

The Book of Ephesians – An Overview

Introduction:

2Ti 3:16 NIV All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

All of Scripture has the power to breathe God’s life into each and every one of us. However, there are some books, such as Ephesians, that seem to have greater relevance to our present situation than others. There is a strong sense in which it could have been written to a 21st century church rather than a 1st century one. Ephesians is about *us!* Paul seems to be speaking directly to *me* when he says that out of His love God chose us before time began (1:4). And even more to the point, God has lavished (yes – lavished!) His grace upon us and forgiven us through the blood Jesus the Christ (1:7-8).

It’s almost as if Paul knew everything about the current condition of our Church culture, and the problems we are facing today. When John Stott wrote his classic commentary on Ephesians in 1979, the title he gave it was “*God’s New Society*“. Not only does Ephesians address the individual Christian, but Paul is at pains to show how we must change our attitudes to one another and modify our behaviour as a body of believers. If ever there was a time when the church needed to give the lead in ushering in the kind of society that God envisions, surely now is that time. In just about every sphere, Western civilisation is in a total mess, and is in need of hearing the message that the Apostle Paul delivers in his letter to the Ephesians.

Schematic Outline:

Focus	Belief in our Position				Behaviour on our Walk		
Key words	Accepted Chosen	Grace Faith	Peace Wisdom	Power Love	Body Maturity	Conduct Control	Purpose Prayer
Section	In Christ – Blessed	In Christ – Redeemed	In Christ – Reconciled	In Christ – Spirit-Filled	In Christ - Unity	In Christ – New life	In Christ - Protected
	1:1 1:23 2:1	2:10 2:11	3:13 3:14	3:21 4:1	4:16 4:17	6:9 6:10	6:24
Place	Prison in Rome						
Date	circa 62 A.D.						
Author	The Apostle Paul						

Background¹:

In 1 Cor. 16:9, Paul says that he will stay in Ephesus “because a great door for effective work has opened to me” (NIV). This tells us where first Corinthians was written, probably during his first year in Ephesus, but before the riot described in Acts 19:21-41. Paul spent three full years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31; probably c. 52 – 55 A.D.) and founded its thriving church.

After leaving Ephesus in 55 A.D., Paul went back to Corinth and wintered there. (There, he wrote the letter to the Romans, in which he stated that Priscilla and Aquila risked their own necks for his life. Apparently, this took place at Ephesus. There is a tradition, found in several traces, that Paul had an encounter with a lion at Ephesus. This tradition dates from the mid-second century A.D. Yet, Acts is silent about any of these things.) He then headed for Jerusalem by boat, where he was taken captive by the Romans because the Jews rioted when they saw him in the Temple. He then appealed to Caesar and was brought to Rome in around 59 or 60 A.D.

Date and location of writing:

The epistle to the Ephesians was probably written around 62 A.D., during Paul’s first imprisonment in the city.

Recipients:

Some scholars have tried to cast doubt on the “to God's holy people in Ephesus” found in verse 1. However, “the words ‘To Ephesus’ are clearly at the top on the oldest manuscript, p. 46, contained at the University of Michigan Library”ⁱⁱ. In addition, the majority of the early church affirmed that the letter was written to the church in Ephesus.

That said, there is also the strong possibility that this letter would have been circulated to the churches at Laodicea, Colossae and over the whole of modern-day Turkey. In turn, Paul’s letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Laodiceans (now lost but mentioned in Col. 4:16) would have been read in Ephesus. Hence we can state that this letter was read more widely than “to God's holy people in Ephesus” might suggest.

Key Passages:

Eph 1:7-10 NIV In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (8) that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, (9) he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, (10) to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment--to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Eph 2:8-10 NIV For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Key Thoughts:

- **Jesus Christ.** He is referenced directly in this short letter some 100 times. To take Jesus Christ out of Ephesians is to gut the letter completely.
- The letter contains three great passages on salvation (2:1-10), on sanctification (4:17-32) and on spiritual warfare (6:10-20).
- Three major Christian concepts found in this book are – **SIT, WALK, STAND**
- Our position is first to **sit** in heavenly places possessing our inheritance as co-heirs with Christ. From sitting we can **walk** according to His calling. Lastly, we **stand** as a conqueror on this earth.
- There are two great prayers in this book — 1:15-23 and 3:14-21.
- A major problem in the Ephesian church was a lack of love (cf. Rev. 2:4). More than one-sixth of all the references that Paul makes to love are found in this one little book — 19 references. He mentions the word in this book more than in any other book that he wrote, including Romans and 1 Corinthians. When Paul feels compelled to write any of his letters, it’s usually to correct problems, and his topics reflect his concerns.
- There are 9 important terms in Ephesians chapter 1 that refer to what Christ has done for us:
 - Blessed us (1:3)
 - Adopted us as sons^{iii, iv} (1:5)
 - Made known to us (1:9), i.e., revealed what was previously hidden – His will to save through Christ
 - Given us an inheritance (1:14, but also implied in our sonship, 1:5)
 - Sealed us (1:13)
 - Chosen us (1:4)
 - Redeemed us (1:7)
 - Predestined us (1:5)
 - Forgiven us (1:7)
- Unity is beautifully expressed in this book (4:1-6):
 - One body
 - One Lord
 - One God and Father
 - One Spirit
 - One faith
 - One hope
 - One baptism

The letter does not address any particular pastoral problem but is an overall doctrinal treatise for the church.

