

EPHESIANS

Lesson 1

SOME BIG IDEAS

Two parts of Ephesians

Find the Hinge Verse (Think, Mike Wisdom)

Who is the Audience?

2:11-3:1

You & Us, 2:12, 2:1-5

Practical Letter: Find all the occurrences of the word “walk”

How Does Paul Get to the “Therefore”?

- Spiritual Blessings in Christs
- God’s Inheritance
- God Raised Christ from the Dead
 - & Made Him to sit in the Heavens
- God Raised Us from the Dead
 - & Made Us to Sit in the Heavens
- Reconciled to God
- Fellow-citizens
- Habitation of God in the Spirit

Questions

1. If you were to divide the book of Ephesians into only two chapters rather than six, where would you make the division, and why?
2. Based on Ephesians 2:11-3:1, for what group of people was this letter written?

3. Keeping in mind your answer to the previous question, notice the “we” and “you” in Ephesians 1:12-13. Who is “we” and who is “you”?
4. Again, keeping in mind your answers to the previous two questions, notice the “you” and “we” in 2:1-5. Who had previously been dead but was now made alive, the “you,” the “we”, or both the “you” and the “we”? Why does Paul speak of the “you” and “we” distinctly in 2:1-5?
5. Find all occurrences of the word “walk” in Ephesians.
6. What did God do for Jesus according to Ephesians 1:20? What did God do for both the “you” and the “us” according to Ephesians 2:4-5?
7. In Ephesians 2:11-12, Paul briefly emphasizes the prior condition of his audience. Notice the contrast between that condition and their condition in Christ as described in 2:19-22
8. The idea that Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God in one body, all of them having equal access to God, is a prominent idea in Ephesians.
 - a. What is that body called in 1:22-23?
 - b. Is there a different means of access for Gentiles as opposed to the access enjoyed by the Jews?
 - c. Besides the mention of “one body,” what other phrase does Paul use in Ephesians 2:15-16 to emphasize that Jews and Gentiles together form one entity?
9. Together Jews (who were near) and Gentiles (who were far off) have become what? (Ephesians 2:20-22)

EPHESIANS

Lesson 2

The Greeting, “Grace and Peace”

1. For examples of typical greetings used in Letters at this time, see Acts 15:23, Acts 23:26, James 1:1.
2. The Greeting found in many NT letters is a modified form, substituting “grace and peace” for “greeting.”
3. The word translated grace is related to the word translated “greeting”
4. “Peace” is said to have been typical oriental greeting. See for example, Daniel 4:1.
5. For Christians, what would be the significance of combining “grace” and “peace”?

Spiritual Blessings in Christ, 1:1-14

The primary thought of the sentence beginning in verse three is “Blessed is God who has blessed us in Christ.” But Paul piles relative clause on top of prepositional phrase on top of participial phrase until the sentence extends all the way through our verse fourteen. To say that in Christ, God has given us “every spiritual blessing” is not sufficient. Paul elaborates, explaining that even before the foundation of the world, God had purposed to bless us in Christ and, in particular, to make us holy and blameless in Christ, sons even. Grace, redemption, forgiveness are all ours through Christ. Again in verse four, the point of emphasis is that God chose us in him, that is, in Christ.

All of this is couched in language emphasizing that the recipients are the beneficiaries of God's good will toward them. Twice Paul mentions that all this was God's "good pleasure" (1.5, 9). Paul emphasizes the liberality of God's kindness as he says God graced us with his grace (1.6), and forgave us in accordance with the riches of his grace (1.7), which he caused to abound toward us (1.8). Paul's aim is to move his readers to gratitude and, by means of that gratitude, to a walk worthy of their calling.

We ought not overlook Paul's indication that these blessings had been ordained before the foundation of the world. Paul will return to this idea in chapter three as he assures Gentile Christians that their inclusion is not an afterthought, but is in accordance with God's eternal purpose.

—Excerpted from "Walk Worthily, A Commentary on Ephesians."

1. Make a list of the things that are said to be in or through Christ in Ephesians 1:3-13. (I found 13!)

2. "In the heavenlies," an adjective used as a noun. What is the meaning?
 - a. —the point is probably simply exaltation. David wrote, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him" (Ps 103.11). And again, God's "lovingkindness is great to the heavens" (Ps 57.10). Is this really a very different idea than "Thy lovingkindness, O Lord is in the heavens" (Ps 36.5), which the NAS translates as "extends to the heavens"? In the Septuagint, the parallel phrase is "Your truth is unto the clouds"....There is no distinction to be sought between ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (in the sky) and ἕως τῶν νεφελῶν (unto the clouds). Whether "clouds" or "sky," the point is exalted height, and whether "unto" or "in," the point is that God's kindness and truth belong to an exalted realm.

