



Ephesians

**“A Letter of Love”
Lord of the Lakes
Adult Bible Class**

Ephesians 1:1–2

A letter about love

Look

Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus during his first imprisonment in Rome. (3:1; 4:1) The city of Ephesus was important in the ancient world. It was a large city, a thriving trade center, and an important administrative city.

Verses 1, 2 “Paul . . . To the saints who are in Ephesus . . . Grace to you and peace”—This is the standard three-part opening for a letter in those days: name of the author, name of the recipients, and a greeting.

Discuss

1. Briefly review Paul’s work in the city of Ephesus. (Acts 18:19–21; 19:1–20:1)
2. Why were the Christians in Ephesus called saints? (verse 2)
3. Paul’s letters were all written to specific people, and Paul had specific reasons for writing them. For example, Galatians was written to counteract the influence of false teachers who were calling into question the nature of the gospel. You may want to read Galatians 1:6. That verse sets the tone for the entire letter. Now contrast it with Ephesians 1:3. What can you expect to be the tone for this letter?

Apply

4. Are the members of your congregation saints? Explain.
5. Explain: Paul was an apostle, someone sent out with authority by God’s command. How is Paul’s call the same as your pastor’s call? How is it different? your call?
6. Why are the words *grace* and *peace* so comforting to Christians?

Paul began his letter to the Ephesian Christians by stressing God’s grace. That theme will carry throughout the entire book.

Ephesians 1:3–14

God's plan for our salvation

Look

Verses 3–14 are one sentence in the original Greek (some two hundred words!). It is a hymn of praise that can be broken down into three sections: the Father predestined us (verses 3–6), the Son redeemed us (verses 7–12), and the Spirit sealed us (verses 13, 14).

Verses 4, 5, 14 *"He chose us"; "he predestined us"*—These words are at the heart of these verses. The teaching of predestination is sometimes avoided because we have difficulty understanding some parts of it. Yet it is one of the most comforting of all the Bible's teachings, for it says that we're saved by God's grace alone and that our salvation lies in his hands. Because of this, nothing can separate us from God's love.

Discuss

1. In verse 3, Paul used the term "heavenly places." This term refers to the affairs of the spiritual world, issues of importance coming from the throne of God. This certainly applies to the fact that God predestined us before the beginning of the world. What do we mean when we say that God predestined us? (verses 4, 5)
2. What is the mystery Paul talks about in verse 9? (Also see Romans 16:25.)
3. How is the Holy Spirit a "the guarantee of our inheritance"? (verse 14)

Apply

4. The topic of predestination raises some difficult questions, yet Paul does not focus on them. Rather than debate difficulties, what does Paul do with this teaching?
5. How can you be sure that you have been elected and chosen to go to heaven?

Paul praises God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for electing us, redeeming us, and bringing us to faith.

Ephesians 1:15–23

A prayer to be enlightened

Look

Verse 18 *“Hope”*—Paul is talking about the hope we have as Christians. The biblical concept of hope is much different than the way we sometimes use the word in our everyday talk. When we say “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow,” we are really saying we wish it would not rain. But it may rain anyway. The biblical concept of hope implies certainty. We *are* going to heaven someday. The only reason this is called “hope” is that we haven’t received it yet. But it is as certain as Christ’s victory for us.

Discuss

1. What caused Paul to thank God for the Ephesian Christians? (verse 15)
2. What was Paul asking for when he asked God to give the Ephesians “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation”? (verse 17)
3. What is the hope to which we have been called?
4. We all know how blind and powerless we are in spiritual matters. However, what power is at work in us who believe?
5. Why is the church called Jesus’ body? (verses 22, 23)

Apply

6. How does the hope we have in Christ shape our lives and dictate our actions?
7. We confess that right now Jesus is at the right hand of God. What comfort does this give us, especially when we see what is happening in the world today?

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians. He thanked God for the blessings God had given them and then asked God to cause the Ephesians to know him even better.

