

Ephesians

Purpose: “To address the mystery of the church” (edited from New Geneva Study Bible).

Outline: 1:1-1:23 – Chosen to receive Christ and glorify God – Through the Church

2:1-22 – One in sin, One in Christ – Forming the Church

3:1-20 – Through the Gospel – Gentiles and Israel Become one Church

4:1-5:16 – Unity and Purity – Marks of the Church

5:17-6:9 – Filled with the Spirit – the Worship and Relationships of the Church

6:10-24 – Spiritual Armour – the Battle of the Church

Author: Paul

Date: 60-62 AD while imprisoned in Rome

Highlights:

This is the first of the four “prison epistles” – letters that Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome. The four letters are to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and the personal letter to Philemon.

This letter does not address any particular errors or heresy in the church, which frees Paul to focus on the mystery of the church. The tone of the letter is less instructive and more prayerful. This letter is a favorite among many because of its content and also because of its tone.

The letter begins with praise to God for blessings in Christ. This is broken down by looking at how the triune God rescues us from sin and brings us to salvation. We are elected by the Father (1:3-6), redeemed by the Son (1:7-10), and sealed by the Spirit (1:11-14). Paul concludes this opening with a prayer of thanksgiving.

The second chapter shows how we were all dead in our sins (1-3), were saved by grace (4-10) [2:8-10 is a great passage to memorize], that we might be one in Christ and form the body of Christ – that is, the Church (11-22).

Chapter three emphasizes that through the gospel we (Gentiles) become heirs with Israel (vv. 1-13). The Jews were the chosen people of the Old Testament. They were chosen to receive special blessings from God that they might share God’s love, power, and blessings with the world. Their failure to do this resulted in Gentiles being chosen as God’s people for the same task. Even if the Jews had rightly done their task as the chosen nation it would still have been necessary for a Messiah to come in order to redeem mankind from their sins. The chapter concludes with a passionate prayer (14-19) and powerful doxology (20-21).

It is in 3:2-7 that Paul talks about the “mystery” of God’s grace, which brings Jews and Gentiles together in Christ. This is not an unknown mystery – since the OT prophets anticipated it. It is mystery, which is fully made known through Christ and through its living out by the followers of Christ.

Chapter four applies the work of Christ to the lives of believers. Our life in Christ should cause us to become unified as the Body of Christ. We are not, simply, to seek unity for the sake of unity. We are to keep the unity that comes from following the same Lord in the same faith. Since we all came from the same place (sin) and have been given the same gift (salvation) by the same method (grace) through the same source (Christ), it stands to reason that there should be unity as the same Holy Spirit guides us all.

4:11-13 reminds us that it is the same God who calls each of us to serve the church according to the gifts that we have been given. And it should be noted that the purpose of pastors is “to prepare God’s people” (also translated “equip the saints”). Pastors are not to do the work, but are to teach in order that the people under their care may be equipped to do the work of the church.

Chapter four switches from discussing the unity of the church (vv. 1-16), to discussing the purity of the church (vv. 17-32). Whenever you discuss the one, you should discuss the other. Unity and purity must go together and should never be separated.

This continues into chapter five where we are taught to be imitators of God (vv. 1-16). We are able to imitate God when we are filled with the Spirit (v.18). And being filled with the Spirit should be evident in our Worship and our relationships (vertical relationship & horizontal relationships).

5:19-20 discusses our Spirit filled worship. 5:21 sets up our Spirit filled relationships. 5:22-33 discusses relationships between wives and husbands. 6:1-4 discusses relationships between children and parents. 6:5-9 discusses relationships between slaves and masters.

The final section lays out the spiritual armor of God that we need to wear in order to fight the spiritual battle, which is being continually waged against the church.