

**A Guide for Preachers  
and Teachers**

# **EPHESIANS**

**The Church and God's Eternal  
Purpose in Christ**

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## PREFACE

This Guide is designed to help people teach and preach the book of Ephesians. It is not a commentary but a series of notes and outlines aimed at helping Bible students grasp the message of Ephesians, the meaning of its text, and its relevance for today.

It has been born out of ten years of teaching courses in biblical theology and preaching. Doing so has impressed me with the special need today's church has for teaching and preaching that grapples seriously with the text of Scripture in the context of the overall message of the Bible. Biblical theology (the study of theology from the viewpoint of its progressive revelation in history) and exegesis (the study of the meaning of the text in its original historical setting) are essential tools for doing this. They have been brought together in this Guide to enable the teacher and preacher to see more quickly into the meaning and message of the book of Ephesians.

It needs to be understood that the aim in providing this Guide is not to relieve teachers and preachers of the need for their own diligent study. Nor is it intended to rob them of their creativity in outlining and writing sermons. It simply attempts to help them do these things more quickly by providing the focus that can be so hard to discover in expounding the Bible.

This Guide contains five sections. The first introduces the background, message and relevance of the book of Ephesians. It helps appreciate the circumstances in which the letter was written and how it can be used today. Extensive endnotes provide comments and quotations for those looking for more scholarly insights.

The second section is an interpretive outline of the contents of Ephesians. This provides an overview of the contents of the book in outline form and establishes a framework for appreciating the contribution of its individual sections.

The third section of the Guide looks closely at the text of Ephesians itself. It contains mechanical layouts, analytical outlines, unifying ideas and statements of relevance and purpose for individual sections of the letter. These are based on the approach to preaching outlined by Haddon W. Robinson in his book *Biblical Preaching*.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth section focuses the main themes of Ephesians and the fifth provides a devotional supplement to help teachers and preachers think their way deeply into the book. To accomplish the latter the text has been broken down into a number of small sections and questions and suggestions for reflection provided for each.

If this Guide (and others that may follow) helps those who minister God's word to do so more effectively it will have fully served its purpose. It is dedicated to seeing God glorified and his church strengthened through a full and faithful exposition of the mystery of Christ.

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July 2001

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980)

# INTRODUCING EPHESIANS

## I. BACKGROUND TO THE LETTER

### A. Author and Readers:

Ephesians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to Christians in Asia Minor while he was in prison in Rome some time around the year 63 A.D.

1. There can be little doubt that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison (3:1,13; 4:1). Some scholars think he was being held in the Roman garrison in Caesarea Philippi at the time, but the majority regard it as one of the prison epistles from Rome. As such, it is a companion letter to Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.<sup>i</sup>
2. Traditionally it has been understood to be a letter to the church in Ephesus, a prominent city in the western part of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). But a number of factors cast doubt as to its original destination. For one thing, it lacks the warmth one might expect of a letter written to a church so well known to the apostle. For another, it appears that Paul may not have actually met some of his readers (see 1:15 for example).<sup>ii</sup>
3. More recently it has become popular to think of Ephesians as a “circular” letter written to a number of churches in and about Ephesus.<sup>iii</sup> In some older manuscripts the word “Ephesus” is missing from the opening verse, pointing to the possibility that Paul originally left the destination blank. He may have intended the letter for a number of churches, copies of which could be supplied with the name of the church inserted in each, much as we address “circular” letters today.
4. We shall perhaps never know for sure whom this letter was written to. Carson, Moo and Morris are correct when they write  
“In the end we must probably conclude that we do not know for sure for whom the letter was originally intended. The evidence of the great mass of the MSS and the improbabilities of all the other views may drive us back to the view that it was meant for the church at Ephesus. If we feel that the absence of characteristic Pauline expressions of warmth (which would be probable in a letter to a church where he had spent as much time as he did at Ephesus) and of references to concrete situations are significant, then we will probably think of some form of circular. But we are left with difficulties whichever view we adopt.”<sup>iv</sup>

For the purposes of this study we will adopt the view that Paul did write this letter to the church at Ephesus, knowing as he did so that its contents were applicable not simply to one church, but to all of the churches in western Asia Minor.

### B. Occasion and Purpose:

Paul apparently wrote this letter to fit in with the planned visit of Tychicus and Onesimus to Ephesus rather than in response to any definite crisis in the church.

1. The occasion for the letter can be described in this way. While in prison in Rome Paul came into contact with a runaway slave named Onesimus. Through the apostle’s preaching Onesimus became a believer and a valued helper.<sup>v</sup> Much as Paul wanted to keep him with him, he saw it necessary to return him to his owner, a Christian man by the name of Philemon who lived in the city of Colosse in Asia Minor. To pave the way for his reacceptance, he wrote a delicate letter (our NT letter of Philemon) encouraging Philemon to welcome his truant slave back. At the same time, hearing that false teaching was causing trouble in the church of Colosse (presumably through its founder, Epaphras, who was with Paul at the time),<sup>vi</sup> the apostle also wrote a letter to the church as a whole (the NT letter of Colossians) to warn it against errors threatening its health. Both of these

letters he entrusted to one of his co-workers, a native of Ephesus named Tychicus,<sup>vii</sup> who was to accompany Onesimus on the journey.

