

INTRODUCTION TO

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE

EPHESIANS



Author and Title

Pauline authorship of Ephesians was universally accepted until modern times. Today a number of scholars claim that it was written in Paul's name by an unknown follower or imitator of Paul, and they give two main reasons: (1) the letter's style and thought does not strike everyone as characteristically Pauline; and (2) the author of Ephesians does not seem to be familiar with the letter's recipients (see 1:15; 3:2; 4:21), which seems odd given Paul's extended stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:10).

However, there are sound reasons to affirm that Paul wrote Ephesians. First, the letter explicitly claims to be Paul's (1:1; 3:1), which should weigh heavily in the debate unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The early church—which rejected other spurious letters—unanimously accepted this letter to Ephesus as being written by Paul, and this was a city with a reputation for discernment regarding false apostolic claims (Rev. 2:2). Furthermore, letters in antiquity were usually transmitted through a person known by both author and recipient(s) who would have guaranteed the original copy's genuineness and elaborated on its details—see note on Ephesians 6:21–22 regarding Tychicus.

Second, analyses of an author's style are often subjectively based on incomplete evidence. With the aid of more sophisticated computer analysis, further careful study has shown that Ephesians has more similarities to Paul's accepted style than was earlier recognized. In addition, recent research suggests that the roles of secretaries in the composition of ancient letters should be given greater consideration than it has been given in the past. Ephesians does indeed demonstrate close similarity with Paul's forms of expression and thought. Critics have used this evidence to ascribe authorship to someone Paul had influenced, but it is more likely that these marks of Pauline thought and writing style confirm that he himself wrote the book.

The question of Paul's apparent unfamiliarity with his readers can easily be explained. Ancient archaeological evidence has shown that Ephesus controlled a large network of outlying villages and rural areas up to 30 miles (48 km) from the city. Also, Acts 19:10 reveals that reports of Paul's preaching during his stay at Ephesus had radiated out to "all the residents of Asia." Hence, Paul would not have been personally acquainted with newer pockets of believers in the Ephesian villages and rural farms that had sprung up since his stay in the city a few years before the writing of this letter.

Moreover, many have suggested that Ephesians in its present form stems from the Ephesus copy of a circular letter to several Asian churches that Tychicus was delivering in the course of his journey to Colossae, along with the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7–9). Therefore, the absence of personal greetings is no cause for surprise.

Finally, it would be extraordinarily odd for someone to write so forcefully that his readers should "speak the truth" and "put away falsehood" (4:15, 25) in a letter he was deceptively forging! Consequently, it can be affirmed with good confidence that Paul wrote Ephesians.

The title "to the Ephesians" is found in many early manuscripts (see note on 1:1). It indicates that the letter was written to the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding dependent region.

Date

Because Paul mentions his imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), this letter should be dated to c. A.D. 62 when Paul was held in Rome (Acts 28). Critics who date Ephesians later in the first century do so from doubts about Paul's authorship rather than from strong evidence against the earlier date.

Theme

There are two main themes of Ephesians: (1) Christ has reconciled all creation to himself and to God, and (2) Christ has united people from all nations to himself and to one another in his church. These great deeds were accomplished through the powerful, sovereign, and free working of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and are recognized and received by faith alone through his grace. In light of these great truths, Christians are to lead lives that are a fitting tribute of gratitude to their great Lord.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

There was no specific occasion or problem that inspired this letter, though Paul does mention that he desired the Ephesians to know how he was faring in confinement (6:21–22). Ephesians articulates general instruction in the truths of the cosmic redemptive work of God in Christ; the unity of the church among diverse peoples; and proper conduct in the church, the home, and the world. Unity and love in the bond of peace mark the work of the Savior as well as Christians’ grateful response to his free grace in their lives.

Ancient Ephesus forms an appropriate background to the book of Ephesians because of this city’s fascination with magic and the occult (see Acts 19:19, and below). This helps explain Paul’s emphasis on the power of God over all heavenly authorities and on Christ’s triumphant ascension as head over the church and over all things in this age and the next. The Ephesians needed to be reminded of these things in order to remain resolute in their allegiance to Christ as the supreme power in the world and in their lives.

