



BIBLE EXPOSITORY

*Commentary*

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*Ephesians - Philemon*

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# ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. XI

**Ephesians–Philemon**

EDITORS

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*Iain M. Duguid*

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# EXPOSITORY

## *Commentary*

VOL. XI

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### *Ephesians–Philemon*

Ephesians  
*Benjamin L. Merkle*

1–2 Thessalonians  
*David W. Chapman*

Philippians  
*Jason C. Meyer*

1–2 Timothy and Titus  
*Denny Burk*

Colossians  
*Alistair I. Wilson*

Philemon  
*Alistair I. Wilson*

*ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians–Philemon*

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# CONTENTS

Tables .....	7
Preface to the ESV Expository Commentary .....	9
Contributors .....	11
Abbreviations .....	13
Ephesians ..... 17 <i>Benjamin L. Merkle</i>	Pastoral Epistles ..... 359 <i>Denny Burk</i>
Philippians ..... 121 <i>Jason C. Meyer</i>	1 Timothy ..... 371 <i>Denny Burk</i>
Colossians ..... 195 <i>Alistair I. Wilson</i>	2 Timothy ..... 453 <i>Denny Burk</i>
1 Thessalonians ..... 257 <i>David W. Chapman</i>	Titus ..... 497 <i>Denny Burk</i>
2 Thessalonians ..... 317 <i>David W. Chapman</i>	Philemon ..... 527 <i>Alistair I. Wilson</i>
Scripture Index .....	551



# TABLES

## *Philippians*

2.1	The Bookend Effect in Philippians .....	125
2.2	Thematic Unity of the Philippians “Bookends”: Grace and Gratitude .....	132
2.3	The Bookend Effect in Philippians 1:27 and 3:20–4:3 .....	144
2.4	Parallels in Philippians 1:27–2:4 and 3:15–4:3 .....	144
2.5	Philippians 2:5 as a Bridge between 2:1–4 and 2:6–11 .....	150
2.6	The Christ Hymn of Philippians and the Servant Songs of Isaiah .....	151
2.7	The New Covenant Church as the Inversion of Old Covenant Israel .....	157
2.8	Allusions to and Echoes of the Old Testament in Philippians 2:12–18 .....	157
2.9	Philippians 2:15 as a Deliberate Inversion of Deuteronomy 32:5 .....	159
2.10	The Christlike Example of Timothy .....	162
2.11	The Christlike Example of Epaphroditus .....	165
2.12	Five Vocabulary Links between Philippians 1:27–30 and 3:15–4:1 .....	180
2.13	Comparison of Philippians 1:27 and 3:20 .....	181
2.14	Comparison of Philippians 1:27 and 4:1 .....	182
2.15	Key Connection between Philippians 1:27 and 4:3 .....	183
2.16	Partnership as a Thematic Thread in Philippians .....	191

## *Colossians*

3.1	Similarities between Colossians 1:14 and Ephesians 1:7 .....	217
3.2	Similarities between Colossians 1:15–17 and 1:18–20 .....	220
3.3	Similarities between Colossians 1:21–22 and Ephesians 2:12, 16 .....	226
3.4	Similarities between Colossians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:1, 5 .....	236



***1 Timothy***

6.1 Paul's Three-Part Salutation in 1 Timothy 1:1–2 ..... 374

6.2 1 Timothy 1:9–10a and the Ten Commandments ..... 382

6.3 Agency and Order in Creation and the Fall ..... 400

6.4 1 Timothy 3:16 as a “Subversive Echo” of Artemis Worship ..... 414

***2 Timothy***

7.1 Paul's Three-Part Salutation in 2 Timothy 1:1–2 ..... 456

# PREFACE

## TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *robustly biblical-theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## *General*

c.	circa, about, approximately	lit.	literal, literally
cf.	confer, compare, see	LXX	Septuagint
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	mg.	marginal reading
diss.	dissertation	MT	Masoretic Text
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	n.d.	no date
e.g.	for example	NT	New Testament
esp.	especially	OT	Old Testament
et al.	and others	par.	parallel passage
etc.	and so on	repr.	reprinted
ff.	and following	rev.	revised (by)
Gk.	Greek	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
Hb.	Hebrew	trans.	translator, translated by
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	v., vv.	verse(s)
i.e.	that is	vol(s).	volume(s)
		vs.	versus

## *Bibliographic*

ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
BTCB	Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament

- ICC International Critical Commentary
- LNTS The Library of New Testament Studies
- LSJ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- NA<sup>28</sup> Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia; German Bible Society, 2012.
- NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary
- NPNF2 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
- NTL New Testament Library
- PNTC Pillar New Testament Commentary
- SHBC Smith and Helwys Bible Commentary
- SNTSMS Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 1964–1976.
- THNTC The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
- UBS<sup>5</sup> *The Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger, prepared by the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia; United Bible Societies, 2014.
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
- ZECNT Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

### *Books of the Bible*

Gen.	Genesis	Josh.	Joshua
Ex.	Exodus	Judg.	Judges
Lev.	Leviticus	Ruth	Ruth
Num.	Numbers	1 Sam.	1 Samuel
Deut.	Deuteronomy	2 Sam.	2 Samuel

1 Kings	1 Kings	Mal.	Malachi
2 Kings	2 Kings	Matt.	Matthew
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Mark	Mark
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Luke	Luke
Ezra	Ezra	John	John
Neh.	Nehemiah	Acts	Acts
Est.	Esther	Rom.	Romans
Job	Job	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Ps., Pss.	Psalms	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Prov.	Proverbs	Gal.	Galatians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Eph.	Ephesians
Song	Song of Solomon	Phil.	Philippians
Isa.	Isaiah	Col.	Colossians
Jer.	Jeremiah	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Lam.	Lamentations	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Ezek.	Ezekiel	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Dan.	Daniel	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Hos.	Hosea	Titus	Titus
Joel	Joel	Philem.	Philemon
Amos	Amos	Heb.	Hebrews
Obad.	Obadiah	James	James
Jonah	Jonah	1 Pet.	1 Peter
Mic.	Micah	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Nah.	Nahum	1 John	1 John
Hab.	Habakkuk	2 John	2 John
Zeph.	Zephaniah	3 John	3 John
Hag.	Haggai	Jude	Jude
Zech.	Zechariah	Rev.	Revelation

*Apocrypha and Other Noncanonical Sources Cited*

1 Clem.	1 Clement
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
Did.	Didache





# EPHESIANS

*Benjamin L. Merkle*



# INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

## *Overview*

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians living in (or near) Ephesus in order to strengthen their faith, promote their unity, and exhort them to holiness. In the first half of the book (Ephesians 1–3), Paul provides a solid theological foundation as he (1) reminds his readers of God’s great grace and the spiritual blessings believers possess based on their union with Christ (1:3–14), (2) prays for them to grow in their knowledge of God and what he has done for them in Christ (1:15–23), (3) emphasizes the grace of God in the salvation of believers (2:1–10), (4) describes the plight of the Gentiles as those who were alienated from God and his people but now may be accepted as a result of their being united to Christ through faith (2:11–22), (5) describes his unique ministry to the Gentiles and how that relates to the “divine mystery” (3:1–13), and (6) offers a second prayer for his readers, that they will be strengthened, will be able to comprehend the love of Christ, and will be filled with the fullness of God (3:14–21).

In Chapter 4 Paul begins to apply these glorious truths to the everyday lives of his readers. He exhorts the Ephesian believers to walk in unity (4:1–6) while recognizing that diversity is needed for building up the body of Christ (4:7–16). Next, Paul exhorts them not to walk (i.e., live) as unbelieving Gentiles but to put off the old self and put on the new (4:17–24). They are to do so by imitating God and walking in love (4:25–5:2). They are to avoid immorality and greed and instead live in the light (5:3–14). They are to walk carefully, being wise, understanding God’s will, and being filled with the Spirit (5:15–21). Paul also addresses various relationships within the church, including those between (1) wives and husbands (5:22–33), (2) children and parents (6:1–4), and (3) slaves and masters (6:5–9). Finally, he emphasizes that believers must acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare and the need to be prepared for battle (6:10–20). They are to stand firm by putting on the whole armor of God, which includes persevering in prayer. Paul concludes his letter with a commendation of Tychicus and a final benediction (6:21–24).

## *Title*

This letter is named after its recipients and the city in which they lived (“to the saints who are in Ephesus”; 1:1). Along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon,

it is known as one of the “Prison Epistles,” since it was most likely written during a two-year imprisonment in Rome.

### *Author*

The author identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1:1) and “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1).<sup>1</sup> Paul was a former Pharisee and persecutor of Christians who was converted on his way to Damascus (c. AD 35) and called by Christ to be his apostle. He became one of the church’s greatest missionary-theologians, authoring thirteen books of the NT.

### *Date and Occasion*

The most likely date for Paul’s writing of Ephesians is during his imprisonment in Rome (AD 60–62). Paul refers to his imprisonment in all of the Prison Epistles (Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 16, 17; Col. 4:3, 10; Philem. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23). In Ephesians he identifies himself as “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (3:1), “a prisoner for the Lord” (4:1), and “an ambassador in chains” (6:20). According to Acts 28:30, Paul spent two years in Rome under house arrest, with the freedom to receive visitors.

