

I OVERVIEW OF EPHESIANS

PURPOSE: To strengthen the believers on Ephesus in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and the purpose of the church, the body of Christ.

AUTHOR: Apostle Paul.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: Church at Ephesus and all believers everywhere

DATE WRITTEN: About 61 A.D. from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there.

SETTING: This letter was not written to confront any heresy or problem in the churches, but sent with Tychicus to strengthen and encourage the churches in the area. Paul was very close to the Ephesian church, having spent more than 3 years with them.

BLUEPRINT:

- **Unity in Christ (1:1-3:21)**
- **Unity in the church (4:1-6:24)**

MEGATHEMES:

God's purpose	According to God's eternal, loving plan, he directs, carries out, and sustains our salvation. When we respond to Christ's love by trusting in Him, His purpose becomes our mission.
Christ the center	Christ is exalted as the central meaning of the universe and the focus of history. He is the head of the body, the church. Because Christ is central to everything, His power must be central in us.
Living Church	The nature of the church is presented. The church, under Christ's control, is a living body, a family, a dwelling. God gives believers special abilities by His Holy Spirit to build the church. We are part of Christ's body, and we must live in vital union with Him. Our conduct must be consistent with this living relationship.
New family	Because God, through Christ, paid our penalty for sin and forgave us, we have been reconciled and brought near to Him. We are a new society, a new family. United with Christ means we are to treat one another as family members. We are one family in Christ, so there should be no barriers, no divisions, and no basis for discrimination.
Christian conduct	Paul encourages all Christians to wise, dynamic Christian living, for with privileges goes family responsibility. As a new community, we are to have Christ's new standards. God provides His Holy Spirit to enable us to live His way. To utilize His power, we must lay aside our evil desires and draw upon the power of His new life.

II SCRIPTURE

BROUGHT TOGETHER (2:11-13)

Ephesians 2 –God's Way of Reconciliation

The remaining 12 verses of Ephesians 2 speak to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ. Before Jesus paid for the sins of both the Jews and Gentiles, pious Jews considered all Gentiles ceremonially unclean. Moreover, they thought of themselves as pure and clean because of their national heritage and religious ceremonies. However, Paul quickly points out that BOTH of the Jews and Gentiles are unclean before God and need to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. God was always looking for a change of heart (Romans 2:25-29; Colossians 2:11).

(11-12) Need for reconciliation of Gentile and Jew: God's work of reconciliation is not only between God and the chosen individual, though it **must begin there**. Once we are reconciled to God, His work of reconciliation can then continue between groups of people that are at odds with one another (i.e., Jews and Gentiles in the First Century A.D.).

The first-Century Gentiles were in a desperate place. They had no national hope of the Messiah as did the Jews. For many centuries, the Jews had cherished the hope of the Messiah as did the Jews (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 49:10; Psalm 2, Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:1-7; Isaiah 11:1-9; Daniel 7:13-14; Micah 5:1-4; Zechariah 9:9). But the Gentiles were aliens, strangers, having no hope, and being without God; not only spiritually dead, but also not having access to God that the Jews enjoyed. They were both excluded from the citizenship of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise. Thus, there was no common bond between Jew and Gentile.

Moreover, before Jesus Christ ushered in the Sixth Dispensation of Grace, Gentiles and Jews were kept apart from each other, and the Jews even separated themselves from the Samaritans. Jews considered Gentiles beyond God's saving power, ceremonially unclean, and therefore without hope, while concomitantly, Gentiles resented Jewish claims of spiritual superiority. However, Jesus revealed the total sinfulness of pagans, the Gentiles, **and the Jews** in **Romans 1:21-3:20**, concluding in **Romans 3:23** that ALL have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God. Jesus then offered salvation equally to all He had chosen who receive Him by faith (**Romans 3:21; Romans 9:4-8; Galatians 4:8**).

Without God in the world: Some people believe in God, but they believe He lives in heaven and has nothing to do with this world (James 2:19). In that way, a person can still believe in God and be without God in the world.

