

# Pauline Epistle: **EPHESIANS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Apostle Paul likely wrote the book of Ephesians during his imprisonment in Rome sometime between A.D. 60-63. The purpose of this letter is to help the Ephesian believers grow toward Christlike maturity and to remind the growing church of the truth of Christ's work on our behalf. Paul develops three main themes in Ephesians:

1. Christ has reconciled all creation to himself.
2. Christ has united people from all nations to himself and to one another in his church.
3. Christians must live as new people now that we have been freed from the bondage of sin.

Ephesians provides a foundational understanding of the redemptive work that Christ accomplished on the cross and sums up the essentials of the gospel in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

## **IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING**

Imagine that it's December 1, and you ask your grandchildren what they want for Christmas. You tell them that they can ask for ANYTHING in the world. They then tell you what they want more than anything: a jersey from their favorite Cowboys player. To many that might seem like a nice gift, but you are Jerry Jones, and you have access to much more cool Cowboys gear that your grandchildren wouldn't even know to ask for.

This imaginary example mirrors in a miniscule way our relationship with God. He can do far more abundantly than all we could ever think or ask, and yet so many times we ask for a jersey instead of the full-suite access that God offers.

## **BOOK ORGANIZATION**

Chapters 1-3: Wealth in Christ

Chapters 4-6: Walk with Christ

## **JESUS IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

The purpose of Ephesians is to articulate the truth of our salvation that was paid for by Jesus through his death, burial, and resurrection. Ephesians also provides a clearer understanding of our relationship with God through Christ as our intercessor. Key verses that highlight our relationship with Jesus include:

- In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7)
- And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

- For through him you have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:18-20)
- God accomplished his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Ephesians 3:11-12)

## **BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

### **OBSERVATION**

- The primary link to the Old Testament in Ephesians is in the startling concept (to the Jews) of the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:32). This amazing mystery (a truth not previously revealed) of the church is that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (Ephesians 3:6) This was a mystery completely hidden in the Old Testament (Ephesians 3:5, 9).
- The Israelites who were true followers of God always believed that they alone were God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). Accepting Gentiles on an equal status in this new paradigm was extremely difficult and caused many disputes among Jewish believers and Gentile converts. Paul also speaks of the church as the "bride of Christ," a previously unheard-of concept in the Old Testament.

### **INTERPRETATION**

#### **Narrative context:**

- Author: Paul
- Original Audience: Churches around Ephesus
- Intended Message: Paul explores how the gospel should affect the way we live our lives, personally, in our community, and within our families.
- Context within Scripture: Written approximately 30 years after Christ's resurrection, this epistle was written to strengthen the church and remind the Ephesians of the truths of the gospel.

#### **Historical context:**

- Before being imprisoned in Rome, Paul had a large missionary presence there, and many people came to know Christ during his missionary journeys. Years later, Paul would end up in prison in Rome.
- This is the context in which he would write Ephesians to the churches around Ephesus.

#### **Key Themes:**

1. All people are by nature spiritually dead. They disobey God's law and are ruled by Satan. (1:7; 2:1-3, 5, 11-12)
2. God predestined his people to redemption and holiness in Christ. (1:3-14; 2:4, 8-9)
3. God's rich mercy in Christ has saved sinners. This free gift is by grace through faith alone. (1:7-8; 2:4-14)
4. Jesus' saving work was part of redeeming a fallen creation for God. For this he deserves all glory, honor, and authority in this age and the next. (1:15-23; 3:1-13)

5. After his resurrection, Jesus unites Jews and Gentiles into the church, which is his body, as a new creation. (1:23; 2:10-22; 3:1-21; 4:1-6)
6. Christ's people are saved to new lives of holiness in thought, word, and deed. They must reject their old, sinful lifestyles. (4:1-3, 17-32; 5:1-20)
7. Holiness in life includes submission to proper authorities, in home and family life; and those in authority must care for those in submission to them. (5:21-6:9)
8. Jesus has given powerful gifts to his church. These bring unity, maturity, and defense against the devil and his allies. (4:7-16; 6:10-19)

#### APPLICATION

- How can we explain that God chose us in Christ before the world began?
- As followers of Christ, we are no longer dead in our sins. Why do we still act like we are at times?
- What does it look like to walk in freedom in Christ?
- What lessons can we learn from Paul's letter to the saints in Ephesus?

#### PRAYER

- Ask God to equip you with the full armor of God. Ask him where the weak points are in the way you wear your armor and to strengthen you by his Spirit.
- Before sitting down to write your devotional, ask the Lord for humility and to give you words that come straight from him. We could never understand the Bible on our own, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit in us.
- Ask that God would clearly speak to the readers of Join The Journey and that their hearts would be stirred through the passage of Scripture and the words you write.

#### **CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

The apostle's design is to settle and establish the Ephesians in the truth, and further to acquaint them with the mystery of the gospel . . . . In the former part he represents the great privilege of the Ephesians, who, having been in time past idolatrous heathens, were now converted to Christianity and received into covenant with God, which he illustrates from a view of their deplorable state before their conversion, Eph. 1:1-3:21. In the latter part (which we have in Eph. 4:1-6:24) he instructs them in the principal duties of religion, both personal and relative, and exhorts and quickens them to the faithful discharge of them.

—Matthew Henry

Hence the final words of Ephesians cap-off its central message: in Christ Jesus and through the redemptive grace of the triune God, believers experience now the inauguration of the new creation and will dwell with our Lord in unified peace in new, incorruptible resurrection existence. As our risen Messianic King dwells in incorruptibility now as first fruits, so shall all his people live together with him in incorruptible glory forevermore. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every blessing of the Spirit in the high-heavenlies in Christ . . . for praise of the glory of his grace which he bestowed on us in his Beloved” (Eph 1:3, 6).

—S.M. Baugh

We are in Christ, as the members are in the head. He represents us. When we talk of counting heads, we mean counting the whole body; so Christ, the head, represents all the members, and he stands for us. We were in Christ, beloved, according to the words of the Holy Ghost—we were in Christ in our election, “according as he hath chosen us in him.” There is a personal election of every child of God, but that personal election is connected with Christ.

—Charles Spurgeon

## SOURCES

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