We were separated from Christ, but now in Christ Jesus we “have been brought near” (2:13).
- We were “foreigners,” but now we are “fellow citizens” (2:19).
- We were darkened in understanding, but now we have “learned about the Messiah.” We have put off the “old self” and put on the “new self” (4:20-24).
- We were “darkness,” but now we are “light in the Lord” (5:8).

Paul describes the transforming power of the gospel throughout the letter.

Ephesians divides naturally into two parts: who we are in Christ (our position), and how we are to live in Christ (our practice). The first part makes up the first half of the book, and the second part makes up the second half of the book. Each part can be broken down further. Allow me to sketch out the contents briefly.

### *Our Position—Who We Are in Christ (1:3–3:21)*

In the opening chapters we read about how God, in His glorious grace, saves sinners through Jesus Christ, granting them spiritual life. The focus is not on what we must do but rather on what God has done for us. The verb tenses are mainly passive.

*We now have new life in Christ (1:3–2:10).* In the first two chapters the new life we have in Christ is explained with power and beauty. Look at this new life we enjoy:

- We have been chosen and adopted by the Father (1:4-6).
- We have been redeemed by the Son (1:7-12).
- We have been sealed with the Spirit (1:13-14).
- We have been given resurrection power (1:19).
- We have been given eyes to see the lordship of Jesus (1:15-23).
- We have been brought from death to life by grace through faith in Christ (2:1-10).
- We have been raised and seated with Him in the heavens “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (2:5-7 ESV).
- We have been created for good works (2:10).

We find here that Christianity is not about becoming religious. It is not about conforming to a list of rules. It is not about adopting a philosophy. It is not about financial prosperity. It is not about becoming a nice person. It is about becoming a *new* person. It is about going from death to life. It is about going from darkness to light. The missionary’s task is not to call people to religion but to call people to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

*We now have a new community in Christ (2:11–3:21).* When God saves sinners, He brings them into a new community. This new community, called the church, is made up of various groups of people. Both Jew and Gentile are now one. Paul says, “He is our peace, who made both groups

one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. . . . So that He might create in Himself one new man from the two” (2:14-15). We belong to a new community, united in Jesus. We are “fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household” (2:19).

John Stott says,

The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God’s new community. For his purpose . . . is not just to save individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build up his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory.  
(*The Living Church*, 19–20)

Isn’t it awesome to know we belong to something that exists to display the glory of God? Yes, it would be great to wear the jersey of your favorite team, but you belong to something much better! You belong to the church of the living God. When you become a Christian, you belong to God, and you belong to brothers and sisters in Him.

Steve Timmis says,

It is not that I belong to God and then make a decision to join a church. My being in Christ means being in Christ with others who are in Christ. This is my identity. This is our identity. . . . If the church is the body of Christ, then we should not live as disembodied Christians. (Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 41)

Are we living out our corporate identity by belonging to a local, visible church? Do we have brothers and sisters with whom we love, serve, weep, rejoice, and celebrate? We were saved for community.

#### *Our Practice—How We Are to Live in Christ (4:1–6:24)*

In the second half of the letter, Paul shifts. He turns his attention to the responsibilities of the saints. Many of the verbs are imperatives.

*We must now pursue unity and purity in Christ (4:1–5:14).* The vision for unity that is explained in 2:11-22 is now fleshed out in these verses. He explains how we can be “diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us” (4:3). Paul describes how our distinct character (4:1-2), our doctrinal convictions (vv. 4-6), our diverse capabilities (vv. 7-14), and our dependence on Christ and one another (vv. 15-16) unite us.

Then in 4:17–5:14 Paul talks about a particular way believers are to “walk” (4:17; 5:2,8). They are to live out their new identity in purity and love.

*We must now pursue submissiveness and stability in Christ (5:15–6:24).* Finally, Paul begins to talk about how we should live out Spirit-filled relationships (5:14–6:9). He emphasizes submission, love, and respect in our relationships within the church, marriage, as parents and children, and in the workplace. Christians should pursue harmony in the home, at work, and in the church.

We also have an enemy to stand against (6:10-20). The book closes with vivid imagery of our spiritual battle against the Devil. By the power of God, we are to take our stand.

So Ephesians is teaching us about a whole new way to live. New people pursue different lifestyles than the surrounding culture. That was a challenge in Ephesus, and it is a challenge today.

### Don't Lose Your First Love

The final thing I would like to point out is the last phrase in Ephesians 6:23-24. Paul closes this great letter to the saints with an implicit admonition to love Jesus purely and simply: “love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible” (ESV). Reading the book of Ephesians should increase our love for Jesus.

What is interesting about the church in Ephesus is that even though it had an amazing history, the final mention in Revelation 2:1-7 about this great church is that they “abandoned the love [they] had at first.”

Think about it: Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Paul, Timothy, and later John ministered to this church. What a heritage! Yet about 40 years after the first generation of believers, they had lost their love.

Though they were commended for spotting heresy (Paul predicted wolves would enter in Acts 20, and 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John illustrate this), they lost their love. They had a cold orthodoxy. We must ask ourselves: Is our service to Jesus mechanical? Do we love Him, or are we just using Him for our own ambitions?

Jesus told them to repent. That is what we must do if we have lost love for Christ: return to extolling Jesus for who He is and what He has done. Let's turn to the book of Ephesians now and find a view of Jesus that should lead us to such exaltation.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which point under “Why Study Ephesians?” had the most impact on you and why?
2. How might the nature of Paul’s calling on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and his experiences in Ephesus (Acts 19) affect the way we listen to his words in this book?
3. How are grace and peace related? Why are they central in the Christian message?
4. How were the challenges faced by the Ephesian church similar to what we face today?
5. What does it mean to be “in Christ”? How might we live out this truth daily?
6. How does Paul describe the church in the book of Ephesians? How is that different from the way people describe the church today?
7. Summarize the first half of Ephesians in one or two sentences. Take a moment to read through Ephesians 1–3 slowly.
8. Summarize the second half of Ephesians in one or two sentences. Take a moment to read through Ephesians 4–6 slowly.
9. Select a passage to memorize from the book of Ephesians. Explain your choice.
10. How would you describe the temperature of your relationship with Jesus? Pray for your love for Christ to be increased through this study.