Identifying the precise occasion for the letter is difficult, for it is the most general and therefore the least situational of all of Paul’s letters. It is written primarily, though not exclusively, to Gentile Christians (Eph. 2:11–12; 3:1; 4:17). These readers know of Paul’s imprisonment (3:13; 4:1) and will receive a visit from Tychicus, who will inform them further of Paul’s situation.

Identifying the purpose of the letter has also been a challenge. There are, however, several goals that Paul seems to have in its writing: (1) to strengthen the faith of his readers by reminding them of their union with Christ, which results in untold blessings, (2) to promote Jew-Gentile unity, and (3) to exhort his readers to pursue holiness, which involves fighting against the powers of darkness.

### *Genre and Literary Structure*

Similar to other Pauline letters, Ephesians follows a typical epistolary structure. It begins with the usual prescript, which includes the author, recipients, and greeting (1:1–2). Paul adds that he is “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” and that his addressees are “saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1). In addition, the usual Hellenistic greeting is expanded: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2).

Unlike most of Paul’s other letters, which then include a thanksgiving and/or prayer, Ephesians then has a long section in which Paul blesses God for the blessings believers receive through their union with Christ (1:3–14). The only other letter that contains a similar blessing or eulogy is 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:3–7). The next section contains a thanksgiving and a prayer for the Ephesian believers (Eph. 1:15–23; cf. 3:14–21).

<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the authorship of Ephesians, see Interpretive Challenges below.

The body of Ephesians can be divided into two sections: the doctrinal or theological section (1:3–3:21) and the ethical or practical section (4:1–6:20). Paul’s use of the imperative mood supports this division. Of the forty imperatives in the letter, only one is found in the first section (2:11), with the other thirty-nine occurring in the second section. The first three verses of the ethical section (4:1–3) form the basic thrust of what chapters 4–6 seek to accomplish, with the key word “walk” appearing in each major portion of this section (4:17 [2x]; 5:2, 8, 15; cf. 2:2, 10). The body concludes with an exhortation to prayer, serving as a climax of the entire letter (6:10–20).

Throughout the body of the letter, several other literary features are found. Paul includes four explicit OT quotations (e.g., Ps. 68:18 in 4:8) and many OT allusions, evidenced by the use of key OT terms and concepts (election, helmet of salvation, hope, Father, mercy, promise, redemption, temple, wisdom). Paul seems also to employ early Christian traditional material (Eph. 4:4–6; 5:14) as well as “household codes” similar to those of Greco-Roman literature, in which he addresses relationships between wives and husbands, children and fathers, and slaves and masters (5:22–6:9). Following the body of the letter, Ephesians concludes with a final greeting, including a reference to the bearer of the letter, Tychicus (6:21–22), as well as a concluding prayer (6:23) and benediction (6:24).

### *Theology of Ephesians*

The rich theology of the letter to the Ephesians has elevated it to a place of prominence among Paul’s letters. Harold Hoehner comments, “The Letter to the Ephesians is one of the most influential documents in the Christian church,”<sup>2</sup> and Peter O’Brien says, “The Letter to the Ephesians is one of the most significant documents ever written.”<sup>3</sup> Although there are many topics we could examine in this introduction, we will emphasize three that are intimately related to the occasion and purpose of the letter.

#### CHRISTOLOGY

First, Paul emphasizes the pivotal role of Christ. Paul bases the blessings and privileges believers possess firmly on the work of Christ, using various terms such as Christ (46x), Jesus (20x), Lord (23x), and Son of God (1x).<sup>4</sup> Many of these titles are used in combination, such as “Jesus Christ,” “Christ Jesus,” and “the Lord Jesus Christ.” In addition, Paul not only uses the phrase “in Christ” nine times, he also uses various constructions conveying the same idea, such as “in him” (5x), “in whom” (7x), or “in the beloved” (1x). The focus of Ephesians is not so much the believer’s union with Christ in his death (though cf. 1:7; 2:13, 16; 5:2, 25) but the believer’s union with him in his resurrection, exaltation, and enthronement (1:20–23; 2:5–6). All the spiritual blessings believers receive are “in Christ.” Christ

<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Word counts are based on the Greek NT (UBS<sup>5</sup>), not an English translation.

will “unite all things” in heaven and on earth (1:10). All things are put in subjection to him, and he is the head over all things (1:22). It is through the blood of Christ that believers are brought near to God, which results in peace (2:13–14). Christ himself is the cornerstone of the church (2:20) and has given leadership gifts to his church (4:7–11). The church is both the bride of Christ (5:25, 32) and the body of Christ (1:23; 4:12; 5:23, 30). Finally, Paul underscores the present benefits a believer possesses as a consequence of being in Christ; they are not merely future benefits.

#### ECCLESIOLOGY

Second, Paul highlights the importance of the church. The term itself occurs nine times in this letter, along with other expressions referring to the community of believers. Although in his other letters Paul usually focuses on the church as a local expression of God’s people, in Ephesians the universal church receives greater attention (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32). A major emphasis is placed on the unity Jews and Gentiles experience because of their common salvation. Because the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles has been torn down, the two have become one (2:14), thus creating “one new man” (2:15). Those redeemed by Christ are “fellow citizens” and “members of the household of God” (2:19). Together they constitute a unique building, a “holy temple,” that has become “a dwelling place for God” (2:21–22). Walking in a manner worthy of God’s calling, they must be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). Paul then declares, “There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (4:4–6). The church is also pictured as the bride and body of Christ. Finally, Christ rules over his church as “head” (1:22–23; 4:15; 5:23).

#### SANCTIFICATION

Third, Paul stresses the need for believers to lead godly lives. Since they are united with Christ, it is imperative that Christians’ lives be consistent with that reality. He therefore reminds his readers to be who they already are in Christ. Though formerly they were “strangers and aliens,” they are now “fellow citizens” (2:19). As Gentiles they once walked “in the futility of their minds” (4:17), but they must no longer live as those who “are darkened in their understanding,” who live in “ignorance,” who have hard hearts (4:18), who “have given themselves up to sensuality,” or who “practice every kind of impurity” (4:19). Rather, Paul urges them to remember where they came from (2:11) and “to walk in a manner worthy” of their calling (4:1). They are to “put off” their old self (4:22) and “put on the new self” (4:24), which is created for righteousness and holiness. They are to watch carefully how they live, making wise decisions (5:15). In addition, Paul sets forth specific instructions in the household codes of 5:22–6:9, instructing wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters. Finally, living a holy life is not simply about making war on our own sinful

nature but also involves a supernatural battle “against the spiritual forces . . . in the heavenly places” (6:12).

### *Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ*

Along with Colossians, Ephesians has been recognized as one of the most Christological books of the NT. One of the uniquely Christological aspects of Ephesians is Paul’s assertion in 1:9–10 that God has “a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him.” Paul sees a divine plan at work in human history that finds its unity and fulfillment in Christ.

Because Christ conquered death by his resurrection and exaltation, so too believers are not only made alive by God’s grace, adopted into God’s family, and redeemed from their sin; they are also raised spiritually and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. The blessings Christians enjoy in Christ that are described in 1:3–14 are similar to the blessings Israel enjoyed in the OT. Israel enjoyed the blessing of being chosen (Gen. 12:1–3; Deut. 7:6–8; 14:2), loved (Deut. 7:8; 33:12; Isa. 5:1; Jer. 11:15), adopted (Ex. 4:22; Isa. 1:2; Hos. 11:1; Rom. 9:4), redeemed (Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 15:5; 1 Chron. 17:21), given an inheritance (Num. 26:55–56; Deut. 3:28; Josh. 11:23), and promised the Holy Spirit (Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29). Just as Israel was set apart to God and called to walk blamelessly (Pss. 15:2; 18:23), so also believers are called to live “holy and blameless before him” (Eph. 1:4). In addition, Paul emphasizes the radical new unity of Jews and Gentiles. God revealed to him an amazing mystery, which “is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). The OT spoke of Gentiles as well as Jews worshiping Yahweh, but Paul goes further, declaring that Jews and Gentiles actual become “one new man in place of the two” (Eph. 2:15).

As mentioned above, Ephesians has many similarities to Colossians. In fact, roughly one-fourth of the wording in Colossians is found in Ephesians (e.g., cf. Eph. 6:21–22 with Col. 4:7–8). The simplest and most reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that Paul authored both letters at roughly the same time to similar audiences. There are several reasons for understanding the similarities in this way. First, the letter claims to be written by the apostle Paul (Eph. 1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:13). Second, Pauline authorship was unanimously embraced by the early church. Third, the theology of Ephesians, though not always identical, is completely compatible with Paul’s other letters. Differences between Ephesians and Colossians most likely result from the different purposes involved in writing the letters.

Many portions of Ephesians also mirror the teachings found elsewhere in Paul’s writings and in the rest of the NT. For example, the focus on Christ’s resurrection, exaltation, and enthronement is quite common to the rest of the NT.<sup>5</sup> In addition, household codes such as those in Ephesians (5:22–6:9) are also found in Colossians 3:18–4:1, 1 Timothy 5:1–6:2, and 1 Peter 2:18–3:7.