Timeline

	A.D.	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80
Death, resurrection of Christ (A.D. 33 [or 30]) [†]		●										
Paul’s conversion (33/34*)		●										
Paul’s first Jerusalem visit (36/37*)			●									
Paul’s second Jerusalem visit (famine relief) (44–47*)				●								
Paul’s first missionary journey (46–47)					●							
Paul’s third Jerusalem visit (apostolic council) (48–49*)					●							
Paul’s second missionary journey (48/49–51*)					●							
Paul’s third journey (incl. 3 years in Ephesus) (52–57*)						●						
Paul, under house arrest in Rome, writes to Ephesus (62*)									●			
Paul martyred in Rome (64–67*)									●			

* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus’ Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

The Ancient City of Ephesus

An important port city on the west coast of Asia, Ephesus boasted the temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world). Just a few decades before Paul, Strabo called Ephesus the greatest emporium in the province of Asia Minor (*Geography* 12.8.15; cf. 14.1.20–26). However, the silting up of the harbor and the ravages of earthquakes caused the abandonment of the harbor city several centuries later. Today, among the vast archaeological remains, some key structures date from the actual time of the NT.

The grandiose theater, where citizens chanted “great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:29–40), had been enlarged under Claudius near the time when Paul was in the city. It held an estimated 20,000 or more spectators. The theater looked west toward the port. From the theater a processional way led north toward the temple of Artemis. In the fourth century B.C. the Ephesians proudly rebuilt this huge temple with their own funds after a fire, even refusing aid from Alexander the Great. The temple surroundings were deemed an official “refuge” for those fearing vengeance, and it played a central part in the economic prosperity of the city, even acting at times like a bank. A eunuch priest served the goddess Artemis, assisted by virgin women. Today very little remains of that once great temple beyond its foundations and a sizable altar, although the nearby museum displays two large statues of Artemis discovered elsewhere in Ephesus.

Other archaeologically extant religious structures include a post-NT temple of Serapis and several impor-

tant imperial cult temples. Before Paul's day, Ephesus had proudly obtained the right to host the Temple of the Divine Julius [Caesar] and the goddess Roma. The city later housed memorials to the emperors Trajan (A.D. 98–117) and Hadrian (A.D. 117–138); and it possessed a huge temple of Domitian (A.D. 81–96), which may have been constructed during the time the apostle John was in western Asia. Luke testifies to Jewish presence in Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 24; 19:1–10, 13–17), and this is confirmed by inscriptions and by literary sources (e.g., Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.39; *Jewish Antiquities* 14.262–264).

Civic structures during the time of Paul included the state agora (marketplace) with its stoa, basilica, and town hall. This spilled out onto Curetes Street, which contained several monuments to important citizens such as Pollio and Memmius. Curetes Street led to the commercial agora neighboring the theater; this large market square could be entered through the Mazaeus and Mithradates Gate (erected in honor of their patrons Caesar Augustus and Marcus Agrippa). Shops lined this agora and part of Curetes Street. A building across the street from the agora has frequently been called a brothel, although some have questioned this. On the way to the Artemis temple from the theater, one would have passed the huge stadium renovated or built under Nero (A.D. 54–68).

