

Ephesians

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Author: Paul

Date: Written in Rome about AD 61.



Purpose: to encourage the Ephesians (and all Christians) to live in accordance with their position in Christ and to grow to maturity in Him.

Key words: "In Christ". (19 times in the first three chapters).

Key verses:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. 1:4

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. 2:8-10

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 3:12

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4:1-3

Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. 4:23, 24

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 6:10



Ephesians has been called the “Queen” of Paul’s epistles (letters).

Greeting (1:1-2)

Paul opens the letter with a greeting to the “saints in Ephesus” and to the “faithful in Christ Jesus”. (1:1-2). The message of Ephesians is relevant for all Christians!

Our position in Christ (1:3 - 3:21)

a. Why God should be praised (1:3-14)

Paul starts by praising God for what He has done for us “in Christ”

- The Father chose us to be in Christ (1:3-6)

Before the creation of the world He:

- blessed us with every spiritual blessing (in Christ)
- chose us (in Christ) to be holy and blameless in His sight
- pre-destined us in love to be His sons and daughters (through Christ).

All by His grace!

- The Son redeemed us to be in Christ (1:7-12)

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross, over 2000 years ago:

- we were redeemed through Christ’s blood
- we were forgiven
- we were chosen and pre-destined to be saved and to live for God’s glory

This was by God’s grace, according to God’s plan, and in accordance with God’s will.

God’s overall purpose is to bring everything in heaven and earth together under one Head: the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The Spirit sealed us in Christ (1:13-14).

When we heard the truth and believed it we were saved and:

- were included in the Body of Christ
- were sealed by the Holy Spirit guaranteeing our inheritance in God’s Kingdom
- are to live for God’s glory.

So Paul begins this letter with a reminder of the great things God has done for believers *individually*.

Next he prays that his readers will understand what God has done for them *corporately*

b. Prayer that we would understand our position in Christ (1:15-23)

Paul is confident that they are true believers (1:15) because he has heard of their faith in Christ, and their love for the saints. He knows that God is able to answer his prayer in them because the same power which raised Christ from the dead is available to them (1:20-23).

Key words of salvation

Election

God’s choosing of someone to come to Christ. This choosing is by God’s grace and took place before the creation of the world.

Pre-destination

God’s determining that those He has elected will come to Christ. Pre-destination takes place based on God’s foreknowledge of our choices. See Romans 8: 28-30

Redemption

The purchasing of us back for God, by the payment of a ransom (Christ’s blood shed on the Cross). As a result of our redemption we belong to God. See Colossians 1:14



Paul prays that they (and we):

- may have a Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we might know Jesus better
- may have the eyes of our hearts enlightened to know
 - the hope for which He has called us
 - the riches of His glorious inheritance in us
 - His incomparably great power in us

What a difference it would make if we realised that the power in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!

The power in us is the same power that raised Christ from the dead; seated Him at God's right hand; placed Him above all rule, authority, power, dominion and title; placed everything under His feet, and appointed Him as Head of the Church. Wow!

c. God reconciled us to Himself in Christ (2:1-10)

Paul reminds us of the great things God has done for us in Christ.

We used to be dead in our sins; disobedient; thinking and acting out of our sinful nature, and fully deserving of God's wrath.

But God in His great mercy reconciled us to Himself and saved us:

- He made us alive in Christ.
- He raised us up with Christ so we reign with Christ.
- He seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ.

All by His grace and as a demonstration of His goodness and kindness!

Our salvation is by grace, through faith. It isn't based on any works that we might do. We are God's workmanship! Why? So that we might do the things that He has specially prepared for us to do.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2: 8-10

But God has not just done a work of individual reconciliation. He has also reconciled Jew and Gentile to each other by creating one new body in Christ.

d. God reconciled Jews and Gentiles in Christ (2:11-22)

First, Paul outlines the Gentiles' former state. Individually, they were separated from Christ, excluded from Israel, foreigners to God's promises, without God and without hope.

But now, in Christ Jesus, Gentiles (including you and me!) have been brought near to God through the shedding of Jesus' blood on the Cross. This means anyone can be saved and have a relationship with God.

Jesus brings Jewish and Gentile believers together as one in Christ. Previously Jews could have relationship with God via their commandments and regulations, but at the Cross Jesus has fulfilled and abolished them. There is now one body: the Body of Christ, the Church, and our relationship with God is through the Holy Spirit.