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 2:24–36; 3:15–16, 21, 26; 23:6; 24:14–15; 26:23; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:3–28; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 3:21.



### *Preaching from Ephesians*

The book of Ephesians has a long history of influence in the life of the church.<sup>6</sup> As a result, it is not surprising that Ephesians is commonly preached in local churches. The book features many issues that were relevant not only in Paul's day and to Paul's audience but to ours as well. Issues such as God's sovereignty, race relations, roles in marriage and the family, the nature of the church, and spiritual warfare are woven throughout the letter.

Because there is so much theology and relevant practical material in Ephesians, many pastors often preach slowly through this book (spanning six months to a year). While such a practice is warranted, it does present a corresponding challenge related to the structure of the book, which focuses on theology in the first half (chs. 1–3) and practical application in the second (chs. 4–6). While preaching the second half of Ephesians, there is the danger of forgetting to ground the imperatives (commands) in the finished work of Christ. Goldsworthy offers a good reminder when he says, "Every sermon should be understandable on its own as a proclamation of Christ."<sup>7</sup>

### *Interpretive Challenges*

#### AUTHORSHIP

Although the author identifies himself as "Paul" (Eph. 1:1; 3:1), this self-identification has been vigorously debated in modern scholarship, for several reasons: (1) the letter's impersonal tone (1:13; 1:15–16; 3:2; 4:21) and lack of personal greeting; (2) the letter's language and style (1:3–14, 15–23; 2:1–7; 3:1–13; 4:11–16; 6:14–20); (3) the letter's similarity to Colossians; (4) the letter's theological emphases (its relatively "high" or "cosmic" Christology [1:3, 9–10, 20–23; 2:5–6], its more developed ecclesiology [1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32], and its lack of reference to the *parousia* [or second "coming"] of Christ or the "day of the Lord"); and (5) the common practice of pseudonymity (writing a letter in someone else's name).

These arguments, however, can be adequately addressed. (1) The letter's impersonal tone makes sense if the letter was written not only to Ephesus but also as a circular letter (cf. comment on 1:1b). In addition, the author does include some personal details (1:15–16; 3:1; 4:1; 6:19–20). (2) The letter's language and style differs at points with some other Pauline letters, but a statistical study of vocabulary is not reliable based on the size of the Pauline corpus. Additionally, Paul elsewhere writes with long sentences, even if Ephesians has a greater number of them. (3) The letter's similarity to Colossians in no way indicates that Colossians was a source for Ephesians but rather indicates that Paul probably wrote the two letters around the same time to Christians experiencing similar circumstances. (4) The letter's theological emphases have been somewhat exaggerated by many critics. Although it is true that the resurrection and exaltation of Christ is stressed, the

<sup>6</sup> See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 311–342.

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 237.

author does not ignore the death and cross of Christ (1:7; 2:13, 16; 5:2, 25). The letter's ecclesiology does highlight the universal (rather than the local) church, but this distinction is often overstated and simplistic. And, there are several references in the letter to the future aspect of eschatology (1:10, 13–14, 18; 4:30; 5:5, 6, 27; 6:10–20). (5) Although pseudonymous letters existed in the first century, it is clear that such letters, if they were discovered to be pseudonymous, were rejected by both Jewish and Christian communities.

#### RECIPIENTS

The precise location to which Paul sent this letter is debated because some manuscripts include the phrase “in Ephesus” (1:1) while others do not. Factors favoring the omission of this phrase include the general content and impersonal tone as well as the lack of any personal greetings in the letter. These reasons suggest the letter was not written to any one specific location; it may have been intended as a circular letter and not merely for the Christians in Ephesians.

There are, however, compelling reasons for seeing “in Ephesus” as authentic. Not only is this addition found in a diversity of manuscript traditions, but also it makes the syntax of the Greek awkward (making it more likely that the phrase was removed in some manuscripts than that it was added to others). The general content and impersonal tone of the letter could have been necessary for multiple reasons: (1) about five years had passed since Paul last visited the church at Ephesus, which would have allowed for numerous new converts unknown to Paul to join the church; (2) the letter could have been sent to several house churches scattered throughout the city as well as to some located outside the city in the surrounding area. Additionally, there are also no personal greetings in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, or Philippians.

#### WRITING STYLE

As Paul writes this letter, he often employs long sentences (1:3–14, 15–23; 2:1–7; 3:1–7; 4:11–16; 6:14–20). Such sentences can make it difficult to follow Paul's train of thought and isolate his main ideas. Of course, these sentences may not appear as long in English versions, but the reader is still tasked with the duty of discerning Paul's central point. Paul's sentences are complex, often with many prepositional phrases. Most of these prepositional phrases are adverbial (that is, modifying a verb and not a noun or pronoun), but it is not always clear which verb these phrases modify.

#### *Outline*

- I. Introductory Address and Greeting (1:1–2)
  - A. Author (1:1a)
  - B. Recipients (1:1b)
  - C. Greetings (1:2)

- II. Praise God for His Blessings in Christ (1:3–14)
  - A. He Chose Us (1:3–6)
  - B. He Redeems Us (1:7–10)
  - C. He Gives Us an Inheritance (1:11–12)
  - D. He Seals Us with His Spirit (1:13–14)
- III. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:15–23)
  - A. Paul's Thanksgiving for Their Faith and Love (1:15–16a)
  - B. Paul's Prayer (1:16b–23)
    - 1. That God Will Give Them the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation (1:16b–17)
    - 2. That They Will Know God's Great Grace (1:18–23)
      - a. The Hope of His Calling (1:18a)
      - b. The Riches of His Glorious Inheritance (1:18b)
      - c. The Immeasurable Greatness of His Power (1:19–23)
- IV. From Death to Life (2:1–10)
  - A. Dead in Trespasses and Sins (2:1–3)
  - B. Made Alive with Christ (2:4–7)
  - C. By Grace for Good Works (2:8–10)
- V. From Strangers to Members (2:11–22)
  - A. Remember Your Past Situation (2:11–13)
    - 1. Far from Christ (2:11–12)
    - 2. But Now Brought Near (2:13)
  - B. Remember that Christ Is Your Peace (2:14–18)
    - 1. Christ Has Made Jews and Gentiles One (2:14a)
    - 2. Christ Has Broken Down the Dividing Wall (2:14b)
    - 3. Christ Has Abolished the Law (2:15–16)
      - a. So That He Might Create One New Man (2:15)
      - b. So That He Might Reconcile Us Both to God (2:16)
    - 4. Christ Preached Peace to Jews and Gentiles (2:17–18)
  - C. Remember Your New Status in Christ (2:19–22)
    - 1. As Citizens in God's Kingdom (2:19a)
    - 2. As Members of God's Household (2:19b)
    - 3. As Part of God's Holy Temple (2:20–22)
- VI. Paul's Situation, Stewardship, and Service (3:1–13)
  - A. Paul's Situation (3:1)
  - B. Paul's Stewardship of the Mystery (3:2–7)
  - C. Paul's Service in Proclaiming the Mystery (3:8–12)
  - D. Paul's Encouragement to the Ephesians (3:13)
- VII. Paul's Second Prayer (3:14–21)
  - A. Address to the Father (3:14–15)
  - B. Prayer for Strength (3:16–17a)
  - C. Prayer for Understanding (3:17b–19a)
  - D. Prayer for Filling (3:19b)
  - E. Praise to God (3:20–21)

- VIII. Unity in the Church (4:1–6)
  - A. The Manner and Means of Unity (4:1–3)
  - B. The Basis of Unity (4:4–6)
- IX. Diversity in the Church (4:7–16)
  - A. Diversity according to Christ's Gifts (4:7–10)
  - B. Diversity for the Purpose of Unity and Maturity (4:11–16)
- X. Living according to the Renewed Self (4:17–24)
  - A. Don't Live Like Unbelievers (4:17–19)
    - 1. They Are Futile in Their Thinking (4:17)
    - 2. They Are Darkened in Their Understanding (4:18a)
    - 3. They Are Alienated from the Life of God (4:18b)
    - 4. They Have Become Callous (4:19)
  - B. Instead Live according to What You Have Been Taught (4:20–24)
    - 1. You Have Learned Christ (4:20–21)
    - 2. You Are to Obey Christ (4:22–24)
      - a. Put Off Your Old Self (4:22)
      - b. Be Renewed in Your Minds (4:23)
      - c. Put On the New Self (4:24)
- XI. Walking in Love (4:25–5:2)
  - A. Don't Lie but Speak the Truth (4:25)
  - B. Don't Sin When You Are Angry (4:26–27)
  - C. Don't Steal but Work Hard (4:28)
  - D. Don't Speak What Is Harmful but What Builds Up (4:29)
  - E. Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30)
  - F. Don't Be Bitter or Angry but Forgive One Another (4:31–32)
  - G. Imitate God by Walking in Love (5:1–2)
- XII. Walking as Children of Light (5:3–14)
  - A. Avoid Immorality, Greed, and Filthy Language (5:3–6)
  - B. Live as People of the Light (5:7–14)
- XIII. Walking Carefully (5:15–21)
  - A. Walk with Wisdom (5:15–16)
  - B. Walk with Understanding (5:17)
  - C. Walk with Spirit-Filled Lives (5:18–21)
- XIV. Wives and Husbands (5:22–33)
  - A. Wives, Submit to Your Husbands (5:22–24)
  - B. Husbands, Love Your Wives (5:25–32)
  - C. Let Each Husband Love His Wife and Each Wife Respect Her Husband (5:33)
- XV. Children and Parents (6:1–4)
  - A. Children, Obey and Honor Your Parents (6:1–3)
  - B. Fathers, Do Not Provoke but Train Your Children (6:4)
- XVI. Slaves and Masters (6:5–9)
  - A. Slaves, Obey Your Masters (6:5–8)
  - B. Masters, Properly Treat Your Slaves (6:9)

