

Introduction to Ephesians¹

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Introductory Matters

Authorship

External evidence for Pauline authorship of Ephesians is strong. External sources favoring Pauline authorship include Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Marcion, Hippolytus, the Muratorian Canon, Hermas, Barnabas, and Origen. So strong is this external evidence that acceptance of Pauline authorship was virtually unanimous until the higher critical movement of the 19th century.

Various pieces of *internal* evidence also favor Pauline authorship. The book identifies Paul as the author twice (1:1; 3:1). Interestingly, the author's name reappears. This same phenomenon occurs in some of Paul's other letters that are inarguably authentic (Gal 5:2; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Cor 10:1; Col 1:23). Moreover, the typical introductory items so prevalent in Paul's other letters appear also in Ephesians. Such items include the writer's description of himself as an apostle and prisoner (1:1; 3:1; 6:20). The writer also describes himself as an apostle by the will of God (1:1; Gal 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1). Another similarity with Paul is the writer's low estimate of his apostolic status (3:8; 1 Cor 15:9-10). The style of Ephesians is distinctly Pauline as it contains the following elements: salutation, thanksgiving, doctrine, application, closing personal remarks, and benediction. Ephesians also bears a striking similarity to Colossians. Both books are similar in terms of content,

¹ Material for this section was assembled from various sources, including Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 241-54; Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 613-14; idem, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 1-114; Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 399-404; Daniel Wallace, "Ephesians: Introduction, Outline, and Argument," online: www.bible.org, accessed 5 September 2005, 1-8; Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Ephesians," online: www.soniclight.com, accessed 5 September 2005, 1-2.

vocabulary, and time of composition.² Of the 155 verses in Ephesians, the content of 78 of them are repeated in Colossians.

Despite such internal evidence, many contend that other internal evidence goes against Pauline authorship. However, most of these arguments have been answered. For example, some point out the differences between Ephesians and Colossians. Yet, as explained above, the similarities seem to outweigh any differences between the two. Moreover, others argue that Ephesians contains certain words not found in Paul's other letters. However, this objection can be rebutted by noting the following: there is a similar vocabulary (grace, adoption, holy) and theology (justification by faith alone) with Paul's other writings, similar differences can be observed in between Galatians and Philippians, and Paul may have used an amanuensis. In addition, some observe a different style in comparison to Paul's other letters. Such differences in style include long sentences and repeated synonyms. However, a comparison of Romans and 2 Corinthians demonstrates that the style of Paul's letters varies greatly depending upon the circumstances. Finally, some see a theological difference between Ephesians and Paul's other writings. The cosmic reign of Christ and the universal nature of the church exemplify such differences. However, these theological concepts could be the product of a maturation of Paul's theological outlook and his continued meditation upon the universal nature of the church.

If Paul did not write Ephesians, then who wrote it? Opponents of Pauline authorship contend that it is a pseudonymous writing that was the product of one of Paul's disciples. However, this thesis is tenuous in light of the fact that pseudonymity was not practiced by the early church. Moreover, Ephesians has been dubbed the greatest of Paul's writings. How could such a magnificent book have been written by one of Paul's disciples rather than Paul himself?

Destination

The letter was written to the saints at Ephesus (1:1). The Athenians colonized Ephesus in the 11th century B.C. The Persians, Macedonians, and Romans subsequently conquered the city. After being destroyed by a fire in 356 B.C., the city was rebuilt. It was rebuilt because of pride as well as

² For a helpful chart showing the similarities between these books, see Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 34.

its strategic location. The city was located on the banks of the Cayaster River on the east of the Aegean Sea. The city became the chief port of Asia as well as the religious, commercial, and political center of this region. The city was the home of a 25,000 seat theatre, a racecourse, and the temple of Artemis (Greek name) or Diana (Roman name). This temple, which housed numerous prostitutes, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (Acts 19:35ff). The city owed much of its local economy and preoccupation with pagan sorcery to the Temple of Diana. The city was also the home of a number of zealous and prejudicial Jews (Acts 2:9; 6:9; 19:8, 10; 21:27-32). Ephesus, which was the home of the Olympics, boasted a half a million people in Paul's day.

Paul desired to preach the gospel in Asia on his second missionary journey but the Spirit forbade him (Acts 16:6). However, later on the same journey he had the opportunity to preach in the synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). When his hearers asked him to stay in Ephesus longer, he replied that he could not, after first assuring them that he would return (Acts 18:18-19). However, Priscilla and Aquila, who had accompanied Paul on his journey from Corinth to Ephesus, remained in Ephesus while he returned to Caesarea and Syrian Antioch. During their stay in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila mentored Apollos, who eventually went on to minister in Corinth (Acts 18:24-28).

Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. During his three-year stay in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) many amazing things happened. His first converts were twelve disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). Paul preached in the synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8). However, after experiencing opposition (Acts 19:9) he withdrew from the synagogue and ministered at the school of Tyrannus for two years (Acts 19:10). This ministry proved effective (Acts 19:20; 1 Cor 16:19) and ultimately led to the birth of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 2-3). During Paul's stay in Ephesus, God authenticated his ministry through various signs (Acts 19:11-12). Paul's ministry eventually led to the conversion of numerous sorcerers (Acts 19:17-20). The effectiveness of Paul's ministry ultimately hurt the trade of the local silversmiths who made their living through the sale and manufacture of statues to be used in the temple. Thus, Demetrius provoked a mob leading to the dragging of Gaius and Aristarchus before the Ephesians in the theater. Although Paul wanted to join his friends in the theater, his fellow believers restrained him. The town clerk eventually quieted the mob by explaining that their activity would invite an investigation by Rome and that the issue could be resolved through other legal channels. These events caused Paul to leave Ephesus for Macedonia (Acts 19:23-41).