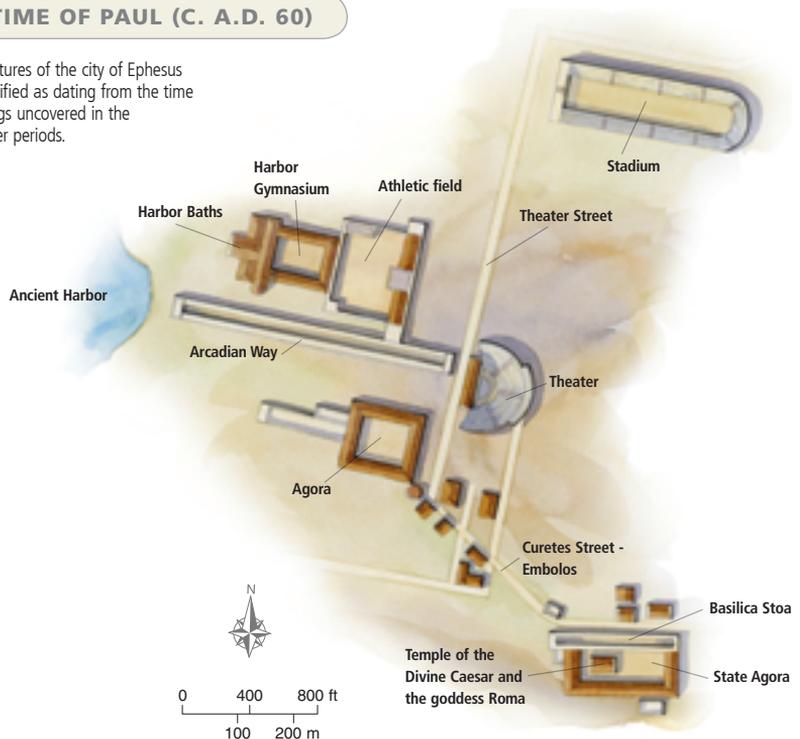
The wealth of some residents of Ephesus is apparent in the lavish terrace houses just off Curetes Street. Later inscriptions mention a guild of silversmiths and even give the names of specific silversmiths (cf. Demetrius the silversmith, mentioned in Acts 19:24). However, as in most Roman cities, many people would have been slaves, and others would not have claimed much wealth. By the end of the second century (after the NT period) many other monumental structures were added, including some important gymnasia and the famous Library of Celsus. Remains of the giant Byzantine Church of Mary remind one that this former pagan town later hosted an important church council (the Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431).

History of Salvation

Christians have experienced in Christ the salvation and blessings that God promised through the ages, and look forward to the consummation of God's purposes in Christ. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the Overview of the Bible, pp. 23–26.)

EPHESUS IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

The city plan below shows those features of the city of Ephesus that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Many of the notable buildings uncovered in the excavation at Ephesus date from later periods.





The Setting of Ephesians

(c. A.D. 62)

Ephesus was a wealthy port city in the Roman province of Asia. It was a center of learning and was positioned near several key land routes in western Asia Minor. Paul probably wrote his letter to the Ephesians while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28).

Key Themes

1. All people are by nature spiritually dead, transgressors of God's law, and under the rule of Satan.	1:7; 2:1-3, 5, 11-12
2. God predestined his elect to redemption and holiness in Christ according to the free counsel of his will.	1:3-14; 2:4, 8-9
3. God's rich mercy in Christ has saved sinners; this free gift is by grace through faith alone.	1:7-8; 2:4-14
4. Christ's earthly work of redemption was part of his cosmic reconciliation and exaltation in this age and the next.	1:15-23; 3:1-13
5. Christ's reconciliation entails uniting all people, whether Jew or Gentile, into his one body, the church, as a new creation.	1:23; 2:10-15; 3:1-21; 4:1-6
6. Christ's people are renewed to new lives of holiness in thought, word, and deed, and must reject their old, sinful lifestyles.	4:1-3, 17-32; 5:1-20
7. Holiness of life entails submission to proper authorities, and loving and considerate care for those in submission.	5:21-6:9
8. Christ has given powerful gifts to his church to bring about her unity, maturity, and defense against the onslaughts of the devil and his allies.	4:7-16; 6:10-19

Literary Features

Ephesians exemplifies the genre of the NT epistle, with its salutation (including sender, recipients, and greeting), thanksgiving, exposition, exhortation, and closing (including final greetings and benediction). The main argument of the letter is punctuated by several prayers and an interior benediction (3:20-21) that marks the transition from doctrinal affirmations to practical exhortations. Chapter 2 takes the form of a spiritual biography, in which Paul recounts the saving work of Christ in the life of every Christian, and especially in the lives of Gentiles who are now included in the one new people of God. In chapter 3 the apostle takes an autobiographical turn as he testifies about his calling to the Gentiles and his prayers for the Ephesian church. The *paraenesis* (series of moral exhortations) consists mainly of instructions for household conduct, both for the church as the household of faith and for individual believers in their domestic relationships. The famous description of the complete armor in the last chapter is an extended metaphor. Paul also catalogs the blessings of salvation in a lofty and exhilarating lyrical style.