- XVII. Putting on the Whole Armor of God (6:10–20)
  - A. Be Strong in the Lord (6:10)
  - B. Put On the Whole Armor of God (6:11–13)
  - C. Stand Firm by Employing the Whole Armor of God (6:14–20)
- XVIII. Commendation and Benediction (6:21–24)
  - A. Commendation of Tychicus (6:21–22)
  - B. Benediction of Peace, Love, Faith, and Grace (6:23–24)

## EPHESIANS 1:1–2

**I** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
 To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful<sup>1</sup> in Christ Jesus:  
<sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Some manuscripts *saints who are also faithful* (omitting *in Ephesus*)

### *Section Overview*

The opening two verses form a greeting or salutation in a somewhat typical ancient style: an identification of the sender and recipient and then a greeting. Paul normally expands each of these components so that his introductory greetings are lengthier than what was typical. In this case, he identifies the divine source of his authority (“the will of God”; v. 1), further describes his readers (“the saints . . . faithful in Christ Jesus”; v. 1), and offers the divine source of his prayer of blessing (“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”; v. 2).

### *Section Outline*

- I. Introductory Address and Greeting (1:1–2)
  - A. Author (1:1a)
  - B. Recipients (1:1b)
  - C. Greetings (1:2)

### *Comment*

**1:1a** Paul identifies himself as the sole author of this letter, which is true also of Romans and the Pastoral Epistles. He uses “apostle” in its technical sense, which refers specifically to the Twelve (Matt. 10:2; Acts 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:5, 7) and himself (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:9), who were chosen and commissioned by Jesus to a unique position in the founding of the church. The qualifying phrase “of Christ Jesus” indicates relationship: Paul is an apostle who belongs to Jesus Christ. Furthermore,

his apostleship is “by the will of God,” which expresses the means by which Paul was chosen and commissioned as an apostle. The same opening phrase is found in 2 Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, and 2 Timothy 1:1.

**1:1b** Paul next identifies his recipients. First, he designates them as “saints” (cf. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). Second, he refers to them as “faithful” (or “believing”) in Christ Jesus, indicating their positive response to the gospel message. Third, these believing saints are located in the city of Ephesus, although some of the earliest manuscripts do not include this location. For this reason, many take “in Ephesus” to be a later (but still accurate) addition, since Ephesus was probably the first or primary location to which the letter was sent (cf. Introduction: Interpretive Challenges).

**1:2** The third element in the introduction is the greeting. This particular greeting is a favorite of Paul’s, with its exact formula (i.e., the entire verse) found in seven other letters as well (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; and Philem. 3). The customary Hellenistic or Greek style was simply “greetings” (a form of the word “grace”; cf. Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1), and the traditional Jewish style was “peace.” Paul’s greeting is distinctively Christian and combines both elements. “Grace” and “peace” are major themes in this letter, occurring twelve times (Eph. 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24) and eight times (1:2; 2:14, 15, 17 [2x]; 4:3; 6:15, 23), respectively. Paul indicates the origin or source of grace and peace in the Christian life as “God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

### *Response*

Paul writes this letter in accordance with the authority he received as an apostle of Christ Jesus. His apostleship signifies not only that he belongs to Christ but also that he is fully authorized as Christ’s messenger to proclaim the good news of the one who sent him. Paul’s calling to reach the Gentiles with the gospel is not something he gave himself but is something to which he was called by the sovereign plan of God. In fact, prior to his call, Paul was striving to find and arrest Christians proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah. It was “by the will of God” that Paul received his apostleship. This phrase reminds us that it was God’s unmerited favor and grace that saved Paul and called him to serve. He received his position not through his own personal accomplishments or good works but through God’s gracious plan (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15–16), and the same is true for us. Thus, although Paul received a unique calling as an apostle, the mercy he received is an example for us as we remember that God chose us not because of something desirable in us but because of his love and grace found in Christ Jesus.

## EPHESIANS 1:3–14

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us<sup>1</sup> for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known<sup>2</sup> to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee<sup>3</sup> of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,<sup>4</sup> to the praise of his glory.

<sup>1</sup>Or *before him in love*, <sup>5</sup>*having predestined us* <sup>2</sup>Or *he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known . . .*  
<sup>3</sup>Or *down payment* <sup>4</sup>Or *until God redeems his possession*

### *Section Overview*

This section begins the first half of the body of the letter (Eph. 1:3–3:21) and contains extended praise to God for the spiritual blessings believers receive from their union with Christ. In the original Greek this section (1:3–14) consists of one long sentence (202 words). Structurally, this blessing precedes the thanksgiving section that is typical of most of Paul’s epistles (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:3–7). The phrases “in Christ,” “in him,” or “in the beloved” occur eleven times in the Greek (nine times in the ESV). Several other elements are also emphasized: (1) the threefold repetition of God’s purpose (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11); (2) the threefold repetition of “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14), demonstrating the significance of each member of the Trinity (God the Father [vv. 3–6], Son [vv. 7–12], and Spirit [vv. 13–14]); and (3) four key verbs that form the basis of praise to God (vv. 4 [“he chose us”], 7 [“we have redemption”], 11 [“we have obtained an inheritance”], 13 [“you . . . were sealed”]). The first of these elements (the threefold repetition of God’s purpose; vv. 5, 9, 11), is paralleled by the threefold repetition of “In him” (vv. 7, 11, 13).

### *Section Outline*

- II. Praise God for His Blessings in Christ (1:3–14)
  - A. He Chose Us (1:3–6)
  - B. He Redeems Us (1:7–10)
  - C. He Gives Us an Inheritance (1:11–12)
  - D. He Seals Us with His Spirit (1:13–14)

### *Comment*

1:3 Paul begins the body of this letter in a typical OT or Jewish style of a prolonged blessing (*berakah*). The main idea of this section is found in the first word in both the English and Greek text: “blessed” (*eulogētos*). God is to be blessed or praised because of his great grace that provides believers in Jesus Christ a plethora of spiritual blessings (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; 1 Pet. 1:3). Note the emphasis on blessing: “*Blessed be . . . who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.*” God is described not only as “Father” but also as the one “who has blessed” believers. This latter phrase gives the basis or grounds for blessing God: God is to be blessed (praised) because he is the one who blesses.

The final section of this verse consists of a series of three prepositional phrases clarifying the nature of God’s blessings. First, God has blessed us “in Christ.” That is, these blessings are reserved specifically for those who believe in Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension and are united with him through faith. It could be argued that “in Christ” is the most important phrase of this passage (and the entire letter), as it occurs in different forms with the preposition “in” eleven times (Eph. 1:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 [2x], 11, 12, 13 [2x]). Second, God has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing.” Here Paul limits the type of blessing specifically to *spiritual* blessings (i.e., blessings pertaining to life in the Spirit). This phrase is a summary of everything Christians receive through God’s work in his Son, including election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit. Third, God has blessed us “in the heavenly places” (lit., “in the heavenlies”), a phrase found only in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Because our blessings are “in Christ,” they are also in the heavenly places, where Christ is now ruling. And yet, the benefits Christ secured are available to his children here and now (though not fully). This verse serves as a summary statement for the entire section.

1:4 Paul provides the first of four main reasons believers are to praise God: because he chose us. God’s election is a theme throughout the Bible (Gen. 12:1–3; Deut. 7:6–8; 14:2). In Christ, God chooses a people for himself. Although a corporate element is present, it would be inaccurate to claim that individuals are not in view.

This election is said to take place “before the foundation of the world” (cf. John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). That is, God’s choice in election occurred before time and creation, emphasizing that this choice was based on God’s sovereign purpose, not human merits. Thus the appropriate response is to praise God for such blessing.



God's election, however, is not without an end goal. Paul continues by saying that the purpose of those chosen by God is "that we should be holy and blameless before him" (cf. Col. 1:22). With the privilege of election comes the responsibility of living according to God's Word. God desires not only to forgive our sins but also to conform us to the image of his beloved Son (Rom. 8:29–30). "Before him" most likely means before Jesus, specifically referring to the day of our Lord Jesus when we will appear before him in judgment.

