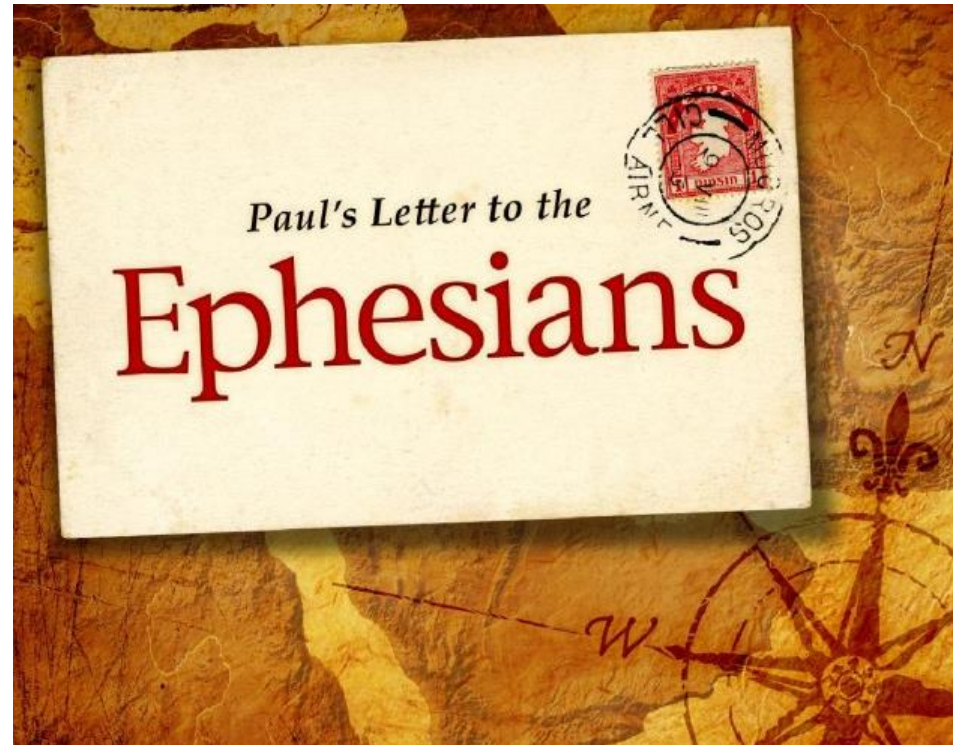


# Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

**BIBLE CLASS #14**



**INTRODUCTION:** The Epistle to the Ephesians, also called the Letter to the Ephesians and often shortened to Ephesians, is the tenth book of the New Testament. Ephesus was the largest city and political capital of Asia Minor. It was the location of a large pagan temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Artemis. Paul and his associates spend several years in Ephesus (Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-40; 20:16-38; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 16:8-9). Other early Christian leaders also passed through Ephesus, such as Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18-26) and Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Paul lived in Ephesus on the Aegean Sea for two years (Acts 19:10) during his third missionary journey to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. The Church in Ephesus continued to grow and became a major center of Pauline Christianity after Paul's own death (1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:18; 4:12; cf. Revelation 1:11; 2:1-7), and of the Early Christian Church.



**AUTHORSHIP:** Paul is designated as the sole author at Ephesians 1:1. For the first 18 centuries, since the beginning of the Church, Ephesians was considered to have been written by Paul of Tarsus. Of the thirteen NT letters attributed to Paul today, most scholars today distinguish between two groups: those written by Paul himself vs. those written by his followers. For the Letter to the Ephesians, the scholarly divide is about 50/50 (that is, about 50% of scholars think they were written by Paul himself, while the other 50% think they are written later by a follower of Paul).

**NOTE:** Of the thirteen NT letters attributed to Paul, most scholars today distinguish between two groups: those written by Paul himself vs. those written by his followers. However, since not all scholars are in agreement regarding the authorship of certain letters, we can distinguish them by calling them “undisputed” letters vs. “disputed” ones.

**WHEN AND WAS IT WRITTEN WHERE (AND CONTEXT):**

Biblical scholar Fr. Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D. wrote:

“If they are authentic written by Paul, the date is in the early 60's AD, either from Caesarea or Rome, while Paul was imprisoned (Last phase of Paul's life). If they were written by a follower of Paul, they were probably written in the 80's or 90's AD, probably from Asia Minor (maybe from Ephesus itself). In either case, the author(s) know(s) some people in these churches, and they know several of the authors' associates, indicating lots of travel back and forth between the various Pauline communities in Asia Minor. Ephesians was almost certainly written later than Colossians, and is literarily dependent upon it.”

**OVERVIEW:**


Ephesians is the great Pauline letter about the church. It deals, however, not so much with a congregation in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor as with the worldwide church, the head of which is Christ (Ephesians 4:15), the purpose of which is to be the instrument for making God's plan of salvation known throughout the universe (Ephesians 3:9–10).



Yet this ecclesiology is anchored in God's saving love, shown in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:4–10), and the whole of redemption is rooted in the plan and accomplishment of the triune God (Ephesians 1:3–14). The language is often that of doxology (Ephesians 1:3–14) and prayer (cf. Ephesians 1:15–23; 3:14–19), indeed of liturgy and hymns (Ephesians 3:20–21; 5:14).