Ephesians finds its central unity in the work of Jesus Christ and in the community of people (both Jews

and Gentiles) who are corporately united in him. The strong opening statement of praise and the absence of any theological polemics make Ephesians pervasively positive in tone. The clear division of the epistle into two halves of nearly equal length (namely, the doctrinal section in chs. 1–3 and the practical section in chs. 4–6) also provides a strong sense of structural unity.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1–14)
 - A. Greetings (1:1–2)
 - B. Spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3–14)
- II. Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:15–23)
- III. Salvation by Grace through Faith (2:1–10)
 - A. Hopelessness and helplessness without Christ (2:1–3)
 - B. Hope in Christ (2:4–10)
- IV. Unity and Peace of Christ (2:11–22)
 - A. Unity of Christ's people (2:11–15)
 - B. Peace with God (2:16–18)
 - C. Implications of Christ's peace (2:19–22)
- V. Revelation of the Gospel Mystery (3:1–13)
 - A. Paul's apostolic ministry (3:1–7)
 - B. The mystery and wisdom (3:8–13)
- VI. Paul's Prayer for Strength and Insight (3:14–21)
- VII. Unity of the Body of Christ (4:1–16)
 - A. Exhortation to unity (4:1–6)
 - B. The different gifts (4:7–10)
 - C. The gifts for edification of the church (4:11–16)
- VIII. Paul's Testimony (4:17–24)
- IX. Exhortation to an Edifying Lifestyle (4:25–32)
- X. New Life in Love (5:1–20)
 - A. Exhortation to self-sacrificial love (5:1–2)
 - B. Instruction in holy living (5:3–20)
- XI. Submission to One Another (5:21–6:9)
 - A. Submission in general (5:21)
 - B. Wives and husbands (5:22–33)
 - C. Children and parents (6:1–4)
 - D. Slaves and masters (6:5–9)
- XII. The Whole Armor of God (6:10–20)
 - A. The Lord's strength (6:10–13)
 - B. Standing firm (6:14–17)
 - C. Being constant in prayer (6:18–20)
- XIII. Conclusion (6:21–24)

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE
EPHESIANS

Greeting

1 Paul, ^aan apostle of Christ Jesus ^bby the will of God,
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and ^care faithful¹ in Christ Jesus:
^{2d}Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

^{3e}Blessed be ^fthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ^gin the heavenly places, ^{4h}even as he ⁱchose us in him ^jbefore the foundation of the world, that we should be ^kholy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us ²for ^madoption as sons through Jesus Christ, ⁿaccording to the purpose of his will, ^{6o}to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in ^pthe Beloved. ^{7q}In him we have ^rredemption ^sthrough his blood, ^tthe forgiveness of our trespasses,

¹Some manuscripts *saints who are also faithful* (omitting *in Ephesus*) ²Or *before him in love, having predestined us*
1 Cor. 1:30; [ch. 4:30] ³See Acts 20:28 ⁴See Acts 2:38

Chapter 1

^{1a}See 2 Cor. 1:1 ^bSee 1 Cor. 1:1 ^cCol. 1:2
^{2d}See Rom. 1:7
^{3e}2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3
^fSee Rom. 15:6 ^gver. 20; ch. 2:6; 3:10; 6:12
^{4h}[ch. 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2] ⁱJames 2:5; [Deut. 7:6; 26:18] ^j[2 Tim. 1:9; See Matt. 13:35
^kch. 5:27; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 4:7
⁵ver. 11; Rom. 8:29, 30
^mSee Rom. 8:15 ⁿver. 9; [Luke 2:14; Heb. 2:4; See Luke 12:32
^{6o}ver. 12, 14 ^p[John 3:35; 10:17; Col. 1:13]; See Matt. 3:17
^{7q}Col. 1:14 ^rRom. 3:24;

1:1–14 Introduction. Paul opens his letter with greetings (vv. 1–2) and a lengthy blessing of God (vv. 3–14) where he expresses the two main themes of the letter: Christ has reconciled all of creation and has united the church in himself.

