

Note

Ephesians – Part 1 of 1

Summary

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Ephesians presents God’s purpose, power and plan for living a holy life in Christ. It contains the doctrine that salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians emphasizes the unity in the multi-ethnic church of Christ that has come about for both the Jews and the Gentiles. It shows believers how to walk in love as Christ did and how to use the armor of God to defend against spiritual attacks.

Transcript

Ephesians – Part 1 of 1

Today we come to the letter to the Ephesians. This is one of what are called Pauline prison epistles. Paul wrote 4 letters from the prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

Now, we had just read the book of Galatians. And in Galatians, Paul deals with a very common problem that shakes our foundation - we are saved by faith in Christ. But human nature, namely human pride, always think we are better than we are. We think we can add to the perfect work of Christ. And so, this idea of adding more to the gospel to make it a “fuller” gospel is now very pervasive where if you want to be a church member, you not only trust in Christ, but you've got to fulfill this condition and that condition. It gives us this idea that to be a child of God, we need our own goodness added in. No. To be a child of God is just simply trust Jesus as Savior. All those additions are not conditions to be a child of God but rather results or effects after you become a child of God through simple faith. Sola fide - faith in Christ and His finished work alone.

Galatians was doctrinal, but now we come to a book that's very balanced between doctrine and duty, justification and sanctification. Very balanced. The book of Ephesians is what we would call a general letter. Some letters Paul wrote were personal like to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon. Some he wrote for a purpose - purposeful letters, because he heard there were problems like in Galatia. In Ephesians, it appears that it's just a general letter, not to any particular person, nor addressing any particular problem or false teaching. It's just written as a general letter to educate, to give people a better understanding of the Christian faith and Christian duty. How do you know it's a general letter? There are not many names mentioned in it. Normally, if you have personal greetings, you would write to “such and such”, but not here. Paul was in Ephesus for two whole years so he knew almost everybody personally? If it was a personal letter, he would have put a greeting to such and such, but nothing at all.

How do we know Paul was in Ephesus for over two years? It's found in the book of Acts. In Acts 18 to 20 and you will see his ministry in Ephesus. Now

the Ephesian Church is the best known church in the entire New Testament. We know more about the Ephesian Church than any other church. You say, "How's that so?" For example, when Paul wrote to Timothy in First Timothy, Second Timothy, Timothy was pastoring the Ephesian Church. And John the apostle, wrote the book of John and First John, Second John and Third John in Ephesus. So more is known about this church than the other churches which we don't know much except the problems like the Galatian churches.

What was the city of Ephesus like? Ephesus is in present day Turkey, a huge economic city at that time, at the crossroads. And it was not only an economic center, but a religious center. Because a meteorite had fallen near the city; a huge black stone with full of bumps on it, and those bumps resembled a female breast. And so the people in Ephesus worshipped this meteorite. It was placed in the temple. This meteorite was supposed to be the goddess Diana; in Greek called Artemis. So everybody went to Ephesus, to the temple of Diana, to worship this black stone. And when people went to Ephesus to worship in this temple, they brought back souvenirs: silver replicas of this meteorite, which was a major business. Paul destroyed the business there because he said that's not a god. So the traders who made a fortune on this business caused problems and chased Paul out of the city.

Now the letter itself is very simple, very balanced. Only 6 chapters - the first 3 chapters are basically about how we are saved - Christian doctrine of how God gave us salvation. And the second half, chapters 4 to 6, tell us how we should now bless others. We have tasted the love of Christ, and seen that agape love of God should now give out this agape love. So first half: doctrine; second half: duty. Or you say, "Justification; sanctification". This is probably the best presentation of our faith as opposed to Romans.

The theme of this book is: Christ is the Head of the Church.

What is the Church? It's a universal, multi-ethnic Church. It is a body, the Body of Christ. The Church, the multinational Church is the Body of Christ. He's the head, the Church is the body, to show the world the agape love of God; to show the world, God, who is love. So basically, Christ came to this world to show He is the Word of God. In the beginning, was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. Word is expressing who is God. I've never seen him, I cannot comprehend this God, so high, so lofty, so infinite, but in Christ, the world saw this God. Christ is now gone up, He is now the Head of a bigger Body. Before, He had just a body, but now, He's

the head of a huge body called the Church. And the Church now is to show God to the world. What aspect of God? Especially the agape love of God because the primary characteristic of God is love.

