

**Ephesians –  
one of the  
greatest  
New  
Testament  
Letters**

'Ephesians' is one of the greatest of the New Testament letters. It is not so 'controversial' a letter as many of Paul's letters. Of course the material is controversial, but what I mean is that most of Paul's letters are written to deal with serious heresies or with major failures in Paul's churches. Ephesians is written in a more positive manner and does not seem to be intended to put down any heresy or handle any opponents in any obvious manner. Romans is like this also, to a large extent. This is why Romans and Ephesians are often thought to be Paul's greatest letters.

**• A circular  
letter from  
prison**

'Ephesians' was one of the 'prison letters' written (like Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) while Paul was in prison in Rome during the AD 60s. It is quite likely that it was intended as a circular letter, to be sent to more than one church.

**The  
Greatness  
of God's  
salvation  
plan**

The letter deals with the greatness of salvation and God's plan to put everything under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wants his readers to see the exceeding greatness of God's power in creating the church out of both Jewish and gentile peoples (see 1:18–19; 3:8, 18, 19, 20, all of which emphasise the greatness of what God has done for us in Christ).

The main sections may be presented as follows.

1:1–2	Introduction
1:3–14	A burst of praise: the greatness of salvation
1:15–19a	He begins his prayer that we might see the greatness of salvation.
1:19b– 2:22	His exposition of the power of God.  How we see God's power in Christ (1:19b–23), in the individual (2:1–10) and in the church (2:11–22).
3:1–13	He restarts his prayer (3:1) and then digresses to talk about how he himself has a place in God's plan.
3:14–21	He completes his prayer.
4:1–16	They must put the gospel into practice in their lives. In agreement with God's mighty plan, the first matter he deals with is the unity of the fellowship in the church.
4:17–24	He calls them to holiness in general terms. He deals with what they must not be (4:17–19) and what they should be (4:20–24).
4:25–5:7	He deals with the details of the call to godliness. Truth (4:25), Anger (4:26–27), Stealing (4:28), Talk (4:29–30), Kindness (4:31–5:2), Common sins (5:3–7).
5:8–21	Two other ways of appealing for godly living. They must be light (5:8–14) and they must be full of the Holy Spirit (5:15–21).
5:22–6:9	Three sets of relationships, husbands and wives (5:22–33), parents and children (6:1–4), servants and employers (6:5–9).
6:10–20	The devil and the Christian's armour.
6:21–24	Conclusion

## Introduction

The first two verses are Paul's introduction. *'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To God's holy people living in Ephesus, people who are believers, and are in Christ Jesus'* <sup>□1</sup>. *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'* <sup>□2</sup>.

□1 1:1  
□2 1:2

### • Paul – an apostle

Paul is an apostle, one who has supreme authority to represent Jesus Christ. The first generation of apostles were literally eye-witnesses of the resurrection, and were enabled to write the word of God with a word-by-word inspiration.

### • Written to Christians

Paul knows that he is writing to Christian people, people who are 'saints', 'believers' and people who are 'in Christ'.

He takes it that his readers are open to fresh blessings from God. Our great needs are 'grace' (undeserved help from God) and 'peace' (the joy of reconciliation with God). Such blessings come as we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

### • A burst of praise

Paul's first main paragraph is in 1:3–14. He begins with a burst of praise, worshipping God for the greatness of salvation.

*'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>□1</sup>.

□1 1:3

Paul plunges into praise. His heart is full. It is not enough to hold right doctrine. Do we praise God like this? Every blessing is in Christ. God has blessed us in Christ. With Christ comes everything else we need. 'Spiritual' blessings means blessings that come to us by the Holy Spirit. 'In the heavenlies' means 'in the spiritual realm'. God saves us by transferring us to a new realm altogether <sup>□1</sup>.

□1 see  
Colossians  
1:13

## "All Spiritual Blessings"

Next Paul explains what he means by 'all spiritual blessings'. There are blessings of the past, the present and the future, as he explains in verses 4–14.

### • The past – before history began

#### Verses 4–6a: God's plan before history began

*'He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless/before Him in love. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, for Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.'*

### • The present – this age

#### Verses 6b–9: God's giving us salvation in this age

*'This grace He freely gave us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. He has multiplied these riches of His grace towards us with all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ.'*

### • The future – the fullness of times

#### Verses 10–14: God's plan for the future

*'In His good pleasure He is planning an arrangement for the fullness of times. He has a plan to bring together all things in Christ, things in heaven and things in earth – in Him. In Him also we were allocated an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, in order that we might be to the praise of His glory – we who first hoped in Christ. In Christ also,*

having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and having believed in Him, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the down-payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.'

**God's Plan –  
how it  
happens**

• **Father, Son  
and Holy Spirit**

• **Prayer,  
teaching and  
experience**

We notice that these verses begin with the plan of the Father, move on to the work of Jesus, and end with the work of the Holy Spirit. The Father plans; the Son mediates; the Holy Spirit applies.

Paul wants us to see the vastness and the power of salvation. How can this happen?

(i) It is partly a matter of **prayerfulness**. Paul spends a lot of time praying for the people in this letter.

(ii) It is also a matter of **meditation on the apostolic teaching**.

(iii) It also has a lot to do with practical **experience** in the struggle to live a godly life. But we urgently need to see the greatness and the power of what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.



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