Later, on his third missionary journey, Paul counseled the Ephesian elders on the Isle of Miletus. There he admonished them regarding their responsibility to teach and to protect the flock from false teachers (Acts 20:17-38). In sum, the church at Ephesus had been blessed by being ministered to by many from the apostolic generation, including Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, and John.³ The church was also blessed as the recipient of four canonical books, including Ephesians, 1–2 Timothy, and Revelation (Rev 2:1).

A problem as to the exact destination of the letter arises upon the realization that the phrase “at Ephesus” (1:1) is omitted in three of the best and oldest Alexandrian manuscripts.⁴ Furthermore, Marcion referred to the letter as “the letter to the Laodecians.” These facts have caused many to conclude that the letter was an encyclical letter sent by Paul to the churches in Asia rather than a letter addressed to a single destination. Some have speculated that the letter to the Laodecians (Col 4:16) is actually what is now known as the letter to the Ephesians with the Laodecia inserted so that the Laodecians might read it. This theory is buttressed by the fact that the letter contains no personal greetings or terms of endearment. In addition, the letter contains no specific reference to a local church problem. Furthermore, by using the terminology “heard” (1:15; 3:2; 4:21), Paul was indicating no direct knowledge of the recipients. Such impersonality seems strange in light of the fact that Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). Although Paul was unknown in Asia (Col 2:1), he was certainly well known in Ephesus. The encyclical theory receives further support when it is understood that the doctrinal truths presented in the letter are universally applicable. Such universal doctrinal truths include the universal church, salvation, the Spirit’s ministry, family and business relationships, spiritual warfare, and the admonition to mature.

Despite this theory’s initial appeal, it is fraught with problems. First, no other Greek manuscripts include any names of other churches or cities in lieu of the phrase “at Ephesus.” Second, the majority of the most widely distributed Greek manuscripts do contain the phrase. Third, the church fathers believed that the letter was sent to Ephesus. Fourth, the title “to the Ephesians” appears in all the manuscripts. Fifth, the lack of personal references may be due to other factors. Such factors may include the purity of the church, Paul’s purpose in writing, Paul’s desire to avoid

³ Tradition places John in Ephesus in the latter part of his life.

⁴ Among these are the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus and the fifth century Codex Vaticanus.

favoritism, and the fact that Paul wanted to keep the letter short. If Paul had sent personal greetings to everyone he knew in Ephesus, the letter would have expanded beyond a manageable size. Interestingly, the only letters that Paul attached personal greeting to were Colossians and Romans. These were letters to churches that Paul had never visited. Sixth, perhaps the universal applicability of the doctrine presented in Ephesians can be explained in terms of the fact that the letter was sent to Ephesus yet was written in such a way that its principles could be universally applied throughout Asia. Seventh, even if the letter is encyclical, it is likely that the letter gained its title because it went to Ephesus first and later returned to Ephesus since this was the predominant city in Asia. In sum, no interpretive issue within the book is affected if the interpreter holds to a specific destination or an encyclical purpose of Ephesians.

Place of Writing and Date

The letter was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31) making it the first of Paul's four "prison epistles" (Eph, Phil, Col, Phlm). Four reasons make it likely that Paul wrote during this period. First, as in his other letters, Paul mentions his chains (3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil 1:12-13; Col 1:24; 4:3, 10, 18; Phlm 1, 9-10, 13, 23). Second, Ephesians 6:18-20 indicates that Paul had an opportunity to preach the gospel to others while in prison. This scenario harmonizes well with Paul's first Roman imprisonment where he was under house arrest and able to receive visitors (Acts 28:17, 23, 30). Third, as explained earlier, a great deal of overlap exists in between Ephesians and Colossians. Fourth, in both Ephesians and Colossians, Paul commends Tychicus as the bearer of the epistle (6:21; Col 4:7-9). Thus, Ephesians must be dated during the time of Paul's first Roman imprisonment if Colossians is similarly dated during this era. Interestingly, Colossians also mentions Onesimus (Col 4:7-9), a character that figures prominently in Philemon. Thus, Ephesians must also be dated during Paul's imprisonment if Philemon is dated during this period.

Others have proposed inadequate alternatives for the place of writing. Some contend that the letter was written during Paul's two-year Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 24:27). However, this locale is unlikely given the fact that Paul's companions were never assembled in Caesarea, the letter neglects to mention the Caesarean known as Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8), and the Caesarean imprisonment offered no hope of imminent release (Phil 1:19-21, 25, 27; 2:24; Phlm 22). Others have proposed Ephesus as the place of writing (2 Cor 11:23; Rom 16:7). This theory's attractiveness involves the ease at which Paul could have communicated to the Ephesian church. However there is

no record that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus. A final option is that the letter was written from Paul's second Roman imprisonment. This theory is strengthened through the mention of Tychicus in both Ephesians (6:21) and 2 Timothy (2 Tim 4:12). However, the similarity of content between Ephesians and Colossians argues against this theory.

The most reasonable scenario is as follows. Tychicus was about to take Onesimus back to Philemon at Colossae. Consequently, Paul entrusted the letter to Tychicus to deliver to Ephesus. This would be a reasonable request since only 100 miles existed in between Colossae and Ephesus. In fact, Tychicus carried Paul's three other "prison epistles" as well. We know that Tychicus eventually rejoined Paul during his second Roman imprisonment because 2 Timothy 4:12 indicates that he sent Tychicus back to Ephesus. If Paul's first Roman imprisonment is accepted as the place of writing, then a date of A.D. 60 is appropriate. Ephesians was most likely written before the other prison letters since it makes no mention of an imminent release as the others do (Phil 1:19-21, 25, 27; 2:24; Phlm 22).

