

Paul's Letter to the Ephesian Church
Lesson 1

The Mystery of the Gospel of God

Ephesians was written by Paul to a congregation established during one of Paul's later missionary journeys referred to in Acts 19. It was written from Rome, probably in A.D. 62 or 63. It was written to display the scope of God's eternal plans for Jews and Gentiles alike. It deals with the mystery of God, hidden for ages but now made known in Jesus Christ. The Roman province of Asia (the part of the world now known as western Turkey) where Ephesus sat was basking in prosperity during the first century AD. It was one of the older and more stable provinces of the Roman Empire, far from the turmoil of border provinces like Palestine and Gaul (France). Agriculture, industry, and commerce all flourished under Roman protection, and travel was safe, although very expensive. Asia had seven urban centers of which Ephesus was the outstanding city. Through Ephesus' port passed goods from China and inland Asia Minor bound for Italy and Rome. There were wide avenues, huge public buildings and squares, and luxurious private homes designed to impress tourists. Their theater could seat 25,000 people. Dozens of temples used colors and symbols to attract the eye and advertise their wealth and importance. The greatest of these temples was dedicated to Artemis of the Ephesians and was known throughout the Empire as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was four times the size of the Parthenon.



The great temple of Artemis drew tourists and worshipers and served as a giant bank from which cities and nations as well as individuals applied for loans. This highly successful institutionalized religion is the backdrop against which Paul gives us a vision of the church of Jesus Christ. The church is no institution: it is a body, a family, a holy but living temple. It reveals a glory in the living personalities of its members which far outshines the glory of the stone temple of Ephesus, even though that temple was four times the size of the Parthenon of Athens.

In the Revelation, John writes to the church at Ephesus and gives us a glimpse of what she was like 30 years after Paul writes to her.

Rev. 2:1-7 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ²I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; ³and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. ⁴But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent. ⁶Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

This book is important for Christians to study today. It helps us not to think of our own churches in institutional terms—as buildings and programs and activities alone. It helps us to see ourselves and one another as living expressions of a Christ who still expresses His glory in human lives.

Ephes. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: **2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians must be saints! You can never expect to be a saint in heaven if you are not a saint on earth. If you are not faithful in believing in Jesus Christ, then you are not a saint. The truth of sainthood is found in a relationship with the Lord and living that relationship with those around you here on earth. It is by grace that we receive the free and undeserved love of God. It is through this same grace that the Spirit comes to bring peace and blessings both spiritual and temporal to the lives of the saints. There is no peace without God's grace. If there is no peace, then there is no grace. The best saints need a fresh supplies of the grace of the Spirit every moment of their lives.

Ephes. 1:3 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 blameless before Him. In love **5** He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, **6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. **7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, **8** which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight **9** He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him **10** with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him **11** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, **12** to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. **13** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Heavenly and spiritual blessings are the best blessings of all. When we have these blessings, we cannot and will not be miserable! Without heavenly and spiritual blessings, we will be miserable! By the choice of God the Father before the foundation of the world, saints would receive a spiritual and heavenly blessing through Christ. This blessing makes us saints, and saints are to be holy by separating themselves from sin, being set apart to God, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In love they were predestinated, or fore-ordained, through the process called adoption as children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The process called "adoption" in this letter is what is predestined, not the person. Through this process a person can be openly admitted to the privileges of that high relation to Christ. The reconciled and adopted believer becomes the pardoned sinner. As such, he gives all the praise of his salvation to his gracious Father.

God's love appointed this method of redemption, spared not His own Son, and draws believers to hear and embrace this salvation. It is rich grace! Through this process God provided such a guarantee by freely sacrificing His Son. The saints actions, as well as words, declares their sainthood.

Blessings are made known to saints by the Lord's showing them the mystery of His sovereign will through this method of redemption. But this was hidden from the saints of old before Christ came to earth. But at the proper time God had made them known by His written word, the preached gospel, and Spirit of truth surrounding Christ. Christ united as God and man, in His own personhood, brought both redemption and salvation to man. By His Spirit the graces of faith and love were made one with God. What a gracious promise that is, which secures the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! The sanctifying and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit seal saints as the children of God, and heirs to heaven. Grace, redemption, and salvation are the first-fruits of holy happiness as saints. This is the great design of God in all that He has done for us. As saints we are to give praise of Christ's glory.