Ephesians 1:3 ESV

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.

I want you to know that He has blessed us 'in Christ'. Often we think we are blessed by Christ. So like Christ is there and He blesses us, you get some blessing from Him. No, we are blessed in Christ. Now that's a world of difference. It's very hard to grasp it but this is foundational to our faith. You see the word "in Christ", "in Him", "in Christ", many times in Ephesians. In other words, when God sees me, He sees me not as PC (Paul Choo), but He sees me in Christ. He sees Christ's greatness, Christ's goodness, Christ's righteousness, and He sees me in Christ. And so, as He blesses Christ, I am IN Christ receiving those heavenly blessings. I'm not getting some sprinkling of blessings. If you are blessed by somebody, he might throw some blessings on you but when you're blessed in someone, whatever he has, is yours. We are not just saved, we are one with Christ. We're IN Christ. He's in us. Galatians 2:20, Christ lives in me. Now, that sort of miniaturizes Christ a little bit, I prefer to say, "The Holy Spirit lives in me", which is far more accurate. In a real sense, He is a third person, the Spirit of Christ that lives in us. But in Galatians, it says, "Christ lives in me". That's not wrong either, because the Three are One and One are Three. But to be theologically accurate, you say, "The Holy Spirit of Christ lives in me" but we are IN Christ. He's bigger and I'm smaller. And every time God sees me, He sees me in Christ, and every blessing I receive, I'm blessed because I'm in Christ: what He gets, I get. That's hard to grasp. intellectually and by faith, how can you accept that? You mean, "I'm so close to Christ and I'm in Christ?" Yes, on the day we trusted him, we are united with Christ. Let me read it again: 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.

Ephesians 1:7-8

In Him we have redemption through His blood the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.....

In Him, we are forgiven and we are lavished with the riches of His grace. All these are ours, to be received by simple faith.

Ephesians 1:10 (I think this is the goal of this book)
as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in Heaven and things on Earth.

So Christ is going to be Head of everything, everyone in Heaven and on Earth. He is the Head of first, the united Church, then later, a united Heaven and Earth. He's not just the head of a Jewish group of believers, which we saw in the gospels but in the epistles, we see He is the Head of a universal church, and then of Heaven and Earth. That's the goal, the Headship of Christ, in God's time.

Ephesians 1:18-20.

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 and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might.

Have you ever sat down to figure out what is the inheritance of the saints? Have you ever figured what is the immeasurable power working towards us? In us?

Ephesians 1:22-23.

And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

He was in the body as we saw in the gospels, but now we are the body that the world can see and He fills us with His power, with His might, that the whole world might see God. He's the head, we are the body. Now this multi-national church is the massive body of Christ to show God's love to the world. Are we doing that? Are we showing God's love to the world by hiding in the church and encouraging one another to study the Bible and memorize more verses? Does the world see God's agape love in us? I'm afraid not. Because we are more into the doctrinal studies rather than this goal of glorifying God.

Chapter 2 tells us we are dead in sins. What do you mean by dead? It says, before we are saved, we are dead. Yes, we are dead to God and dead to

others. We are only alive to our own passions. That's basically what Ephesians 2:1-3 says. But what's the goal of us being saved?

Ephesians 2:10.

For we are His workmanship, (His masterpiece) created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Christianity today is more about talk, more about classroom, but here we see it's about our walk. You sit on a chair and listen and take notes, so that you can go out and walk. We are that workmanship for good works, as we go out into the world. That's the goal of our faith.

Ephesians 2:11-12.

Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands - remember that you were at that time separated from Christ....