Purpose

Paul seems to have had multiple reasons for writing the letter. First, although the letter was not written to correct a specific problem in the church, it was written to prevent future problems by encouraging believers to walk in the spiritual wealth they presently possess. Thus, Paul makes the Ephesians aware of their position (1-3) so that they can draw upon these resources in their daily practice (4-6). Second, Paul wanted his readers to understand that the true source of their spiritual power was their relationship with Christ rather than the pagan magic that was so prevalent in Ephesus. Third, Paul wanted to promote unity within the church. Paul does this by reminding his readers of their corporate identity (2:11-3:13) and reminding them to live in harmony with this identity (4:1-16). Fourth, Paul wrote to admonish his readers to love. One sixth of Paul's references to love appear in this letter. The book begins (1:4, 6) and ends (6:23-24) with an emphasis upon love. Paul would later remind the Ephesians that love is the goal of their instruction (1 Tim 1:5). Such advice was necessary for the Ephesians who would eventually leave their first love (Rev 2:4).

Structure and Message

In the first section of the book (Eph 1-3), Paul explains the spiritual wealth of the believer. This section contains no imperatives. Paul simply unfolds what the believer already possesses

because of his relationship to Christ. However, in the second section (Eph 4–6), Paul explains how the believer is responsible to conduct himself in light of the riches that he has received.

Consequently, 35 imperatives are found in this section. Thus, while the first section focuses upon knowledge, belief, position, and privileges, the second section focuses upon wisdom, behavior, practice, and responsibility. Thus, the message of Ephesians is that believers are responsible to walk according to their heavenly calling.

Unique Characteristics

The letter boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, it contributes to ecclesiology. Nowhere is the universal nature of the church better presented than in Ephesians. The letter explains the mystery nature of the church and the fact that it is comprised of both Jew and Gentile as joint heirs. Ephesians and Colossians taken together explain the relationship of the head (Christ) to the body (the church). While Colossians focuses upon the head, Ephesians focuses upon the body. Second, the letter contributes to pneumatology by explaining the multiple ministries that the Spirit accomplishes on the believer's behalf. Third, the letter contributes to Christology by explaining the believer's relationship to Christ. This is evidenced though the repetition of the phrase "in Christ" found throughout the letter. This phrase or its equivalent appears roughly 35 times in the letter, which is more than any other New Testament book. Fourth, besides Romans, the letter represents Paul's most carefully written theological letter. Fifth, the letter explains the heavenly nature of the believer's calling. Sixth, the book employs numerous literary devices that are not as prevalent in Paul's other letters. They include the uniting of Ephesians 1:3-14 into a single Greek sentence, the consistent use of the light/darkness motif (Eph 5:8), and the spiritual warfare chapter (Eph 6:10-20). Other miscellaneous characteristics include the way the book connects worship and theology and trends toward formality. The book contains no personal greetings. In Ephesians, Paul only communicates two personal facts about himself (his imprisonment and his reason for sending Tychicus).

Outline⁵

- I. Wealth of the believer (1:1-3:21)
 - A. Greeting (1:1-2)
 - 1. Sender (1:1a)
 - 2. Recipients (1:1b)
 - 3. Salutation: grace and peace (1:2)
 - B. Riches (1:3-14)
 - 1. Riches enumerated (1:3-14)
 - a) Chosen by the Father (1:3-6)
 - i) Blessing (1:3-5)
 - (a) Every spiritual blessing (1:3)
 - (b) Chose believing sinner to be holy (1:4)
 - (c) Predestined to adoption through Christ (1:5)
 - ii) Doxology to the Father (1:6)
 - b) Redeemed by the Son (1:7-12)
 - i) Blessings (1:7-11)
 - (a) Redemption through his blood (1:7a)
 - (b) Forgiveness of sins (1:7b)
 - (c) Revelation of redemptive program (1:8-10)
 - (d) Inheritance (1:11)
 - ii) Doxology to the Son (1:12)
 - c) Sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14)
 - i) Blessings (1:13-14a)
 - (a) Sealed (1:13)
 - (b) Pledge (1:14a)
 - ii) Doxology to the Holy Spirit (1:14b)
 - C. Prayer for comprehension riches (1:15-23)
 - 1. Commendation (1:15-16a)
 - 2. Supplication (1:16b-23)
 - a) General request for revelation (1:16b-18a)
 - b) Specific request for revelation (1:18b-23)
 - i) Hope of the divine calling (1:18b)
 - ii) Riches of His glorious inheritance (1:18c)
 - iii) Greatness of God's power which raised and ascended Christ (1:19-23)
 - (a) Magnitude (1:19)
 - (b) Manifestation (1:20-23)
 - (1) Displayed Christ (1:20-21)
 - a. Raising Christ (1:20a)
 - b. Seating Christ in heaven (1:20b-21)
 - (2) Everything subjected to Christ (1:22a)
 - (3) Christ as head of church (1:22b-23)

⁵ Parts of this outline have been influenced by the outline presented in Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 64-69.

