



Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Chapters 1-6

Preventative Medicine

The letter to the church in Ephesus has many similarities to the letter that Paul also wrote to the church in Colossae. The two letters were likely written at the same time in order to address concerns in the region with false teachers and corruption of Christian practices. Ephesus is located about 100 miles to

the west of Colossae. One might describe the letter to Colossae as “radical surgery”, and the letter to Ephesus as “preventative medicine”.



Colossians is clearly addressing specific concerns. Ephesians is much more general and positive in its tone, it does not appear to be addressing a particular false teaching or practice. Rather, its purpose is to lay the strong foundation on the preaching of the holy apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone so that the Church might be strong, united and mature so as to face any and every stormy “wind” or “wave” of false teaching or ungodly practice which may be blown

their way.

The letter to the Ephesians may have been a circular letter intended to be copied and circulated around the region and read by many different congregations. This may account for why the letter contains fewer personal greetings and acknowledgements that are typical of Paul's letters. Some of the earliest copies of the letter do not have the audience identifier “in Ephesus” in verse 1:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. —Ephesians 1:1*

So it is likely that Paul wrote the letter to be read widely in the general region, of western Asia Minor. This letter along with the letter to the individual Philemon and to the church in Colossae were likely hand delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus, two of Paul's personal assistants. (see Eph. 6:21; Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12; Philemon). Paul intended the letters which he wrote to this region to be copied and shared among all the churches in the region (see Colossians 4:16).



The Church in Ephesus

The church in Ephesus was started by the Apostle Paul himself. In Acts, we read where Paul first visited the area for three months to Ephesus is recorded in (Acts 19:1-8).

He left Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla to build a mission congregation (Acts 18:24-26). Early the following year, Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years and made it a base of missionary outreach from which “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). His missionary efforts from Ephesus to the region were so effective that the idol makers rioted! (Acts 19:26-27)

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

--1 Cor. 6:8-9

The work that Paul had accomplished in Ephesus was substantial despite all the opposition and persecution he encountered. The letters to the region serve to strengthen that good work for the long term administration of the Gospel in Asia Minor.

On his last journey to Jerusalem, the apostle landed at Miletus and, summoning together the elders of the church from Ephesus, delivered to them a farewell charge expecting to see them no more. The final charge to the elders of the Church in Ephesus resonates with the letter to the church. He voices concern for their strong leadership in the “word of his grace which is able to build you up” in the face of the threat of false teachers that Paul characterizes as “fierce wolves” who will speak “twisted things” draw away disciples (Acts 20:29-30).

Paul’s purpose in writing the letter is clearly preemptive. He is seeking to ward off the theological problems which were plaguing other congregations in the region. If those twisted teachings and practices were to take root in Ephesus, it could be disastrous for the entire Christian community in Asia. For this reason, the letter provides a strong dose of preventative medicine for churches in every generation.



Literary Structure²

Passage	Content	Theme	Structure	Mood
1:1–14	Salutation and benediction for all God’s blessings in Christ	Salvation	New life	Indicative: What God has done for believers in Christ
1:15–23	Prayer of thanksgiving for knowing God’s glorious work in Christ			
2:1–10	Saved by grace through faith in Christ			
2:11–22	Gentiles and Jews are united in Christ	Reconciliation	New society	
3:1–13	Paul’s calling to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles			
3:14–21	Prayer of intercession for Christ’s love, power, and glory in the church			
4:1–16	Exhortation to use a diversity of gifts to promote unity in the body of Christ	Sanctification	New standards	Imperative: What God tells believers to do in Christ
4:17–32	Exhortation to put off the old self and put on the new self in Christ			
5:1–21	Exhortation to walk in the love and the light of Christ			
5:22–33	Husbands and wives	Domestic duties	New relationships	
6:1–9	Parents and children, masters and servants			
6:10–20	The full armor of God	Spiritual warfare		
6:21–24	Closing greetings and benediction			

² <http://www.esvliterarystudybible.org/search?q=Ephesians+1>



The book of Ephesians divides neatly into two main sections. In chapters 1-3, Paul is primarily speaking in the indicative verb tense about the new life and society being formed in Jesus Christ. In the second half of the book—chapters 4-6, Paul moves toward the application of this new life and community to day to day life in the church as a maturing body and to individuals and households living within a world which is under spiritual assault by the spiritual forces of evil.

Indicative: What God has done for believers in Christ (1-3)

The Heart of Paul's life and ministry is what he calls the "Gospel of Salvation". In Chapter 1, Paul, praises God for the blessings and benefits of the Gospel of Salvation in the lives of the church in Ephesus. In chapter 2, he explains precisely how the Gospel of Salvation works through grace and faith in Jesus Christ. He outlines the larger implications of the Gospel as an outworking of the plan of God for global reconciliation among all people. In chapter 3, Paul reflects on the cosmic and spiritual realities at work in the interplay between the administration of the gospel on earth among the nations and the powerful impact God's of work on the rulers, powers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

Salvation: New Life (1:1-2:10)

After his epistolary greetings, Paul describes in rich language the new life which is being given to "the saints" in Jesus Christ. Before he can even talk about it, he overflows in blessing and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Gospel of Salvation. God is working out a glorious plan of salvation for human kind in Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the "riches of his grace"...