It basically says here that there used to be a huge division between the Jews and the Gentiles. In other words, the faith of the Old Testament was basically what I would have called a national faith. It was for the Jews, and all religions in the world were basically like that. There was a god of this country, the god of that country, the god of this village, the god of that town. But now, in the New Testament, God wants one Church, one Body that is multinational to represent Him in the whole world. To you and me today, isn't the church always like that? No, it was never like that. At the time when Paul wrote this to the Ephesians, there was still a very big gap. You saw in Galatians, how the Jews came in and said, “How can you guys really be God’s people? You're not even Jewish in your ways? You don't eat like Jews, you don't celebrate Jewish festivals, you don't circumcise like the Jews. You want to really worship God, you must be Jewish”. Today, every religion has its cultural links. Christianity should not have, it's multi-national. Certain religions we know came from a certain country like Arabia, or Tibet, or whatever. And you can tell, the language used in their holy book came from one country, and is not supposed to be translated. They're supposed to wear the same clothes, look the same way, because they represent a nation, a culture, but we are supposed to be just multinational. But somehow, the western church imposes a lot of western culture as if Christianity is western, which is totally wrong. We're one Church

representing Christ, each one representing Christ in the world. It doesn't matter how we dress, as long as we trust the same Christ, and the dress is not immodest.

Chapter 3 then goes on to talk about Paul's unique role as the Apostle to the Gentiles. When we say "Gentiles". A better word for us would be 'world', otherwise you might think Gentiles are a special breed of people. So Paul now is the Apostle to the world and he did his best to reach the known world at that time with the limited transportation. He reached the Roman world and many different races. So Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:18 Paul is saying, "I don't know why God chose me, I persecuted the church, I'm not even one of the original 12, and yet God chose me to do this amazing job of bringing Christ to the world".

This is Paul's prayer -Ephesians 3:18-19 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul's prayer is that we may be filled and understand the love of God, the love of Christ - how much He loved us, how much He sacrificed to leave Heaven and to come down to earth, live that life of suffering, go on the cross, die for us. Paul says, "I hope you comprehend, grasp this love of Christ." Because that's what you're supposed to do. When you are filled with His love, you can share this love to the world. So that's his prayer for us. What's the purpose of knowing all this love of Christ? So you know more verses, and just fill our heads?

So remember, chapters 1 to 3 speaks of the faith we receive, the doctrines that we have learnt, are supposed now to be expressed as our testimony to the world. Chapter 4 to 6 is about how these doctrines now come out as duty or sanctification to bless the world.

Ephesians 4:1

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,...

Walk, Christian, walk, not sit. Not learn. Learning must result in walking. How many Christians walk out to show the love of Christ by reaching the needy, helping the poor? How many? How much of your time is walk and

how much of your time is classroom talk? 95% and 5%? More likely 99% and 1%! Ephesians doesn't allow that. In

Ephesians 4:2-6, we begin our walk, first, by making sure that there is unity in our church. Walking around to our members, bearing one another's burdens.

Ephesians 4:2,

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There's oneness. To have oneness, you need to love one another, to bear each other's burdens, not have cliques, because you look down on people. You find those people so slow, so irritating, so dull, so uneducated. No, come down, bear each other's burdens like Christ did, He came down. The trouble with classroom and intellect is, we try to go up. I'm not anti-intellectual, please don't get me wrong. But there's always this danger of thinking I know so much; come out and serve. So it sounds like unity – one, one, one.

Ephesians 4:11,

And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,....

So, there's oneness and yet there's this diversity: different gifts. God uses different gifts. So there's unity but not uniformity. And the purpose of all these gifts is to do what?

Ephesians 4:12,

to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood.....

So, the purpose of all these is to do what? Serve! To equip the saints for what? So they can serve, to help everyone in the church to grow to maturity. What is maturity? To be like Christ - to love, to give, to serve. Maturity is not to be smart. It's different from knowledge. Maturity is to be like the one perfect person - Christ. What was Christ like? Spent all His time in classroom, memorizing verses? No! Serving, reaching out.

How do we do this? Look at

Ephesians 4: 22-24,

to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Putting off old habits. What are the old habits? Self. Everything I do is to make myself more comfortable, happier and more reputable. Put off those things and put on the new manner of serving. The upside down economy-of giving, of humbling. Not easy. After a lifetime of habits, it's very hard to change. So it's a case of putting off once, trying again, sometimes you forget, you take it back on, put it off, put on the new habit, a new lifestyle, piece by piece. So that, as we put on, put off, we become more and more like Christ, and less and less like Satan, and Satan's people in the world - selfish, self-indulgent.