The last phrase, "in love," could modify either the previous statement ("that we should be holy and blameless before him in love") or what follows ("in love he predestined us"). Although some English versions favor the former (CSB, KJV, NKJV, NRSV), the latter interpretation is preferable (ESV, NASB, NIV) since the focus of this section is on God's work of blessing his people.

1:5–6 The act of God's choosing (v. 4) is now expanded and emphasized in these verses. God's choice of his people is related to their being *predestined* (or "fore-ordained" or "predetermined") to be a part of his family and thus receive all the accompanying benefits. But predestination is not an end in itself. Rather, God's divine purpose of predestination is that those chosen are adopted into his family through the finished work of Christ. In the OT, the nation of Israel was given this special privilege (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Rom. 9:4). Adoption was quite common in Greco-Roman culture. Adoptees were given the full status of the family and became heirs of the family's estate. Paul now applies this concept to believers (cf. Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18). The term "adoption" is used only five times in the NT, and only by Paul (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5). Those who were once "sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) and "children of wrath" (2:3) are now able to call God their Father. The realization of this intimate relationship is possible only "through Jesus Christ" (1:5); he alone provides access to the Father, because of his finished work on the cross.

God's work of predestination was done "according to the purpose of his will" (v. 5). It was done in accordance with his "purpose," indicating that the choosing of his people was something in which God delighted. And it was done in accordance with his "will." God has a definite plan and redemptive purpose for adopting wayward sinners into his family.

God's gracious act of predestination and adoption was done so that his redeemed children might praise his glorious grace (v. 6; cf. vv. 12, 14). God's grace is glorious as it reflects his character and is therefore worthy of our highest praise. Paul further notes that God has "blessed" us with this grace. This verb highlights the abundant kindness of God in freely granting salvation to those who did not deserve it. This grace comes to us "in the Beloved," that is, "in Christ."

1:7–8 Paul now offers the second of four main reasons why God is worthy of the praises of his people: because he redeems us. Paul moves from God's predetermining choice before time to his work of redemption in the course of history. This verse is structurally parallel to verses 11 and 13, as each begins with "In him." The redemption believers have is "in him," that is, "in the Beloved" (v. 6). The Greek

word translated “redemption” indicates release or liberation from imprisonment or captivity. It occurs 10 times in the NT, seven of those times in Paul’s writings (cf. Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:14; 4:30; Col. 1:4; cf. also Heb. 9:15; 11:35).

The concept of redemption is found also in the OT, where it describes both the release of slaves from bondage (Ex. 21:8; Lev. 25:48) and the deliverance of God’s people from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 1 Chron. 17:21). In verse 7 Paul specifically indicates that our redemption in Christ is “through his blood”; the *means* by which redemption is procured is the sacrificial death of Jesus.

The redemption believers receive is then equated with “the forgiveness of our trespasses.” Forgiveness implies an offense requiring just punishment. Here, Paul uses “trespasses” instead of the more common word “sins,” though the parallel passage in Colossians 1:14 uses “sins.” The believer’s redemption is presented as the fulfillment of a “new exodus” prophesied in the OT. In other words, the redemption Christians receive is the fulfillment of what was typified when Israel was redeemed from Egypt. And just as Israel’s exodus from Egypt was accompanied by the institution of the Levitical system so that Israel could atone for their sins, so also the believer’s redemption in Christ from sin is accompanied by full and final forgiveness.

Behind God’s work of redemption is his grace (“according to the riches of his grace”; Eph. 1:7). In verse 6 Paul spoke of God’s “glorious grace,” and now he picks up the topic of grace once more, this time referring to the wealth or abundance of God’s grace (cf. 1:18; 3:8, 16; cf. Col. 1:27; 2:2–3). Ephesians 1:8 expands upon the “grace” mentioned in verse 7 by indicating that God has “lavished” this grace upon his people, further elaborating the extent of God’s grace. Paul then adds that the manner in which God bestows his grace is “in all wisdom and insight.” God did not lavish his grace on his people in an ill-conceived or haphazard manner.

**1:9** The plan of God to accomplish redemption through his Son is no longer a mystery. It was God’s design all along for his people to understand his purposes, but some of the details of his plan were not disclosed. In the gospel, however, God has revealed his divine mystery, which involves uniting all things in Christ. Verse 9 is best understood as stating the *means* by which God made his purposes known (“by making known to us”). “Making known” is often used in connection with God’s unveiling of his revelation (Rom. 16:26; Eph. 3:3, 5, 10; Col. 1:27). “Mystery” in Paul’s writings refers to something once hidden but now disclosed, especially as it relates to God’s plan to unite all things (including Jews and Gentiles) into the one body of Christ (Rom. 11:25; 16:25–27; Eph. 3:3, 4, 9; Col. 1:26–27; 1 Tim. 3:16). The term occurs twenty-eight times in the NT, twenty-one of those times in Paul’s writings, including six times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).

Just as God’s choice to predestine believers for adoption was “according to the purpose of his will” (1:5), so, too, his design to reveal his redemptive plan is “according to his purpose.” Specifically, God’s plan was set forth in his Son. That is, Christ was intimately involved with the Father in planning redemption.

**1:10** God set forth his plan not only “in Christ” but also “as a plan for the fullness of time,” communicating his divine purpose. The term translated “plan” (*oikonomia*) occurs eight other times in the NT (Luke 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4) and can have three different meanings: (1) the act of administrating; (2) that which is administered (i.e., a plan); or (3) the office (or role) of an administrator.

God’s perfect plan was “to unite all things” through his Son. This phrase describes the content of the mystery hidden in the past but now revealed in the gospel. The only other NT use of the verb “to unite” is in Romans 13:9, where Paul notes that all of the OT commandments can be “summed up” by the command to love your neighbor as yourself. “All things” refers to the entire universe (cf. Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16, 20). This is confirmed when Paul amplifies this thought by adding, “things in heaven and things on earth.” Finally, all of God’s purposes will be accomplished “in him,” that is, “in Christ.” Christ is not only the means by which God will unite all the disparate elements of creation; he is also the center and focal point through whom and for whom this will take place. The election and predestination of Israel as God’s firstborn son pointed forward to Christ, the elect one, God’s Son, just as the redemption of Israel from Egypt pointed forward to his cross. It is only in Christ that believers enjoy the blessings described in this section.

**1:11** In verses 11–12, Paul provides the third of four reasons believers should praise God: because he has given us an imperishable inheritance. The repetition of “In him” (i.e., Christ) indicates that this section of the eulogy is structurally parallel to verses 7 and 13. It is through our union with Christ that believers are incorporated into the family of God and have become heirs to the blessings and promises made by the Father (cf. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1, 5, 7).

The verb translated “we have obtained an inheritance” (*klēroō*) can also mean to “appoint by lot” and occurs only here in the NT.<sup>8</sup> In light of the latter definition, some interpret the phrase to mean, “we have been allotted to God as his inheritance” or “we were claimed by God as his portion.” With this interpretation, believers are not receiving an inheritance but *are* the inheritance that God receives. While the concept of God’s possessing his people as an inheritance is found in the OT (e.g., Deut. 4:20; 9:29; 32:8–9; 1 Kings 8:51; Pss. 33:12; 106:40), it does not fit the tenor of the context of Ephesians 1:11–12, which emphasizes the blessing (i.e., inheritance) believers receive. The theme of believers receiving an inheritance is mentioned also in verses 5, 14, and 18.

Paul further assures the Ephesian believers of their inheritance (which is both present and future) by reminding them again that God has predestined them to possess it. Just as believers were predestined for adoption “according to the purpose of his will” (1:5), so here they are predestined to receive an inheritance “according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” The

<sup>8</sup> The noun form of this term (*klēros*) is often used in the Greek OT to refer to the apportioning of the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel. Here Paul indicates that believers are given an inheritance, demonstrating the fulfillment of the initial promise to Israel.

comfort to believers is that, while we were sinners and his enemies (Rom. 5:8–10), God delighted to choose a people for himself. That salvation is God’s initiative is nothing but good news. This was not a reckless and ill-conceived plan but was done according to his *purpose* (cf. Eph. 3:11), *counsel*, and *will*. It was a carefully considered plan carried out by his sovereign control of the universe.

**1:12** Here we see the divine purpose for why believers are predestined to receive an inheritance: that they might praise God’s glory (cf. vv. 6, 14). Paul further describes the “we” who are chosen for the purpose of praising God’s glory by adding “who were the first to hope in Christ.” The Greek verb underlying this phrase, which occurs only here in the NT, can refer either to Jewish believers or, generically, to all believers.

God’s glory is the revelation and manifestation of who he is: his essence, power, majesty, purity, and holiness. Therefore, to praise God for his glory is to declare that he is the one true God, who made heaven and earth.

**1:13** Paul now highlights the final reason why God is worthy of the praises of his people: he has sealed them with his Holy Spirit. The repetition of “In him” indicates that this section is structurally parallel to verses 7 and 11. The main thrust of verses 13–14 is, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” Paul again reminds his readers to bless God because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, who not only indwells his people but also is the means by which they are sealed so as to guarantee that they will receive their promised inheritance.

