

THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS: EXPLORING OUR RICHES IN CHRIST

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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To the Teacher Introduction to Ephesians

Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of Asia Minor. The Temple of Diana—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—stood in Ephesus, making Ephesus the regional center of pagan worship. And, since Ephesus had a harbor, it was a key city for commercial activity.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). Indeed it was from Ephesus, serving as a hub, that the Gospel spread around the region (Acts 19:10). The church at Ephesus began as a result of a brief visit Paul made at the end of his second of three missionary journeys (Acts 18:18-28). But it was later, during the harvest of his last visit to the region, that Paul experienced the abundant fruit of the entire region (Acts 19:1-41). Tradition bears record that John the Apostle, the one whom Jesus loved, was the pastor of the Ephesian church.

The epistle we have come to know and love was written approximately 10 years after Paul's last visit to the area (circa 62 A.D.). When Paul wrote to the church he loved deeply in the Lord, he was under arrest and in prison at Rome (cp. 3:1; 4:1; also Acts 21:15ff). Indeed four of his Christ-exalting letters come from Paul's hand while in prison: Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, and our present book, Ephesians.

One particular aspect about Ephesians has gained it a name in scholarly circles, namely, Paul's "Church Epistle." More than in his other letters, Paul focuses on the universal church, the church as it is in the mind

of God, not as the church is in local contexts. Rather than the church which meets in the building on Main Street—the church which has many problems with which to deal—Paul reveals sweeping thoughts about God's people from eternity past (1:3-4) to eternity future (2:7). In short, he reveals much about the universal church through the ages.

Unlike the local assembly, all those genuinely saved are members of the universal church. This means the local church and the universal church are not coextensive. While this sounds complicated it is not. Instead it simply means a person may be a member of a local church but not really be saved; he or she became a member upon an inadequate profession of faith. How could that happen? It happens because the local church is an imperfect church, an imperfect organization which can be, and is, flawed. Of course, it is flawed because it is made up of flawed human beings!

On the other hand, the universal church is composed only of those who genuinely possess faith in Jesus Christ and consequently have been born again. Everyone who is a member of the universal church will go to heaven. The same cannot be said for every member of the local church. There are more differences to mention, but enough has been given to demonstrate that the local church and the universal church are not coextensive.

The outline of Ephesians naturally divides into two identifiable sections:



I. Christian Doctrine: Our Riches in Christ (chapters 1-3).

As we noted above, Paul makes a sweeping statement from eternity past to eternity future. And, the key to an understanding of our blessings as believers in Jesus Christ is our rootedness in eternity past. Paul writes in the very beginning of his letter, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (1:3-4a). Hence, this cosmic proposition about the church becomes one of the key verses in unlocking the book of Ephesians.

The first three chapters clearly envelop *Christian doctrine*. Divided into two subsections, Paul first deals with our *possessions in Christ* (1:1-14), including a prayer for enlightenment from Christ (vv. 15-23). He then moves deeper to discuss our *position in Christ* as believers (2:1-22). Similarly to the first subsection, he ends this section with a prayer for enablement to put doctrine into the stuff of everyday life (3:1-21).

II. Christian Duty: Our Responsibilities in Christ (chapters 4-6).

While sterile doctrine may make good philosophy, good philosophy alone can never please our God. Rather, it takes living out the Christian principles we learn, to please God. Therefore, the second half of the book is given to understanding how our riches in Christ affect our responsibility to live for Christ. The first verse of this section sums up the rest of Paul’s letter in a pithy exhortation, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (4:1).

*We are to walk
worthy as
believers in
Jesus Christ.*

Following this clear exhortation for the believer to walk worthy in Christ is a series of images which depicts exactly what Paul had in mind:

- Walk in *unity* (4:1-6)
- Walk in *purity* (4:17-32)
- Walk in *love* (5:1-6)
- Walk in *light* (5:7-14)
- Walk in *carefulness* (5:15-17)
- Walk in *harmony* (5:18-6:9)
- Walk in *victory* (6:10-24)

In short, as the Apostle obviously exhorts, we are to walk worthy as believers in Jesus Christ. Let’s get started!

Recommended Reading:

Journey Through the Bible (jerryvines.com)

The Bible Exposition Commentary, Warren Wiersbe, (Victor Books)

New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians, William Hendriksen, (Baker Book House.)

Exploring Ephesians and Philippians, John Phillips, (Kregel Books)