Ephesians 2:1–10

From death to life

Look

Verses 2, 5 *“Dead . . . alive”*—Paul contrasts the life we have in Christ with what we were by nature, completely dead in sin.

Verses 8 and 9 of this chapter are extremely clear about salvation by grace through faith. Paul piles up phrases to make his point: *“by grace . . . through faith . . . not your own doing . . . gift of God . . . not a result of works . . . no one may boast.”*

Discuss

1. What picture does Paul paint when he says that we were “dead in [our] trespasses and sins”? (verse 1)
2. The idea of death is not to be carried too far. We were certainly dead to God. But there was quite a bit of activity going on within us. Describe that activity. (verses 2, 3)
3. God loved us, but it was not because he saw anything lovable in us. Why did God love us and shower his grace on us?
4. We often say, “To God alone be the glory.” How does Paul express this in his discussion of our being raised to life? (verse 7)
5. We were predestined to come to faith in our Lord. But predestination also affects how we live our lives. Explain.

Apply

6. Reflect on verse 6. As you go about your day-to-day life, what can you always remember?

Paul makes it crystal clear that we are saved by grace alone. God’s grace makes us heirs of heaven and servants of the Lord here and now.

Ephesians 2:11–22

God's grace throughout the ages

Look

- Verse 11 *"The uncircumcision"; "the circumcision"*—In this section Paul describes the new relationship between Jews and Gentiles. God told Abraham and his descendants to circumcise themselves as a sign of his covenant with them. This sign was not given to non-Jewish people. From that time on, Jewish people were separated from non-Jewish people. This separation became even more pronounced when God gave Israel his laws on Mount Sinai.
- Verses 12, 14 *"Separated"; "dividing wall of hostility"*—In some ways it is puzzling to listen to Paul's description of the hostility and division between Jews and Gentiles. After all, in Old Testament times many Gentiles came to faith. What's more, God wanted Israel to be a light shining out into the gentile world, leading them to God. Yet Paul is evaluating the situation from the standpoint of the law. God's law kept Gentiles from being citizens of Israel. It kept them and their nation from receiving the promises God gave the nation of Israel. Even converts to Judaism were never given full worship rights along with the Jews, even though many accepted this limitation on their rights and worshiped God anyway. In general, however, the division created by the law kept the Gentiles separate from the Jews. Gentiles went on worshipping their false gods and remained separate from the true God.

Discuss

1. Although the Israelites, whom God put under his law, had God's promises, they needed Christ. Why?

2. Paul says that Christ did three things.
 - Christ brought Israel to God by

 - Christ brought the Gentiles to God by

 - Christ joined Jews and Gentiles by

Apply

3. Reflect on the fact that you are part of a grand temple that is being built by God himself.

In Christ, Jews and Gentiles can stand before God and are at peace with him.

Ephesians 3:1–13

Paul's work: to preach the mystery of God's plan of salvation

Look

Verses 3, 6 *"The mystery"*—Paul continues his discussion from the last chapter. He had described how God freed the Jews from the law and, at the same time, opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. It is a mystery, particularly to the Jews, that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith. It's a mystery because it needed to be revealed; people couldn't discover this truth by themselves. Now Paul continues by showing his involvement in God's plan.

Discuss

1. What is Paul's role in God's plan of salvation?
2. How did the administration of God's grace to Paul benefit the Ephesians?
3. Why did Paul consider his ministry a special gift of God's grace? (verses 7, 8)
4. Who is watching as the message of the gospel is proclaimed and as God builds his church?
5. Why weren't the Ephesians to be discouraged by Paul's suffering? (verse 13)

Apply

6. Do you approach God in freedom and confidence? Why or why not? Is there anything that can keep us from doing that?
7. How can suffering be said to work out for glory?

Paul became an apostle because of God's grace. God gave Paul the honor of telling people, both Jews and Gentiles, that their sins were forgiven.