The Holy Spirit is described as “promised.” The Spirit was promised to the people of Israel in the OT (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29; cf. Acts 1:4; 2:33; Gal. 3:14) and is the means (“with”) by which God seals his people. Paul also indicates that their sealing with the Spirit took place “when [they] heard the word of truth.” In contrast to the many false gospels, Paul speaks of the word he preached as being “the word of truth” (cf. Gal. 2:5, 14; Col. 1:5). He further describes his message as “the gospel of your salvation.” That is, it is the good news that saves one from the impending wrath of God (cf. Rom. 1:18).

The result of hearing and believing was that the Ephesian Christians “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” When they heard the gospel and believed it, they were immediately sealed with the Holy Spirit. These three actions occurred simultaneously. “Sealed” is the main verb in this section (Eph. 1:13–14) and is a divine passive (passive voice with the implied subject being God; i.e., they were sealed by God). This verb can be used to convey at least four ideas: (1) security; (2) authentication; (3) genuineness; and (4) identification of ownership (cf. 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22). The last option seems most appropriate in this context: God is to be blessed because he seals believers with his Spirit, claiming them as his own and securing their eschatological inheritance.

**1:14** Paul further elaborates on the person of the Holy Spirit by reminding his readers that the Spirit “is the guarantee of our inheritance.” “Guarantee” is used only three times in the NT, each by Paul in reference to the Holy Spirit (2 Cor.

1:22; 5:5; cf. Rom. 8:23). In the ancient world, a “guarantee” (*arrabōn*) functioned as a down payment given to someone providing a service with the expectation that full payment would be made after the service was performed. Once the *arrabōn* was accepted, a person was committed to fulfilling the terms of the contract. Similarly, God has given his people the Holy Spirit with the expectation and assurance that a full inheritance will follow (cf. 2 Cor. 5:5). That is, the presence of God’s Spirit will not be undone but will endure “until we acquire possession of it” (Eph. 1:14; cf. 4:30). Although the inheritance believers will receive certainly includes the blessing of eternal fellowship with God, because the Spirit indwells believers they can even now begin to enjoy their inheritance.

Again, the result of God’s favor on his people that includes sealing with the Holy Spirit should lead to praise: “to the praise of his glory” (cf. 1:6, 12). This final expression of praise concludes not only the fourth and final section but also the entire eulogy as a whole (vv. 3–14). Thus the eulogy not only began with blessing and praise; it ends in the same way.

### *Response*

While meditating on God’s grace, Paul erupts with praises to his God. Paul is not merely saying that God is worthy of our praise. Rather, he is actually praising God for his glorious salvation—and in so doing he is inviting his readers to do the same. This passage is indeed a great example for us. We should often contemplate the wonders of God’s grace and his amazing plan of salvation in Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 2:3). We have a great salvation because we have a great God. As we contemplate the many blessings we have in Christ, we should respond with appropriate praise to God.

The Trinitarian focus of this doxology is immediately evident. First, it is God the Father who is to be praised for his marvelous salvation. He is described as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3), who chose us (v. 4), predestined us (vv. 5, 11), adopted us (vv. 5, 11, 14), redeemed us (v. 7), forgave us (vv. 7–8), and sealed us by his Spirit (v. 13). These blessings given to his people were part of his sovereign plan before the foundation of the world (v. 4). The Father works all things according to his “purpose” (vv. 5, 9, 11), “will” (vv. 5, 9, 11), and “plan” (v. 10), and all things are done “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14).

This introductory eulogy is also Christ-centered, focusing on the unique work of the Son. The salvation Christians possess is deeply anchored in the finished work of Jesus. This emphasis is borne out by Paul’s use in this passage of the phrase “in Christ” (or its equivalent) eleven times in Greek (nine times in the ESV).<sup>9</sup> Every spiritual blessing we possess is due to our relationship and union with Christ (v. 3). Specifically, we are chosen “in him” (v. 4), predestined in him (v. 5), blessed “in the Beloved” (v. 6), redeemed “in him” (v. 7), united “in him” (v. 10), granted an inheritance “in him” (v. 11), and sealed with the Spirit “in him” (v. 13).

<sup>9</sup> “In Christ” occurs 164 times in Paul’s 13 letters, with 36 of those occurrences in Ephesians.

Finally, the work and ministry of the Spirit is clearly seen in this passage. We are blessed with every “spiritual” blessing in the heavenly places (v. 3). That is, we are given every blessing that relates to or belongs to God’s Spirit. Thus, all the blessings mentioned in this passage are gifts given by the Holy Spirit. In addition, those who have faith in Christ are “sealed with the . . . Holy Spirit” (v. 13). This primarily indicates that the Holy Spirit is the means by which we are sealed, demonstrating we belong to God. And yet, the Spirit is also the down payment or deposit guaranteeing God’s future blessings to believers. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is infinitely worthy of our praise.

## EPHESIANS 1:15–23

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>1</sup> toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts omit *your love*

### *Section Overview*

Paul moves from blessing God to offering thanksgiving and prayer for his audience (cf. Phil. 1:3–11; Col. 1:3–14; Philem. 4–6). Like the previous section, this section also comprises one long sentence (169 words) in the Greek. The key idea is found in verse 16, where Paul unceasingly gives thanks and prays for the Ephesian Christians. This key thought is followed by two content clauses in verse 17 (“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation”) and verse 18 (“that you may know . . .”). The second of these two purposes is further expanded with three demonstrative pronoun phrases (“*what* is the hope to which he has called you, *what* are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and *what* is the immeasurable greatness of his power”; vv. 18–19). Paul then further elaborates on this final point by offering four ways in which God’s mighty

power is displayed through his Son (vv. 20–23). He begins with thanksgiving and prayer but moves to lofty statements of Jesus' exalted position in the universe, which, as the length of material devoted to this latter topic indicates (vv. 20–23), is being emphasized by the apostle.

### *Section Outline*

- III. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:15–23)
  - A. Paul's Thanksgiving for Their Faith and Love (1:15–16a)
  - B. Paul's Prayer (1:16b–23)
    - 1. That God Will Give Them the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation (1:16b–17)
    - 2. That They Will Know God's Great Grace (1:18–23)
      - a. The Hope of His Calling (1:18a)
      - b. The Riches of His Glorious Inheritance (1:18b)
      - c. The Immeasurable Greatness of His Power (1:19–23)

### *Comment*

**1:15–16a** Paul now offers thanks for the faith and love of his readers. “For this reason” points back to the entire preceding eulogy of verses 3–14, perhaps especially to verses 13–14, and provides a reason for why Paul gives thanks and prays for the Ephesian believers (cf. 5:17; 6:13, where the same Greek phrase is also used). In 1:16 Paul provides the main thought of this section when he says that he unceasingly gives thanks and prays for his readers. This verse involves two separate, though related, actions. The first is that Paul is thankful for the Ephesian believers. It would be easy to misinterpret Paul's first statement (“I do not cease to give thanks for you”) to mean that he is always (whenever he is awake) thanking God for them. In fact, his giving thanks is related to his prayers. That is, whenever he prays, he is in the habit of thanking God for the faith and love of the Ephesians.

Paul specifically gives thanks “because” he heard of their (1) “faith in the Lord” and (2) “love toward all the saints” (cf. Col. 1:3–4). First, Paul is thankful for their faith. Although they lived in a hostile environment where Christianity was marginalized and Christians suffered persecution (cf. Acts 19:21–41), they held firmly to their faith. Notice this is not a blind faith but a specific faith “in the Lord Jesus.” The Ephesian Christians did not confess the god Artemis (Diana) or even Caesar as Lord. Rather, their Lord was Jesus. Their faith was not simply an intellectual affirmation of Christian belief about Jesus but was, more importantly, an intimate union with Jesus, who provided them with grace and strength to survive and thrive in the world. Second, Paul is thankful for the love the Ephesian believers possessed “toward all the saints.” “Saints” refers to all believers, who have been “sanctified” or “made holy” by the redemption found in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:1, 18).

**1:16b–17** In the second half of verse 16, Paul transitions from thanksgiving to intercession. The content of Paul's prayer begins in verse 17, but not before he

includes a twofold description of the one who is the source of all divine blessings. First, the one to whom Paul prays is acknowledged as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Similar to his eulogy in 1:3, Paul links blessings from God to his Son Jesus Christ, demonstrating the centrality of the Son in the Father’s purposes. Second, he addresses God as “the Father of glory.” Elsewhere God is referred to as “the God of glory” (Ps. 29:3; Acts 7:2), “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1), and “the King of glory” (Ps. 24:7–10).

Paul asks that God would give the Ephesian believers “the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation” (Eph. 1:17; cf. Isa. 11:2). Although it is possible to take “spirit” as a reference to human disposition, it is best to interpret this usage as a reference to the Holy Spirit, who imparts both wisdom and revelation (so ESV). Although all believers are already sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), there is still a need for them to be filled with the Spirit and walk according to him. Specifically, Paul prays that the work of the Spirit would produce wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Paul often prays for his readers to grow in the knowledge of God (Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9–10; Philem. 6); this knowledge is not some mere esoteric insight but is the type of intimate knowledge that family members possess.

