

Ephesians

Title

The letter is addressed to the church in the city of Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor, modern Turkey). Because the name Ephesus is not mentioned in every early manuscript, some scholars believe the letter was an encyclical, intended to be circulated and read among all the churches in Asia Minor and was simply sent first to believers in Ephesus. (gty.org)

Author and Date

The author of this letter is clearly Paul as we see it in the opening of the letter 1:1 and also in chapter 3: 1-4.

The letter is believed to have been written from Rome, while Paul was under house arrest (Acts 28:16-31) around A.D. 60-62. (gty.org)

To whom was it written

It was written to the Gentiles or non-Jews that lived in Asia Minor. (2:11, 3:1)

The overall theme of the letter

The overall theme is God's election for the purpose of holiness. (1:4) In here are displayed immense riches of God the Father, that are bundled up in God the Son, outside of whom there can be no enjoyment of such divine benevolence, and that are sealed and held securely By God the Holy Spirit.

The Reason of Writing to Them (3:1)

1. That God's election, mercy, redemption, inheritance, preservation, and resurrection are by no means merited but are totally and utterly and incontestably as a gift of God and are in accordance with the good pleasure of his will and to the praise of his glorious grace and which are lavished on us, without measure, in Christ, the Beloved One. (1:1,5,6,7,11,13,20, 2:1,5,8)
2. That Paul had received a revelation by God to make known to the Gentiles the mystery of Christ, which was hidden in God for ages wherein are contained the incalculable riches of Christ, namely that Gentiles:
 - a. Are no longer:
 - i. Without Christ (2:12)
 - ii. Excluded from the citizenship of Israel (2:12)
 - iii. Foreigners to the covenants of promise (2:12)
 - iv. Without hope and without God in the world (2:12)
 - b. But are:
 - i. Members of the same body (3:6)
 - ii. Fellow citizens with the saints (2;29)

- iii. Partners in the promise (3:6)
 - iv. Members of God's household for whom Paul prays that they may know the hope of God's calling (2:19, 1:18)
- 3. That Christ has endowed the church with the gifts of apostles and prophets (times past) and evangelist, pastors, and teachers, (time present) equipping the saints for the work of ministry to build up the body of Christ in the knowledge of God's Son lest they be tossed and blown around by false teaching

The Purpose of the Letter

- 1. Therefore, live worthy of the calling you have received (4:1-3)
 - a. Will all humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace
- 2. Therefore, we must not live as we once did:
 - a. You should no longer live as the gentiles live (4:17-19)
 - i. In the futility of their thoughts
 - ii. Given to promiscuity and every kind of impurity
 - b. You should live as Christ has taught you (4:20-32)
 - i. Take off the old way of life that is corrupted by deceitful desires
 - ii. Be renewed in the spirit of your minds
 - iii. Put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness
- 3. Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor (4:25)
- 4. Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly love children
 - a. Pay careful attention to how you live (5:15)
 - i. Conduct in the church
 - ii. Conduct in the family – husbands and wives, parents and children
 - iii. Conduct in the world – employers and employees

Genuine Christianity is not only knowing but knowing and doing, not only knowledge of the head but the enlightenment of the heart as well. A person cannot be a child of God unless he is also an imitator of his holy character.

The Help Provided in Carrying out this Good Purpose

For this reason, take up the full armor of God (6:13-20)

Challenging Verse

- a. ..." but be filled by the Spirit" (5:18)

The first 3 chapters deal with our riches that we have in Christ and the other 3 deal with holy practical living as a result of these riches. We are to understand this verse in the practical sense and not in a mystical sense. Here we have a contrast: reckless living is the result of being drunk with wine, but holy living is to

be filled with the Spirit and therefore to be filled with the Spirit is to live in holiness, just as to be drunk with wine is to live in recklessness.

Philippians

Title

Philippians derives its name from the Greek city where the church to which it was addressed was located. Philippi was the first town in Macedonia where Paul established a church. Originally known as Krenides (“The Little Fountains”) because of the numerous nearby springs, Philippi (“city of Philip”) received its name from Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great). Attracted by the nearby gold mines, Philip conquered the region in the fourth century B.C. In the second century B.C., Philippi became part of the Roman province of Macedonia. (gty.org)

Author and Date

The unanimous testimony of the early church was that the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians. The traditional view is that Philippians, along with the other Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon), was written during Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome (ca. A.D. 60–62). (gty.org)

To Whom was it Written

To the believers who were in Philippi. It seems that the church was comprised primarily of Gentiles and a few Jews. The salutation “To all the saints” I believe is indicative of this. To all saints, young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile.