2. In order to reach Colosse, Tychicus and Onesimus had to sail to Ephesus. From there they would strike out east to the Lycus Valley via the main Roman road to the Euphrates. Given Paul's long and close association with the church in Ephesus, nothing could have been more natural for him than to write a letter for the two travellers to deliver to it as they made their way to Colosse. There were seemingly no particular problems in the church demanding urgent pastoral attention so he was able to write in a positive, non-controversial way. Realizing that Tychicus and Onesimus would also be in contact with other churches on their journey as well (in major towns like Magnesia, Tralles, Hierapolis and Laodicea), he may have written with an eye to copies of this letter being left with them too – accounting for the “circular letter” theory above.<sup>viii</sup>
3. While not dominated by any single pastoral issue,<sup>ix</sup> the letter to the Ephesians does touch on topics that any church in western Asia Minor would have found relevant at the time. Most of them were made up largely of Gentiles and in many cases were probably experiencing Jew-Gentile tensions as converts grappled to reconcile the Jewish heritage of the church with their own Gentile background. Again, given their pre-Christian way of life and the social environment in which they existed, the threat of syncretism and relapse into pagan ways must have been constantly present. Furthermore, it is well known that the people of the region lived in dread of spiritual powers, and new believers probably still felt a certain fear towards them.<sup>x</sup> All of these matters are dealt with decisively in this letter, supporting the idea that though non-specific, it nevertheless was aimed at providing pastoral encouragement for a range of needs facing churches at that time.<sup>xi</sup> Arnold has stated the purpose of the letter well in saying that it was written predominantly to Gentile Christians "to advance their understanding of the glory of their redemption and encourage them to proper conduct in keeping with their faith."<sup>xii</sup>

### **C. Unique Features:**

In addition to its non-specific character mentioned above, Ephesians is unique among Paul's letters in its literary form and in the close similarity it bears to Colossians.

1. In literary form, the first part of Ephesians (chapters 1-3) is marked by the language of prayer and praise and has a lofty, almost hymnic tone about it. Long, complex sentences replace the terse, pungent style of parts of other letters. These stylistic features have caused some to question whether Paul wrote Ephesians.<sup>xiii</sup> His letters, however, were invariably situational. He wrote as occasion allowed or demanded. Here, “rising above the smoke of battle” as one writer puts it,<sup>xiv</sup> his style is more contemplative, in keeping with the exalted nature of his theme.<sup>xv</sup> Relieved of the need to correct particular problems or refute dangerous errors he is able to soar to new heights, expressing the mystery of God's purposes in Christ in what is essentially a prayer and praise report with added ethical counsels.<sup>xvi</sup>
2. The letter that results bears many resemblances to Colossians. Indeed, some believe that it is essentially a copying over of Colossians for another audience.<sup>xvii</sup> However, it is questionable that this is the best way of explaining the resemblances in the two letters. Colossians was written to counter heresies threatening the church and consistently reflects that purpose. But Ephesians, as we have noted, is not dominated by any single concern and should not be considered as a simple adaptation of Colossians. It is better to suppose that, with his recently written letter to the Colossians close at hand and its themes still in his mind, Paul wrote another letter developing many of those same thoughts with another audience in mind.<sup>xviii</sup> This accounts for the similarities yet preserves the distinctness of the letters.

# UNDERSTANDING EPHESIANS

## An Interpretive Outline of the Letter

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Ephesians divides naturally into two main sections. The first is often labeled doctrinal, and the second, practical. However, this popular classification is over-simple. Both sections are practical in terms of their purpose, and both are extensively doctrinal in content. It is better to say that the first outlines God's great purpose in Christ for believers, while the second traces the ethical implications that flow from that.

### Part I. GOD'S GREAT PURPOSE IN CHRIST FOR BELIEVERS (1:3-3:21)

#### A. Paul introduces himself to his readers (1:1-2)

##### 1. He introduces himself (v. 1)

- a) He identifies himself as *Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ* (v. 1). The title is typically added to affirm authority. Paul wants his readers to know that he is not writing as an individual, but as an accredited representative of Jesus Christ.
- b) He traces his authority ultimately to *the will of God* – an source that features largely in what follows. Paul recognizes that the whole plan of salvation flows from the will of the Father (1:5,9,11), and his apostleship represents an integral part of that will.

