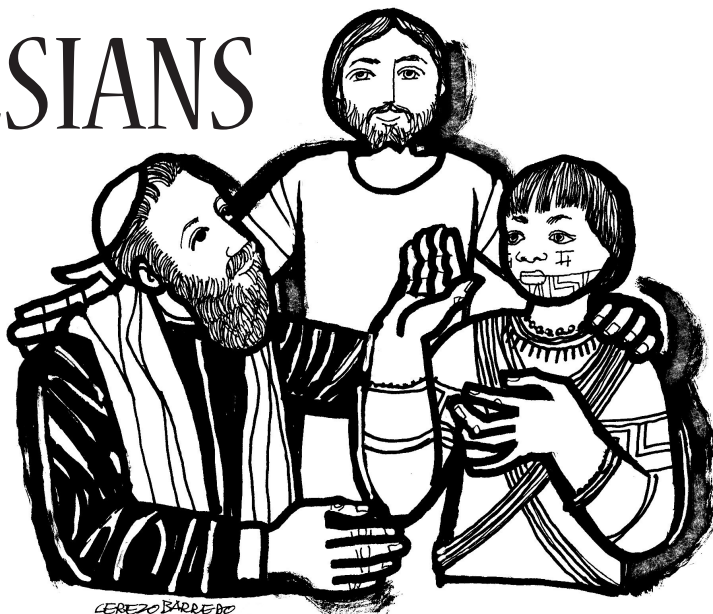


EPHESIANS



Read Ephesians 1:1–14

Many question the Pauline authorship of this letter. If Paul himself is not the author, his theology, somewhat developed, mediates his authority to a post-Pauline generation. The author addresses the “saints,” those consecrated to God through baptism and called to become holy in moral deeds. A great blessing follows. The saints have been chosen, destined in love to praise God in the beloved, Jesus.

Reflect: The author summarizes much of Christian belief: redemption, forgiveness of sins, the goal of unity of all things and all peoples. All is based on faith and hope. What do these most basic beliefs mean to you?

^a Other ancient authorities lack *in Ephesus*, reading *saints who are also faithful*

^b *Gk in him*

^c *Or been made a heritage*

Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful^a in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

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^b before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,^c hav-

Pray: Let your prayer arise from your trust in God and in Jesus (faith) and be confident because of your hope. You are already blessed, a member of the saints of the household of God.

Act: Since God has blessed you with faith and hope, be optimistic; live with confidence in the future.

Read Ephesians 1:15–23

God has accomplished great things in Jesus and now you have learned why you can hope. Faith has given birth to hope. Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead, is the head of all things and his body now is the church.

Reflect: Have you accepted the headship of Jesus over all things and thus over all people? If wisdom is the order that God has implanted in the universe, now you know that all order in the universe depends on Jesus.

Pray: Individual prayer finds fulfillment in the church's prayer. The prayer of petition belongs in communal prayer of all of the saints. Pay attention to the prayer of the church.

Act: Let your faith affect your work this day.

ing been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^a is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Paul's Prayer

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love^b toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God^c put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

From Death to Life

2 You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ^d—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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

^a Other ancient authorities read *who*

^b Other ancient authorities lack *and your love*

^c Gk *He*

^d Other ancient authorities read *in Christ*

Read Ephesians 2:1–10

By faith you have been saved and not by works. Once you walked in darkness but, through your trust in Jesus, you have experienced the great love of God. The future is great. All will experience the immeasurable love of God.

Reflect: You have left behind sin and failure and now experience the presence of God (grace). Forgiveness is a gift freely given and freely accepted. Think about what you have received.

Pray: Thank God for the gift of grace, the gift of Jesus, and the gift of forgiveness.

Act: Walk tall, not because of what you have done but because of what God has done for you. Face any problem with confidence.

Read Ephesians 2:11–22

Jews and Gentiles are now one. Long separated, now all peoples (Jews and non-Jews) have experienced peace. God has united all through Jesus in the one household of the saints. The church today includes all people.

Reflect: The world is divided by race, national origin, gender, and social status. This should not be, especially in the church. Think about prejudice and how it has affected you and everyone else. How can you support the unity of all peoples?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to contribute to equality for all. Pray for an end to racism and sexism.

Act: Do something today to demonstrate your acceptance of all people, especially the ones you have trouble accepting.

us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

One in Christ

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth,^a called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body^b through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^c ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.^d ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually^e into a dwelling place for God.

Paul’s Ministry to the Gentiles

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, ³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵ In former generations this mystery^f was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the

^a Gk in the flesh

^b Or reconcile both of us in one body for God

^c Or in him, or in himself

^d Or keystone

^e Gk in the Spirit

^f Or of

^g Gk it

Read Ephesians 3:1–13

God has blessed Paul and chosen Paul to preach to the Gentiles. Past generations had known only what separates people. Now through faith in Jesus people can experience the greatness of unity.