Now, in Christ, Jewish and Gentile Christians are one!

- We are no longer aliens from God.
- We are fellow citizens with all of God's people.
- We are all members of God's household.
- Together we form a holy temple for the Lord in which He dwells by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians was initially written to Gentile Christians. The apostles who brought them the good news of individual reconciliation to God had also brought the good news of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile.



Paul stresses that Jew and Gentile are now one in Christ possibly because of the Gentiles' arrogance about the Jewish roots of Christianity. He reminds them, and us, that salvation is now possible for all: Jew and Gentile, but only in Christ.

Comment

Paul states that the work of Christ on the Cross has brought peace between Jews and Gentiles. That's very true in Christ!

In the world, though, there is still much bitterness, war, hatred and misunderstanding. Nations and individuals tend to be strongly pro- or anti-Israel. Some of this is historical, some spiritual and some based on interpretations of the Bible that seem to ignore Ephesians 2:11-22. The Church has been grafted in to the rootstock of Israel, and a remnant of Jews have received Jesus as Messiah and been saved. But God has not finished His dealings with Israel. In the end times He will restore Israel and bring her back to Himself *And so all Israel will be saved*. See Romans 11:11-32. Then God's purposes for mankind will be fully realised and all will be "one in Christ Jesus".



Only when society is built on "Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" will there be peace between nations.

e. Paul is an apostle to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

Paul wanted to make sure his readers didn't think that he had replaced other apostles and prophets (or that the Gentiles had replaced the Jews in God's favour).

He explains that his gospel is different because it wasn't revealed from the Old Testament but was revealed by the Holy Spirit. Its message, though, was the same as that of the other apostles, but with a new aspect: that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel; fellow members of the Body of Christ, and equal partakers in God's purposes in Christ. Jews and Gentiles are one in this new body and neither can claim superiority. Nor can Paul claim superiority over any other Christian: he is just God's servant, sharing the gospel by God's grace, in God's power, and doing what God wants him to do: ie. share the gospel with the Gentiles.

This is part of God's eternal purpose: that through the Church (Jew or Gentile) the wisdom of God that was accomplished in Christ might be made known to all, and that everyone may be able to approach God with freedom and confidence (in Christ).



f. Prayer that we might be strong in Christ (3:14-21)

Paul prays that we all may:

- be strengthened by the Holy Spirit within us
- have Christ living in our hearts
- be established in love
- understand the enormity of God's love for us
- be filled with the fullness of God

He then praises God in a benediction, recognising that God is able to do far more than we expect, through His power at work within us.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. 3: 20, 21

So, what does it mean to be “In Christ”?

Standing ‘In Christ’

State in the world

- your legal position before God - how God sees you - based on the finished work of Christ on the Cross	- your real position as you live in the world - how you see yourself, and how others see you - based on the way you are living now
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		Standing in Christ	State in the world
Salvation	Eph 1:7,11,13	- redeemed, God’s possession - saved by God’s grace - sealed by the Holy Spirit	- Christians - saved by God’s grace - indwelt by and need to be filled with the Holy Spirit
Righteousness	2 Cor 5:21 Col:1:22 Eph 1:4	- righteous - holy and blameless in God’s sight - free from any accusation	- mixture of sin and righteousness
Sin	Eph 2: 5 Rom 6:18	- alive - forgiven - free from sin	- mixture of sin and righteousness - need to repent and ask for forgiveness
Position	Eph 2:6	- seated with Christ in the heavenlies	- on earth
Access to God	Eph 3:12	- can approach God with confidence	- mixture of faith and unbelief
Power	Eph 1:3,18-20	- have every spiritual blessing - powerful	- mixture of weakness, strength, humanity and God’s power
Victory	2 Cor 2:14	- always in triumph and victory	- mixture of defeat, victory, ups and downs
Needs	Phil 4:19	- all needs met	- mixture of needy and needs met
Relationship with God	Eph 1:5	- children of God - saved by God’s grace - have eternal life	- children of God - saved and live by God’s grace - have eternal life

Major scriptures about being ‘In Christ’:

Philippians 4:13, Colossians 2: 9-15, 3:1-3, Galatians 3: 26-29, 6:14, Ephesians Chapters 1-3, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, Romans Chapters 3-8



The Holy Spirit is continually at work in our lives to make our state in the world more like our standing in Christ!