##### 2. He defines his readers (v. 1)

- a) Paul is writing to *Christians in Ephesus* (see *Introducing Ephesians* for a discussion of Paul's readers). This way of beginning a piece of writing clearly establishes that we are dealing with a letter.
- b) He describes them as "*saints and... the faithful in Christ*" [believers who are in Christ – NIV mg.]. At the outset he establishes that his readers belong to God's new community, and that they are, through faith, united to Christ Jesus.

##### 3. He pronounces a blessing (v. 2)

- a) He seeks *grace and peace* for them. Grace (the unmerited favour and blessing of God), and peace (the wholeness that comes from being right with God) aptly summarize the blessings of salvation.
- b) These have as their source "*God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" All spiritual blessings flow from the father, through the Son, and are conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit.

#### B. Paul praises God for the blessings he has showered on believers in Christ (1:3-14)

##### 1. He describes the nature of those blessings.

- a) They are *spiritual blessings in heavenly places* (v 3). Through their spiritual union with Christ, who has been raised by the power of God to the right hand of the Father (1:23), believers are even now seated with him in heavenly places (2:6; 4:4). There they enjoy spiritual blessings in Christ that God showers upon them through (or "in") his Son.
- b) *These blessings include* being holy and blameless in God's sight (1:4), being adopted as sons, and thus, being heirs of a heavenly inheritance (1:5,14), being

forgiven their sins through the redemption that comes through Christ's blood (1:7), and having knowledge of God's eternal purposes in Christ (1:9f).

## **2. He identifies the source of those blessings**

- a) Ultimately they stem from the *eternal purpose* and *predetermining will* of God (1:5,9,11). Believers were chosen in Christ before creation of the world (1:4), and were predestined to adoption (1:5) by the one who work out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (1:11).
- b) Directing this eternal purpose is the *absolute, sovereign good pleasure and love* (1:4,5,9) of God. No external cause moves him to bestow blessings upon sinners. Everything is done according to the pleasure of his will.

## **3. He specifies the means of those blessings**

- a) They are received freely *through the grace of God*, not through any merit or human worth (1:6,7).
- b) All come *in connection with Jesus Christ*. God showers his grace on us "in the One he loves" (1:6). God's ultimate purpose – to reunite all things in heaven and earth when the times have reached their fulfillment – is all centred in Christ (1:9,10). His redemptive work is the meritorious basis of all blessings (1:7), his Lordship is the means of their administration (1:9f, 22), and union with him through faith in the gospel is the way of participating in them (1:3,4,11,13).

## **4. He states the purpose of those blessings**

- a) While bringing incredible blessing to believers, they are *not ultimately given for the sake of believers*.
- b) God's purpose in all things pertaining to his plan is *the praise of the glory of his grace* (1:6,12,14 - see also 2:7, 3:10f)

## **5. He affirms the certainty of those blessings**

- a) The *Holy Spirit* has been given as a *seal* (1:13) marking the inclusion of believers in Christ.
- b) He is also a *deposit of assured future blessing* (1:14).

## **C. He shares with his readers his prayer that they might appreciate their position in Christ (1:15-23)**

### **1. He had been ceaselessly thanking God for them (1:15)**

- a) He *had begun to do so* upon hearing of their faith in Christ and love toward their fellow-saints. This may imply that Paul did not learn first-hand of their faith, but through the report of someone else.
- b) He had *continued to do so* since then. He made a point of remembering them whenever he prayed.

### **2. He had been constantly making requests of God for them (1:17-23)**

- a) He had been praying that God would give them the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation* to know him better. They knew God already, but he longed that they might, through the Holy Spirit, have the spiritual insight to know him better.
- b) He had been praying that they would come to *appreciate the hope* that lay before them (v 18). God's purposes in Christ assured them of a glorious future. They doubtless understood this in part. Paul wanted them to understand it more fully.
- c) He has also been praying that they might comprehend the *greatness of God's power* towards them (v 19-23). That power was nothing less than the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God; the power that had vested him with authority to rule over all things for the sake of his body, the church, his very fullness (vv. 19-23).

# TEACHING & PREACHING EPHESIANS

\* \* \* \*

## Using This Section

As explained in the Preface, the purpose of this section is to help teachers and preachers examine the text of Ephesians and focus its central ideas. Eight contributions have been made to this:

### **1. SUBDIVISIONS OF THE LETTER –**

The text of Ephesians has been broken up into sections suitable for teaching and preaching. In most cases, larger thought units have been used in order to preserve the intent of the apostle's message. Each is capable of further subdivision, but in doing so, care needs to be taken to ensure that the overall meaning of a section is not fragmented and its purpose lost.

### **2. SECTION TITLES –**

Each individual section has been given a title, usually taken from a key element in the text itself. Titles reflect the general theme of the section.

### **3. MECHANICAL LAYOUTS –**

Each section of the text has been printed out in a way that highlights its main and subordinate elements and its flow of thought. Subordinate elements are indented under the phrases and clauses they qualify and connections between phrases often indicated by arrows. Dotted and labeled brackets identify major subsections.