- D. Position (2:1-3:13)
 - 1. Individual (2:1-10)
 - a) Old (2:1-3)
 - i) Dead (2:1)
 - ii) Demonically influenced (2:2)
 - iii) Depraved (2:3a)
 - iv) Doomed (2:3b)
 - b) New (2:4-10)
 - i) Spiritual life (2:4-5)
 - ii) Heavenly position (2:6-7)
 - iii) Saved (2:8-9)
 - iv) Created for good works (2:10)
 - 2. Corporate (2:11-3:13)
 - a) Reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (2:11-22)
 - i) Statement of union (2:11-13)
 - (a) Past disunion (2:11-12)
 - (1) Non-circumcision (2:11)
 - (2) Separate from Christ (2:12a)
 - (3) Excluded from Israel (2:12b)
 - (4) Strangers to covenants (2:12c)
 - (5) Without hope (2:12d)
 - (6) Without God (2:12e)
 - (b) Present union (2:13)
 - ii) Explanation of union (2:14-18)
 - (a) Assertion of peace (2:14a)
 - (b) Destruction of wall (2:14b-15a)
 - (c) Made the two one (2:15b-18)
 - (1) Peace (2:15b)
 - (2) One body (2:16)
 - (3) Old Testament analogy (2:17)
 - (4) One access (2:18)
 - iii) Description of the new building (2:19-22)
 - (a) God's household (2:19)
 - (b) Foundation (2:20)
 - (c) Formation (2:21)
 - (d) Function (2:22)
 - b) Revelation of the mystery of the church (3:1-13)
 - i) Introduction (3:1)
 - ii) The mystery (3:2-6)
 - (a) Administration of God's grace (3:2)
 - (b) Revelation of the mystery (3:3-6)
 - (1) Its disclosure by revelation (3:3)
 - (2) Its comprehensibility (3:4)
 - (3) Its timing (3:5)
 - (4) Its content (3:6)
 - iii) Paul's ministry (3:7-12)

- (a) Paul's placement into the ministry (3:7-8a)
 - (b) Paul's performance in the ministry (3:8b-9)
 - (1) To preach the riches of Christ (3:8b)
 - (2) To enlighten the mystery (3:9)
 - (c) Content of Paul's ministry (3:10-12)
 - (1) God's wisdom (3:10)
 - (2) God's purpose (3:11)
 - (3) Our access (3:12)
 - iv) Concluding exhortation (3:13)
 - c) Prayer for comprehension (3:14-21)
 - i) Paul's humility in prayer (3:14-15)
 - ii) Content of the prayer of (3:16-19)
 - (a) Strengthening the inner man (3:16)
 - (b) Christ would be at home in their hearts (3:17a)
 - (c) Comprehension of God's love (3:17b-19)
 - iii) Ascription of praise (3:20-21)
- II. Walk of the believer (4-6)
- A. Walk of unity (4:1-16)
 - 1. Exhortation to unity (4:1-3)
 - a) Exhortation to walk worthy (4:1)
 - b) Character traits creating unity (4:2)
 - c) Exhortation to unity (4:3)
 - 2. Explanation of unity: Common doctrine (4:4-6)
 - a) One body (4:4a)
 - b) One Spirit (4:4b)
 - c) One Lord (4:5a)
 - d) One faith (4:5b)
 - e) One baptism (4:5c)
 - f) One God (4:6a)
 - g) One Father (4:6b)
 - 3. The reason for unity: gifts (4:7-12)
 - a) Reality of giftedness (4:7)
 - b) Reason for gifts (4:8-10)
 - c) Enumeration of gifts (4:11)
 - d) Purpose of gifts (4:12-16)
 - B. Walk of holiness (4:17-32)
 - 1. Do not imitate the pagan (4:17-21)
 - a) Exhortation not to imitate the pagan (4:17a)
 - b) Description of the pagan (4:17b-19)
 - c) Exhortation to follow the teaching of Christ (4:20-21)
 - 2. Put off the old man and put on the new (4:22-24)
 - 3. Contrasts explaining how to put off the old man and embrace the new (4:25-32)
 - a) Truth rather than lies (4:25)
 - b) Righteous anger rather than sin (4:26-27)
 - c) Work rather than stealing (4:28a)
 - d) Giving rather than stealing (4:28b)

- e) Edifying speech rather than corrupt communication (4:29-30)
- f) Forgiveness instead of bitterness (4:31-32)
- C. Walk of love (5:1-6)
 - 1. Positive (5:1-2)
 - a) Imitate God (5:1)
 - b) Walk in love (5:2)
 - i) Command to love (5:2a)
 - ii) Example of Christ (5:2b)
 - 2. Negative: abstain from evil (5:3-6)
 - a) Responsibility (5:3-4)
 - i) In conduct (5:3)
 - ii) In conversation (5:4)
 - b) Reason (5:5-6)
 - i) Evildoers have no inheritance (5:5)
 - ii) Evildoers will experience God's wrath (5:6)
- D. Walk in the light (5:7-14)
 - 1. Do not become involved with evildoers (5:7-10)
 - a) Command: do not get involved with evildoers (5:7)
 - b) Reason: believers are changed people (5:8a)
 - c) Command: walk as children of light (5:8b-10)
 - i) Walk as children of light (5:8b)
 - ii) Fruit of the light (5:9)
 - iii) Please the Lord (5:10)
 - 2. Do not become involved with evil works (5:11-13)
 - a) Command: do not participate but expose (5:11)
 - b) Reason: shame of evil works (5:12)
 - c) Explanation: light exposes the darkness (5:13)
 - 3. Conclusion: Enlightenment of Christ (5:14)
- E. Walk of wisdom (5:15-17)
 - 1. Walk circumspectly (5:15)
 - 2. Use time wisely (5:16)
 - 3. Understand God's will (5:17)
- F. Walk of the spirit (5:18-6:9)
 - 1. Command to be filled with the Spirit (5:18)
 - 2. Evidence of the Spirit's control (5:19-6:9)
 - a) Speaking (5:19a)
 - b) Singing (5:19b)
 - c) Thanksgiving (5:20)
 - d) Submission (5:21-6:9)
 - i) Command of submission (5:21)
 - ii) Practicality of submission (5:22-6:9)
 - (a) Husbands and wives (5:22-33)
 - (1) Wife's submission (5:22-24)
 - a. Imperative: wives submit (5:22)
 - b. Reason: husband is to lead (5:23)
 - c. Illustration: Christ and the church (5:24a)

