

Paul's Ephesian Epistle

Ephesians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles," probably the first, and written while under house arrest awaiting trial in Rome (61AD). It is unlikely to have been written during his Caesarean or second Roman imprisonments. The words "in Ephesus" are not found in the oldest and best manuscripts, indicating that it was probably a circular epistle for all the churches in the province of Asia. It was delivered by Tychicus, along with the Colossian letter and Philemon. Thus it is the least personal of his letters, emphasizing the doctrines of salvation and new revelation about the nature of the universal church. The body of Christ is an organism of which all local congregations are a part. The church is an "open secret" unrevealed in the Old Testament as one body of both Jews and Gentiles. The last half of the epistle explains the lifestyle and nature of the ministry of believers within that body, equipped by spiritual gifts. Our spiritual resources for winning the warfare against satanic forces are described.

1:1-2 - Greeting. Paul, an apostolic missionary of the Messiah Jesus by the will of God, to His set-apart people who are (in the city of Ephesus), believers in Christ Jesus: ²Grace and peaceful wholeness to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

1:3-6 - The Father's eternal plan. Praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in union with Christ, ⁴just as before creation he appointed us in union with him to be a responsible people, holy and blameless in his sight. ¹ ⁵Thus by laying claim to us ²in love as his own adopted sons he brought us to himself through Jesus Christ according to his pleasure and plan, ⁶resulting in praise for his glorious unmerited favor from which he freely favored us in the beloved One.

1:7-12 - Salvation by the Son. It is through Christ that we have liberating redemption through his shed blood giving forgiveness for our trespasses according to the wealth of his unmerited favor, ⁸which he lavished on us in all wisdom and understanding. ⁹God purposed in him to do this by revealing to us apostles the open secret of his plan as it pleased him, ¹⁰looking toward the trusteeship of the climax of the ages, when all these believers in Christ will be gathered together under his headship, whether those in him already in heaven or those now on earth. ¹¹Also, it was through union with him we were made his inheritance by His laying claim to us according to his purpose ³ who works all these things ⁴according to the counsel of his will, ¹²so that we

1. Most translations make Paul's Gk. into obscure English by importing heavy theological notions with no basis in Greek. *Ekleptomai* means to be appointed to an office or responsibility. This is all done to those already "in Christ," an expression found 20 times in these first two chapters. We are appointed only through connection with Christ, the choice One of God, by repentant faith (cf. Appendix A). Every Christian has been appointed to an exalted office with the responsibility to be holy and blameless before him in love!

2. The Gk. *proorizein* is very rare, used only once before the NT by Demosthenes, meaning 'to lay claim,' which in a context of adoption makes good sense. The Gk. *huiiothesia* refers to the Roman practice of a father laying claim to his boy, previously under care of slaves, as a mature son with full rights of inheritance. Cf. Gal. 3:23-4:7; Rom. 8:14-23. The Gk. *proorizein* does not ever mean 'predestine,' as Jerome erroneously put it in the Latin Vulgate. WAY has 'claimed.' Wycliffe (1382) put 'foreordain,' as did the ERV, ASV, Bruce, and Robertson. (Cf. App. B and my BCAA, pp. 330-344.) Note also that the word used for Christ, '*prototokos*,' refers to the pre-eminence that the firstborn son in a family was given.

3. Although the rare Gk. *klēroein* is difficult, reference in the context to the inheritance (*klēronomia*, 1:14, 18) and adoption (1:5) support this rendering, and it certainly should not be rendered just 'to chose.' It has to do with being appointed by lot (BAGD, p. 435). Israel's tribes got their inheritance by lot, and Israel was appointed to be God's inheritance (Dt. 4:20). (cf. Alford, *GT*, IV:77; *EGT*, III:263) Only two dozen versions (ESV, HCSB, NLT, NKJV, NAS, WAY, AMP, WUE, Bruce, etc.) recognize this.

4. The Gk. *ta panta* has a demonstrative force in 18 of 40+ NT usages and should be so rendered here. Paul refers back to the Father's plan of salvation and Christ's shed blood, not to all that eventuates in the world. It is noteworthy that the subjective, personal work of the Spirit

who have already put our confident hope in him might be to the praise of his glory.

1:13-14 - The Spirit's application of salvation. You also were sealed in union with him with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and trusted in him. ¹⁴His Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until the final liberating redemption of those who belong to him, unto the praise of his splendor.

1:15-23 - Paul's prayer for the church. This is why since I heard about your trust in the Lord Jesus and your love for all his people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you when I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷that God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation of the full knowledge of him ¹⁸by enlightening the insights of your heart to know the sure expectation of that to which he has summoned us, that is, the wealth of his glorious inheritance among his people ¹⁹and his incomparably great power available to us who trust him. ²⁰The measure of his mighty power was operative in raising the Messiah out from the dead and in seating him at the honored place at his side in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule, authority, power, lordship, and any name that could be claimed, not only in this age but also in the coming one. ²²Additionally, God subjected all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for His called-out people, ²³which is his body, the fulness of Him who fills all things in every way.

2:1-10 - From death to life. Previously you were spiritually dead in your transgressions and sins, which caused you to live life as a part of the world-system of this present age, which is under the authority of the ruler of unseen spiritual forces, who is the spiritual being now working in those who are disobedient to God. We all also used to live like them in the lusts of our sinful nature by doing its wishes and thoughts. Like the rest of humanity by nature we were deserving of God's wrath. ⁴However, God being rich in mercy springing from his super-abundant love for us, although we were dead in trespasses, made us spiritually alive in the Messiah. It is by his unmerited favor that you have been saved! Through Christ Jesus he raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly realm so that in the coming ages He might display the incomparable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸You thus stand saved by his unmerited favor through trust, and this salvation is not from yourselves since it is God's free gift, ⁹not of human performance so that no one can boast. ⁵ For we are God's handiwork, created in Messiah Jesus to do the good works which God planned in advance for us to do.