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 - b. According to Ephesians 2:6, who is in the "heavenlies"?

3. According to Ephesians 1:4, what (not whom) did God predestine, or foreordain? That is, what did God predetermine?

4. There is a question about the significance of “in love” in Ephesians 1:4. Is this telling us something about God’s choosing, or is it telling us something about the area in which we are to be “holy and blameless”? If it is the latter, compare Matthew 5:43-48 and Ephesians 5:1, and explain what the meaning would be.

5. In Ephesians 1:10, most English translations use one of the following words: “plan,” “administration,” or “dispensation.” Which of these words would fit nicely with the language of 1:6-8, “grace...freely bestowed,” “riches of his grace,” and “made to abound toward us”?

6. Think about the meaning of the phrase “the fulness of the times” in Ephesians 1:10. What is the point of the phrase, and what is not the point of the phrase? Consider Daniel 2. Had God long known precisely when the Christ would be sent into the world?

7. In Ephesians 1:11 Some translators suppose Paul is saying that God’s people receive something, an inheritance (as in the KJV, NAS, ESV, NLV), while others understand Paul to be speaking of God’s people as being something God receives, as being God’s inheritance (as in the ASV, NIV, NET). Look at Dt 4.20, 9.26,29, 1 Sam 10.1, 1 Ki 8.51,53, 2 Ki 21.14, Ps 33.12, 68.9, 106.5, Is 19.25, Mic 7.18, and then explain the latter interpretation.

8. There are at least three ideas associated with the language of sealing.

- The idea of identification. (1 Ki 21.8, Neh 10.1, Est 3.10, 8.8, 8.10, *et al.*)
- The idea that something so marked consequently is spared some coming destruction (Rev 7.3f).
- The idea that the contents of a sealed vessel were inaccessible gave “sealed” the additional significance of “closed.” (Mt 27.66). Compare Job 14.17, Daniel 12.4.

“Consider the first of these ideas, the idea of identification, as being prominent in Ephesians 1.13. This is consistent with the language of possession and inheritance. God has identified the saints from among the Gentiles as part of the possession that constitutes his inheritance, or as Peter says, “a people for God’s own possession...you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Pt 2.9f). But the idea of protection is not far behind inasmuch as the sealing results in the redemption of those sealed (vs. 14, cf. 2 Cor 5.4–5). So also at 2 Timothy 2.19, the seal identifies those who belong to the Lord, but the result is that the firm foundation of God stands. This is the point Paul is making in Ephesians 1.13. His readers have been identified as belonging to God, sealed by the promised Holy Spirit.

Much of the attention given to this phrase seems to derive from the notion that Paul is talking about the Spirit doing something in us in such a way that we can discern the sealing and thus be assured of our salvation.

Whatever one may think of that idea, the point of this passage is that God’s inheritance in the saints is assured to him, that he has assured it to himself, having sealed it such that “the Lord knows them that are his” (2 Tim 2.19).”

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- So the point of Ephesians 1:13 is that God’s people are identified as belonging to God inasmuch as they are led by his Spirit. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the Sons of God” (Rom 8.14).

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Lesson 3 Ephesians 1:15-2:22

1. What about Eph. 1:15 might seem odd if we suppose this letter was written uniquely to the saints at Ephesus?
2. Do you find it encouraging when someone says to you, "I'm praying for you," or "I thank God for you"? Notice that is what Paul does in Ephesians 1:16. See also Philemon 4, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, Philippians 1:3-4, Romans 1:8, Colossians 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 1:4.
3. According to Ephesians 1:20, where has the Christ been seated? According to Acts 2:25 (Psalm 16:8), who is at whose right hand? How are both true? What does this tell you about the significance of "at the right hand"?
4. Can you identify a parallel between Ephesians 1:20 and Ephesians 2:1-6? What is it?
5. Paul seems to allude to the wall in the temple complex beyond which Gentiles were not allowed to pass as a symbol of the separation between Jews and Gentiles and of the Gentiles' being "far off" from God. However, one prominent commentator on Ephesians objects to seeing an allusion to this wall for the following four reasons: (1) He says, "there is no reference to the Jerusalem wall in this context," (2) "the Jerusalem wall is never called by the designation given in the present context," (3) "the wall in Jerusalem was still standing

when Paul wrote this letter,” and (4) “it was probably unfamiliar to the average person in the churches around Ephesus.” We’ll discuss his second objection in class. What do you think about his third objection? Consider Acts 21:29ff in connection with his fourth objection. (And yes, I know, the first objection seems to be nothing more than “because I said so.”)