The chapters of Ephesians emphasize the unity in the church of Christ that has come about for both Jews and Gentiles within God's household (Ephesians 1:15–2:22, especially Ephesians 2:11–22) and indeed the "*seven unities*" of church, Spirit, hope; one Lord, faith, and baptism; and the one God (Ephesians 4:4–6). The Mystery of the Church is the Body of Christ, with Christ as the head (3:1–13). Yet the concern is not with the church for its own sake but rather as the means for mission in the world (Ephesians 3:1–4:24).

The gifts Christ gives its members are to lead to growth and renewal (Ephesians 4:7–24). Ethical admonition is not lacking either; all aspects of human life and relationships are illumined by the light of Christ (Ephesians 4:25–6:20).



Be kind to one another,  
tenderhearted, forgiving  
one another, as God in  
Christ forgave you.

- Ephesians 4:32 ESV

All Christians are called to: *"Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Paul also describes the Spirit-led ministries present in the Christian church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers and illustrates its purpose in 4:11-13. He calls for the exemplary Christ-centered living of its members through a person's daily conduct (4:1-5:5); we are to live as children of the light (5:8 - 5:20); and, finally in the letter's most famous

passage, Paul compares the relationship of Christ and the Church to the marriage relationship of husband and wife: (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Paul varies this pattern by an emphasis on mutuality (see Ephesians 5:20); use of Old Testament material about father and mother in Ephesians 6:2; the judgment to come for slave-owners (you have a Master in heaven, Ephesians 6:9); and above all the initial principle of subordination to one another under Christ, thus effectively undermining exclusive claims to domination by one party. Into the section on wives and husbands an elaborate teaching on Christ and the church has been woven (Ephesians 5:22–33).



# THE ARMOR OF GOD

## EPHESIANS 6:10-18

"... be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." v. 10, 11

### The Shield of Faith (Eph. 6:16)

Faith is being sure that God will keep His promises. Faith in God protects you when you are tempted to doubt.



### Feet Prepared with the Gospel of Peace (Eph. 6:15)

The Gospel of Peace is being right with God and being contented in troubled times. Jesus said peacemakers were blessed.



### The Helmet of Salvation (Eph. 6:17)

Put on the Helmet of Salvation by believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again.

### The Breastplate of Righteousness (Eph. 6:14)

Righteousness is being honest, good, humble, and fair to others. It means standing up for weaker people.

### The Belt of Truth (Eph. 6:14)

Truth keeps us from giving in to the world's beliefs. Compare your beliefs and actions to the truth of the Word of God.

### The Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17)

which is the Word of God. God's Word is our offensive weapon. When we tell others what the Bible says, the Holy Spirit helps people see their bad thoughts and actions, and makes them want to be forgiven.

Paul finalizes the letter with a general exhortation to courage and prayer *“at every opportunity in the Spirit”* (Ephesians 6:18). Drawing upon the imagery and ideas of Isaiah 11:5; 59:16–17; and Wisdom 5:17–23. Paul describes the Christian in terms of the dress and equipment of Roman soldiers as *“the Armor of God”* for Christians: *“Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* He observes, however, that the Christian’s readiness for combat is not directed against human beings but against the spiritual powers of evil (Ephesians 6:10–17; cf. Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10). Unique importance is placed upon prayer (Ephesians 6:18–20).

Ephesians consist of six chapters.

## **Outlines of the Letters to the Ephesians:**

### **Letter Opening (Eph. 1:1-14)**

- A. Sender & Recipients (Eph. 1:1)
- B. Formulaic Greeting (Eph. 1:2)
- C. Blessing Prayer: heavenly mysteries in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14)

### **Letter Body (Eph. 1:15—6:20)**

- A. Prayer for the faith, love and hope of those whom God has made part of the body of the heavenly Christ (Eph. 1:15-23)
- B. Through the apostles God has made the Gentiles alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1—3:21)
  - 1. Contrast between their old "death" in sin and life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10)
  - 2. Reconciliation of the Gentiles to God in the one body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-22)
  - 3. Paul's suffering and ministry to bring the Gentiles into the body of Christ (Eph.3:1-13)
  - 4. Prayer for faith and love among Paul's converts (Eph. 3:14-21)
- C. Christian life in the world (Eph. 4:1—6:20)
  - 1. Unity of the body of Christ which is built up by different ministries (Eph. 4:1-16)
  - 2. Old life in darkness" contrasted with new life as "children of light" (Eph. 4:17—5:21)
  - 3. Household code: Marriage in Christ; children and parents; slaves and masters (Eph. 5:22—6:9)
  - 4. **Gird yourselves for spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20)**

### **Letter Conclusion (Eph. 6:21-24)**

- A. Paul is sending Tychicus, a faithful minister (Eph. 6:21-22)
- B. Generic greetings to the whole community (Eph. 6:23)
- C. Final Blessing (Eph. 6:24)

## **RESOURCES USED AND RECOMENDED:**

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>
- Agape Bible Study at: [http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape\\_Bible\\_Studies\\_Menu.php](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php)
- Agape Bible Study Lessons for the Letter of Paul to the Romans  
At: [http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Romans/Romans\\_Menu.php](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Romans/Romans_Menu.php)
- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at:  
[http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline\\_Chronology.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm)
- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J. At:  
[http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT\\_Letters.htm#Edited](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited)

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