Ephesians 3:14–21

Three prayers for God's people

Look

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians three things. Paul prayed that God would strengthen their inner being (verses 14–17), lead them to know his love (verses 18, 19a), and grasp the fullness that is theirs as members of God's family (verse 19b). He ended his prayer with a doxology, a hymn of praise to God. As you study Paul's prayer, find lessons you can use in your own prayer life.

Discuss

1. How does Paul begin his prayer for the Ephesians?

2. What kind of strength does Paul pray for in verses 16 and 17?

3. As our spirits are strengthened, we come to know Christ's love more and more and we grow in power. What kind of power is Paul referring to?

4. Paul asks that God would fill us with his fullness. This does not mean we become gods. What is God's fullness?

Apply

5. Paul introduced his prayer by saying that he knelt before God the Father. Kneeling is a good custom because it reminds us that we are God's servants who humbly come before the King with our prayers. Certainly it's not necessary to kneel when we pray. How can we be sure to "mentally" kneel every time we pray?

6. Why should we not hold back in our petitions to our heavenly Father? (verse 20)

7. Share a time when you prayed and the Lord gave you far more than you prayed for.

Paul prayed on behalf of the Christians in Ephesus, asking that God increase their knowledge of his love.

Ephesians 4:1–16

Believers are united in Christ's church

Look

In many of Paul's letters, there are two parts. He begins by reminding us of what God has done for us. Then he continues by instructing us on how our lives reflect our calling. The dividing line between these two sections in Ephesians is between chapters 3 and 4. At the beginning of chapter 4, Paul tells us to live a life *worthy* of the calling we have received. The Greek word for *worthy* means "that which balances the scales." Of course, we do not pay God back for what he has done for us. Rather, we live our lives so as to reflect our calling as God's people.

Discuss

1. What qualities does Paul list in verses 2 and 3? How do these qualities help the church maintain peace and unity as it goes about doing its work in this world?

2. What unites us? (verses 4, 5)

3. Why did Jesus descend to this world, complete his work, and then ascend into heaven?

4. What are some gifts God gave the church? (verse 11)

5. What are pastors and teachers to do for the congregation?

Apply

6. Paul says that the work of pastors is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (verse 12). What does that mean for the way your pastor uses his time?

7. What are the challenges associated with "speaking the truth in love"? (verse 15)

The unity we have as Christians comes directly from God. He has unified us in a common faith. He has given us called workers to prepare us for works of service.

Ephesians 4:17–32

Living a truth-filled life

Look

Verses 22, 24 *“Old self” . . . “new self”*—These are Paul’s terms for the corrupt, sinful nature and for the new being that God has created in us through the gospel. These terms help us understand ourselves as Christians. There is no “converting” the old man. We must simply put him off by daily contrition and repentance. We cannot “create” the new man. Only God can do that. We put on the new man as we remember what God has done for us in Christ.

Discuss

1. Focus on Paul’s description of the unbeliever. Does this describe the world today?
2. What does it mean, specifically, that truth is found “in Jesus”? (verse 21)

Apply

3. What are we to do when
 - we are tempted to lie?
 - we are rightly angry over some evil?
 - we are tempted to go to bed angry?
 - we are tempted to take something that is not ours?
 - we are tempted to joke in a course way?
 - we are tempted to make light of God’s Holy Spirit, who lives in us?
 - other people do bad things to us?
4. What things can you do this week to put off the old self and put on the new self? Be specific!
5. What is the secret to “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you”?

Paul urged the Ephesians to put off their sinful nature and to live God-pleasing lives.

Ephesians 5:1–20

Gospel encouragement for godly living

Look

Verse 10 *“Discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”* The ESV translation of verse 10 might be a bit misleading. It’s not difficult to learn what pleases God. The word Paul used here means to approve of or to put a stamp of approval on something. Paul wanted the Ephesians to approve of (and do!) the same things God does.

