

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY ONE

Ephesians: A Life-Changing Letter

An Overview of Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians gives us a doctrinal foundation for believing, and it is full of practical advice. The information helps us not only at work and in the social realm but also at home and in private. Ephesians talks about things that matter.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OF all the world's works of literature, the Bible nourishes our souls the most. We savor its words as food from heaven, morsels of divine revelation about God and what it means to walk closely with Him. Each book of the Bible teaches us "what is true" and how to do "what is right" (2 Timothy 3:16), and Paul's letter to the Ephesians is no exception.

Ephesians perfectly balances Christian doctrine and practical application—creating a healthy blend of *believing* "what is true" and *doing* "what is right." According to Chuck Swindoll, Ephesians feeds our souls with the heartiest of spiritual fare:

This letter skips the light hors d'oeuvres of the spiritual banquet and jumps straight into the main course. Within a few verses we discover that this is no dainty lunch for the grazer, but a veritable feast of theological truth served up by a Master Chef.¹

In this survey of Ephesians, we'll overview the full expanse of the spiritual feast God spreads before us. As we step into God's banquet hall, let's prepare our hearts to receive all the spiritual nutrition God offers on the menu of Ephesians.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we always pray for God's Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts as we open God's Word. As Chuck advised, "Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort."²

You may wish to pray as Chuck prays before he studies the Word: "I often pray, 'Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it.'"³ Write your prayer here if you wish.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by reading Scripture carefully and slowly, absorbing every word. For helpful instruction from Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.

Now let's turn to the Scriptures! Familiarize yourself with the background of Ephesians by reading about Paul's brief visit to Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey in [Acts 18:18–22](#). Then read about Paul's longer stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey in [Acts 19](#).



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Observation: The World in Which the Letter Was Written

Paul's ministry in Ephesus played a strategic role in his fulfilling God's mission to tell "the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). The capital of the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus was geographically central, located at a thriving seaport connecting Asia to the east with Europe to the west.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Bible maps are a vital tool in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible Study. Find Ephesus on the map in the back of your Bible. You can also locate Ephesus by going to the map, titled, "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*," on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Take a few minutes to follow the paths of Paul's second and third journeys to Ephesus as you read the next sections.

Paul's First Visit to Ephesus

According to Acts 18:18–19, Paul took his friends and fellow tentmakers, Priscilla and Aquila, with him from Corinth to Ephesus. Paul then left Ephesus, promising, "I will come back later, God willing" (Acts 18:21). Staying in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila mentored the young teacher, Apollos (18:24–28). Paul referred to Priscilla and Aquila in his letter to the Corinthians. What did he say was happening in their home (*1 Corinthians 16:19*)? What does this brief reference tell us about the way the early church functioned?

The seedling church in Ephesus took root with Priscilla and Aquila, but when Paul returned, it blossomed and spread!



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Paul's Return and Extended Stay in Ephesus

Paul saw the strategic potential of Ephesus as a gateway city for the gospel, staying there for about two years during his third missionary journey. What were his ministry activities as described in the following passages?

Teaching—[Acts 19:8–10](#). Note how far Paul's teaching spread from this strategic center of ministry.

Miracles—[Acts 19:11–20](#). Note the results of Paul's miracles and how they spread the message of the Lord.

Paganism in Ephesus

The believers in Ephesus lived in a city renowned for its paganism. The temple of the Greek goddess Artemis stood as the city's crown jewel and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.⁴ Not only did the temple control the spiritual climate of the entire region, it also drove the economy. What did Paul do and say to upset the idol-worshipping industry ([Acts 19:23–31](#))?



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After the riots calmed, Paul gathered the believers together to encourage them. “Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia” (Acts 20:1). What did Paul say before he left? We don’t know exactly, but we know what he wrote in his letter to them years later while under house arrest in Rome.



Interpretation: Overview of Ephesians

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, Nero ruled the Roman Empire and was persecuting Christians ruthlessly. Despite the dangers, Paul urged the Ephesians not to cower behind a curtain but live openly “as people of light!” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul challenged the church to swing wide the doors of ministry and to “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (5:15).

The Believer’s Position in Christ—Ephesians 1–3

The first three chapters of Paul’s letter lay out the doctrine of our position in Christ. Christ, through His death, resurrection, and exaltation has reconciled us to God—has united Jews and Gentiles into “one body” (Ephesians 2:16). Dip your finger into the chapters in this section of Paul’s letter by reading the following verses and writing down Paul’s points.