Without Christ: The woeful condition of the lost person is to be without Christ. Being without Christ means to be: (1) Without spiritual blessings; (2) Without light; (3) Without peace; (4) Without rest; (5) Without safety; (6) Without hope; and, (7) Without a Prophet, Priest, or King.

(13) Gentiles brought near to God: God brought the Gospel to the Jews first, but when they refused it, He offered it to the Gentiles (**Acts 11:18**), who are now in Christ Jesus and are no longer far off or alienated from Christ's love. They are made near to the things of God, and the sacrificial death of Christ, and the shedding of His blood, accomplishes this.

By the blood of Christ: Many people suggest different ways to come near to God. Some think you can come by keeping the law or by belonging to a group (i.e., Israel; the church). But the only way to be brought near to God is by the blood of Christ. What Jesus did on the cross, suffering as a guilty sinner in the place of guilty sinners (**Romans 5:8**), is the **only thing** that can bring us near to God (**John 14:6**).

JOINED TOGETHER (2:14-18)

In these next 5 verses, Paul focused on the new union of the Jews and the Gentiles that replaced their old animosities. After both receiving Christ as Savior, Jews and Gentiles became one body in Christ. In His death, Christ destroyed all that separated Jews and Gentiles in order to reconcile them to God and to unite them into one people in His body, the church.

(14-16) Jew and Gentile brought together in the Church: Christ has broken down the walls that people build amongst themselves; as the Jews and Gentiles did. These discriminatory barriers include, but are not limited to: (1) age; (2) appearance; (3) intelligence; (4) political persuasion; (5) economic status; (6) race; and, (7) theological perspective.

Because of Christ's death, the following has become reality: (1) We are all one family; (2) Our anger against each other has disappeared; (3) We can all approach God through the Holy Spirit; (4) We are no longer strangers to God; and, (5) We are all part of beautiful temple with Christ as our cornerstone. Paul will expound on each of these changes in relationship in the remainder of **Ephesians 2**.

For He Himself is our peace: Jesus Himself is our peace. He hasn't simply made peace between God and man and Jew and Gentile; but He is our peace.

The work of Jesus on the cross is the common ground of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, there is no longer any dividing wall between Jew and Gentile because Jesus broke it down.

It should be noted that in the Jewish temple, in between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the women, there was a physical barrier; an actual wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. The wall of separation is gone because the common Lordship of Jesus Christ is greater than any previous division.

If the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not greater than any difference you have with others; be it political, racial, economic, linguistic, geographical or whatever, then you have not fully understood what it means to be under the His Lordship.

Christ Made the Ceremonial Law Null and Void: Since Christ fulfilled all that the **ceremonial law** symbolized, it was no longer applicable under the new Dispensation of Grace (**Hebrews 8:1-13**). However, although keeping the **moral law** is not a means to salvation (**Ephesians 2:8-10**) it is a fundamental part to godliness to be actively followed as a servant to Jesus Christ.

It is only through the power of the indwelt Holy Spirit that we are capable of obeying the moral law, as we are no longer under the bondage of sin (**Romans 3:31; Matthew 5:17-20**).

The source of contention between Jew and Gentile was that the Gentiles did not keep the law. However, since Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf, and since He bore the penalty for our failure to keep the law, we are reconciled through His work on the cross; putting to death the source of contention.

The law as a source of righteousness is no longer an issue between the Jew and Gentile, as that source of enmity between these people is dead. Gentiles and Jews are brought together into one body, the Church, where our unity in Jesus is far greater than our previous differences.

Early Christians called themselves a "third race" or a "new race." Early Christians recognized that they were not Jews, not Gentiles, but one new man embracing all who are in Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17).

Through the cross: We see the emphasis Paul places on the work of Jesus on the cross. This unity did not just happen, but it was the hard-fought accomplishment of Jesus. This means that Jesus' prayer in **John 17** (i.e., that they all may be one), was a prayer He prayed knowing that His work of the cross would accomplish and He was willing to pray knowing His agony would be used to answer it.