Ephes. 1:¹⁵For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Spiritual blessings are laid up for us by God in His Son the Lord Jesus. How do we get these spiritual blessings? They are retrieved by prayer. Even the best saint needs to be prayed for and likewise we need to pray for the welfare of Christian friends. Heavenly wisdom is something every true saint greatly desires. And even though we are saints, we are often stubborn when it comes to yielding under God's yoke, even though there is no other way to find rest for the soul! Often, for a little worldly pleasure, we part from the peace of God. But if we were to dispute less and pray more, then we would see more and more of the hope of our calling and the riches of the Divine glory in our inheritance. It is our desire to feel the mighty power of God's Divine grace as it begins and carries on the work of faith in our souls. Have you ever contemplated the difficulty of a soul fully believing in Christ? It is difficult to venture ones all and their hope of eternal life, upon one Man's (Christ's) righteousness. It is a miracle of God that can work this power in us. It is Christ who supplies all the necessities of those who trust in Him. It is Christ who gives us all the blessings in rich abundance. By Christ we come to be filled with the fullness of grace. We must come to Christ. We are called by the Holy Spirit to come and find salvation in Him. In our weakness we must perceive the greatness of Christ's mighty power which effects the conversion of the believer.

Ephes. 2: ¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The death of the soul is found in sin. All people are dead in their trespasses and sins. They have absolutely no desire for spiritual pleasures. But when we take a glimpse at a corpse, it stirs something within us. Think of it, a never-dying spirit is has now fled from the clay and has left nothing but the vessel of a man behind. But there is something far more serious than this. The thought of a dead soul, a lost soul, a fallen soul, is more devastating. Conformity to this world is the state of sin. Lost men are slaves to this world. Regardless of who they are, all people are naturally children of disobedience and are also by nature children of wrath. Why does a sinner need to seek earnestly for that grace which will make them children of God and heirs of His glory? God's eternal love for His creatures is the fountain from which all His mercies flow towards all people. Every converted sinner is a saved sinner, delivered from sin and wrath and placed in the grace that saves and sets free. A regenerated sinner becomes a living soul who lives a life of holiness. He is born of God; he lives, pardoned from the guilt of sin, and justified by grace. Sinners roll in the filth of this world yet the souls of saints sit in heavenly places. Saints are above this world, by God's grace. One's faith, conversion, and eternal salvation, are not found in works, lest any should boast about anything we can do. These things are brought to pass by the free gift of God. It is His purpose for each saint that by blessing us with the knowledge of His will, and His Holy Spirit which produces such a change in us, we can only glorify God by our conversation and perseverance in Christ-like holiness.

Ephes. 2: ¹¹Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹²*remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷AND HE CAME

AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; ¹⁸for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Where is the foundation of the Christian hope found? It is in Christ and His covenant. Who can reflect upon the misery of a person who has been separated forever from the people of God and cut off from the body of Christ without trembling? When a person is without the covenant of promise, he has no hope and no Savior. For him God is but a God of vengeance, for all eternity! Salvation is far from the wicked. However, God is there to help in this life and He did it by the sufferings and death of Christ.

Christ Jesus made peace for all who would believe by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. Christ is our Peace, our Author, our Center, and our Substance of being at peace with God. It was His desire to bring the union of the Gentiles and Jews into one church. Through the Person, Sacrifice, and Mediation of Christ, mankind can draw near to God as a Father and are brought with acceptance into His presence, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as one with the Father and the Son.

The church might be compared here to a city, and every converted sinner is free to be a citizen. It is also might be compared to a house, and every converted sinner is part of the family. The church might also be compared to a building, founded on Christ's doctrine, delivered by the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament.

God dwells in all believers now; they are the temple of God through the working of the blessed Holy Spirit. Let us then ask, "Where is our hope fixed?" Is it on Christ and in accordance with His word? Have we devoted ourselves as holy temples to God through Christ? Are we spiritually-minded, and do we bear the fruit of the Spirit? Do we grieve the holy Comforter? Do we desire His presence? Is His influence upon our hearts? Are we discharging the duties allotted to us by Him, to the glory of God?