Reflect: Paul once knew of the great differences between Jews and all others. He enjoyed the distinctness of Judaism. God, through Jesus, made Paul change his thinking. What prejudices do you hold on to? What separates you from others?

Pray: Once you have identified one of your prejudices, make the need to overcome this sin the object of your prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit for help to live without prejudice.

Act: Seek some interaction with an individual with whom you have had difficulty in the past.

Read Ephesians 3:14–21

Paul prays for the community. He addresses God as Father. His prayer is trinitarian: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He prays for faith and love for the Ephesians.

Reflect: Do you comprehend the greatness of the love of God in Jesus? What does it mean to say that the love of Christ surpasses all knowledge? Is knowledge important?

Pray: Make this prayer of Paul your own. Read it and pray it, using the same words and then your own words.

Act: During this day, frequently offer the prayer, “Thank you God; thank you Jesus.”

Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see^a what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in^b God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.^c ¹³ I pray therefore that you^d may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Prayer for the Readers

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,^e ¹⁵ from whom every family^f in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended^g into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pas-

^a Other ancient authorities read *to bring to light*

^b Or *by*

^c Or *the faith of him*

^d Or *I*

^e Other ancient authorities add *of our Lord Jesus Christ*

^f Gk *fatherhood*

^g Other ancient authorities add *first*

Read Ephesians 4:1–16

One Lord, one faith, and one baptism; one God who is over all. Paul preaches unity in Christianity and unity in the church. Not all are teachers or apostles or prophets. Each has a contribution to make. Seeking unity, Christians speak the truth in love.

Reflect: Instead of thinking about what is divisive within Christianity and within the church, think of what unites. Seeking what people have in common overcomes the differences, especially if what we have in common is Christ.

Pray: Jesus prayed that all might be one. Join your prayer to his.

Act: Visit a church of another denomination and pray for unity.

Read Ephesians 4:17–32

Pay attention to what you have become: a new creation in the likeness of God. Pay attention to the truth. Make your words express what is in your mind and heart. Avoid any anger and bitterness. Be kind to one another.

Reflect: Has truth become a casualty in our society? Do you cut corners when dealing with the truth? If so, when and why?

Pray: Let your words in prayer come from your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in all truthfulness.

Act: Make sure that this day you speak only the truth. Perform one act of kindness.

tors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

The Old Life and the New

17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. ²² You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Rules for the New Life

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,^a as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in **5** Christ has forgiven you.^b ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us^c and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

^a Other ancient authorities read *building up faith*

^b Other ancient authorities read *us*

^c Other ancient authorities read *you*

Read Ephesians 5:1–20

Live what you believe. Darkness means sin and you have left the darkness behind. The possibility of sinning always exists, so you must be careful, especially in choosing those with whom you associate. An evil person will bring out the evil that exists within you. Seek out the wise and learn from them.

Reflect: Consider the sins mentioned in this passage. Think of one sin that needs attention in your life.

Pray: Seek guidance from the Holy Spirit to avoid the sin that you know needs attention.

Act: With the help of the Holy Spirit avoid the sin needing attention by practicing the opposite virtue.

Read Ephesians 5:21–33

“Defer to,” is a better translation than “be subject to” in this passage. Wives and husbands “defer” to each other. Paul deals with his own contemporary society in which the husband owns the wife and attempts to change it.

Reflect: Some take these verses literally, paying no attention to how the passage begins. The emphasis is on the husbands who love and care for their wives as Christ does for the church. In spite of Paul’s efforts (following his Master) to change society, inequality still exists between the sexes.

Pray: Pray for wives and husbands.

Act: If you are married, “defer” to your spouse. If not married, “defer” to a friend.

Renounce Pagan Ways

3 But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. 5 Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian Household

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who

loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.^a ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined

to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. ³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Read Ephesians 6

Paul reinforces what is needed in family life: children are to obey and parents are to guide and instruct and do nothing to anger their offspring. Paul accepts the reality of slavery and attempts to modify how slaves and masters interact. All should live in peace, wishing each other the best of everything.

Reflect: Could Jesus and Paul have done more to change society with regard to the relationship between husbands and wives and masters and slaves? Is slavery still present in the world? Why do spouses have problems in their relationships? Why do families have problems?

Pray: Pray for understanding within families. Pray for better “listening” by each member of the family.

Act: Listen to everyone today. If you find yourself wishing that the person would stop speaking so you can speak, you are not listening.

Children and Parents

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord,^b for this is right. ² “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: ³ “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves and Masters

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; ⁶ not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, ⁸ knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

⁹ And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our^c struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these,^d take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and

^a Other ancient authorities add *of his flesh and of his bones*

^b Other ancient authorities lack *in the Lord*

^c Other ancient authorities read *your*

^d Or *In all circumstances*

supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,^a ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Personal Matters and Benediction

21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the whole community,^b and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.^c

^a Other ancient authorities lack *of the gospel*

^b Gk *to the brothers*

^c Other ancient authorities add *Amen*