The feud between the two groups ended at the Cross. When Jesus was crucified, He put an end to their hostility, which was rooted in the Law. They both learned that the Law was not given to relieve sin, but to reveal sin, and to be a schoolmaster to Jesus Christ (**Galatians 3:24**). Jews and Gentiles are now parts of the Body of Christ (**Ephesians 4:4**).

This bringing together of Jew and Gentile in Jesus is a partial fulfillment of God's eternal purpose as stated in **Ephesians 1:10**: that . . . He might gather together in one all things in Christ. God uses the bringing together Jew and Gentile into the Church as a preview of His ultimate work of summing up all things into Jesus Christ.

(17-18) How Jews and Gentiles are brought together: As they respond to the same gospel, the same peace is preached to those afar off (i.e., Gentiles) and those near (i.e., Jews). They enjoy the same access to God, access that comes by one Spirit to the Father. Not only are Jews and Gentiles saved by the same gospel, but they also have the same essential walk with God and access to Him. One group does not have a greater access than the other does, therefore there is no difference between them.

When conflict arises among Christian groups of different backgrounds, you can be sure that they forget that they were saved by the same gospel and that they have the same access to God. In conflict situations, one or both groups usually feel they have superior access to God.

The Jews were "near" to God because they already knew Him through the Scriptures and worshipped Him in their religious ceremonies (**Isaiah 57:19; Isaiah 52:7**). The Gentiles were "far away" because they knew little or nothing about God. However, since both the Jew and Gentile could not be saved by their accomplishments, they needed to hear about salvation available through Jesus Christ (**II Corinthians 5:18-20**), and through Him, the access we have by one Spirit to the Father.

BUILT TOGETHER (2:19-22)

(19-22) Picture of God's work of reconciliation, both individual and among groups:

Consequently, Gentiles are no longer foreigners and aliens and they have full citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Christians of Gentile background should not regard themselves as "second-class citizens" in God's kingdom in any regard. They are not only full citizens, but also full and equal members of God's household.

Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets: The Jews and Gentiles are built upon a common foundation of having one body and the same access to God. This common foundation is the original apostles and prophets, and their enduring revelation, as recorded in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone: This corner stone "literally means at the tip of the angle. It refers to the capstone or binding stone that holds the whole structure together. The Kingdom of God, of which all who trust in Jesus are members, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone (**Psalm 118:22; Mark 12:10; Acts 4:11**). The 21st Century Church is not built on contemporary ideas, but rather on the spiritual heritage given to us in the Old and New Testaments.

Salmond on corner stone: "It denotes the stone placed at the extreme corner, so as to bind the other stones in the building together - the most important stone in the structure, the one on which its stability depended."
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In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord: The main point of this metaphor is that in union with Christ, the whole building is joined together. The church is a theocracy with Jesus Christ as the Head. All believers, both Jew and Gentile, find their true place and function in relation to Christ as they are joined with Him (**Romans 12:3-5**).

This building is growing like a living organism towards what God intended it to be: A holy temple of the Lord. When Christ came, He Himself became the place of the divine dwelling among men. As we keep to our common foundation, the whole building of God's people grows together in a beautiful way, as a holy temple where God dwells in beauty and glory. God arranges the Church for His own glory and purposes.

This tells us that the Church is a dwelling place, a place where God lives. It is never to be an empty house that is virtually a museum, with no one living inside. The Church is to be both the living place of God and His people.

This tells us that the Church is a temple, holy and set apart to God. We serve there as priests, offering the spiritual sacrifices of our lips and hearts, our praises to God (Hebrews 13:15). The church is more than a pulpit and steeple, it's a chosen people.

"The Father makes choice of this house, the Son purchaseth it, the Holy Ghost taketh possession of it." (Trapp)

By using the present tense, Paul emphasized the continual nature of being built into the dwelling place of God. Believers are the stones used to build God's new temple, achievable through the power of the indwelt Holy Spirit; the link between believers on earth and the heavenly realm.
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