### **4. ANALYTICAL OUTLINES –**

Brief outlines are placed alongside each mechanical layout to identify the relationships between the various sentences, phrases and clauses in each section.

### **5. SUMMARY OF IDEAS –**

The main ideas of the passage are paraphrased and summarized to bring them into focus.

### **6. UNIFYING IDEA –**

The unifying or central idea of each section is identified by first recognizing its subject (both general and specific), and then what it actually says about this subject (the complement). Combining the subject and complement into a single brief statement forms the unifying idea of a passage.

### **7. RELEVANCE –**

Brief statements of the relevance of the subject and its message to Christian life today are provided. These are merely suggestions that help move from the world of the biblical text to our modern world. Teachers and preachers will need to develop these initial thoughts to suit their own circumstances.

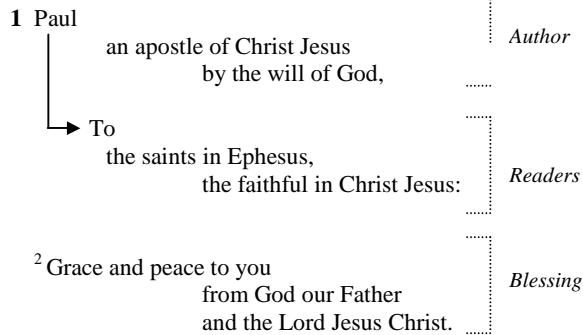
### **8. PURPOSE –**

Effective teaching and preaching is purposeful. Suggestions are provided to help focus ministry goals for each section.

## D. Chapter 1

# 1. A Letter To Saints (1:1-2)

### I. MECHANICAL LAYOUT



### II. ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

#### A. The Writer

1. Named
2. Described

#### B. The Readers

1. Identified
2. Described

#### C. The Greeting

1. Stated
2. Its source

### III. SUMMARY OF IDEAS:

1. Following the conventions of his day, Paul opens this letter by introducing himself, identifying his readers, and adding a blessing. Typically, he amplifies and Christianizes each of these components, varying their content from letter to letter. The elaborations usually reflect the distinctiveness of each letter and provide a clue to its central theme.
2. Here Paul identifies himself as an “apostle of Christ Jesus”, appeals to the fact that this is according to “the will of God”, and addresses himself to believers whom he calls “saints” and “the faithful in Christ Jesus.”
3. Each of these details is significant and does reflect the contents to follow. This is an authoritative apostolic letter to those who have become God’s special people through faith in Christ.

### IV. THE UNIFYING IDEA:

1. *The General Subject:* Introduction to the book of Ephesians
2. *The Specific Subject:* How Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians
3. *The Complement:* By introducing himself as an apostle of Christ writing to God’s saints in the city of Ephesus
4. *The Idea:* Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ writing to God’s saints in the city of Ephesus  
(or- more simply)  
The apostle Paul writes to saints in Ephesus

### V. RELEVANCE:

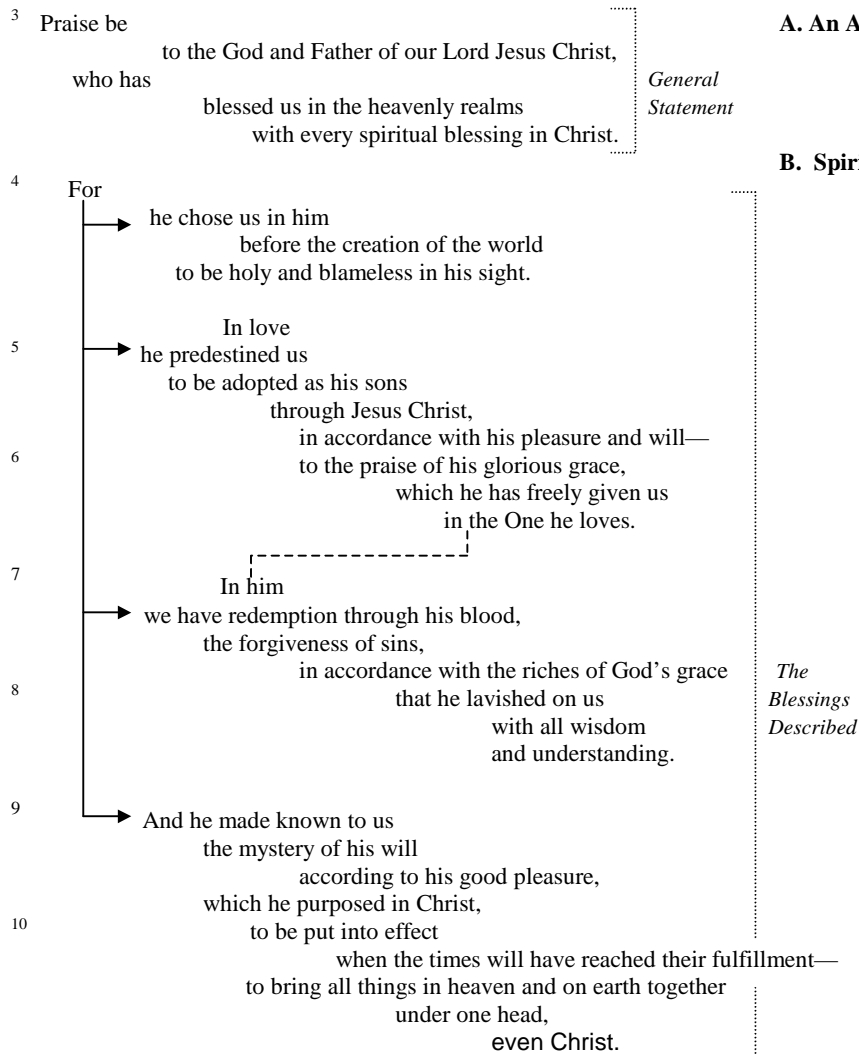
This introduction highlights the fact that Christ has given authoritative guidance and instruction through his apostles to those who believe in him that they might live as God’s holy people. We need to be reminded today of that rich treasury of instruction, and of our status as “saints” in Christ.