Worth studying!

In the first half of Ephesians Paul has explained what it means for us to be “in Christ”. In the second half he tells us how to live this out in practice. Key aspects are:

- live worthy of the Lord
- have unity in the Spirit
- keep growing to maturity
- live in the light
- be filled with the Spirit
- being submissive in your relationships
- be strong in the Lord

Living out our position in Christ (4:1- 6:23)

a. Live worthy of the Lord (4:1,2)

Those who are “in Christ” are to live worthy of their high calling. This involves being humble, gentle, patient, loving and accepting.

b. Have unity in the Spirit (4:3-6)

We are to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. After all, we have one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over us all and in us all. How can we not be one!

c. Keep growing to maturity (4:7-16)

Everyone is different and we have all been given special grace from God. We are to grow in this so that we may:

- be one in Christ
- know Jesus intimately
- become mature
- not be like children with many ups and downs
- speak the truth in love
- grow to be like Jesus
- find and contribute to our place in His body

Wow, what a high calling!

(But actually this is just living like what we are already “in Christ”!).

In fact we are to ‘attain to the full measure of Christ’ and ‘in all things to grow up into Him who is the head, that is, Christ’.

To help us come to maturity in Christ God gives people to help and equip us:

- Apostles (who are sent to establish new Churches)
- Prophets (who hear from God and speak God’s word to us)
- Evangelists (who proclaim the gospel)
- Shepherds (who care for us)
- Teachers (who teach us God’s ways)

These people are God’s gifts to us, and their function is to equip us for ministry (not to do all the ministry themselves!). The Body of Christ will only be effective when each one of us is exercising our ministry in maturity, unity and love.

d. Live in the light (4:17-5:14)

Paul then reminds his readers what they used to be before Christ (4:17-19), and how they have put off the ‘old man’ and put on the ‘new man’ (4:20-24). Since they are new creatures in Christ they ought to act like it. As members of one new body they must not to go back to their old ways (4:25-32).

Living in the light means:

- being good examples to unbelievers
- living in relationship with God
- being sensitive to God
- living in accordance with the truth we have been taught
- putting off our old self with its deceitful desires
- having a renewed attitude in our minds
- being like God in true righteousness and holiness eg. not holding on to anger, not stealing, working hard, speaking in a way that is wholesome and upbuilding
- not grieving the Holy Spirit
- getting rid of all bitterness and malice
- being kind, compassionate and forgiving



- imitating God
- loving
- not engaging in sexual immorality or impurity.

(If we don't live in the light we miss out on our inheritance - living in the Kingdom of God. ie. being what He wants us to be, and doing what He wants us to do, and we will experience God's wrath.

Chapter 5: 5,6 contrasts living in the Kingdom of God with how we used to live. These verses are not saying that if we sin we lose our salvation and won't get to heaven!).

- living in goodness, righteousness and truth
- not getting involved in works of darkness; rather we are to expose them.

e. Be filled with the Spirit (5:15-20)

As Christians wanting to live in the light (and be like we are in Christ) we need to be very careful and wise in the way we live. Our main focus is to be on doing God's will, and not get involved in things like drunkenness and debauchery.

Rather we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will then work in our lives to make us like Christ, and will lead us to do the things that God wants us to do. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit it will shine out:

- in worship and thankfulness to God
- so that everything we do is done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



f. Be submissive in your relationships (5:21-6:9)

When we are 'in Christ' we are totally under the Lordship of Christ. This submission is to be reflected in all of our human relationships:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 5:21

The word for submit (*hupēiko*) means to retire, yield, withdraw. When you submit you willingly and lovingly give in to someone else, based on your reverence for Christ. Just as you yield to His love you yield to others, reflecting that love.

In each of the submission situations that follow:

- all parties are to 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (including husbands, parents and bosses)
- the one submitted to must be acting in love
- the one submitting must be acting in love and be free to submit willingly
- if there is any element of power or control submission becomes replaced by subjection (exactly the opposite of what Paul was saying!). If someone is subdued by power they are hardly submitting!

Submission is totally different to 'subjection'. Subjection is giving in to overwhelming power, while submission is giving in to overwhelming love. There is no element of power in submission. It is all about love.

If someone says *You must submit to me* power is involved and the resulting action is not submission.

The responsibility to love and to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ overshadows each situation!

