

#11. THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

1. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is written in order to explain the nature and purpose of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. Many scholars believe it was an "encyclical letter", written to several churches within a region. Supporting this view is the fact that some of the earliest manuscripts do not have the name Ephesus in the text. The supposition is that the letter was intended for each of the churches in Asia Minor. This explains the lack of personal information in the greeting and farewell, (except in regard to Tychichus, who delivered the letters). The copy of the letter delivered to the church at Ephesus is one of the extant copies used in our canon of Scripture.

2. **Authorship and date** - Paul wrote the letter according to 1:1 and 3:1.
 - It was probably written from a Roman prison in 60-62AD. Along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, Ephesians is considered one of the Apostle's "Prison Letters". To some degree, 2 Timothy is also considered a prison epistle, while it is generally categorized as a Pastoral letter.

 - The first three chapters are highly theological, while the final three chapters focus on the Christian standard of behavior and holy living.

3. **Paul's emphasis** centers on helping the Ephesians understand their identity in Christ.

4. **Key Chapter**
 - It is difficult to identify key chapters since each one is considered of vital importance, but chapter six is perhaps the best known section as Paul discusses the dynamic of Christian Armor and spiritual warfare. In it he discusses:
 - The helmet, which symbolizes salvation in a general sense.

 - The breastplate, which symbolizes both our positional righteousness in Christ, and the practical righteousness of embracing a holy lifestyle.

 - The belt reminds us of truth, upon which other pieces of armor hang or connect.

- The shoes represent the message of the Gospel and the life of peace which is based on reconciliation to God.
- The shield represents faith; the spear represents the powerful, living Word of God.

5. Key Verses

- **Ephesians 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 - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
- **Ephesians 2:13-16 NIV** - “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh, the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the Cross, by which He put to death their hostility.”
- **Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV** - “It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
- **Ephesians 6:10 NIV** - **Finally**, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

6. Key People

- **Paul** - The founding pastor of the churches in Southern Galatia. The story of Paul’s ministry there is found in Acts 13 and 14. Under the tutelage of Rabbi Gamaliel, a young Paul had received intensive training in the Scriptures and Jewish traditions while living in Jerusalem (Acts 23:3-6 and Philippians 3:5, 6).
- **Tychichus** - an associate of Paul who probably delivered the letters to the respective churches.

7. Key Place

- **Ephesus** - the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

8. Key Themes

- **God's eternal purpose** - God's purpose is the union of all His people, Jew and Gentile alike, into one new creation.
- **The Church** - is the result of this union.
- **Christian Behavior** - as members of God's family we are to live holy, peaceful lives, worthy of His calling and Name.

9. The Contents of Ephesians - The idea of unity is such strong emphasis in this letter that some have suggested a simple outline centering on that idea:

- There is unity between Christ and His people (1:1-3:21). This affects our standing before God.
- There is a resulting unity within the family of God (4:1-6:24). This affects our conduct in the world.

A more detailed outline falls along these lines...

- **Greetings to the Church (1:1,2)**
- **The Mystery of the Church (1:3-3:13)**
 - Our eternal standing in Christ (1:3-6)
 - Our redemption through Christ (1:7-10)
 - Our Inheritance Because of Christ (1:11-14)
 - Our Resources in Christ (1:15-23)
 - Our Unity in Christ (2:11-3:13)

- **The Destiny of the Church (3:14-21)**
- **The Lifestyle of the Church (4:1-6)**
- **The Building of the Church (4:7-16)**
- **The Life of the Church (5:1-21)**
 - Walk in Love (5:1-7)
 - Walk in the Light (5:8-14)
 - Walk in Wisdom (5:15-18)
 - Walk in the Holy Spirit (5:18-21)
- **Authority and Submission in the Church (5:22-6:9)**
 - Husbands and Wives (5:22-33)
 - Parents and Children (6:1-4)
 - Employers and Employees (6:5-9)
- **The Armory and Battle of the Church (6:10-20)**
 - Our Warfare (6:10-13)
 - Our Weapons and Armor (6:14-20)
- **Farewell to the Ephesians (6:21-24)**

Worth noting about Ephesians:

- There is a strong emphasis on unity both in the narrow sense (with each other there in Ephesus), and in the broader sense (the wall between Jew and Gentile has been broken down).

- Christians are one in spiritual body.
 - Christians are one in spirit.
 - Christians are one in our eternal hope.
 - Christians are one in a common faith.
 - Christians are united under one Lord.
 - Christians experience one process of baptism.
 - Christians serve the one true and living God.
- The concept of 'Mystery' is part of the message of Ephesians. Paul's use of the word doesn't imply there is something that needs to be solved, but rather it conveys the idea of a previously hidden truth that is now openly revealed. The word is used four times in Colossians, twice in Romans, and once each in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, but is used six times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 4; 4:9; 5:32; 6:19). Paul's emphasis revolves around the plan for God's church; the true symbolism of marriage, and the revelatory dynamic of the Gospel. We must remember that the truest, deepest and richest understanding of the Gospel can only be received by the revelatory assistance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-9; 1:18-31).

When reading Ephesians:

- Tychichus is probably also delivering two letters to the congregation in Colosse (the letter to the Colossians, and the personal correspondence known as Philemon).
- Remember that Paul is specifically concerned with communicating the fact that God has fully integrated Gentiles into His family. Not only are Gentiles included, but Gentiles and Jews have been fused together. There is a sense in which God will perform addition work in the lives of the Jews (Romans 9, 10, 11), but for all intents and purposes, we are eternally united as 'one people in Christ Jesus'. We will see the idea of 'unity' scattered throughout this brief letter.
- Never underestimate God's love for His church and the value He places upon her. She is more than an *organization*, she is an *organism* - the Bride of Christ.