The Themes of the Letter

1. Exhortation to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Encouragement that as citizens of heaven to walk worthy of the gospel and though we must suffer for it yet let us honor him in our body whether by life or by death. Christ in life is our aim and Christ in death is our gain. The encouragement is grounded in the fact that it has been granted to us on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him (1:29)

2. The relationship between God’s work of grace in us and the natural outflow of that grace to one another.

If we have been encouraged in Christ, consoled in his love, have been united with his Spirit then we must unite with his will (“make my joy complete”), namely that we should think of each other with the same holy affection that Christ thinks of us, (“thinking the same way”) having the same love for each other as Christ has for us (“having the same love”) being united with one purpose and in humility to consider others more important than ourselves just as Christ, God of very God, humbled himself. For this reason and in this sense, we are to work out our own salvation.

3.

a. Caution towards heresy or false teaching, namely that circumcision done in the flesh and the works of the law are necessary for righteousness.

b. A reminder of sound teaching and the true doctrine of righteousness, namely worshiping by the Spirit of God, boasting in Christ, and putting no confidence in the flesh.

“But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ” and “Because of him (Christ) I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung...” (3:7-8). You cannot have two saviors, both Christ and works. If you would have the righteousness that is from God, through faith in Christ, you must give up your own righteousness from the law. Christ is so big that when he comes to dwell in our hearts, he occupies the whole space thereof so that there is no room for another. Those who put confidence in the flesh, think little of Christ, but we who boast in Christ know him to be the one who fills all things in every way. If Christ is in our heart, our abounding sin is forgotten and swallowed up in the sea of greater abounding grace, our debt to God’s righteousness has been erased, there is no condemnation and no wrath to come. Our guilt is gone, our heart does not condemn us. Our conscience has no quarrel with us but is quiet and satisfied. When Christ is in our heart, the cup of our spiritual satisfaction is full and overflows. When the Christian has found this treasure in Christ, he does not add to it but on the contrary, he goes and sells everything in order to secure it. Preach to me Christ and I shall boast in him but preach to me good works and I shall consider them as dung, and so I must “so that I may gain Christ” (3:8).

4. Practical counsel

- a. Agreement in the Lord and our part in aiding one another toward this goal,
- b. Rejoicing in the Lord,
- c. Prayer with thanksgiving rather than and preferable to worry

Challenging Verse

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (2:12)

1. he is speaking to already saved people and therefore they cannot work out to gain that which they already possess
 - a. work out your salvation, not work out for your salvation. Display God’s work in you. Are you a lamp? Then let your light shine that they may see your good works. Has God created you in Christ? To what end? For good works which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. If God is working in you, both to will and to do, then it is only natural that you should exhibit the fruit of his work in you just as when the branch is connected to the vine brings forth the grape.

Colossians

Title

Colossians is named for the city of Colosse, where the church it was addressed to was located. It was also to be read in the neighboring church at Laodicea (4:16). (gty.org)

Author and Date

Paul is identified as author at the beginning (1:1; cf. v. 23; 4:18), as customarily in his epistles. The testimony of the early church, including such key figures as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius, confirms that the opening claim is genuine. Additional evidence for Paul's authorship comes from the book's close parallels with Philemon, which is universally accepted as having been written by Paul. Both were written (ca. A.D. 60–62) while Paul was a prisoner in Rome (4:3, 10, 18; Philem. 9, 10, 13, 23); plus the names of the same people (e.g., Timothy, Aristarchus, Archippus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, Onesimus, and Demas) appear in both epistles, showing that both were written by the same author at about the same time. For biographical information on Paul see Introduction to Romans: Author and Date. (gty.org)

To Whom it was Written

It was written to the Gentile believers at Colosse although there might have been some Jewish believers in that church since there was a Jewish legalism as well as paganism that contributed to heresy that was spreading at Colosse.