Ephesians 5:1-2,

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So who are we supposed to be like? You're supposed to be like God, imitators of God. You say, "Who is God? How? Like Christ, the love of Christ - giving, giving, who gave Himself. Have you given yourself for anything? For anyone? Or are you trying to receive, receive, and receive? "I like to go this church, they really feed me". Nothing wrong with it, but have you fed anyone else? "I like this church, they really take care of me". Have you taken care of anyone? That's the problem with Christianity today. It's a receiving, it's a desiring-the old nature. We don't even see ourselves needing to be like Christ. We just see ourselves needing to know about Christ. There's a world of difference. So, basically walk in love as Christ did. What kind of love? Agape love. What is agape love? Paying attention, not wanting to be attracted - that's Eros, you're attracted to another person. Affinity, I like those guys- they're my type. We spend our time in church talking to one another, we are the same gang-attention type of love. Seeing those with needs, going out, reaching them in the church, beyond the church - that's agape love - looking for people with needs. So you can express "Christ's love to us". Christ saw our need: we were sinners going to hell, He came down to express that love to us. So chapter 5 tells us about having to walk in love. Oh Christian, please start walking.

He tells us in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled continually with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Drunkards love to keep drinking, and be drunk with wine; people love to eat, and get drunk with food; people love pleasure, to be full of pleasure. We just keep feeding ourselves with whatever we like.

The word “filled” is just like you keep filling yourself with your favorite food or even your favorite drink. “Filled” - they keep filling with the Spirit. How do you know you're filled with the Spirit? It will show.

Ephesians 5:19

addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

One evidence of being filled with the Spirit is you're always rejoicing, praising God all the time, not just during worship service, but singing all the time. Your heart is so filled with God's unbelievable love to you, you keep singing privately or corporately.

Ephesians 5:20

giving thanks always and for everything to God to the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Second evidence of being filled with the Spirit is, you're always thankful, not always complaining. You go to Christian fellowships, and you hear complaining - from the weather, to the government, to the economy, but to give thanks, not so common. You know who's filled with the Spirit? The guy who's giving thanks. For what? Giving thanks always, for everything, to God, the Father. So different! Sometimes we do give thanks because something amazing happens, but for EVERY THING - sunshine, a bird that flew by, a beautiful cloud in the sky?

And then the third evidence is submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ. The third thing about being filled with the Spirit is, you are able to submit just as Christ humbled Himself, and submitted Himself. You can, because you have that humble Spirit of Christ.

Then he goes on, Wives submit to your husbands, Ephesians 5:22-32 is about wives' submission to husband. You say, "suddenly from practical thing goes to a family". Yes, because our Christian walk must begin first with the family. And if a wife cannot submit to a husband, how can she submit to Christ? Our proud a spirit, "Why should I submit to my husband? Why should I submit to Christ? I like this, I like to do that". So that humble spirit of putting yourself under some authority to your husband, that's where it all begins. And this submission in Ephesians 5:22-32 is telling us, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as unto the Lord", -you learn submission. And then in Ephesians 6:1-4, children obey your parents, in the Lord. And then later, Ephesians 6:5-9 is telling all servants to submit to your earthly boss, as unto Christ. Learn submission, because our old nature is: "Who are you to tell me anything? I live my own life, I make my own decisions, and I just do it. I'm master of my own destiny". That's how we've always been. You say, "I don't mind submitting to Christ". Really? You haven't learnt submission till you learnt to submit to your parents. Employee, you haven't learnt submission till you learn to submit to your employer. It's a whole new ball game that you need to learn, a new habit to put on, this habit of no more deciding what you want to do. Because that messed up your life. We are lousy masters of ourselves though we cannot admit that. So here we see this need to submit to authority, and especially the authority of our Head, Jesus Christ who allows us to learn submission - a wife to her husband, a child to a dad, and an employee (to employer). But of course, it doesn't mean that the master can dominate and bully. Christ never bullied us, He loved us.