- d. Application: follow church's example (5:24b)
- (2) Husband's duty to love wife (5:25-32)
 - a. Imperative: husband love wife (5:25a)
 - b. Illustration: Christ's love for the church (5:25b-27)
 - c. Explanation (5:28-32)
 - i. Love wife as own body (5:28-29a)
 - ii. Christ cares for his body (5:29b-30)
 - iii. The two are one flesh (5:31)
 - iv. Mystery (5:32)
- (3) Summation of responsibilities (5:33)
- (b) Parents and children (6:1-4)
 - (1) Children's submission (6:1-3)
 - a. Imperative (6:1)
 - b. Old Testament support (6:2-3)
 - i. Commandment (6:2a)
 - ii. Promise (6:2b-3)
 - (2) Parent's duty (6:4)
 - a. Negative: do not provoke to wrath (6:4a)
 - b. Positive: rear them in knowledge of God (6:4b)
- (c) Slaves and masters (6:5-9)
 - (1) Duty of slaves (6:5-8)
 - a. Imperative: obey masters (6:5-7)
 - b. Reason: God rewards (6:8)
 - (2) Duty of masters (6:9)
 - a. Imperative: do not threaten (6:9a)
 - b. Reason: God judges (6:9b)
- G. Walk of warfare (6:10-20)
 - 1. Be strong in the Lord (6:10)
 - 2. Put on God's armor (6:11a)
 - 3. Purpose: to stand against Satan (6:11b-12)
 - 4. Reiteration: put on God's armor (6:13)
 - 5. Weaponry enumerated (6:14-20)
 - a) Belt of truth (6:14a)
 - b) Breastplate of righteousness (6:14b)
 - c) Sandals of peace (6:15)
 - d) Shield of faith (6:16)
 - e) Helmet of salvation (6:17a)
 - f) Sword of the Spirit (6:17b)
 - g) Prayer (6:18-20)
 - i) Petition (6:18)
 - ii) Intercession for Paul (6:19-20)
 - (a) Utterance (6:19a)
 - (b) Boldness (6:19b-20)
- H. Conclusion (6:21-24)
 - 1. Tychicus as the letter's bearer (6:21-22)
 - 2. Salutation (6:23)

3. Benediction (6:24)

Argument

In this first section, Paul details the wealth of the believer (Eph 1–3). After issuing his customary greeting (1:1-2), Paul describes the riches that have been lavished upon the Christian (1:3-14).⁶ He uses a Trinitarian approach to enumerate the various blessing that have been given to believers by the Father, Son, and Spirit. Each section ends with a doxology to the member of the Trinity responsible for the previously described blessings (1:6, 12, 14b).

First, Paul describes the blessings emanating from the Father (1:3-6). These blessings are related to election. They include the bestowal of every spiritual blessing (1:3),⁷ election (1:4),⁸ and predestination (1:5).⁹ Paul then praises the Father for freely bestowing these blessings (1:6).¹⁰ Second, Paul describes the blessings emanating from the Son (1:7-12). These blessings are related to redemption.¹¹ They include redemption (1:7a), forgiveness (1:7b), revelation of God’s redemptive program (1:8-11),¹² and future inheritance (1:11).¹³ Paul then praises the Son because of these

⁶ These verses comprise a single sentence in the original.

⁷ The addition of the *iota* in *ouranios* indicates that although these blessings emanate in heaven, they vest the believer with a heavenly quality. Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2050A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2004.

⁸ Election involves a sovereign act of God in which He determines who will be saved. Verse 4 answers the following three questions about election: How? In Christ. When? Before the foundation of the world. For what purpose? To be holy.

⁹ Predestination comes from the verb *prooizw* and means “from the horizon.” In other words, God marks the believer out for election before his existence. Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2050A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2004.

¹⁰ While many look at election and predestination as concepts to shun, Paul saw them as reasons for praising God.

¹¹ Redemption conveys the idea of purchase. It is different from propitiation and reconciliation in terms of its object. While the object of redemption is sin, the object of propitiation is God and the object of reconciliation is man.

¹² The word *oikonomia* in verse 10 conveys the idea of an arrangement or stewardship (Luke 16:2-4). Paul by using this term seems to be communicating the existence of a new, present dispensation that further manifests

blessings (1:12). Third, Paul mentions blessing emanating from the Spirit (1:13-14).¹⁴ They include the sealing of the believer by the Spirit (1:13)¹⁵ as well as the fact that the Spirit in the believer's life acts as a down payment guaranteeing his future glorification (1:14a). The magnificence of such blessings prompts Paul to praise the Spirit (1:14b). Throughout this paragraph, Paul reiterates that these blessings have come into the believer's life because of an act of the divine will (1:5, 9, 11).

After enumerating the believer's spiritual blessings, Paul prays that his audience will grasp the riches that they have been given (1:15-23). After commending the Ephesians (1:15-16a), Paul prays for their understanding (1:16b-18a).¹⁶ Paul specifically prays that they will understand three things.¹⁷ They include the hope of their divine calling (1:18b), the riches of His glorious inheritance (1:18c), and the greatness of God's power (1:19-23). After expressing the greatneses of God's power (1:19), Paul explains that God manifested such power in Christ (1:20-23). This is seen through His resurrection (1:20a), present session in heaven (1:20b-21), authority over all things (1:22a), and headship over the church (1:22b-23).¹⁸

God's grace. This dispensation will last until "the summing up of all things" or until the end of the millennium when Christ turns all things over to the Father thus ushering in the eternal state (1 Cor 15:28).