...which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. —Ephesians 1:8-10

God has a plan for cosmic unity which is being brought into operation—right now! Paul is overwhelmed with praise and gratitude that he and the members of the Church Ephesus are privileged to be a part of it. At the heart of the plan is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. These two powerful forces are literally saving the world, one person at a time.

The forces of evil "this world", "the prince of the power of the air", "the passions of our flesh" are on a course which will only result in death, bondage and the "wrath" of God (2:1-3). But the Lord, who is "rich in mercy" and of "great love", has made a way of salvation through faith in the grace offered by the cross and resurrection of Jesus (1:6-7; 2:1-8) and through resurrection power at work through the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit (1:17-23; 2:8b-10).

The application of the Gospel comes through the agency of the gift of the Spirit manifesting itself in believing faith in Jesus Christ and in the outworking of a "holy life" in Christ:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may



boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:8-10

Reconciliation: New Society (2:11-3:21)

The fruit of the Gospel of Salvation is global and cosmic unity. The very grace and spiritual power offered to individual people through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is universal in its scope. It is being offered and received by all nations, Gentile and Jewish peoples alike. Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, nations and people were estranged from one another. But now, the reconciliation of the nations to God through the Jewish Messiah, provides the occasion for radical reconciliation among human peoples, tribes and nations.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. --Ephesians 2:13-16

Again the heart of what makes this possible is the cross of Jesus Christ (2:16) and the uniting gift of the Holy Spirit (2:18). Paul draws on the covenantal promises given through the Old Testament prophets of a united humanity built together as a living Temple with Jesus Christ as the “chief cornerstone” (2:20).

The problem for international unification on earth actually has up to this point in human history been a result of rebellion by powers, rulers and authorities in the heavenly spiritual realms. The reunification of

people with God the Father through the cross and Holy Spirit has the reversing effect of unseating rebellious spiritual authorities and powers in the heavenly realms.

It is “for this reason” that Paul is devoted to praying for the spiritual strengthening of the people of the Church in the spiritual power and love of God. (3:14-21):

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. –Eph. 3:8-10

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in



heaven and on earth is named,¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. —Ephesians 3:14-21

Imperative: What God tells believers to do in Christ (4-6)

The Gospel of Salvation has practical implications for every believer and new community in Christ. The theory translates into practical reality. In chapters 4 and 5, Paul addresses the application of the Gospel to corporate church administration unity and maturity in truth and love (4:1-16) and personal spiritual holiness of life (4:17-5:21). He then exhorts the church to manifest the reconciliation in Christ through all interpersonal and household relationships. He finally redefines the nature of the conflict to be primarily a spiritual conflict with Satan and the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms (6:10-24).

Sanctification: New Standards (4:1-5:21)

As Paul has already stated the Church is the primary locus of the New Society being built in Christ. So he first turns his attention to “maintain the unity” of the Church in the truth of the Gospel. The forces of evil will seek to use two forces: schism and heresy to thwart the plan of God from unfolding in the world. It is imperative that the leaders of the Church work together as a unified body to grow strong in Christ. (4:1-6)

While there is a diversity of gifts and peoples within the membership of the Church, that very diversity was given to help strengthen a unified and built up body of Christ that is mature and immovable in the truth. (4:7-16):

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. —Eph. 4:14-16

The second component to the new life and new society in Christ is to manifest and walk in the Spirit-filled life. There will be a marked contrast between those who are not saved and still under bondage and those who are saved and free in Christ. The new self, new creation will be reflected in the Christians manner of speech, in the moods and self control of emotions, in the character of grace and forgiveness, in sexual purity (4:17-5:7). Christians are called to walk as children of the light, reflecting God’s glory and his Spirit of love, holiness and truth. (4:8-21)



New Relationships: Domestic Duties and Spiritual Warfare

The new life and new society redefines the relationships Christians have as the basic household level (5:22-6:9). Also, it redefines our relationships with our adversaries and enemies (6:10-24).

Paul ended the last section with an exhortation: “Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. We are filled with the Spirit in three ways:

1. By addressing one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual psalms (Corporate worship)
2. By giving thanks in everything (Eucharist)
3. By submitting to one another out of reverence for the Lord (Relationships)

In verses 5:22-6:9, Paul expands on what it looks like to be filled with the Holy Spirit by submitting to one another out of reverence for the Lord. He begins and focuses primarily on the marital relationship and describes a manner of mutual submission between husband and wife. He then turns to children and parents (6:1-4) and household servants and masters (6:5-9). Relationships in Christian households should be a reflection of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27

The world’s formation of household relationships is based in domination and power. Christ overcomes the world.

The way Christ overcomes is mysteriously through overcoming the Spiritual forces of Evil in the heavenly realms. Paul redefines the battle line away from “flesh and blood” and toward Satan and the Spiritual forces of evil:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. —Ephesians 6:11-12

The spiritual battle requires spiritual armor and weapons. Paul goes through each piece of armor in detail. (6:13-17). Likewise, the weaponry is spiritual as well, the Word of God and the Spirit of God (6:17-20).

If the church will take to heart the letter to the Ephesians, it will be strong for fulfillment of God’s plan to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven and vice versa in heaven—as it is on earth!