6. See Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 in connection with Ephesians 2:20. Discuss the imagery of Christ as a cornerstone. While Paul does not quote Isaiah 28.16 in Ephesians, he does quote the passage at Romans 9.33, and quotes the last part of the verse again at 10.11.
7. In what sense are the apostles and prophets the foundation?

EPHESIANS

Lesson 4 Ephesians 3:1-21

My translation of Ephesians 3:1-7

On account of this, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ [Jesus] on behalf of you the Gentiles—if indeed you heard about the stewardship from God’s favor that was bestowed upon me for you (namely, that according to revelation the mystery was made known to me just as I previously wrote in a few words, with reference to which you are able, when reading, to appreciate my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in spirit) the Gentiles being fellow-heirs and fellow members of the body and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel of which I was made a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that had been given to me according to the working of his power.

Paul’s Interrupted Prayer

Paul begins his prayer of thanksgiving (3.1):

On account of this, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ [Jesus] on behalf of you the Gentiles—

but turns his attention to the privilege bestowed upon him, as his readers may have heard (3.2–13):

if indeed you heard about the stewardship from God’s favor that was bestowed upon me for you

before resuming the prayer which he had only barely begun (3.14–21):

On account of this I bow my knees to the Father...

1. Chapter three is Paul's prayer on behalf of the Gentiles. He begins by explaining what prompts his prayer: "On account of this." On account of what?
2. He identifies himself as the prisoner of Christ on behalf of the Gentiles that they might be reminded of the degree to which he had invested himself in their salvation. And then beginning in verse 14, he describes what he prays on their behalf. But in between his self-identification as a prisoner and the beginning of his description of his prayer, he elaborates on his own work on behalf of the Gentiles and how great a favor he considered it to be that he was given the privilege of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. How is Paul's description of the inception of his ministry consistent with Luke's account? (Acts 26.14ff, cf. Ga 1.11; Acts 26.16, Acts 26.17).

Having referred to his work on behalf of the Gentiles (3.1), Paul now digresses to discuss that work, and especially to describe it as a great privilege in view of the momentous import of the message that Gentiles are fellow heirs of the gospel.

3. In Ephesians 3:2 ("if indeed you heard about the stewardship from God's favor that was bestowed upon me for you"), Paul uses the word "stewardship" ("dispensation" in KJV, NKJV; "administration" in NIV) of his responsibility, yea, privilege, to preach even to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, thus making known what had previously been a mystery, although it was part of God's eternal purpose.
4. The Greek word points to his responsibility as a steward (cf. 1 Cor 4.1, "Let a man count us as stewards...of God's mysteries"). What does Paul have in mind when he uses the word "favor" or "grace." What favor does he have in view? (Compare Eph 3:8 and Romans 15:15-16. Note that in Eph 3:2, grammatically, it is the favor that is said to have been bestowed upon Paul, not the stewardship.)
5. Specifically, what is it that had been a mystery?
6. Explain the meaning of the statement that the wisdom of God is made known through the church. (Eph 3:10)

7. For how long had it been God's plan to save Gentiles along with Jews in one body, i.e., the church of Jesus Christ? (Eph. 3:11)

8. In Ephesians 3:3, Paul says, "as I wrote before in few words..." Exactly what does Paul say he wrote before, and where does that writing exist today?

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Lesson 5, Ephesians 4:1-16

1. Explain why we might say Ephesians 4:1 is the “hinge verse” of the letter.
2. Paul speaks of the unity of the spirit and mentions seven “ones” in 4:3-6. What is the first “one” he mentions? Having chapters 2 & 3 in mind, why is it fitting that Paul emphasizes these “ones”?
3. On 4:8-10 and the use of wording from Psalm 68...
 - a. In what ways is Paul’s wording different than the wording found in Psalm 68:18?
 - b. What is God’s role as pictured in Psalm 68:7?
 - c. What is God’s role as pictured in Psalm 68:11-14?
 - d. Look at the last part of Psalm 68:12 and compare Judges 5:30. Explain what is going on.
 - e. Cite phrases in Psalm 68 that portray God as beneficent.
 - f. Would it be more accurate to say Paul “quotes Psalm 68:18,” or “borrows the language of Psalm 68:18”?
 - g. Looking at your answers to 3.c, 3.d, and 3.e, can you see the overall portrait of God in the Psalm as being applicable specifically to Christ? How so? What captivity would be in view in the application to the Christ, and what gifts does Paul specify in Ephesians 4:11?

From “Walk Worthily” ...