¹³ Some understand the notion of inheritance here to be looking not so much at what the believer receives from God but rather how God looks at the believer. This latter understanding would communicate the idea that the believer is God's special inheritance. A possible Old Testament precedent might be the way God looked at Israel as His special treasure. Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2050A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2004.

¹⁴ These blessing transpire in a person's life contemporaneous with faith. This is also true with respect to most of the other blessings mentioned above.

¹⁵ Sealing involves a mark of ownership (Matt 27:66). In this case, the ownership is divine.

¹⁶ Although the text uses the word "revelation," illumination is the proper theological understanding. While revelation refers to a disclosure of new truth, illumination refers to the Spirit given ability to comprehend what has already been revealed (1 Cor 2:14-15; 1 John 2:20).

¹⁷ These three specific items are evident through the three-fold use of "that" (1:18-twice; 1:19).

¹⁸ Because Christ's resurrection had to first occur before He could become head over the church, it is impossible for the church to have existed in Old Testament times.

Now that Paul has explained the believer's riches (1:3-23), he begins to discuss the believer's position (2:1-3:13). He first enumerates the believer's individual position (2:1-10). He does this by contrasting the believer's position before (2:1-3) and after his conversion (2:4-10). Only when such a contrast is made will the believer fully appreciate his present position in Christ. Before coming to Christ a person is dead (2:1), demonically influenced (2:2), depraved (2:3a), and doomed (2:3b).¹⁹ In other words, the world, the flesh, and the devil control him. However, after coming to Christ, the believer's position is reversed. He experiences spiritual life rather than death (2:4-5). He is given a new heavenly position (2:6-7).²⁰ He has been saved (2:8-9)²¹ for the purpose of good works (2:10).

Having explained the believer's individual position (2:1-10), Paul now unfolds his corporate position (2:11-3:13). Not only have the Gentiles experienced a vertical reconciliation to God but they have also experienced a horizontal reconciliation with the Jews (2:11-22). Although the Gentiles were previously alienated from Israel (2:11-12), they have now been unified with the Jew (2:13). This is because the dividing wall²² separating the two has been broken down (2:14b-15a). This results in peace between the two groups (2:14a, 15b). They have both been placed into one new body (2:16-17; Isa 57:19) with each having equal access to the Father (2:18). This new spiritual organism that both believing Jew and Gentile are members of (2:19) is built upon the foundation of the apostles, prophets, and Christ (2:20)²³ and is being formed into a temple (2:21) where God dwells (2:22).

¹⁹ Such a description renders tenuous the notion of an unbeliever's "free will."

²⁰ God's purpose in giving these blessings is to manifest His grace to believers throughout all eternity (2:7).

²¹ Because the gospel involves salvation by faith rather than through meritorious works, it excludes the principle of boasting (Rom 3:27; 4:2). The neuter pronoun "that" in 2:8 looks back to the entire section in 2:4-8. It cannot merely look back to faith (feminine noun), grace (feminine noun), or saved (masculine participle). It is common for words or phrases to refer back to entire sections in Ephesians (1:15 looks back to 1:13-14; 3:1 looks back to 2:11-12; 3:14 looks back to 3:1-13).

²² The dividing wall probably refers to the Law. For a full discussion of the various interpretive options for the dividing wall, see Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 369-71.

²³ In this context, "apostles and prophets" represent New Testament rather than Old Testament apostles and prophets.

Paul offers further clarification of this new temple by explaining it in terms of a manifestation of God's mystery program (3:1-13). Paul explains that he was in prison (3:1) because of his stewardship of this mystery (3:2). Paul understood this mystery program because God had supernaturally revealed it to him (3:3-4). This mystery, which was unknown in previous dispensations,²⁴ was made known to Paul (3:5).²⁵ The content of the mystery is that Jew and Gentile would be united as joint spiritual heirs in a new spiritual organism known as the church (3:6).²⁶ Paul's stewardship of this mystery not only placed him into the ministry (3:7-8a) but also shaped his ministry's direction (3:8b-9). His function was to preach Christ to the Gentiles (3:8b) by illuminating to them this mystery (3:9). Paul faithfully ministered the mystery because God used it to teach the angels truths about His gracious character (3:10), it was part of God's eternal plan (3:11),²⁷ and it gave both Jew and Gentile confident access to God (3:12). Thus, Paul exhorts his readers not to become discouraged at his imprisonment because his setbacks were in furtherance of the propagation of the mystery (3:13).

²⁴ For an exegetical defense of "mystery" as something unrevealed see Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 428-34.

²⁵ Some take the adverb *ws* in the restrictive sense indicating a comparison of degree. This interpretation would mean that the mystery was partially revealed in the Old Testament. A superior interpretation involves taking *ws* in a descriptive sense indicating a comparison of kind. This interpretation would mean that the mystery was unrevealed in the Old Testament. Several reasons make this latter interpretation preferable. First, the context supports the view (3:9). Second, the parallel passage (Col 1:26) does not use the comparative adverb *ws* but rather explains that the mystery was kept hidden in the past and is now (*nun*) being revealed to the saints. Third, the position of the *nun* agrees with Colossians 1:26 and Ephesians 3:10 in contrasting the two ages. Although in the past the mystery was unknown, "now" it is known. Fourth, "revealed" means to completely uncover rather than to partially uncover. Hoehner, "Ephesians," 629.

²⁶ Although Gentile blessing was foretold in the Old Testament (Gen 12:3; Amos 9:12), such blessing was always predicated upon Gentiles becoming proselytes to Judaism. The mystery that Paul is now unfolding is that becoming a proselyte to experience the blessings of God is unnecessary. Both Jew and Gentile have equal standing in a new spiritual organism called the church. In other words, the preeminence of Israel has been set-aside in this age. However, such preeminence will be restored in the millennial age (Isa 2:2-4).