2:11-22 - Excluded Gentiles brought into one family. For this reason you must keep in mind that when you Gentile peoples by birth were called "the uncircumcised ones" by those who were *proudly* called "the circumcised" (though only physically so), ¹²at that time you were living apart from Christ without God and hope in the world, excluded from citizenship in Israel and strangers from the covenant promises. ¹³You who were once far away but now by belonging to Messiah Jesus were brought near through the blood *sacrifice* of Christ.

^{2:14}For he himself is our peaceful wholeness, making both groups into one by breaking down the hostile dividing wall of separation. ¹⁵By his bodily *sacrifice* He rendered inoperative the commands and decrees of the *Mosaic* Law, so that from the two groups he might create in himself one new humanity by making peaceful wholeness ¹⁶and might reconcile both to God into one body through the crucifixion by himself putting the hostility to death. ¹⁷By his coming he proclaimed peace both to you who were far away and to those who were near, ¹⁸since we both have access to the Father through him by the same Spirit. ⁶

^{2:19}As a result, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens of God's family, ²⁰a household

in sealing us comes after "all these things" and could not be included among them.

5. The neuter demonstrative pronoun *autos* cannot refer back to *pistis* (faith) which is feminine, but rather to the whole of salvation as confirmed by Rom. 6:23. Faith is not the gift of God. The ambiguity in English should be eliminated (Calvin, *Comm.*, XXI: 228-9; *GGBB*, p. 575; my *BCAA*, pp. 259-266), as only the AMP, CEB, CW, WAY, WUE, and NOG have done.

6. The Gk. *eirēnē* usually translated 'peace' signifies the Heb. word *shalom*, which means 'completeness,' 'wholeness,' and 'peace' with people and with God, so two words get the full meaning. The dividing wall in the temple in Jerusalem excluded Gentiles under penalty of death.

built on the apostolic and prophetic foundation with Christ Jesus himself the chief cornerstone,^{7 21} in whom the whole building being carefully joined together grows into a sanctuary for the Lord. ²²Through union with him you Gentiles also are being built up together *with Jews* to become a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit.

3:1-13 - God's open secret plan for his church revealed. On account of this truth, I, Paul, am a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles. ²Surely you have heard of the trusteeship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the open secret was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote before. ⁴By reading this you can perceive my insight into Christ's open secret, ⁵which was not made known to people in past ages, but now is revealed by the Spirit to his dedicated apostles and prophetic spokesmen, ^{8 6}that through the good news Gentiles become joint heirs *with Jews*, part of the same body, and sharers together of the promise in Messiah Jesus.⁹

^{3:7}I was made a servant of this good news by God's gracious gift given me by his powerful working. ⁸Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given to me to proclaim to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ ⁹and to reveal the trusteeship of the open secret.¹⁰ In past ages it was kept hidden by God, the Creator of all things, ¹⁰in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through his called-out congregation to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹in accord with his age-long purpose accomplished through Messiah Jesus, our Lord.^{11 12}In him we have bold access to God in the confidence borne of trust in him. ¹³Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart over my afflictions on your behalf, which are actually an honor for you.

3:14-21 - A prayer for spiritual power. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Spirit and Christ's effective indwelling in your hearts by faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love may be able to comprehend with all believers what is its breadth and width, height and depth, and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Indeed, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

7. The genitive/ablative connection of the apostles and prophets with the foundation is ambiguous, probably referring to the foundation laid by the apostles and NT prophets as in 1 Cor. 3:10-11, which is Christ Himself. Many assume that the apostles and prophets are part of the foundation, but either view is possible here. This is important in understanding Christ's words to Peter "upon this bedrock" (Mt. 16:18), since He was referring to himself (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-6).

8. Although the adverb *hōs* is usually comparative, a more absolute contrast between the OT and NT revelation is clear since in 3:9 and Rom. 16:25-6, Paul draws the contrast forcefully. Thus, the church was not revealed in the OT. *GGBB* (pp. 674-8) identified a result usage beside the comparative, as the context and parallel passages require (BAG, pp. 905-7).

9. The main theme of this section is a new program of God for the church, distinct from OT Israel, was being revealed involving a universal message for both Jews and Gentiles. Although revealed through many apostles and NT prophets, it was especially entrusted to Paul to implement among the Gentiles and clarify the nature of this new reality.

10. The Gk. *oikonomia* in today's usage is a trusteeship (WILL) since God had entrusted the gracious gospel for Jews and Gentiles to the apostles and most fully to Paul, this truth was a special trust. Words like dispensation, age, or administration fit elsewhere, but trusteeship fits the context here. Many versions have 'stewardship,' but in this century it does not communicate well. In each age/dispensation God delegates various responsibilities or rules of life to people.

11. The Gk. *mysterion* should be translated 'open secret' (WILL), not transliterated since it has now been revealed, which is the church in its many dimensions. Many aspects are revealed elsewhere relating to the church: in Mt. 13 he gave many parables of the "mysteries of the kingdom" about a previously unrevealed age of preaching; the union of Jew and Gentile in one body (cf. Rom. 16:25-6); in Eph. 5:32, the mystical union of Christ and His church; in Col. 1:24-26, the church itself; in Col. 1:27, the indwelling Christ is its glorious riches; in 1 Cor. 15:51-54, the transformation of believers at the rapture; and in 1 Tim. 3:16, the godliness of Christ's incarnation and ministry. See also the note at Col. 2:2.