Then we finally come to the last part of chapter 6, which is about spiritual warfare, Ephesians 6:10-12

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against rulers, against the authorities, against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

So what do we learn? Be strong 'in the Lord'. That we live in a place where there is a warfare, whether you like it or not. This is not a war that starts at a certain time and stops at a certain time. There's a lot of wars that have starting dates and ending dates. This is a war that goes on, a spiritual battle, and the devil Satan is an aggressive guy. He works hard and he's always

trying to make us fall. So in Ephesians 6:14-17, we see God says put on the whole armor of God. I won't go piece by piece because that's a whole message by itself. The belt of truth. The belt holds the pieces together, it holds the lower part and the upper part. Now, that to me is the balance, and the belt of truth is that balance that puts everything in place. So is your life held in place? Probably a balance between doctrine and duty. Some people have only doctrine. It's like a guy just walking around with pants, and his pants fell off because he doesn't have a belt. Then it says, the breastplate of righteousness. That's the main piece of the Roman army. The breastplate protects your heart, your vital organs, if you get hit in the vital organs, you are dead. That breastplate of righteousness, whose righteousness? Who can give you the breastplate of Christ's righteousness? I dare go into any battle because I know though I'm a sinner, but Christ's righteousness is my righteousness. I can stand before God anytime. Whatever the devil says, I know I have a righteousness that is solid, it's the righteousness of Christ. Shoes to bring the gospel out, you need a good shoes in those days. The ground was rough and stony. If you didn't have the shoes you can't go anywhere. You need good shoes to reach the world. You need a shield of faith, because the devil will keep shooting darts at you – "Are you sure God loves you? Are you sure God's listening to your prayer? You just sinned yesterday, how can you expect God to hear your prayers today?" Those are darts of doubt that he shoots at us. And you can say, "I know He hears me because I'm in Christ, I'm united to Christ" That's the shield of faith, simple faith in the promises of God. And then the helmet of salvation, that solid piece that protects your head. I know I am going to heaven and I'm guaranteed of that. And then, lastly the sword of the Spirit. The only aggressive piece was the sword, the rest were defensive. And the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. The word of God is quick, living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Just one verse, change your life. The word is alive. And then Ephesians 6:18, it says, let's look at the pieces of the armor, it ends by "praying at all times in the Spirit". Prayer is not mentioned as a piece of armor, but you must pray at all times. So you need a balanced life - belt. You know you have the breastplate of righteousness, Christ's righteousness, not yours. You need good shoes to go out. Many people have no shoes. Most Christians are shoeless they don't know how to go out. They're scared to go out. They stepped on the stone, "Ah painful" and they come back in again to the church. Easily hurt and run back in, you need solid shoes so we can walk out. Shield of faith - you need to know your Bible, and all the promises are yours. Whatever the devil says you say, "It is written". Helmet of salvation - you know where

you are going, 100%. Sword of the Spirit - to use when necessary. The Roman armor had no back defense, everything was in the front. The moment a Roman soldier turned and ran back, he's a dead man, his back is exposed. So as Christians, onward Christian soldiers, no turning back. Sometimes you stand still because you can't go forward, you need to re-strengthen yourself, but never turn back.

So what have we learn in Ephesians? To me, we learnt the riches of our salvation, the inheritance God has given us. Unbelievable, that's the word. And so what happens when we are filled with this love of God, comprehend this love of God? When you are filled with something, it flows out. That's life. Unless you are the Dead Sea. Funny part of Israel was that they had a Dead Sea, water just flowed in for centuries, and nothing flowed out. We have "Dead Sea" Christians today, who have been in Bible studies forever, and never reached out to anyone. They have learnt everything about the love of God in sermons, bible studies, etc. but never given out the love of God at all. And you know what happened in the Dead Sea? All the fish in it are dead, nothing can live in it. And then the "Dead Sea" Christians are always miserable and unhappy, wondering why I go to church, I never miss a bible study, I'm faithful in my quiet time, and I'm miserable and unhappy and pathetic. No need to wonder why, just go to the Dead Sea and you understand why. What flows in, must flow out, or you die.

And so what have we learned in Ephesians? We have learnt that God's amazing agape love has been given to us and we, the Church are the Body of Christ to show the world God we have not seen, by the life of the Body of Christ. The Head came once 2000 years ago, showed Israel the love of God. Today, through His Church, He wants to show the agape love of God to the world. Do you know the agape love of God? If you do, then show it to the world. What an amazing God, what an amazing plan, what an amazing Church, the multinational Body of Jesus Christ. May you be part of this body.

May God bless you, and may this book help you to walk the Christian life. God bless you.