### VI. PURPOSE:

To provide an introduction to the background of the letter, but more particularly, an appreciation that Christ has spoken to us through his apostles that we might know who we are and how to live in the world as God’s holy people.

## 2. Blessed in Christ Jesus (1:3-10)

### I. MECHANICAL LAYOUT



### II. ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

#### A. An Ascription of Praise

1. Who is to be praised
2. What he has done

#### B. Spiritual Blessings Elaborated

1. Chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless before him
  - \* when it occurred
2. Predestined in love to be his sons through Christ
  - \* its source
  - \* its purpose
3. Redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ
  - \* the cause or source
4. Shown the mystery of his will in Christ
  - \* when it will happen
  - \* what it will be

### III. SUMMARY OF IDEAS:

1. Paul opens his letter on a note of praise following the standard form of a Jewish blessing.
2. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, is to be praised for blessing us in Christ Jesus in the heavenly places (where we have been raised and seated with him -2:6). He has given us every spiritual blessing in him – blessings which he describes in vv. 4-10.
3. They include the blessing of being holy and blameless before God, being his sons, being redeemed through Christ's blood and forgiven our sins, and having knowledge of God's eternal purpose in Christ.
4. The scope of these blessings is awe-inspiring. All flow from the good pleasure and will of God, as a gift of his grace, through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is truly worthy to be praised!

### IV. THE UNIFYING IDEA:

1. *The General Subject:* Spiritual blessings

2. *The Specific Subject:* How God has blessed us in Christ Jesus
3. *The Complement:* by enabling us to stand before him without blame as forgiven sons who know his eternal will and purpose – all to the praise of his glory and grace.
4. *The Idea:* God has blessed us in Christ Jesus by enabling us to stand before him without blame as forgiven sons who know his eternal will and purpose – all to the praise of his glory and grace.

#### **V. RELEVANCE:**

Nothing is more important for us as believers than to know what God has done for us (and is doing for us) in Christ Jesus. Our self-gratifying generation wants quick, “how to” information. It wants to know what it can get from any enterprise, what’s in it for them. That, however, is not the way to start thinking about the gospel and the Christian life. We begin by looking at what God has done, and praising him for his glorious salvation. Most of us don’t appreciate even fractionally what God has done for us in Christ. We need our horizons expanded. These verses do that for us. They take us up into to the heavenly realms to see where we belong with Christ now; they take us back before time into the electing counsels of God; they show us the love of God in predestining us to be his sons; they show us the certainty of our forgiveness through the redeeming blood of Christ; and they enable us to see the immense scope of God’s glorious plan – the reconciliation of the whole universe through Christ. Clearly grasped, these are life-changing truths. How desperately we need them!

#### **VI. PURPOSE:**

To help people appreciate the inexpressible blessings God has showered on us in Christ with a view to leading them to praise and devotion.

#### **VII. NOTES:**

# FOCUSING EPHESIANS

\* \* \* \* \*

## Using This Section

The main theological ideas of the letter of Ephesians have been summarized under a number of headings, often in a slightly paraphrased or condensed form of the actual text itself. By gathering related ideas together in this way, key elements of the teaching of the book can be seen more clearly. It also puts them in a form that is ideal for topical or doctrinal Bible studies. But perhaps most significantly, it provides a larger theological context for considering ideas as they emerge in the course of expository teaching and preaching.