²⁷ The notion that the church is part of God's eternal plan puts to rest the accusation that the church is "plan B" in God's program. Israel was God's plan as revealed in the Old Testament. The church represents God's plan that was not revealed in the Old Testament.

Paul closes the doctrinal section of the letter by praying (3:14-21) that his readers might comprehend their individual (2:1-10) and corporate (2:11-3:13) spiritual wealth that he has just disclosed to them. After humbling himself before God (3:14-15), Paul prays that the Spirit would strengthen his readers in the inner man (3:16), that Christ would be at home in their hearts (3:17a), and that they might comprehend the full dimensions of God's love (3:17b-19). Because of the individual and corporate wealth bestowed upon believers by God, Paul closes the doctrinal section of the letter by glorifying Him (3:20-21).

“Therefore” (4:1) alerts the reader to the fact that Paul has transitioned out of the doctrinal section of the letter (Eph 1–3) and into its practical section (Eph 4–6). In this second section, Paul exhorts the believer to walk consistently with his previously disclosed spiritual position (4:1). Paul first exhorts his readers to a walk in unity (4:1-16). Paul previously revealed the believer's spiritual unity (2:11-3:13). Now he exhorts these same believers to live in harmony with their spiritually unified status. After enumerating the character traits that create unity (4:2) as well as a brief exhortation to pursue unity (4:3), Paul gives the theological basis for unity. Believers should pursue unity with one another because of seven theological concepts that they all share (4:4-6).²⁸ Paul then explains that God gave spiritual gifts for the purpose of promoting unity within the body of Christ (4:7-12). Gifts are a reality for every believer (4:7) because Christ's death made their distribution possible (4:8-10; Ps 68:18).²⁹ The gifts are diverse (4:11).³⁰ However, when they are properly and faithfully deployed, the result is a unified and mature church (4:12-16).

²⁸ One baptism (4:5) probably refers to the believer's identification with Christ (Rom 6) or the church (1 Cor 12:13) rather than water baptism.

²⁹ In Psalm 68:18, God first takes captives of certain persons before staying in His sanctuary. Who are the captives? It is likely that they are the Levites. They were separated from the other Jews (Num 8:6, 14). This separation allowed them to perform service to the Lord (Num 8:11, 14). This service allowed God to dwell among His people. The Levites were also called gifts (Num 8:19; 18:6). The Levites were also referred to as “taken” and “given.” They were “taken” as captives from among the Jews in order to serve God. They were also “given” as gifts to Aaron. Thus, Paul is using Psalm 68:18 analogously. Just as God chose the Levites to meet the spiritual needs of the nation, God gifts certain individuals in the church age for the purpose of helping the body of Christ to mature. J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1997), 276. Laney also enumerates the other four basic views regarding the background of Psalm 68:18. The descent of Christ into the lower parts of the earth (4:9) probably does not refer to Christ's descent into hell. This

Next Paul exhorts his readers to pursue a walk of holiness (4:17-32). Because believers are already positionally holy (1:4), they are to practice holiness. After exhorting his readers not to imitate the pagan (4:17a), Paul describes the sinfulness of the pagan's lifestyle (4:17b-19). Instead of imitating paganism, Paul admonishes his readers to follow the teaching of Christ (4:20-21). Believers can do this by putting off the old man and embracing the new (4:22-24).³¹ In order to explain how to put off the old man and embrace the new, Paul develops six sets of contrasts (4:25-32). Believers are to embrace truth rather than lies (4:25), righteous anger rather than sin (4:26-27; Ps 4:4), work rather than stealing (4:28a), charity rather than stealing (4:28b), edifying speech rather than corrupt communication (4:29-30), and forgiveness rather than bitterness (4:31-32).³²

Next Paul exhorts his readers to pursue a walk of love (5:1-6). After exhorting them to imitate God (5:1), he commands them to walk in love (5:2a) by following Christ's example (5:2b). Believers can also walk in love by abstaining from evil both in conduct (5:3) and conversation (5:4).

misunderstanding was incorrectly incorporated into the Apostle's Creed. The verse is simply saying that the same Christ who ascended is the same Christ who descended in the form of the incarnation (4:10). The phrase "lower parts of the earth" is an appositional genitive. This means that the lower part refers to the earth. Moreover, Christ's words in Luke 24:43 indicate that He went into the presence of the Father rather than hell after he died. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 276-77.

³⁰ Some contend that "pastors and teachers" comprise a single office based on the Grandville Sharp rule. According to this rule, when two nouns in the same case are joined by kai and the article is before the first noun and not the second, then the two nouns are considered one and the same. However, this rule does not apply to plurals or else "apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20) would be one and the same. Thus, it appears that there are five distinct gifts enumerated in verse 11. Although the gifts of pastor and teacher overlap (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4), they appear distinct in this verse. Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions: A Survey of Problem Passages and Issues from Every Book of the Bible*, 277-78.

³¹ In the Greek, this exhortation takes the form of infinitives of instruction rather than imperatival infinitives. The construction in the parallel passage (Col 3:9-10) is not imperatival either. Because they are in the aorist tense, they refer to completed action or the past even of salvation. Thus, believers are to apply the content that they have already learned. A similar idea is expressed in Romans 6:2-10. Hoehner, "Ephesians," 636-37.

³² For these contrasts, I am indebted to Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 252.