Wives and husbands

- Wives are to submit to husbands *as to the Lord*.
- Husbands are to love their wives *as Christ loved the Church*. This means doing for her what Jesus does for us: loving selflessly and encouraging holiness so the wife may be radiant in her husband's love.
- Husbands and wives are 'one flesh' (just like the oneness of Christ and His Church - in Christ) so how can they not submit to one another in love and respect?



Children and parents

- Children are to obey their parents *for this is right*.
- Parents are not to exasperate (willingly annoy) their children.
- Parents are to bring up their children in the *paideia* (nurture, correcting, chastising, training) and *nouthesia* (instructing, warning, reproofing, admonishing) *of the Lord*.



Servants and masters

- Workers (*doulos* servant) are to obey their bosses (*kurios* master) with respect *as they would to Christ*. They are to work wholeheartedly *as unto the Lord*.
- Bosses are to treat their workers in the same way, without favoritism or threatening.



We love the Lord; submit to Him, serve Him and continually strive to do what pleases Him.

We are to do the same in all of our human relationships!

Wouldn't the world be a different place if this was the norm for everyone!

All of our human relationships are to reflect our position in Christ.

g. Be strong in the Lord (6:10-18)

Back in 2:2 Paul explained that we used to follow the ways of this world, with its spiritual powers and evil influences. We are now *in Christ*, but as we are still *in the world* these influences are still trying to draw us away from God.

We need to *be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power* so we can:

- fight against the devil's schemes
- win in the battle against spiritual powers and authorities
- stand firm and be strong for Christ
- maintain the unity of the Spirit that has been won for us in Christ.

This means putting on the full armour of God:

Helmet of salvation

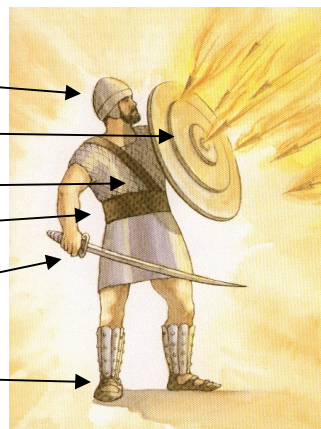
Shield of faith

Breastplate of righteousness

Belt of truth

Sword of the Spirit (God's word)

Sandals of peace



The Armour of God

God's Armour	Know the Truth about...	Living it out in practice
Belt of truth	God, the world, yourself in Christ	Know that God is sovereign. He loves you and has saved you by His grace so you can fulfill His purposes.
Breastplate of righteousness	The Righteousness you have in Christ	You are righteous in Christ. Because Jesus' blood was shed at the cross you are cleansed from sin and set free from bondage to your selfish nature.
Sandals of peace	Inner peace and readiness to share the Gospel	Peace with God comes from your salvation, and ongoing peace comes from your relationship with Jesus Christ. Share this with others!
Shield of faith	Living by faith	Know, believe and trust God's Word. Do what God wants you to do.
Helmet of salvation	Salvation through Christ today and forever	Know that you have been saved by God's grace and that you are His Child. Know your position in Christ and live it out each day.
Sword of the Spirit God's Word	God's Word countering spiritual deception and accusations	Use God's Word to counter deception and triumph over spiritual foes.

Conclusion (6:19-24)

Paul concludes the letter with

- a request that they would pray for him to be fearless in sharing the Gospel
- a commendation of Tychicus (who was probably going to deliver the letter)
- an encouragement to everyone
- a benediction:

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.
Ephesians 6: 23,24

Discussion questions

What were Paul's purposes for writing Ephesians? How are these purposes relevant for today?

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? How is your standing in Christ different to your state in the world? What can you do so that your state in the world is more like your standing in Christ? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this process?

List all of the references to "in Christ" in Ephesians, and explain how each contributes to your understanding of what Jesus has achieved for you at the Cross.

What are God's purposes for Israel? Did they change when Christ came? Relate this to current events in Israel, and also to what must happen before Jesus comes again.

What does it mean for you to "live worthy of the Lord" and to "live in the light"?

What is submission? How can submission be abused? What does Paul say about submission in our important human relationships: husband/wife; children/parents; servants/masters? Why is true submission so powerful and effective?

Describe each of the components in the "Armour of God". What is their purpose? How are they exercised? What happens if they are not exercised?

How can you be "strong in the Lord and in His mighty power"?

What have you learned from your study of Ephesians? How will you apply this in your life?