

EPHESIANS

a self-study guide

by Taylor Ladd

Introduction to EPHESIANS

The book of Ephesians was written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 61-62). It is one of four epistles he composed while in jail at that time (Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are the other three).

The Christians in Ephesus were still fairly new converts at the time Ephesians was written. Paul briefly stopped in Ephesus near the end of his second missionary journey (A.D. 51 or 52), but the majority of his work in the city occurred a few years later during his third missionary journey (A.D. 53-57). Paul spent three years in Ephesus, teaching at first in the synagogue and later moving to the school of Tyrannus. At the time the book of Ephesians was written, most members of the church in Ephesus had been Christians less than ten years.

Ephesus was an important city in the Roman Empire during Paul's ministry there. The population was roughly a quarter of a million, and the city was a major center for government, commerce, and religion in the province of Asia. Magic and idolatry were widespread throughout the city, and Ephesus was the site of the great temple of Artemis, the Greek goddess of fertility. People from all over the Roman Empire traveled to Ephesus to worship her, generating a great deal of revenue through the purchase of shrines and idols.

Review Acts 19 to get an idea of the prevalence of magic and idol worship in first-century Ephesus. Also note the presence of a synagogue in Ephesus, indicating that a number of Jews lived in the city. As you read through Ephesians, keep in mind that the church at Ephesus contained both Jew and Gentile Christians.

Now look at the Ephesians survey chart at the front of the workbook. Quickly read through the epistle to get an idea of Paul's overall message, filling in the survey chart as you go.

- Write down a brief summary of each chapter on the survey chart, and note any key words, phrases, and verses you find important as you read.
- Notice that the epistle divides easily into two sections: ch. 1-3 and ch. 4-6. How do the two sections fit together?
- After reading through Ephesians, think of a theme that summarizes Paul's message and write your theme at the top of the survey chart.

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

Remember as you read: The reason Paul's writings are sometimes hard to understand is because he often uses long, complicated sentences. To understand these types of sentences, first identify the subject, the verb, and any direct or indirect objects. Ignore clauses that do not fit one of these categories, and focus on simplifying the sentence. Once you understand the basic meaning of the sentence, add the omitted clauses and look at how they fit in. Try to understand how each clause adds new meaning to the sentence.

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, **4** just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, **5** having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, **6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Question 1: A major theme addressed in Ephesians is the multitude of spiritual blessings God has given us. In verses 3-5, Paul specifically mentions three of these blessings.

a) What are the three blessings he mentions?

b) According to the text, for what purpose did God give these blessings to us?

Question 2: In verses 4-5, Paul addresses the subject of predestination. In what way did God predestine mankind? Does this differ from common religious views on predestination?

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace **8** which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, **9** having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, **10** that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him. **11** In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, **12** that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Question 3: What did you find interesting in verses 1-14? What is the main point of this section?

Question 4: Notice all of the blessings Paul mentions in the first 14 verses. These are just the first of many blessings listed throughout Ephesians. Take some time to consider all of the spiritual blessings God has given you. Why did He do all of this for us?

Question 5: What is the main point of Paul's prayer?

Make a list of words or phrases in chapter 1 that you find unclear or confusing. Using the context and your knowledge of Ephesians from the survey chart, make an educated guess as to what these words or phrases might mean. If you're still completely stumped, search a commentary on Ephesians to get a better idea. Remember though: brain first, commentary second. A commentary should only be read to supplement your own thinking. Use it only as a last resort.

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **16** do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, **18** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power **20** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, **23** which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Question 1: What is Paul's main point in vv. 1-10?

Question 2: What did you find in vv. 1-10 that interested you?

Question 3: According to v. 10, what is God's purpose for us in all of this? What can we conclude about trying to be justified by our works?

11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – **12** that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, **15** having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, **16** and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. **17** And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. **18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Question 4: What does "the middle wall of separation" refer to? What two things did it separate?

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Question 5: In vv. 19-22, Paul shows that Christians are “fitted together” to create a figurative building. What is the purpose of this building?

Question 6: Identify the main point of vv. 11-22.

Question 7: In chapter 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians of the process by which God made it possible for them to receive spiritual blessings. Which verse describes the turning point in this process?

Question 8: The first part of chapter 2 establishes the idea that salvation is a *gift* from God. Based on this idea, Paul makes two conclusions in the second part of the chapter. Briefly summarize each conclusion.

a)

b)

Question 9: Look back at the survey chart on the first page. How does chapter 2 fit in with the overall theme of Ephesians?

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – **2** if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, **3** how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, **4** by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), **5** which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **6** that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, **7** of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Question 1: In the context of vv. 1-7, what does the word *dispensation* (v. 2) mean?