1:1–2 Greetings. This salutation is briefer than many in Paul's letters. Paul saves his richest introductory remarks for the long blessing of God in vv. 3–14.

1:1 apostle. See note on Rom. 1:1. Paul expresses his authority simply but powerfully: he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. **saints.** The saints ("holy ones" or "consecrated people") are the faithful members of God's people. In Ephesians, Paul clearly uses the term for all members of the church (Eph. 1:15, 18; 2:19; 3:8; 4:12; 6:18), who are directly called to be holy (1:4; 5:3) and are **faithful in Christ Jesus in Ephesus.** It is best to read these words as original even though they are missing in several early manuscripts. The esv alternative footnote reading, "saints who are also faithful," is less likely because it is clumsy in Greek and because the phrase "saints who are" normally expects a place name like "in Ephesus," rather than "also faithful." Some scholars who believe Ephesians is a circular letter suggest that the words "in Ephesus" were deleted in the copies that were sent to places outside of Ephesus. On Ephesus, see Introduction: The Ancient City of Ephesus.

1:3–14 Spiritual Blessings in Christ. In the original Greek, this section is one long, elegant sentence. Paul shows that the triune God initiated and accomplished cosmic reconciliation and redemption for the praise of his glory.

1:3 Blessed be. The blessing that opens Paul's prayer is similar to those that began first-century Jewish prayers that were commonly recited throughout the day (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3). **in Christ.** Paul's praise emphasizes the mediation of Christ for all God's blessings by repeating that these good things are ours "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3, 9), "in the Beloved" (v. 6), or "in him" (vv. 4, 7, 11, 13). **Spiritual** (Gk. *pneumatikos*) here communicates that the saving gifts of God are conveyed by the Holy Spirit (Gk. *Pneuma*), whose personal presence throughout this age is the guarantee of future heavenly blessings (see "spiritual songs" in 5:19; Col. 3:16). Hence, these blessings are in **heavenly places**, since that is the Christian's future abode in imperishable glory when he is resurrected in a spiritual body through the "last Adam," the "life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:40, 44–50).

1:4 He chose us in him means that the Father chose Christians in the Son

(Christ), and this took place in eternity past, **before the foundation of the world.** This indicates that for all eternity the Father has had the role of leading and directing among the persons of the Trinity, even though Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in deity and attributes. God's initiative in redeeming the believer from sin and death was not an arbitrary or whimsical decision but something God had planned all along "in Christ." Since God chose his people in his love, they can take no credit for their salvation. God was determined to have them as his own (see note on 2:8). **holy.** God chose them with the goal that they be holy and **blameless before him.** This goal is not optional for Christians—it is the purpose of election. Holiness here expresses moral purity, while blamelessness expresses freedom from the guilt of trespasses and sins in which the Christian formerly walked (1:7; 2:1, 5). **In love,** at the end of 1:4, properly belongs to v. 5, describing predestination, though the esv footnote indicates that "in love" can also be taken with the preceding phrase ("that we should be holy and blameless before him in love"). Versification was introduced into Bibles in the sixteenth century A.D. for convenience and is not part of the original inspired text.

1:5 predestined. Previously ordained or appointed to some position. God's election of Christians (v. 4) entails his predestining them to something—in this case to **adoption as sons** (see also v. 11; Rom. 8:29–30). Hence, election and predestination in this context refer to God's decision to save someone. All Christians, male and female, are "sons" in the sense of being heirs who will inherit blessings from their Father in heaven. Paul qualifies and stresses God's plan and initiation of redemption with the phrase **according to the purpose of his will** here and elsewhere in the passage (Eph. 1:9, 11). God cannot be constrained by any outside force, and his inexorable will for believers is to pour out his grace and goodness on them in Christ Jesus.