In this picture [Psalm 68] of a conquering king bestowing gifts on his people, the ultimate conquering King being God himself, Paul could easily see a theme that would be ultimately realized in the conquering Christ who would bestow gifts upon his people. (For the idea of Christ taking spoils, see Mt 12.29.)

...

Psalm 68 pictures God:

1. as having vanquished his enemies (68.1–2, 11–14)
2. as having ascended to a place of honor (68.15–18)
3. and as beneficent toward his subjects (68.5–6).

Paul, by the Holy Spirit, sees in the words of Psalm 68.18 (with some adaptation) an application to the Christ, who has:

1. vanquished his enemies (Compare Col 2.15: “having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in [the cross]”)
2. ascended to a place of honor
3. and is beneficent toward his subjects.

4. How many categories are found in Ephesians 4:11, four or five? Or to ask the question another way, does the phrase “pastors and teachers” refer to two different groups, or to one group described in two ways? Give reason(s) for your answer.
5. There are three purposes mentioned in Ephesians 4:12. They are (1) the perfecting of the saints, (2) the work of ministering (3) the building up of the body of Christ. Did Paul intend for these to be understood as sequential (*i.e.*, the apostles *et al.*, perfect the saints, who in turn do the work of ministering, which in turn results in building up the body of Christ)? Or did he intend for them to be understood as parallel (*i.e.*, by means of the apostles *et al.*, the work of perfecting, ministering, and building up is accomplished)? Give reason(s) for your answer.
6. Ultimately, the result of the gifts was to be what? (Ephesians 4:13-16)

EPHESIANS

Lesson 6, Ephesians 4:17-5:21

1. Notice that Ephesians 4:1 and 4:17 contain positive and negative versions of the same admonition. Fill in the blanks:

In order to walk _____, one must not _____.

2. In the context of the exhortation to put on the new man, notice Ephesians 6:23 and compare it with Colossians 2:10. In what ways does a Christian have a different way of thinking? (This is, admittedly, a very open-ended question!)
3. Ephesians 4:26 (*In your anger, do not sin*) is a quotation from first part of Psalm 4:4 as translated in the Septuagint. Check your English translation of that passage. What does it say?
 - a. If you are using the ESV, NKJV, CSB, or HCSB, you'll see a something that looks much like the language in Ephesians 4:26. But this is probably a case of translating the OT based on the use of the corresponding phrase in the New Testament. Look at the NIV, NASB, KJV, or ASV translation if you have access to any of those.
 - b. Perowne translated the Hebrew, "Tremble and sin not," and then explained, "TREMBLE i.e. before God, not before me, and sin not against Him."
 - c. If we understand the second part of Psalm 4:4 to be parallel to the first, what would the meaning of the first part of Psalm 4:4 be?
 - d. However, the language in Ephesians 4:26 can hardly be taken in its own right to mean anything like "stand in awe" or "tremble before God." Paul takes the

- thought suggested by the LXX and, unrelated to the context in Psalm 4, makes his own point. This is evident inasmuch as he adds the thought, “let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”
- e. When Paul says, “Be angry,” is he commanding anger? Look at John 2.19. In that passage, was Jesus commanding the destruction of the temple, i.e., his body? Explain.
4. Compare Ephesians 4:27 with Genesis 3:7. How does holding on to anger endanger us?
 5. Our recent guest speaker, Michael Sullivan, talked about Ephesians 4:28. Do you remember the point that he made?
 6. Not only does Paul prohibit vile and abusive speech, but he also charges us to speak constructively — “*but rather what is good for edification as necessary that it might give grace to those who hear.*” In light of Colossians 4:6, what sort of speech is edifying?
 7. On Ephesians 4:32...

“Forgiving” represents the verb *charizomai*.

In the gospels, *aphiēmi* is used for forgiving sin, and that word views the sinner as incurring a debt. Think of the expression, “forgive a debt,” and see Matthew 6:12.

Paul prefers *charizomai* in all his letters. Paul’s use of *charizomai* is probably due to its etymological connection with *charis* (“grace”), the word so prominent in Paul’s writings. Here in Ephesians, *charis* is God’s grace in Christ (1 .6–7, 2 .5–8), God’s favor in choosing Paul as a messenger to the Gentiles (3 .2–8), and the grace with which we are to speak to others (4.29).

In the story of the sinful woman at Simon’s house (Luke 7), the two words have a nexus in viewing forgiveness of sin as a cancellation of debt (7.42f where *charizomai* is used, and 7.47ff where *aphiēmi* is used).

