

EPHESIANS

Ephesians is a very rich book.

This letter of instruction begins with ecstatic words about Jesus and ends with very practical words to daily life as Christians. In between, you find out what Jesus has done for us and what it means to be in the group that has received God's gifts.

Paul begins with praise. God has given us incredible blessings through Jesus. This list of one wonderful gift from Jesus after another kindles awe and gratitude. Just let the words roll over you. After you read verses 1:3-14 from beginning to end, go back to savor individual lines.

This method of reading is helpful with all six chapters of Ephesians. First, read for the overall impression. Then go back to focus on specific phrases. Here are some manageable divisions for good comprehension:

1:1-2 Greeting	4:1-16
1:3-14	4:17 – 5:5
1:15-22	5:6-20
2:1-10	5:21 – 6:9
2:11-22	6:10-20
3:1-21	6:21-23 Closing

Throughout Ephesians, Paul writes about heavenly, spiritual reality. As people whose perception is flawed by human sin, we need God's words of truth to reveal spiritual reality. Ephesians encourages us to put God's truth into practice. As you read and reflect, ask yourself: *What is God's reality? How is it different from my experience or perception? What changes does it make in my life?*

The relationship between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) was a challenging issue in Ephesus and throughout the entire early church. Acts 18 reports that Paul began his ministry in Ephesus by teaching in the synagogue. After three months, he was no longer allowed, so he taught in a public hall. Many Gentiles became believers in Jesus also. Jews knew

that their special relationship with God was based on God's promises and their obedience to God's laws.

The practice of circumcision showed that the Jews were set apart by and for God. Did Gentile believers need to be circumcised? Did Jewish believers have special advantages? "No," says Paul. We are saved by God's grace, and we can do nothing to establish our status with God. It is all an undeserved gift. In God's reality, all believers are family: the wall of hostility is down, Jesus is our peace, and we are all members of the household of God. This also applies to all racial, ethnic, class, or any other divisions in human society.

Ephesians also teaches about personal relationships with other Christians. The basic principle is: *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. (5:21)*. This calls for respect and mutuality even though power (and abuse of that power) is often accepted as part of husband/wife, parent/child and master/slave (employer/employee) relationships. For example, when the verses about husbands and wives (5:21-33) are read without keeping mutual submission or consideration in mind, it is easy to conclude that the husband is dominant and the woman is an underling. Instead, Jesus teaches us to do what is best for the other person.

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It was at the intersection of major trade routes. Many came to worship at the temple of the Roman goddess Diana, whose Greek name is Artemis. Acts 18:24 through Acts 20:1 tells of Paul's ministry of teaching, healing, and casting out demons as well as the riot aroused by a silversmith who anticipated financial ruin because fewer people were buying silver shrines of Artemis. Acts 20:17-38 records Paul's farewell visit with the Ephesian elders while on his last trip to Jerusalem. Ephesus is also named in Revelation 2:1-7. It is one of the seven churches Jesus speaks to in Revelation.

How were you saved? *By grace through faith, not your own doing, but a gift from God.*
What did God create you for? *Good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*