### I. OUR TRIUNE GOD

#### A. God the Father

1. The opening words of the book of Ephesians introduce us to the God who is our Father and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2,17). More than that, he is the one God and Father of all (4:6), the glorious Father (1:17) who created all things (3:9), and who is over all, through all and in all (4:6). He is a God who is rich in mercy (2:4) and of incomparably great power and wisdom (1:19; 3:10).
2. This great God governs all that comes to pass according to his sovereign purpose and will (1:5,9,11). He has made known the mystery of that will in Christ and through his apostles. It is his purpose to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ, when the times shall have reached their fulfillment (1:10).
3. He is the initiator of salvation and the ultimate source of all spiritual blessing. He chooses people in Christ before the creation of the world, determining even then the works they are to do (1:4; 2:10). In love he predestines them to be adopted as sons (1:5) to the praise of his glory and grace (1:5,12,14), and makes them alive together with Christ when dead in their trespasses and sins (2:5). Out of his glorious riches (3:16) he blesses them with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3), and is the source of their inward strength and grace through the Spirit (1:2; 3:16; 6:23). Through his power at work in his people, he is able to do immeasurably more than they ask or imagine (3:20).
4. In all things he acts freely out of the riches of his grace. Nothing in the reconciliation of man and restoration of the universe is connected with human effort or merit (2:9). All proceeds from the completely unmerited grace of God lavished upon us in Jesus Christ, the One he loves (1:6-8). Only in the ages to come will we appreciate the full dimensions of God's kindness to us in Christ (2:7).
5. He does so with a view to the praise of his own glory. His grace and wisdom (1:6; 3:10) is revealed in the church and in Christ Jesus (3:21), both to men and to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (3:10). It is worthy of the praise of his saints now (1:3), throughout all generations, and for ever and ever (3:21; 1:12,14).

#### B. God the Son

1. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the one Lord of all (4:5), the One the Father loves (1:6).
2. He is the One in whom all God's purposes centre (1:9; 3:11). God chooses his people in him (1:4), predestines them to sonship through him (1:5), and secures their redemption

and forgiveness through him (1:7). The ultimate goal of God's purposes is to unite all things in heaven and earth under him (1:10).

3. To fulfill those purposes the Lord Jesus first descended to the earth then ascended again to heaven (4:9,10). He descended that in his body he might make peace through the blood of his cross (2:13,16), giving himself up for his people as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (5:2). In doing so he secured the cleansing of the church, his body (5:26). He was then raised from death by the mighty power of God and seated at his right hand in the heavenly realms (1:20). Lifted higher than the heavens (4:10), he is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion that exists not only in the present age, but also in the age to come (1:21), and fills all things (1:23; 4:10).
4. From the heavenly places, he now rules over all things for the church. Everything has been put under his feet (1:22,23) and he governs all things in the interests of the church, his body. He is its Head and Saviour, and it is his fullness (1:23). He loves and cares for his body, providing it with gifts that it might grow up into himself and perfect itself in love (5:29; 4:7,8,13,16).
5. In heaven he also serves as the Master of all men and their future Judge (6:8,9). He will one day reward all of his people for the good they do (6:8).

### **C. God the Holy Spirit**

1. As there is one God and Father, and one Lord, so there is one Spirit (4:4) by whom God lives in his people, the new temple (2:22).
2. As the indwelling presence of God with his people, the Spirit serves as a seal marking them as God's possession (1:14). In doing so, he acts as a deposit guaranteeing their inheritance until the day of redemption (1:14; 4:30).
3. He is the effective source of life for God's people while they wait for that day. He unites them together as one body (4:3). As the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, he helps them know God better (1:17). By him they have access through Christ to the Father (2:18), and through him, they are strengthened with might in the inner man so Christ can dwell in their hearts by faith (3:16,17). Consequently they are to take care not to grieve the Spirit (4:30). Instead, they are to go on being filled with the Spirit (5:18), and constantly pray in the Spirit (6:18).

## **II. HIS GREAT SALVATION**

### **A. Man's Lost Condition**

1. All men by nature are sinners. They are disobedient (2:2; 5:6), live in sin and transgression (2:1,5), and follow the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who now works in those who are disobedient (2:2). Their understanding is darkened, and their minds given over to futile thinking (4:18). Ultimately this is because of the hardening of their hearts (4:18). Having lost all sensitivity, they abandon themselves to sensuality, gratifying the cravings of their sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts (4:19; 2:3). This leads them to indulge in unmentionable impurity of all kinds, and continually to lust for more (4:19; 5:12).
2. In this state they are alienated from God and under his condemnation. Spiritually, they are in a condition of death (2:1,5). They are separated from the life of God (4:18), and from Christ (2:12), they are without hope (2:12) and are objects of wrath (2:3). They belong to the darkness (5:8) and excluded from the kingdom of God and of Christ (5:5).

