



Ephesians: God the Exalted

Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

Background

Ephesians is the 49th book of the Bible and the tenth book in the New Testament. Paul briefly visited Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey but spent more than two years ministering to the church there on his third missionary journey. Ephesus was the most important city of strategic importance as a commercial, political, and religious center in the Roman province of Asia, located on the western coast of what is modern day Turkey. Ephesus was also famous for being the "guardian of the temple of the great Artemis" (Acts 19:35), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. During his third missionary journey, Paul's ministry in Ephesus was very successful as "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10).

Paul wrote the Letter to the Ephesians while he was in prison in Rome c. 60-61 AD. Ephesians is one of four letters written by Paul from prison known as the "Prison Epistles." Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians are the other three. Ephesians appears to have been a circular letter intended for more churches than just the one at Ephesus. Unlike many of Paul's other letters, Ephesians does not address any specific problem or false teaching. Rather, Ephesians is a more formal letter in which Paul writes so that his readers will have a better understanding of God's eternal purpose and grace. Paul expounds on what it really means to be a Christian, both in faith and in practice.

The Short Story

The Church is chosen, redeemed, and united in Christ; therefore the Church should walk in unity and in newness of life, in the strength of the Lord and by the armor of God.

What's the Big Idea?

In Ephesians, Paul discusses the big picture of God's eternal purpose and grace. In the first three chapters, Paul writes about the believer's position in Christ and the spiritual blessings given to us by God. These blessings include adoption as sons and daughters of God, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness of sins, wisdom, an inheritance, the seal of the Holy Spirit, life, grace, and citizenship (1:3-14). Paul emphasized that we have been saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that this salvation is a gift of grace from God and nothing we have earned. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (2:8-9). Our salvation, Paul writes, is not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. The climax of God's purpose, "when the times will have reached their fulfillment," is to bring all things in the universe together under Christ (1:10). Therefore, Paul writes, since we have been chosen by God through the work of Jesus Christ and made alive in Him, we are "to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (4:1). In the final chapters of Ephesians, Paul gives practical instructions for living out the Christian life in relationships with others in the church, in the home, and in the world. The Christian life should be characterized by unity, holiness, love, wisdom, and perseverance in spiritual warfare.

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Ephesians was written after many churches had been founded, and it is the one writing in the New Testament in which the word "church" means the church universal rather than the local group. The new picture of the church is as a single functioning body created out of Jew and Gentile, equipped with standards of its own, and engaged in a spiritual conflict. Its goal is "the unity of the faith...the knowledge of the Son of God...the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the church (2:20) and as members of His body, we are to follow His lead. "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (5:1-2).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

1:15-23 ¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,..."

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Why is praying for others so important? How are we to intercede for others?
- How hard is it to stay focused on the King and His Kingdom according to Matthew 6:30-33 ?
- What is the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation"? How does it work in the life of a Christian?
- Why is hope important to us as Christians? What brings hope to you when facing a challenge?
- What attributes stand out in Phil 2:9-11 about Jesus? How do they make you feel about the Lord?

Practical Application

- What needs to go in your life? What needs to be maintained in your life? What needs to change?
- What is your perception and perspective of Jesus? How could you come to know Him better?
- Where have you felt hopeless in a situation? Where do you need to be refreshed with hope today?
- What causes you to forget the magnitude of God's overwhelming power? Why?
- Why is communion a reminder of the most powerful force in all creation? What does it represent?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:9-10 "he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure...."
- 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people"
- 3:20-21 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..."
- 4:11-13 "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..."
- 6:18-20 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...."

Bonus Feature: The Armor of God

In Ephesians chapter six Paul admonishes believers to equip themselves for spiritual battle by putting on the full armor of God. John MacArthur elaborates, "To take advantage of the strength of God's might, a believer must also 'put on the full armor of God, so that [he] will be able to stand firm' (Eph 6:11). The Greek word translated 'put on' (*enduo*) carries the idea of permanence. The full armor of God is not something to be put on and taken off occasionally but is something to be put on permanently. When used in a military sense, the Greek word translated 'stand firm' (*histemi*) refers to holding a critical position while under attack. Living an obedient, Spirit-empowered life is what enables us to stand firm." Source www.gty.org.

Personal Takeaways and Notes