

July 2 Ephesians (80% disputed)

## Intro

The earliest manuscripts for this letter lack the address “in Ephesus”, so some scholars believe that this letter could actually be the missing “letter to Laodicea” mentioned in Colossians 4:6. This letter shares much similar content with Colossians (similar opening/closing, 29 identical vocabulary words, similar rhetorical structure, and a similar household code), so much so that some scholars believe it to be either a copy of Colossians for another community, or a commentary on the letter to the Colossians. Most scholars do not believe that Paul wrote Ephesians because it has a peculiar style, unique diction, distinctive viewpoints, and vocabulary words compared to Paul’s undisputed letters. It is clear from this letter that the author has given up imminent hope of a return of Christ, and it seems that the issue of gentiles being accepted within the church is no longer an issue (rather, it’s simply assumed that gentiles are full partners in the church). The other issue with Paul’s authorship of this letter is that Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus and with the individuals there –he lived there and was imprisoned there- and yet, this letter is very generic. It’s not the warm, personal letter that we should expect Paul to write to a church and its people whom Paul would have known so well and had so much history with. Many scholars date this letter to the early 80s CE.

The premise of the letter to the Ephesians (or Laodiceans?) is that Christians are living in the time in between two cosmic battles –one already performed by God when all things were placed under Jesus’ feet, and another to be held “on that evil day” when the church in its fullness as Christ’s body will fight in heavenly places. In between these battles, the universal church has been created to fight for good works and the bringing together of all diverse persons into the one body of Christ. The church appears to be a place of peace at the time of this writing, but there is indeed a battle raging between the church and the spiritual forces at work in the world.

## Chapter 1

The author begins this letter with an assertion about predestination- that God chose all of the saints before the foundation of the world to be God’s children and receive the inheritance of salvation. Christ has already done everything that is necessary for our salvation, we need only live into the salvation that has been given to us as a gift of God’s grace. Some Christians (ie, Calvinists like Presbyterians, Reformed, Baptists) subscribe to a

theology of double predestination (God pre-ordains who's saved and who's damned), Lutherans subscribe to single predestination (if you're in the church, God predestined you to be here, and for those outside of the church God will do what God will do, it's not our place to judge or to try and figure out who's saved or damned). According to Ephesians, the seal of the Holy Spirit (which we receive at Baptism) is God's pledge to us of our promised inheritance of salvation.

Beginning in verse 15, the author prays for the individuals of the church that God will bless them with a spirit of wisdom and revelation as they increase in faith and relationship with God. The hope for the wisdom is so that: 1 You may know the hope to which you are called, 2 you may know the riches of the glorious inheritance of the saints, and that 3 you may know (trust in) the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe. The power of God was strong enough to raise Christ from the dead, and that same power is what God uses to bless us and help us flourish in the faith today. When God raised Christ from the dead, Christ won a decided victory over the power of death, and God placed all things under his feet at that time. In other words, Christ has already accomplished the work of our salvation and freedom from death.

## Chapter 2

The ruler of the power of the air is the devil/personification of evil. This was a common way both Jews and Christians referred to some of their neighbors pagan deities. They didn't assert that those gods didn't exist at all, but rather that they did exist and produced negative impacts on the world, and that they were no match for the power of our God. The opening of chapter 2 likely refers to the imperial cult of gods who were worshiped in the first century, and who were symbolic of the Roman empire as a whole.

Vs. 4-10 is not only word for word our confession and forgiveness liturgy, but also the cornerstone of our Lutheran Christian faith –that we are saved by God's grace through faith, and nothing can take that away from us. We did nothing to earn our salvation –in fact we couldn't have because Christ came to us, loved us, and saved us, while we were still steeped in sin. We were created for good works, which is to be our way of life as Christians. Christ has broken down the divisions (even ancient, painful divisions like the Jew/Gentile divide) and re-created us anew into the one, unified body of Christ. Christ makes peace in our world by reconciling divided groups into his own body. The author ends chapter 2 with the metaphor of the church as the holy temple for God. He's talking about the people, the body

of Christ, and using the image of the numerous pagan temples which would have been prevalent in this city to remind them that Christ has made the church into a similar majestic structure through the reconciling power of his peace and love.

### Chapter 3

The author now retraces the legacy of Paul and his revelation from God about the full, equal partnership of Gentiles within the body of Christ. This is, at this point in history, a given, rather than a new teaching. This does a fine job of illustrating how God can and does make new revelations to God's people, and how these revelations are always in the direction of grace and inclusion, rather than further separation and oppression. The author offers a beautiful prayer for the church in vs. 16-19. God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!

### Chapter 4

Vs. 1-6 asserts a mini creed for the early church. There are many parallels between this and Colossians chapter 3. The author urges the church to lead a life worthy of the calling to which they have been called (we're created for good works). Christians are to be: humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bod of peace.

Beginning in vs. 11, the author now channels the letter to the Corinthian church in speaking about the gifts of Christ and the vocations we take on within the church as we use the gifts which have been given: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (all of these vocations serve the purpose of equipping the saints –the whole church- for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ until all have come to faith). Our goal as Christians is spiritual maturity, which looks like wise discernment and conformity with Christ. Our lives should emulate Jesus. When each part of Christ's body is working as it should, in the vocation they're called to, the whole body grows and matures in love.

The author now shifts the focus to more specific ways of being conformed to Christ. We must give up our former, sinful ways (drown the old Adam daily, as Luther says), and make of Christianity our new lifestyle. It's hard to make a lifestyle change, especially when the whole culture around you lives the same way you used to. The author gives some helpful, practical tips to the church: speak the truth in love to our neighbors, do not let the sun go down on your anger, do not make room for the devil, give up stealing and work honestly so that you can share with the needy, only say what is useful

for building up (if you can't say anything kind, don't say anything at all), be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.

### Chapter 5

The author now continues the theme of being imitators of Christ, urging the church to put behind them the behaviors of the Roman empire, and not to associate with or even think about the behaviors they're putting behind themselves. This can sound very exclusionary, but this is akin to anyone who has gone through addiction recovery. The individuals of the church had a major lifestyle change to make, complete with new behaviors, these can be very difficult to put into practice if constantly tempted to revert back to the old ways by others.

Vs. 18-20, worship is important, and worship will help believers grow and mature in faith and into the lifestyle of faith.

Vs. 21 begins the household code in Ephesians by saying that truly EVERYONE should be subject to one another. This is not just about one group being submissive, but all Christians should place themselves in a place of servanthood in relation to their neighbors.

### Chapter 6

The household code in Ephesians is similar to that of Colossians, except that the code for husbands and wives is related to the metaphor of Christ and the church.

The author urges the church to stand firm in the Lord by putting on the whole armor of God as they strive to lead Christian lives with the debauchery of the Roman empire all around. The struggle is not against human beings, but against the powers of evil that cause the people to act out in such lewd ways. Fasten the belt of truth around your waste, put on the breastplate of righteousness, as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and finally the sword of the Spirit (the word of God) is the only "offensive weapon" a Christian needs.