1:6 God's ultimate purpose is not redemption as such but the **praise** of his glorious name through redemption. This theme is repeated at key junctures in the argument (see vv. 12, 14).

1:7 Redemption denotes ransoming someone from captivity or from slavery. The supreme OT example was the exodus, where God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt (see Ex. 15:13; Deut. 7:8; 2 Sam. 7:23; Mic. 6:4). **Forgiveness of our trespasses** explains the nature of redemption: Christians are freed from slavery to sin and guilt. This was effected by Christ's **blood**, which means his death as an atoning sacrifice (see also Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:14; 2:13; 4:30; Heb. 9:15).

^{9d}[ch. 3:8, 16; Col. 1:27]; See Rom. 2:4 ¹See Rom. 16:25 ²[See ver. 5 above] ³[ver. 11; Rom. 8:28; 9:11] ⁴See Mark 1:15 ⁵Col. 1:16, 20; [ch. 3:15; Phil. 2:9, 10] ⁶Deut. 4:20; 32:9; See ver. 14 ⁷ver. 5 ⁸ch. 3:11; [Rev. 4:11]; See Rom. 8:28 ⁹[Acts 20:27] ¹⁰ver. 6, 14; [Phil. 1:11] ¹¹2 Cor. 6:7; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; [Acts 13:26; 15:7] ¹²ch. 4:30 ¹³See Acts 1:4 ¹⁴2 Cor. 1:22 ¹⁵Acts 20:32; [ver. 18] ¹⁶Titus 2:14; See ver. 7 ¹⁷See 1 Pet. 2:9 ¹⁸ver. 6, 12 ¹⁹Col. 1:4; Phil. 5; See Rom. 1:8 ²⁰Col. 1:9 ²¹Rom. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:3 ²²See Rom. 15:6 ²³[Col. 1:9] ²⁴[Heb. 6:4; 10:32; Rev. 3:17, 18]; See Acts 26:18 ²⁵ch. 4:4; [ch. 2:12] ²⁶ch. 3:8, 16; Col. 1:27; See ver. 7 ²⁷ch. 3:7; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:29; 2:12 ²⁸ch. 6:10; [Dan. 4:30] ²⁹See Acts 2:24 ³⁰See Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; 1 Pet. 3:22 ³¹See ver. 3

⁴according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ^{9v}making known¹ to us the mystery of his will, ⁿaccording to his purpose, which he ^uset forth in Christ¹⁰ as a plan for ^xthe fullness of time, ^yto unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹In him we have obtained ^zan inheritance, ^ahaving been predestined ^baccording to the purpose of him who works ^call things according to ^cthe counsel of his will, ¹²so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be ^dto the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you heard ^ethe word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, ^fwere sealed with the ^gpromised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is ⁿthe guarantee² of our ⁱinheritance until ^jwe acquire ^kpossession of it, ³^lto the praise of his glory.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

¹⁵For this reason, ^mbecause I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love⁴ toward all the saints, ¹⁶I ⁿdo not cease to give thanks for you, ^oremembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that ^pthe God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, ^qmay give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸^rhaving the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is ^sthe hope to which he has called you, what are ^tthe riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, ^uaccording to the working of ^vhis great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ ^wwhen he raised him from the dead and ^xseated him at his right hand ^yin the heavenly places, ²¹^zfar above ^aall rule and authority and power and dominion, and above ^bevery name that is named, not only in ^cthis age but also in the one

¹Or he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known . . . ²Or down payment ³Or until God redeems his possession ⁴Some manuscripts omit your love

²¹ch. 4:10; Col. 2:10; See John 3:31 ³¹1 Cor. 15:24 ⁴ch. 3:15; Phil. 2:9; [Heb. 1:4] ¹[Matt. 12:32]

1:9 Mystery as used in Scripture (Gk. *mystērion*) refers to the revelation of something that was previously hidden or known only vaguely but now is more fully made known (see note on Col. 1:26–27). The mystery of God's will, now revealed in **Christ**, is "to unite all things in him" (Eph. 1:10; see also 3:3–11).