Structure:

This book easily divides into two main sections: Belief in our Position (1-3) and Behaviour on our Walk (4-6). It stresses our place and purpose in Christ and in the church. The following diagram, is a very simple way of getting an idea of how the various parts of the book fit together.

I. Introduction 1:1-2

II. Belief in our Position – (what we need to believe and accept it means to be a Christian) 1:3-3:21

- A. In Christ – Blessed – The Spiritual Blessings that we **have** by being saved – 1:3-14
 - We **are** – chosen, blameless, predestined, adopted, redeemed and forgiven by Grace
 - We **have** – wisdom, understanding, an inheritance and we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit
- B. In Christ – Blessed – Prayer for Wisdom – 1:15-23
- C. In Christ – Redeemed – Made Alive in Christ to produce good works – 2:1-10
 - Contrast between formerly and now in 2:2 and 2:4-10*
- D. In Christ – Reconciled – Jews and Gentiles joined together into One Church – 2:11-3:13
 - Contrast between formerly and now in 2:11-13* *Contrast between formerly and now in 2:19-22*
- E. In Christ – Spirit-Filled – Prayer for Strength, Power and the Knowledge of God’s love – 3:14-21

III. Behaviour on our Walk - (how we need to live out our relationship with Jesus) 4:1 – 6:20

- A. In Christ - Unity – The call for unity – 4:1-6
- B. In Christ - Unity – The role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in this unity– 4:7-16
- C. In Christ – New life – A new creation – 4:17-24
 - Contrast between formerly and now*
- D. In Christ – New life – Rules for personal conduct – 4:25-32
- E. In Christ – New life – Imitate God and walk in love – 5:1-21
 - Contrast between formerly and now in 5:8*
- F. In Christ – New life – Rules for proper relationships – 5:22 – 6:1-9
- G. In Christ - Protected – The armour of God – 6:10-20

IV. Closing 6:21-24

Poetry (Chiasm)

Chapter 1:3–14 constitutes a 202 word poetic sentence in Greek, which can be shown to have a rather elegant “mirror-like”, Hebrew poetic form known as a “Chiasm”. Earlier phrases (such as **A**) are reflected by mirrored thoughts in subsequent phrases (such as **A’**). Normally it is in the central sections of Hebrew poetry that we find the most important ideas, which is strange to our modern way of thinking. We are more used to the poet *ending* with the most important thing s/he wants to say – a climax rather than a chiasm.

- A** **1:3 Praise be to God**
- B We have every spiritual blessing
- C** **1:4 He chose us in Him**
- D That we would be holy and blameless
- E** **1:5a He predestined us for adoption**
- F** **1:5b in accordance with his pleasure and will**
- G 1:6 **Grace** freely given
- H 1:7 Redemption through his blood
- H’ Forgiveness of our sins
- G’ 1:8 **Grace** lavished upon us
- F’** **1:9 in accordance with the riches of God's grace**
- J 1:10a **In Christ**, God’s will reaches fulfillment
- K 1:10b To unite all things
- K’ Things in heaven and on earth
- J’ 1:11a **In Him** we were chosen
- E’** **1:11b He predestined us according to His plan & purpose**
- D’ 1:12 That we would be to the praise of His glory
- C’** **1:13 You were sealed in Him by the Spirit, having believed**
- B’ 1:14a We have an inheritance
- A’** **1:14b Praise be to God**

Hence we can see that Paul's main point is contained in the **F – F'** stanzas (each of which is structured as an embedded chiasm, G&H and J&K). The central argument of this passage (and indeed the whole of Ephesians), has to do with God's grace, lavished upon us, in accordance with His pleasure and will (**F**). Paul mirrors this in the **F'** stanza, where he shows us how God does this. In and through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, God showers His riches upon us. In doing all of this, God's purpose is to unite all things both in heaven and on earth – another theme that He develops later in 4:1-6. Paul uses the repeated phrase "in Christ"^v as a shorthand way of expressing these complex truths about our status as born again Christians.

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ⁱ Adapted from <http://truthsaves.org/bible-book-outlines/outline-of-ephesians/>

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ In the culture of the times, "son" implied "inheritance".

^{iv} Some versions translate the Greek "*huiiothesian*" as "accepted", but this is incorrect.

^v Or "in Him" – the two phrases are interchangeable one with the other, throughout Paul's writing.