Paul continues his intercessory prayer by requesting that God would grant his readers spiritual insight. Paul uses the phrase “the eyes of your hearts” to refer to believers’ capacity to discern spiritual realities related to the purpose and plan of God (cf. Pss. 13:3; 19:8). Before their conversion, Paul’s readers were “darkened in their understanding” (Eph. 4:18), but now Paul prays that they would be “enlightened” by God’s Spirit in order to comprehend the mysteries of God. To see with one’s heart is to perceive not with physical eyes but with the eyes of faith. Paul then prays specifically that the Ephesian saints would comprehend three spiritual realities.

**1:18a** Paul’s first request is that his audience would know the hope of God’s calling. Notice that the text does not read “the hope of *your* calling” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Pet. 1:10). Rather, it is the hope of *his* calling or, as the ESV rightly translates, “the hope to which he has called you.” God not only predestined his people (Eph. 1:4–5); he also called them through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9) and now, in that gospel, extends hope to those who embrace it (Col. 1:5). Before hearing and believing the gospel, Paul’s readers had “no hope” and were “without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But now, through Christ’s work on the cross, those who once had no hope have been called to a sure one. It is Paul’s prayer that his readers would come to understand and experience this reality in their lives. In essence, this request is that God would enable them to affirm with confidence all the divine blessings mentioned in 1:3–14.

**1:18b** Paul also prays that his readers would comprehend “the riches of his glorious inheritance.” Although it is possible to see the inheritance as God’s possession of his people (a concept found in both OT and NT), here it is best to view the inheritance as that which God gives to his people. Just a few verses earlier, Paul had said



that those who believed the gospel were sealed with the Holy Spirit, “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (v. 14; cf. Col. 1:12).

**1:19** Paul’s third request is for the Ephesians to know the greatness of God’s power, the very same power that raised Jesus, seated him at God’s side, and gave him authority over all things. This request is expanded in verses 20–23, emphasizing that it is especially important to Paul. Such power is needed as God’s people engage in ongoing spiritual warfare (6:10–12; cf. 3:7, 16, 20). The “power” of God is stressed as Paul describes it as possessing “immeasurable greatness.” But Paul does not stop there: he further says that this power is “according to the working of his great might.” *Power*, *working*, *strength* (translated “great”), and *might* are piled up to provoke confidence in God and his plan (cf. Deut. 3:24; Isa. 40:26). Finally, all of God’s power has been directed “toward us who believe.” This news would have been especially encouraging to the letter’s original recipients. Because Ephesus was steeped in magical practices and the cult of Artemis, Paul reassures his readers of the supremacy of God’s power. His readers need not fear hostile spiritual powers, because the power of God is far greater. This power was displayed preeminently in Christ.

**1:20a** Although Paul’s prayer continues, his requests do not. Instead, he focuses on God’s power magnificently demonstrated in Christ. The final request Paul mentions is for his readers to know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power. This power is “according to the *working* of his great might that he *worked* in Christ” (vv. 19b–20a). Verses 20–23 beautifully illustrate the mighty *works* of God accomplished in his Son, specifically his (1) resurrection, (2) exaltation, (3) conquest, and (4) domination.

The first mighty work of God was raising Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus represents the pinnacle of God’s work in salvation history. Although others in the Bible were raised from the dead, the raising of Jesus is significantly different because only Jesus conquered the Devil and sin. The resurrection of Jesus was the focus of early preaching (Acts 2:23–24; 17:18; 1 Cor. 15:3–4) and is at the very center of God’s plan to redeem his people.

**1:20b–21** The second illustration of God’s power is the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of the Father. Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9). Paul’s reference to Christ’s exaltation is significant for at least three reasons.

First, Christ is *seated*, which signifies lordship. The place where Jesus is sitting is not some ordinary *chair* but a *throne*, which implies that he is currently reigning as the sovereign king of the universe. Whereas the resurrection proclaims that he *lives* forever, his exaltation proclaims that he *reigns* forever. In addition, his being seated indicates the completion of his earthly mission.

Second, Christ is seated *at God’s right hand*, which signifies honor and power. When the Bible speaks of Jesus’ being seated at the right hand of God, this should not be understood literally. The Bible tell us that “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and

therefore he does not possess a right hand (nor a literal throne on which to sit). “At his right hand” is metaphorical, indicating honor and status (1 Kings 2:19; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22), as well as power (Ex. 15:6; Ps. 89:13; Isa. 48:13).

Third, Christ is seated *in the heavenly places*, which signifies prominence. His throne is not merely an earthly throne. Even though there might be other kings, there is no king like him. Indeed, he is the “King of kings and the Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16). His throne is over all the spiritual powers in the universe, whether seen or unseen.

Paul emphasizes Jesus’ supremacy by saying that he has been exalted “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Eph. 1:21). Although each of these four terms have distinct nuances, Paul piles them up to convey the comprehensive nature of Jesus’ supremacy. In fact, Jesus is exalted “above every name that is named.” Finally, in case there is any doubt, Paul adds, “not only in this age but also in the one to come.” Christ is not only given a position above all others; he is given that position permanently. Paul’s point, then, is that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the throne at his Father’s side in heaven is the power now at work in God’s people.

**1:22a** The third component Paul mentions to highlight God’s mighty power in exalting his Son is that all things have been put in subjection to Christ. Paul essentially quotes Psalm 8:6 (“You have put all things under his feet”; cf. 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8). Although Christ’s ultimate victory is certain, the final subjugation of all things will not occur until death is defeated and God is all in all. But because of Christ’s present enthronement, which guarantees the certainty of future victory, Paul writes as if it were already accomplished (cf. Phil. 3:21; Col. 2:15).

**1:22b–23** The final example of God’s power displayed in Christ involves his headship over the church. God made Christ head “over all things,” which denotes his supremacy over all of creation, particularly the hostile spiritual powers previously referenced (v. 21; cf. Col. 2:10). In addition, Christ’s headship extends to the church. “Head” refers to one who is of supreme rank or preeminent status and possesses ruling authority. Thus, God’s power in Christ not only has resulted in the sure defeat of his enemies but also is for the good of believers as the promised Messiah graciously rules his church. Although Paul typically uses *ekklēsia* to refer to the local gathering of believers, here it refers to the universal church (cf. Eph. 3:10, 21; 5:23–25, 27, 29, 32; Col. 1:18, 24). Paul concludes by again noting that God’s gift of Christ as head over all creation is for the benefit of the church. So, his prayer is that his readers would comprehend and apprehend the amazing power of God that he works for their advantage.

Paul switches from the metaphor of Christ’s being head over all things, including the church, to the church’s being the body of Christ. This metaphor is used here to describe the relationship not of believers to each other but of Christ to his people. He is the sovereign Lord who fills all things in every respect.

*Response*

Paul not only encouraged others to give thanks to God for all things, including working in the lives of his fellow believers, but also practiced this thankfulness in his letters. Most of Paul's letters contain a section offering thanksgiving or praise to God for his many blessings. In his prayers of thanksgiving, Paul offers heartfelt gratitude to God for a variety of spiritual blessings. He thanks God for his readers' faith, love, hope, grace, and partnership in the gospel. It is not surprising, then, that Paul urges his readers to follow his example. Later in Ephesians he exhorts his audience to be filled with the Spirit, which involves "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20; cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Because "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28), we are able to give thanks in every circumstance.

Paul's thanksgivings seem to be intricately tied to his prayers. When he gives thanks for his readers, he often expresses that thanksgiving as a prayer to God (Rom. 1:9–10; Eph. 1:16; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; Philem. 4). Prayer was obviously important to Paul. He not only offers prayers in his letters; he also frequently asks for prayers *from* his readers (Rom. 15:30; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Philem. 22). Because of his dependence on God for all things, Paul relies on the power of prayer for success in his daily life. It is therefore not surprising that Paul likewise urges his readers to pray not only for him but also constantly (cf. Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17). He likewise exhorts the people of Ephesus to pray for all people (1 Tim. 2:1), calling the men to pray, "lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (1 Tim. 2:8). According to Paul's example and apostolic exhortations, we ought to live in recognition that prayer is essential for the Christian life.

## EPHESIANS 2:1–10

**2** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body<sup>1</sup> and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup>But<sup>3</sup> God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness

toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

<sup>1</sup>Greek *flesh* <sup>2</sup>Greek *like the rest* <sup>3</sup>Or *And*

### *Section Overview*

This section is a practical example of how God’s power, demonstrated in the resurrection and enthronement of Christ, is at work in the life of the believer. Although this paragraph is grammatically complex, the main thought is clear: “God . . . made us alive . . . and raised us up . . . and seated us . . .” (Eph. 2:4–6). These actions do not take place in isolation but are each based on the believer’s union with Christ. Believers are made alive *together with Christ*, raised *with Christ*, and seated *with Christ*.

This paragraph can be divided into two sections. The first section has two parts: (1) living in bondage and under wrath (vv. 1–3) and (2) living and reigning with Christ by grace (vv. 4–7). The second section summarizes the nature of the salvation possessed by God’s people (vv. 8–10). Verse 5 should be seen as the central statement and climax of the passage. The passage is a vivid reminder to believers of God’s great work of salvation that takes those who are spiritually dead (vv. 1–3) and, because of his great kindness and grace secured through Christ’s work on the cross, makes them alive and raises them and seats them with Christ.