The Theme of the Letter

Avoiding destructive heresies based on human traditions and commands and holding on to the head, which is Christ, and that in him, who is God of very God, we have redemption, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and peace with God.

Supporting Themes (the mystery hidden but now revealed)

1. Christ's divine nature (1:15-19, 2:9)
2. Christ's redeeming work (1:14,20-22,27, 2:10-15)
3. Christ, our perfection/righteousness (2:10,14)
4. Christ, our justification and vindication (2:14-15)
5. Christ, the guarantor of our salvation (1:22,3:3)
6. Christ the substance (2:17)

The reason for Writing this Letter

"We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom..." (1:28)

"For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me in person." (2:1)

The Purpose of Writing

1. "...so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (1:28)
2. "...so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery – Christ, in him are hidden all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge." (2:2-3)

Having this purpose accomplished in us by God, we then are called:

- a. To be heavenly minded and not earthly minded (3:1-2)
- b. To put to death our earthly nature for which reason God's wrath is coming (3:2-6)
- c. To display it at Church, at home and abroad the character of our new self, which accords with God's holy character (3:10-25)
- d. To be devoted to prayer both for ourselves as well as for others (4:2-4)

Challenging Verse

"He is...the firstborn over all creation" (1:15)

The usage of the word "firstborn" is here to signify significance more than it is to signify time of occurrence. It is a title of prominence rather than date stamp. When God tells Pharaoh to let his people go, the reason he gives is "Israel is my firstborn son" and if Pharaoh disregards that which is important to God, God will kill what is precious to Pharaoh, namely his firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23).

The title "firstborn" has no significance if it refers to date and not to the honor conferred upon the firstborn. The firstborn was called so because he was to be the sole heir of his father's possessions. "Not that way, my father! This one is the firstborn" said Joseph to Jacob when he saw that his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim's head who was the younger and not Manasseh who was the older.

Now, the context makes it clear that Christ is the only savior and therefore the only heir of all God's elect. "All that the Father gives me will come to me..." (John 6:37) and "Ask of my and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession." (Psalm. 2:8)

I believe this is what the text means by the title "firstborn." Not to mention the fact that "he must have the first place in everything" (Col. 1:18). Who but God can be first in everything and if Christ is first then he is God, and if God, then he is eternal, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. (Heb. 7:3)

Philemon

Title and the Recipients

Philemon, the recipient of this letter, was a prominent member of the church at Colosse (vv. 1,2; cf. Col. 4:9), which met in his house (v. 2). The letter was for him, his family, and the church.

Author and Date

The book claims that the Apostle Paul was its writer (vv. 1,9,19), a claim that few in the history of the church have disputed, especially since there is nothing in Philemon that a forger would have been motivated to write. It is one of the Prison Epistles, along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Its close connection with Colossians, which Paul wrote at the same time (ca. A.D. 60–62; cf. vv. 1,16), brought early and unquestioned vindication of Paul's authorship by the early church fathers (e.g., Jerome, Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia).

The Theme of the Letter

Forgiveness and its nature. "Welcome him as you would me" (v. 17)

- What, to look on him who has wronged me and stole from me the same as the one who is a delight to me and has been a benefactor to my soul? Yes! "Welcome him as you would me"

- What, not to see him as useless that he is but to embrace him as a loving brother? Yes! "Welcome him as you would me." (v. 17)

- What, instead of receiving him with lashes I am to throw him a welcoming party? Yes! "Welcome him as you would me." (v. 17)

- What, instead of charging him for what he owes me, I am to charge it to your account? Yes! "Welcome him as you would me. And if he has wronged you in any way. Or owes you anything, charge that to my account... I will repay it." (v. 17-19)

Forgiveness is not only the removal of punishment but the memory of it as well. It is not removing the offense from the memory of your mind while at the same time removing the offender from the affection of your heart. Forgiveness is the act of doing good and if it dispenses only mercy and not grace as well it is a good left undone. What is the purpose of removing an obstacle if not for the goal of progress, and what is purpose of removing the offense if not for the goal of reconciliation with the offender? Here, therefore we have the beautiful picture of God's forgiveness toward us and the command to do the same, to forgive each other just as God, in Christ, forgave us. (Eph. 4:32)