Question 2: What is the mystery Paul is talking about?

Question 3: Verse 5 says that the mystery was revealed to apostles and prophets. Since we are neither apostles nor prophets, is it possible for us to understand the mystery? If you answer no, why is it not possible? If you answer yes, how is it possible?

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, **9** and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; **10** to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, **11** according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, **12** in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. **13** Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Question 4: What is the *fellowship of the mystery*?

Question 5: One of the interesting points Paul makes in Ephesians is that the influence of a Christian is not confined to the earthly realm.

a) According to this text, to whom do Christians make known the wisdom of God?

b) What does this actually mean?

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, **21** to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Question 6: According to the text, for what reason did Paul bow his knees before the Father? It may help to know that v. 14 is actually a continuation of v. 1 (vv. 2-13 are a digression concerning Paul's ministry to the Gentiles), and v. 1 is a continuation of chapter two.

Question 7: How does Paul's prayer in vv. 16-21 apply to you?

Question 8: Explain how vv. 20-21 fit with the rest of the prayer.

In the space below, write a textual re-creation of vv. 20-21. The purpose of a textual re-creation is to copy the text in a way that will break it up into smaller pieces, bring out certain parts of the text, and make them easier to understand. Use several methods to emphasize different parts of the text (e.g. bolding, indenting, capital letters, highlighting, numbering, writing with different colored pencils, etc.).

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, **2** with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, **3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore He says:

"When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

9 (Now this, "He ascended" – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **13** till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; **14** that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Question 1: What is Paul's main point in vv. 1-16?

Question 2: Consider Ephesians 3:10. With that verse in mind, why is unity so important among God's people?

Question 3: Think about the cultural background of Ephesus. What about their background might cause Paul to place such a strong emphasis on oneness throughout the letter? How does that apply to us today?

Question 4: How do vv. 1-16 apply to young people?

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, **18** having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; **19** who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But you have not so learned Christ, **21** if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: **22** that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, **23** and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, **24** and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. **26** "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, **27** nor give place to the devil. **28** Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. **29** Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. **32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Question 5: What do you find interesting in vv. 17-32? What is Paul's main point in this text?

Question 6: List some of the dangers of sin Paul mentions in this text.

Question 7: What does it mean to *be renewed in the spirit of your mind*? How can we do that?

Question 8: List some less obvious ways in which we can be guilty of the following sins:

- a) Lying

- b) Sinful Anger

- c) Stealing

- d) Corrupt Speech

Question 9: Looking back at the chapters 1-3, why does God command us to put off the old man and put on the new man?

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; **4** neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. **5** For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Question 1: In this text, what is God's standard of holiness for the saints?

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), **10** finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. **11** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. **13** But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, **16** redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, **20** giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Question 2: What did you find that interested you in vv. 1-21? What can we learn about God from this text?

Question 3: How does this text apply to the types of entertainment we choose to take in?

Question 4: Several other versions translate v. 16 *making the most of your time*. In the context of Ephesians, time is another gift God has given us. What are you doing with that gift? Are you making the most of your time? You don't have to write anything down, but spend some time seriously thinking about your answer.

Question 5: Give some practical applications from vv. 1-21 that might be useful when trying to influence and/or teach an unbeliever.

Question 7: What does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband *as to the Lord*? What is the key to true submission?

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. **24** Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, **26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, **27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. **28** So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. **30** For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. **31** "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. **33** Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Question 8: What does it mean for a husband to love his wife in the same way that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her? What is the key to this kind of love?

Question 9: What can we learn about our relationship to Christ from vv. 30-31?

Question 6: To whom is Paul speaking in v. 22? In v. 25? What does this imply?

Directions for the textual worksheet: Use colored pencils to mark the things you find interesting and important. Be prepared to share your findings in class. After studying the worksheet, answer the questions that follow.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: **3** "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Question 1: Remember that vv. 1-4 are a continuation of chapter five. Looking at the text as a whole from 5:22 through 6:4, what is the most important characteristic of a righteous family?

Question 2: What is the time limit God places on obedience to our parents? According to the text, what is the only exception to God's command to obey our parents?

5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; **6** not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, **7** with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, **8** knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Question 3: What can we learn from vv. 5-9?

Question 4: In the text from 5:22 through 6:9, Paul deals with the relationships a Christian has with others.

a) How does this fit in with the overall theme of Ephesians?

b) What is the key to maintaining godly relationships?

Question 8: What can we learn from Paul's personal request in vv. 18-20?

Question 9: Take some time to reflect on our study of Ephesians. How has this book affected your daily walk with God?