1:10 fullness of time. "When the time was ripe," i.e., the time for the fulfillment of God's plan. **unite.** This is the central theme of the passage: God has effected cosmic reconciliation in Christ. The work of Christ on the cross is the central axis for the history of creation, whether **in heaven** or **on earth** (see also Col. 1:15–20), since he has redeemed his people and silenced all hostile powers (see Eph. 3:10).

1:11 Obtained an inheritance seems the best rendering of the Greek verb that normally means "to allot [a portion]." Some believe the meaning is that God has claimed his own portion, the believing Jews (see v. 14). **predestined.** Making those who believe in him heirs with Christ was not an ad hoc event; God had planned it from all eternity. By definition God is sovereign, directing all things freely according to his royal counsel. This is in sharp contrast with the pagan gods of the time, who were understood to be often fickle or bound by an inscrutable and arbitrary fate. God's predestination gives his people tremendous comfort, for they know that all who come to Christ do so through God's enabling grace and appointment (see 2:8–10). **Who works all things according to the counsel of his will** is best understood to mean that every single event that occurs is in some sense predestined by God. At the same time, Paul emphasizes the importance of human responsibility, as is evident in all of the moral commands later in Ephesians (chs. 4–6) and in all of Paul's letters. As Paul demonstrated in all of his remarkable efforts in spreading the gospel (Acts 13–28; cf. 2 Cor. 11:23–28), he believed that doing personal evangelism and making conscious choices to obey God are also absolutely essential in fulfilling God's plan. God uses human means to fulfill what he has ordained. With regard to tragedies and evil, Paul and the other biblical writers never blame God for them (cf. Rom. 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:14; also Job 1:21–22). Rather, they see the doctrine of God's sovereignty as a means of comfort and assurance (cf. Rom. 8:28–30), confident that evil will not triumph, and that God's good plans for his people will be fulfilled. How God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together in the world is a mystery no one can fully understand.

1:12 praise. See note on v. 6.

1:13 Sealed can mean either that the Holy Spirit protects and preserves Christians until they reach their inheritance (see 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 Pet. 1:5; Rev. 7:2–3) or that he "certifies" the authenticity of their acceptance by God as being genuine—they bear the "royal seal" (see John 3:33; Acts 10:44, 47). The first interpretation seems best here, though both ideas are biblically true.

1:14 God pours out his Holy Spirit on all of his children to **guarantee** (or to provide a "down payment" on [esv footnote]) their share in his eternal kingdom because he applies to them all God's powerful working in redemption. **until we acquire possession of it.** This phrase can also be rendered "until God redeems his possession" (esv footnote). In that case it means that, like the Levites in the OT, believers are the Lord's specially treasured possession (see Num. 3:12, 45; 8:14; Josh. 14:3–4; 18:7).

1:15–23 Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving. This section, like vv. 3–14, is a single sentence in the original Greek. Paul prays that the church will gain deep insight into the Lord's powerful working and rich gifts in Christ.

1:15 because I have heard. See Introduction: Author and Title.

1:16 do not cease . . . in my prayers. See note on 6:18.

1:17 To name **the Father of glory as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ** is not to deny Christ's deity but to affirm his true incarnate humanity. Further, it expresses that Christians know God through the Lord Jesus as their mediator. **Spirit of wisdom** refers to the Holy Spirit's secret working in Christians to give them insights into God's Word and the saving knowledge of him (1 Cor. 2:6–12).

1:18–19 Paul prays that believers will comprehend the blessings that are theirs in Christ: (1) their future **hope**; (2) God's **inheritance in the saints**; and (3) their **power** in Christ. The "inheritance" here is not the Christian's inheritance but **his** (God's). This indicates how precious his people are to God. They are, so to speak, what he looks forward to enjoying forever. Paul piles up "power words" to express the **immeasurable greatness** of God's power, **working**, and **great might** toward believers. Power over supernatural forces through magic and the occult was a great concern in ancient Ephesus (Acts 19:19), but the power of the living God in Christ trumps all competing authorities (Acts 19:20).

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