Discuss

1. Serving the Lord is doing the right thing for the right reason. Whenever Paul encourages us to serve the Lord, he always turns his exhortation into a gospel event. That is, he weaves the gospel into his encouragement in a beautiful way. How does he do this in verse 1?
2. What is the link between immorality, impurity, and greed, on the one hand, and idolatry, on the other?
3. Give modern examples of *empty words*.
4. What is the light we live in? Contrast life in the light with life in the darkness.
5. What does Paul mean when he tells us to be “filled with the Spirit”? (verse 18)

Apply

6. Paul paints a beautiful picture in the first verse. Imagine a little boy trying to imitate his beloved father as he pounds a nail into a piece of wood. What is more natural than that? Paul directed the Ephesians to imitate God in the same way. Think about the life of Jesus for a few minutes. What actions and attitudes can we imitate?
7. Why is it important to commit hymns and psalms to memory?

Paul wants Christians to imitate the Lord by staying away from evil and living as children of the light.

Ephesians 5:21–33

A God-pleasing relationship between spouses

Look

Verse 21 *“Submitting”*—The People’s Bible Commentary on Ephesians gives us a good definition of the word *submit*: “The root meaning of the Greek verb means simply ‘to rank people or things *in order* under some specific pattern.’ It does not imply inferiority or lesser value, as our English verbs too easily suggest. To ‘be subordinate’ might come closest to reflecting the Greek” (pp. 202–203, CPH, 2005).

Discuss

1. Why will all Christians submit to one another? (verse 21)
2. In the following sections, Paul applies the principle of submission to various people. In this section, he applies it to husbands and wives. How do wives submit to their husbands? How do husbands submit to their wives?
3. What will a Christian wife keep in mind regarding her relationship with her husband? (verse 23)
4. What will a Christian husband keep in mind regarding his relationship with his wife? (verses 25–29)
5. What main characteristic of Christ’s love for the church does Paul focus on here?

Apply

6. Give an example of a wife having a submissive attitude toward her husband.
7. Give an example of a husband loving his wife as God wants him to.
8. Why is it important for husbands and wives to “leave” their original families as Paul says in verse 31?

Paul addresses Christian husbands and wives, encouraging them to live together in a God-pleasing way. He compares their relationship to Christ and the church.

Ephesians 6:1–9

Parents and children, slaves and masters

Look

Verse 5 *“Slaves”*—Some might think that Paul should have advised slaves to rebel or flee from their masters. But slavery was an institution of the day. Over the years, Christians have had a lot to do with the abolishment of slavery, but Paul was dealing with the situation as it existed.

Discuss

1. What does God promise those children who obey their parents out of respect and love for him? (verses 2, 3)
2. Why are only fathers mentioned in verse 4? What is God’s command to fathers?
3. Verses 5–8 are directed to Christian slaves. How does Paul weave the gospel into his encouragement to slaves?
4. What spiritual truths are to guide masters? (verse 9)

Apply

5. How might a father “provoke” a child?
6. Apply verses 5–8 to an employment situation today.

Paul addresses children, parents, slaves (employees), and masters (employers), and tells them how God wants them to live.

Ephesians 6:10–24

Weapons of Christian warfare

Look

Paul loved to use illustrations! In this final section of Ephesians, Paul used the picture of a Roman soldier to teach the Ephesians about spiritual warfare.

Discuss

1. Verse 10 makes it perfectly clear where we receive the power to carry on in our spiritual battle with Satan. Why are Paul's words in these verses critical for us to remember?
2. What is the devil constantly scheming to do to us?
3. Twice (verses 11, 13) Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God. Why do you think Paul stresses the *full* armor of God?
4. List the pieces of armor God tells us to put on. Why is each important in our fight?
5. Why should a man like Paul ask people to pray that he would proclaim the gospel clearly and fearlessly?

Apply

6. Why is it important to remember that our battle is against spiritual forces? (verse 12)
7. Why might it be fitting to end our letters as Paul ended this letter? (verses 23, 24)

Paul ends his letter with a discussion of spiritual warfare. The weapons and power for our war come from God. Paul urges us to stay in constant communication with our Lord.