The reason that believers are not to imitate the practices of evildoers is that such people have no inheritance in the kingdom (5:5) and will experience God's wrath (5:6).³³

Paul also encourages the Ephesians to walk in the light (5:7-14). Believers can do this by avoiding involvement with evil doers (5:7-10). They should follow this command (5:7) because the Christian is a changed person (5:8a). Rather than imitating evildoers, the believer should walk as children of the light (5:8b) by demonstrating the fruit of the light (5:9) and seeking to please the Lord (5:10). The Ephesians can also walk in the light by avoiding involvement with evil works (5:11-13). Instead of participation in such evil works, the believer should expose them (5:11). Such works are shameful (5:12). Light has the natural function of exposing the darkness (5:13). In sum, the believer should awake from his moral slumber and allow Christ's light to shine upon him (5:14; Isa 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1). Paul also desires that the Ephesians pursue a walk of wisdom (5:15-17). They should walk circumspectly (5:15), use their time wisely (5:16), and understand God's will (5:17).

Paul also wants his readers to pursue a walk in the Spirit (5:18-6:9). After commanding them to be filled with the Spirit (5:18),³⁴ he describes the evidence of the Spirit's control (5:19-6:9). Such evidence includes joy (5:19), thanksgiving (5:20), and submission (5:21). After admonishing his readers to pursue mutual submission,³⁵ Paul explains how this principle works out practically by developing three sets of relationships (5:22-6:9).

In the first relationship (5:22-33), the wife must submit to her husband because he is the head of the marriage just as Christ is the head of the church (5:22-24).³⁶ The husband must love his

³³ It is possible that these verses are speaking of believers. Christians have the potential of not inheriting the kingdom through the forfeiture of rewards. Christians also have the potential of experiencing God's wrath through the imposition of divine discipline (Acts 5:1-11).

³⁴ Being filled with the Spirit is the equivalent of allowing the Spirit to exert control over one's life.

³⁵ Some take this principle of mutual submission (5:21) to mean that the husband must also submit to his wife. However, if this interpretation is consistently followed in the subsequent relationships, then parents would have to submit to their children and masters would have to submit to their slaves. It is more likely that mutual submission entails both parties submitting to their God-ordained roles.

³⁶ Because of the parallel passage (Col 3:18), the verb "be subject" must be supplied in verse 22. Although many take *kefal h* in verse 23 as a reference to source rather than authority, this view is unlikely. In an examination

wife as Christ loved the church.³⁷ Because the husband and wife are one flesh (Gen 2:24), he must care for his wife as if caring for his own body (5:25-33). In the second relationship (6:1-4), children are to submit to their parents (6:1) out of respect for an Old Testament command (6:2a; Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) and promise (6:2b-3).³⁸ Parents also have the responsibility of not provoking their children to wrath (6:4a) and rearing them in the knowledge of God (6:4b). In the third relationship (6:5-9), slaves are to obey their masters (6:5-7) knowing that God will ultimately reward such submission (6:8). Masters are not to mistreat their slaves (6:9a) because God will hold them accountable for such mistreatment (6:9b).³⁹

Finally, Paul exhorts his readers to pursue a walk of warfare (6:10-20). Because of their many blessings, believers will naturally invoke spiritual attacks from the enemy. Thus, Paul reminds his believers to be strong in the Lord (6:10) by putting on God's armor (6:11a, 13). Such weaponry will able them to withstand Satan's assaults (6:11b-12). Paul then enumerates the various pieces of armor (6:14-20). The belt of truth (6:14a) refers to living out the truths of Scripture. The breastplate of righteousness (6:14b) refers to living out God's righteousness. The sandals of peace (6:15) refer to standing firm in the gospel, which gives peace with God. The shield of faith (6:16) refers to trust in God. Such trust has the effect of neutralizing Satanically implanted thoughts of doubt. The helmet of salvation (6:17a) refers to having the message of salvation fixed firmly in the mind. The

of over 2000 extra biblical uses of *kefal h* from the classical period, Grudem concludes that they all mean authority rather than source. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 459-60, n. 6.

³⁷ The reference to the washing of water in 5:26 may have to do with the customary bridal bath that was taken before the wedding. Christ similarly cleanses the church through His word.

³⁸ Paul seems to be using the promise analogously. The point of the analogy is that disobedience to parents has real consequences. In the Old Testament, if children did not obey parents, they suffered capital punishment. If children do not obey their parents in the New Testament era, they probably will not obey God either. If they do not obey God, then they will also suffer consequences.

³⁹ Why did Paul not condemn slavery? First, had Paul condemned slavery, then Rome would have taken away his freedom thus inhibiting his ability to evangelize. Second, Paul's ministry involved the salvation of souls rather than social reform. Third, perhaps Paul knew that the gospel, with emphasis upon human rights, would one day lead to the abolition of slavery. Fourth, Paul did speak out against masters mistreating their slaves (Col 4:1; 1 Pet 2:18-20). Fourth, Paul supported emancipation whenever possible (1 Cor 7:21; Phlm 21).

sword of the Spirit (6:17b) refers to having the right word appropriate for the circumstances.⁴⁰ Prayer (6:18) is the tool by which these various pieces of armor are put on.⁴¹ Paul also requested prayer for himself (6:19-20) in having the right utterance (6:19a) and the boldness to speak it (6:19b-20). Paul concludes the letter (6:21-24) by commending Tychicus as the letter's bearer (6:21-22) and by offering a customary salutation (6:23) and benediction (6:24).

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⁴⁰ Logos is not the word used in verse 17. Logos refers to mere content. Rather, the word used is *rhma*. This refers to the spoken word. It refers to having the right spoken word ready of the right circumstances (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

⁴¹ For this understanding of the spiritual armor, I am indebted to Stanley Toussaint, class notes of Andy Woods in BE2050A Seminar in Pauline Literature, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2004.

⁴² Abbott is an example of a critical commentary. Bruce, Hoehner, and Ellicott are examples of exegetical commentaries. Chafer is an example of a doctrinal commentary. Hendrickson is an example of an expositional commentary. Wiersbe is an example of a devotional commentary.

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