What I want you to get out of the foregoing is the two sides of forgiveness: (1) the concept of a debt that is cancelled, and (2) the noble motivation behind forgiveness. Think of a parable wherein one verse puts these two sides of forgiveness together very nicely. (Hint: The verse number is the cube of the positive square root of half the chapter number.)

8. Based on Ephesians 5:3, is it true that Christians' lives look no different than anyone else's, that Christians will have the same sins in their lives, to the same degree, and the only difference is that Christians are forgiven?
9. Put Ephesians 5:11 in your own words, or explain what it means.
10. We'll discuss the phrase "redeeming the time" in class, but what do you suppose Paul is saying? (Eph. 5:16)
11. Explain the contrast between Ephesians 5:18a and Ephesians 5:18b-19.

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Lesson 7, Ephesians 5:22-6:9

1. Remember that in this section, Paul is calling on Gentile saints to conduct themselves in a manner that is contrasted with how Gentiles of the world lived (Eph. 4:17). Do you have reason to think that in the Gentile world generally, wives had equal status with their husbands? If not, in what way are Paul's instructions to wives in 5:22-23 a contrast with what was one might find in the Gentile world generally?
2. When Paul compares the wife's submission to her husband with the church's submission to Christ, is he painting a picture of subjugation by the husband (i.e., the husband subjugates the wife), or a picture of self-sacrifice by the husband?
3. In practical terms, what is the wife's role in establishing this relationship?
4. In practical terms, what is the husband's role in establishing this relationship?
5. How many times is Genesis 2:24 quoted in the NT?
6. To whom is Ephesians 6:1 addressed? Estimate a minimum age for the intended audience of Ephesians 6:1.
7. Notice that Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is a picture of a household. Aristotle wrote, "Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed...the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children." Given that this is a picture of a household, what do you think about the argument that Ephesians 6:1 is an instruction to grown, independent children?

8. Regardless of the immediate context of a household, is there NT evidence that the instruction to “honor father and mother” applies to a “child” even after he is grown and independent? What all is involved in honoring one’s parents? Is there more to it than merely speaking respectfully?
9. What instruction does Paul give to fathers? How is this instruction worded in Colossians?
10. Regarding slavery
 - a. Are masters exempt from the instruction, “Just as you would that men should do to you, do likewise to them” (Lk 6.31, cf. Mt 7.12)?
 - b. Does race or ethnicity justify ignoring this instruction?
 - c. What word or phrase does your Bible have in 1 Tim. 1:10 that would preclude taking a man by force, removing him from his loved ones and from his homeland against his will, and putting him to forced labor?
 - d. What is forbidden in Ex 21.16 and what is the penalty for such according to Dt 24.7?
 - e. Under the Law of Moses, were there instances where the Israelites were allowed to capture and enslave people? (Dt. 21:10ff, 20:11, Lev. 15:44-45)
 - f. What else did God allow under the Law of Moses according to Dt. 20:12-18?
 - g. Is “allow” the best word here, or is there a stronger word that we should be using?
 - h. Even in the OT, was slave trafficking apart from a divine instruction an acceptable practice? (Amos 1:6)

- i. Is the slavery that is in view in Ephesians 6 the result of revealed instructions to God's people in order to carry out divine justice, as was the case in the OT?
- j. So the point is, in Ephesians, we are talking about slavery that came about through circumstances very different from what is described Dt. 20. Nonetheless, in Ephesians 6, Paul instructs slaves to be obedient to their masters.
- k. The principle of yielding one's own will to do the will of another is fundamental to Christianity.
 - i. See Jn 6:38, Phil 2:7, 1 Pt 2:18-21.
 - ii. In what other earthly relationships must we apply this principle?
 - iii. Given our history in United States of America, we find the very notion of slavery fundamentally abhorrent. But we see Paul repeatedly using the word "slave" to describe his and our relationship to Christ. Cite a few instances of this.
 - iv. The inception of a master/slave relationship is often fraught with violence and evil. A man engaged in slave trafficking is classed with murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, *et al.* (1 Tim 1.10). But here in Ephesians, Paul does not concern himself with how the relationship came to be.
 - 1. If we live in a country that came into existence by wrongful means (e.g., war, coup d'état), do we have to submit to the civil authorities?
 - 2. If a woman marries a dishonest man who lies when he claims he loves her, does she have to submit to her husband?
 - 3. How did Jesus come to stand before Pilate? Was it for just cause? And yet he yielded to the cross, yielded to

his inferiors, indeed, to his creatures. Is it possible to acknowledge the duty of the slave to submit to the master without condoning the means by which he was made a slave?

- v. How were masters instructed to treat their slaves?
- vi. Why do you think Paul didn't simply instruct masters to release their slaves?