What God has done for us—[Ephesians 1:3](#)

What Christ has done for us—[Ephesians 2:4–6](#)



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What the “mystery” means to us—*Ephesians 3:8–11*

The Believer’s Practice on Earth—Ephesians 4–6

Chapters 4–6 instruct us how to live in light of our position in Christ. Write down Paul’s points from these verses.

The walk of the believer—Ephesians 4:1–4

The life of the imitator—Ephesians 5:1–2



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The strategy of the warrior—Ephesians 6:10–12

EPHESIANS

	Introduction (1:1–2)	Our Position in Christ	Our Practice on Earth	Conclusion (6:21–24)
	Section 1: What God has done for us (1) Emphasis: sovereignty Section 2: What Christ has done in us (2:1–10) Emphasis: grace Section 3: What Christ has done between us (2:11–3:21) Emphasis: reconciliation CHAPTERS 1–3	Section 1: Our new unity (4:1–16) Section 2: Our new walk (4:17–6:9) Section 3: Our new strength (6:10–20) CHAPTERS 4–6		
Emphasis	Doctrinal: vertical relationship with God		Practical: horizontal relationship with others	
Core Phrase	"He chose us in Him." (1:4)		"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling." (4:1)	
Subjects	Declarations of heavenly truths (God's accomplishments)		Exhortations for earthly living (Christians' assignments)	
Prayers	Paul's prayer for Ephesians (1:15–23)	Paul's prayer for the whole church (3:14–21)	Christians' prayers for one another (6:18–20)	
Theme	The holy community God is creating and how it is to live out its calling			
Key Verses	1:9–10; 4:1–3			
Christ in Ephesians	Jesus is the source of spiritual blessing, the Cornerstone of the church, and the goal of spiritual maturity (1:3; 2:20; 4:11–16).			

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Paul's Prayers

Three prayers reinforce this structural balance between *declarations of doctrine* in the first three chapters and *exhortations to duty* in last three chapters. Summarize the key points of these prayers.

Prayer for wisdom—Ephesians 1:15–20

Prayer to know Christ's love—Ephesians 3:14–21

Prayer for boldness—Ephesians 6:18–20

Tying together the letter are the golden threads of grace and peace. They open and close the letter (Ephesians 1:2; 6:23–24), and they weave throughout. Through Christ, God shows us grace (2:8–9) and, with the peace of Christ, unites all people in the church (2:14–18). May our lives glimmer with such golden qualities!



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Correlation: Greetings of Grace and Peace

Paul made a practice of beginning and ending his letters with these themes. Read *Galatians 1:3*; *Philippians 1:2*; *Colossians 1:2*; *1 Thessalonians 1:1*; *2 Thessalonians 1:2*; and *Titus 1:4*. Write down the reason you think Paul made grace and peace prominent in his communications.

As you study Ephesians, you will begin to do what I call one of the greatest Christian activities you can do, and that is think God's thoughts after Him. Before long, you will find the decisions being made will be filtered through truths out of Ephesians. Before long, struggles you had been wrestling with will begin to be solved through the truths of the letter to the Ephesians. And it will no longer be print on a page. It will be a letter written on your heart.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

As we study this important letter, let's keep three thoughts in mind.

1. *We are all under the headship of Christ.* Because we serve Jesus and answer to Him, we are to be *submissive* both to Him and each other.
2. *We belong to a body.* We're not alone; we don't have to act on our own or handle our problems by ourselves. We can take refuge in the body of Christ. We need to be *committed* to Christ and to each other.
3. *We can stand against the assault of our enemies.* We have God's resources available to us. To take advantage of them, we need to become *equipped* to utilize them properly.



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Studying Ephesians will show you how to become fully submissive, committed, and equipped as you live as God's light in a dark world. Take a moment and look back at the verses you read in this study. Does any one verse or phrase stand out to you as a special encouragement today? Write it here and note what it means to you.

We've looked over the banquet table of this exquisite book, and in the next study, we'll take a seat and dig in to the first few lines of the chapter 1—the first sampling of truth from many morsels to follow!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how precious is Your Word to us. Thank You for the precepts that give us specific direction and the principles that fill our minds with wisdom. Your Word gives light. And I long to live in the light and reflect the glory of Your Son in this dark world. Speak to me words of life and fill me with Your marvelous grace and wonderful peace. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 160.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
3. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 128.
4. The mythical goddess Artemis, also known as Diana, was considered the mother of all life. For more information about the cultic rituals and the economic importance of the temple at Ephesus, read the online article, "[Diana; Artemis.](#)"

