



Ephesians

The vision of Ephesians is that, in Christ, Jews and Gentiles have been unified into a single household. The letter seeks to encourage its recipients to live this unity in practice. The first half of the book lays out the theology that lies behind this unity exploring in particular the way in which the church is the body of Christ. The second half of the book discusses in more detail what living this unity in practice might look like.

Ephesians and Colossians are often recognized to be companion books as their message is very similar.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 20 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-14; 4.1-32;
 6.10-24



Genre

Epistle



Anything tricky?

One of the passages that a number of people find challenging is 5.21-6.9 which talks about how husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves should relate to one another. The challenge is to work out how much of this applies to the original context (i.e. the Ephesians) and how much to us today.

Notice that there is a very similar passage in the companion letter Colossians



Inspiring quotes

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

(Ephesians 1.3-4)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

(Ephesians 2.8-10)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

(Ephesians 6.10-11)



About the Author

The letter is attributed to Paul in 1.1.

Ever since the 18th century, New Testament scholars have questioned whether the different tone, style and vocabulary might suggest that it might have been written by a later member of the Pauline community using Paul's theology as a base.

There is no absolute agreement on this, however, so as you read it, see whether you think it sounds and feels like the rest of Paul's letters or not.

What do we know about him?

Paul is probably the best known of all the early Christians. Before encountering Jesus Christ on the

road to Damascus, he was a zealous Pharisee who sought to maintain the purity of Judaism. After his experience on the Damascus road, he turned his zeal to proclaiming Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. This brought him into conflict with some other early Christians, not least Peter, who thought that followers of Jesus Christ should convert to Judaism. He travelled around the Roman Empire (though primarily in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey – and Greece) proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and founding communities of Christians as he went. He also wrote a large number of letters, 13 of which are preserved in the New Testament.

Ephesians is traditionally be thought to be one of these.



About the times

Ephesians is thought to have been written while Paul was in prison. If Paul was the author of the letter, then this would date it to ad late 50s or early 60s. Those who do not think that Paul wrote it think that it comes from a much later date sometime between ad 75-95. This is because the themes of Ephesians could be seen to reflect the needs and concerns of a later Christian community.

What were people feeling?

The theme of Ephesians – Christian unity in Christ – is a common one both in the first century and today. The challenge, then as now, is how to live out the gospel's message of unity with those who are very different from you.



What kind of Book is it?

An Epistle, or letter – both Ephesians and Colossians are letters which offer a vision of how to live out the Christian faith. In both, the theology of the first half of the letter is applied in the second half of the letter to everyday living.



How is it structured?

1.1-2	Introduction and greeting
1.3-3.21	A theological reflection on unity in Christ
4.1-6.20	Guidelines as to how to live this unity in practice
6.21-24	Final greeting



Look out for...

One of the interesting features of Ephesians is the way in which it lays out some complex theology (in chapters 1-3), which it then uses to talk about how Christians should live out their faith (chapters 4-6). Notice how this doctrine shapes the way people are expected to behave in the letter.

Ephesians, like Colossians, talks a lot about how the mysteries of God have been revealed in Jesus, look out for the twin themes of mystery and revelation through the book.

Right at the heart of Ephesians lies the belief that reconciliation has already taken place in Christ and now needs to be reflected in the lives of those who are in Christ. Trace the thread of reconciliation through the book both at the start in the theological chapters (1-3) and later on in the practical application chapters (4-6).



What could this mean for me?

Ephesians lays out a clear vision of what kind of behaviour is expected from Christians and what is not. How much of this do you think is still relevant today?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Why do you think that Christians struggle so much to live out unity and reconciliation? Do you think we are better or worse at it than the Ephesians were?
- Many people find the instructions about the relationship between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves difficult in the modern world. Talk about this passage (5.21-6.9) what is your view of what is said here? [If you've already talked about Colossians you may not want to do discuss this again here!]
- Many people's favourite passage from Ephesians is the passage about the armour of God in 6.13-17. What did you make of it? Do you think it's an image that still works today?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



Tweet us photos, stories or questions from your book club using the hashtag [#biblebookclub](https://twitter.com/biblebookclub) and tag [@biblesociety](https://twitter.com/biblesociety).

Bringing *the Bible to* **Life**