### *Section Outline*

- IV. From Death to Life (2:1–10)
  - A. Dead in Trespasses and Sins (2:1–3)
  - B. Made Alive with Christ (2:4–7)
  - C. By Grace for Good Works (2:8–10)

### *Comment*

**2:1** Paul addresses the spiritual state of his readers by declaring that they were “dead in the trespasses and sins. . . .” This is the state not only of the most depraved of society but of all who have not trusted in Christ as Savior. Prior to conversion, every human since Adam lives in rebellion against God by transgressing his commands and sinning against him (Matt. 8:22; Luke 9:60; John 5:24). The reference to both *trespasses* and *sins* is probably an example of redundancy as Paul emphasizes the sinfulness of his readers’ pre-conversion state.

**2:2–3** Paul further elaborates the condition of his readers prior to conversion, saying that they *walked* in trespasses and sins, referring to their behavior and conduct. But this is no longer true for those who have trusted in Christ Jesus—a reality indicated by “once” (vv. 2, 3). Paul draws a sharp contrast between his readers’ past and present condition. They were “once” living this way, but now they have

been transformed by God's grace. And yet, Paul is not finished describing their pre-Christian state. He continues by noting the influences of (1) the world, (2) the Devil, and (3) the flesh.

First, they formerly followed "the course of this world" (v. 2). That is, before knowing Christ, the behavior of the Ephesian believers was determined by the powerful influence of the culture and society in which they lived. Their preferences, attitudes, and habits were not according to God's standard or will but according to the standards of this world (cf. 1 John 2:15).

Second, they also formerly followed "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), clearly a reference to the Devil or Satan. Paul acknowledges that the Devil is a powerful supernatural being, ruling over other evil spirits and possessing authority, and his realm of influence or authority is the "power of the air." Finally, the Devil is called "the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." The Devil is a spiritual being, busily working his evil plan to destroy humanity. Evidently he is somewhat effective, since unbelievers are characterized by disobedience.

Third, our own flesh causes us to sin. All people, both Jew and Gentile, are affected by the fall and are "sons of disobedience" (v. 2). By "flesh" Paul refers not to the physical body or our physical existence but to our fallen, self-centered human nature. The result of this condition is that God's will is not followed; instead, the "desires of the body and the mind" (v. 3) are carried out.

The dire situation for all humanity is not due merely to outside influences. When Paul says that they were "by nature" children of wrath, he refers to our condition as determined "by birth" (cf. Gal. 2:15). The expression "children of wrath" refers to people who deserve or are destined to experience God's wrath.

**2:4–6** After spending three verses describing the desperate situation of mankind, Paul now introduces a glorious contrast: "But God" (v. 4). We were all destined to experience God's wrath, which would have been fair and just because we have all offended a holy God with our "trespasses and sins" (v. 1). Verse 4, however, offers two reasons why this dire predicament has changed: (1) because of God's mercy and (2) because of his great love. God's merciful character is clearly demonstrated throughout the Bible (e.g., Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8; Jonah 4:2; Titus 3:5). God's love is another motivation for the divine initiative in redeeming his people. This love is emphasized by the adjective "great" and the verbal form of the term that follows ("the great love with which he *loved* us"). Both mercy and love stand behind God's decision to call a people out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Just as Ephesians 2:1 began with our dire predicament, so verse 5 repeats that idea: God saved us "when we were dead in our trespasses." In order to heighten the contrast between man's predicament and God's rescue, Paul reiterates man's unregenerate state before highlighting God's intervening work. He then uses three verbs to describe God's gracious salvation—each of which underscores believers' union with Christ: "God . . . made us alive together *with* Christ . . . and raised us up *with* him and seated us *with* him" (vv. 4–6). What God has accomplished for the

believer was accomplished first in Christ. There is a clear parallel between what God *did* in Christ and what he *does* in a Christian.

After noting that God makes believers alive, Paul pauses to introduce the element of grace (“by grace you have been saved”; v. 5). While other religions focus on concepts such as “law” or “ritual,” Christianity’s key word is “grace.” It is because of God’s grace that we receive new life. This key statement was interjected here somewhat parenthetically, but Paul will return to the theme in more detail in verses 8–10.

Paul often speaks of the believer’s union with Christ (Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:12, 20; 3:1). Although Christ’s resurrection was physical, it is clear in the context that both “being made alive” and “being raised” refer to the spiritual life possessed by believers resulting from Christ’s resurrection and their union with him in that resurrection. The final verb, “being seated,” refers to believers’ present exaltation, specifically the privileges, honor, and authority they share as a result of their union with the exalted Christ. Paul may be emphasizing this present position in light of the hostile (demonic) powers frequently mentioned in this letter (Eph. 1:21; 2:1–2; 3:10; 6:10–20).

2:7 God’s divine purpose in salvation is to “show the immeasurable riches of his grace.” God saves rebellious sinners in order to display his marvelous grace, which Paul highlights in at least two ways: (1) with the adjective “immeasurable” and (2) with the noun “riches” (or “wealth”). This statement about grace is even more astonishing when seen in light of the previous condition of sinners who were destined for and deserving of God’s wrath (v. 3): Because of their union with Christ, those who were once enemies are now beloved children. Those who once had no mercy now have mercy. And those who were once without hope now have a living hope. Paul not only mentions God’s “mercy” (v. 4), “love” (v. 4), and “grace” (vv. 5, 7); he also includes God’s “kindness” (cf. Rom. 2:4; Titus 3:4). Specifically, his grace and kindness are directed “toward us in Christ Jesus.” Furthermore, this display of glory is for not only this age but also “the coming ages.” This phrase most likely refers to the unending epoch of time that will encompass all eternity. God’s glory will be on display forever.

2:8–9 These verses are tied to the previous section by “For,” which introduces Paul’s explanation of God’s gracious salvation. Though we were dead in our sins and followed the influences of the world, the Devil, and the flesh, God made us alive, raised us, and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. Thus, salvation is “by grace” (v. 8). Paul already mentioned this idea in verse 5 when he interrupted his thought to assert that salvation is grounded in grace. The grace that results in salvation is received “through faith.” Note that we are saved *because of* or *on the basis of* grace, which is attained *by means of* or *through* faith. We are not saved because of or on the basis of faith. Faith does not save anyone. Only the grace we receive because of Christ’s atonement saves us. Faith is merely the instrument by which grace is received—similar to a syringe that delivers lifesaving medicine. A person is “saved” because of the medicine, not because of the syringe. And yet, without the

syringe (i.e., faith), salvation would not be possible. Faith is the response by which salvation through the perfect work of Christ is received. Faith is not a meritorious work; it is simply trusting in what Christ has accomplished on our behalf.

Verses 8b and 9 explain and amplify what it means to be saved by grace through faith. To do this, Paul uses a chiasm arrangement that includes two negative statements with a positive statement in the middle: “this is not your own doing” (A), “it is the gift of God” (B), “not a result of works” (A’). Salvation does not originate with us; it is a gift of God. If a gift is earned, it is no longer a gift.

Historically, there has been some debate as to the precise antecedent of “this”: What, precisely, is not from us but a gift of God? Is it faith, grace, or something else? Although faith is the closest antecedent, the grammatical genders of “faith” and “this” in Greek do not match, and thus “faith” should be ruled out as the antecedent. The same is true for grace. Thus, most scholars and commentators agree that “this” refers to the entire clause. That is, both the grace and the faith we receive that result in salvation are not of our own doing but are gifts from God.

Because salvation is not dependent on good works, “no one may boast” before God (v. 9; Rom. 3:27; Gal. 6:13; Phil. 3:3).

**2:10** Paul offers further evidence (“For”) that salvation is by grace and not by works by indicating that salvation involves becoming a new creation. Believers are God’s “workmanship” (*poiēma*), a term that occurs only here and in Romans 1:20, where it refers to the works of God at creation. Here it designates God’s work of the *new* creation (cf. Eph. 4:24; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

Paul then informs his readers that they were “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Believers are created for the purpose of good works. Furthermore, God has *predestined* believers to perform such works (“prepared beforehand”; cf. Rom. 9:23). For Paul, the completely free and gracious nature of salvation does not lead to complacency or passivity. It is only when the nature of salvation is misunderstood or abused that God’s grace is misused (Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 16).

Believers are called to “walk” in the good works God has previously prepared for them. By using the verb “walk,” Paul ties together the beginning of this chapter (“walked”; Eph. 2:2) with this part, forming an *inclusio*. Salvation, from beginning to end—even the good works believers perform—is a result of God’s grace. There is therefore no boasting before God, since he is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

### **Response**

This passage contains one of the clearest NT descriptions of the gospel. God, because of his mercy, grace, and love, made believers alive together with Christ. But this reality cannot be fully appreciated without the knowledge and awareness of our dire predicament prior to receiving God’s unmerited grace.

All humanity is in bondage to sin. In fact, we were “dead” in our trespasses and sins. Humanity is not merely sick or ailing but is spiritually bankrupt. We cannot

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