# ABSORBING EPHESIANS

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## Using These Notes

These notes are based on the idea that benefiting from the Bible depends on four things: prayerfully **observing** what it is saying, **interpreting** what it is saying, **reflecting** (or meditating) on what it is saying, and **responding** to what it is saying. Small sections of the letter (suitable for daily meditation in personal devotions), are explored by means of a number of questions and comments. The first set of these (*Something to See*) direct us to key facts and ideas in the Bible text. It is recommended that these be noted as a way of identifying what the Bible is saying. Next there are a series of questions (*Something to Think About*) to stimulate you to think about what you have seen. They might also be used for group discussions or to stimulate further reflection on sermons and talks. Finally, there are brief suggestions as to how you might respond to what you have seen and reflected on (*Something to Do*).

To gain the greatest benefit from these notes it is recommended that you record your observations, thoughts and responses in a notebook. This will help you get into the book of Ephesians, and get Ephesians into you!

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## Chapter One

### I. EPHESIANS 1:1-2

The opening verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesians have attracted a great deal of attention. In several of the oldest manuscripts the word "Ephesus" is missing from v. 1, prompting questions about whether the letter was actually written to Christians in Ephesus (see *Introducing Ephesians*). In the end, the identity of the readers does not stop us from appreciating the rich message of the letter – a message signaled even in these opening verses.

#### A. Something to See

1. How does Paul describe himself?
2. What terms does he use to describe his readers?
3. What spiritual blessings does he seek for them in verse 2?
4. Where do these blessings come from?

#### B. Something to Think About

1. Paul doesn't always introduce himself as "an apostle" in his letters. Why do you think he does so on occasions, and especially in this letter?
2. Why does he appeal to "the will of God" in claiming to be an apostle? Does this have anything to say to us about the source of authority in ministry?
3. What does it mean to be one of God's "saints"? Is this title reserved only for a special class of Christian?
4. What does Paul mean when he talks of Christians being "in Christ"? How do we come to be in this position? (See 1:13)

### **C. Something to Do**

Do you think of yourself as one of God's holy people – someone God has set apart for himself? How should this impact the way you live today?

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## **II. EPHESIANS 1:3-6**

Verses 3-14 are a doxology, or an expression of praise to God. Paul is overwhelmed by the spiritual blessings we have in Christ Jesus. Some of these blessings are described in vv. 3-10.

### **A. Something to See**

1. What has God blessed us with in Christ?
2. Why did he choose us in Christ?
3. When did this take place?
4. How has he demonstrated his great love to us?
5. What led him to do this?
6. What ultimate outcome did he have in view?

### **B. Something to Think About**

1. Do we think much about the spiritual blessings God has given us in Christ, or are we more absorbed with what we can see, feel, touch and taste?
2. Does the wonder of what God has done for you in Christ fill you with praise day by day? Or has the thrill of his love and grace faded?
3. What do you think it means to be “holy and blameless in his sight”? Is this something only for the future, or is it also true now?
4. Sonship has been described as the “apex” or pinnacle of spiritual blessing. What are some of the blessings that flow from being one of God's sons?
5. What is God's purpose in blessing us in Christ? Is it selfish of him to act in this way?

### **C. Something to Do**

Praise God for his wonderful grace to you in Christ. Pray that the joy of your salvation will remain fresh and grow. Think deeply about the blessing of being one of God's holy and blameless sons.

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## **III. EPHESIANS 1:7-10**

Paul, in these verses, continues to describe the spiritual blessings we have in Christ.

### **A. Something to See**

1. What is it that we have “in Christ” (v. 7) and where do such blessings come from?
2. What has God made known to us?
3. When will this be put into effect?
4. What does it consist of?

### **B. Something to Think About**

1. What does the word “redemption” mean? In what sense is it true of us?
2. Paul speaks of God “lavishing” his grace on us. What does this tell us about the spiritual blessings he has given us? Is this the way we typically view God's good gifts to us?

3. When you think of God's plan of redemption or salvation in Christ, what do you normally think of?

<sup>i</sup> Skevington-Wood, *Ephesians*, in **Expositor's Bible Commentary**, Vol. 11 p. . For a thorough discussion of introductory issues relating to authorship and destination etc., see Wm. Hendriksen, **Ephesians**, pp. 3-66 and Carson, Moo and Morris, **An Introduction to the New Testament**, pp.

<sup>ii</sup> "The tone of the letter is impersonal, and some parts of it seem to indicate that the writer did not know the readers... Paul had evangelized the Ephesians and had spent quite a long time among them (Acts 19:8,10; 20:31). The warmth of his affection for them, and theirs for him is plainly evident in their last farewell (Acts 20:17-38, esp. vv. 36-37). It is very difficult to imagine that Paul would have written such a calm and impersonal letter to such dear friends." Carson et al., **op. cit.**, p. 309.

<sup>iii</sup> "'Ephesians' does not look like an occasional letter written to one church which Paul had come to know well through his three years of ministry in Ephesus. Thus most interpreters see Ephesians is some form of circular letter... The letter was probably a circular letter in the sense that it was intended primarily to circulate among the house churches of Ephesus, its environs and perhaps even more broadly in western Asia minor (e.g. to the Lycus valley)." Arnold, *Ephesians*, in **Dictionary of Paul and His Letters**, pp. 244-5 "Perhaps the best form of the circular-letter theory is that which sees Paul as having sent such a letter with Tychicus when he sent Colossians, and that letter was copied and circulated from Ephesus Since it was a circular, there would be a blank instead of the name of the recipients, but the letter would be known to be associated with Ephesus, and in time that name was attached to it." Carson, et. al, p. 310. "Perhaps we may call it a general letter to Gentile Christians, more particularly in the province of Asia - Gentile Christians who (like the readers of 1 Peter), need to be shown what was involved in their recent commitment to Christ." F. F. Bruce, **"Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free,"** p. 426

<sup>iv</sup> Carson et. al., p. 311

<sup>v</sup> see Philemon 10

<sup>vi</sup> See Col. 1:7,8; 4:12,13.

<sup>vii</sup> See Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21

<sup>viii</sup> Reconstructed largely from Turner, *Ephesians*, in **New Bible Commentary**, p. 1222

<sup>ix</sup> "It's purpose is not to face some particular false teaching in a specific congregation, but to encourage all the (mainly Gentile) churches of the area Tychicus was passing through. What better way for Paul to do this than by celebrating the accomplishment in Christ of God's great purposes (1: 3-14), and including a report of how he was praying for the readers, interceding that they might joyfully grasp the central message of the gospel and the wonderful privilege to which they had been admitted (1:15- 2:10; 3:1, 14-21)." Turner, p. 1223.

"As befits a letter intended for more general circulation, Paul did not deal with particular issues, as in Colossians and in much of his other correspondence, but with the implications of gospel. These he had treated in Romans from the angle of the believer's justification. Now he approaches them more broadly in terms of the fellowship of Christians in Christ's body, the church, and the reconciliation of the entire universe in him." Skevington-Wood, pp. 16,17

<sup>x</sup> "The people of the region had an extraordinary fear of the hostile spiritual powers. Through magical practices and cultic rituals, people sought relief and deliverance from the dreaded realms of the powers." Arnold, p. 247. Turner, **loc. cit.** points out that a major part of letter devoted to counteracting this dread of spiritual powers by showing the greater power in Christ and in believers united to him (1:19-23; 2:1-7; 3:9-10,15-16,20; 4:8; 6:10-17).

<sup>xi</sup> "Of all the Pauline letters, Ephesians is the least situational. This does not mean that the letter fails to address real needs and problems faced by its readers; Ephesians simply does not have the same sense of urgency and response to crisis as do the apostle's other letters ...Ephesians is therefore a genuine letter, without a specific crisis, but addressed in a pastoral way to a multiplicity of needs shared by the readership. It was written by the apostle Paul to a network of churches in Ephesus, but also intended for a broader readership among the churches of that region." Arnold, p. 246 "... there is a solemnity about the letter and an absence of specifics that show it is devoted to a general articulation of what is profitable for believers. We must not specify a concrete situation or a concrete problem and say that the letter is addressed exclusively to this.... We may say that it is an important statement of Christian truth that may well have been greatly needed in more than one first-century situation." Carson et al., p. 312

<sup>xii</sup> Arnold, p. 245.

<sup>xiii</sup> In Ephesians, the 'teaching part' "is largely taken up with the praise of God (1: 3-14) and with a report of Paul's prayer for his readers. Throughout the letter, sentences are typically very long and have a slightly liturgical sound.... " Turner, p. 1222

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<sup>xiv</sup> "Paul stood aside from the conflict and contemplated God's overall design for his church and for his world. As he did so, he came to realize as never before the breathtaking scope of God's strategy in Christ for the fullness of time (Ephesians 1:9-10)." Skevington-Wood, p. 17

<sup>xv</sup> Skevington-Wood (p. 17) describes it as a "meditation of the wisdom of the mystery of Christ himself."

<sup>xvi</sup> "...the truth is rather that the letter teaches the core content of Paul's gospel in the form of a call to worship and prayer report (and the digression at 2:11-22 and 3:2-13 more fully explained the teaching implicit in these)." Turner, p. 1222

<sup>xvii</sup> "Passage after passage can be explained as a re-writing of the key themes of Colossians, and about a third of its actual wording is taken over." **Ibid.**, p. 1222

<sup>xviii</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 1223. Turner suggests that Paul takes the theme of "cosmic reconciliation" in Christ in Colossians (see Col. 1:20) and makes this the basis of his letter to the Ephesians. The coming day of the Lord is seen as a day when he "would subject all competing powers to himself and then restore the universe to harmony."