

The Book of Ephesians

Caleb Nelson | Harvest Reformed Presbyterian Church | Fall 2017

“In other words, [Polycarp] places Ephesians on the same level as the Psalms, making Ephesians the first NT book to be called Scripture by the early church fathers.” — Hoehner

“In every sense, Ephesians is Paul’s greatest word on the church, teaching us what the church is in the mind of God, and what it ought to be in practice before the eyes of men.” — Wiersbe

Wiersbe’s outline:

- I. **DOCTRINE: OUR RICHES IN CHRIST (1:3-3:21)**
 - A. **OUR SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS IN CHRIST (1:3-14)**
 1. From the Father (1:4-6)
 2. From the Son (1:7-12)
 3. From the Spirit (1:13-14)
 4. First Prayer: for enlightenment (1:15-23)
 - B. **OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION IN CHRIST (2:1-22)**
 1. Raised and seated on the throne (2:1-10)
 2. Reconciled and set into the temple (2:11-22)
 3. Second Prayer: for enablement (3:1-21; with verses 2-13 as a parenthesis)
- II. **DUTY: OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN CHRIST (4:1-6:20)**
 - A. **A CALL TO WALK IN UNITY (4:1-16)**
 1. Preserving the unity of the Spirit with proper attitudes (4:1-7)
 2. Edifying the body of Christ by the grace given us (4:8-16)
 - B. **A CALL TO WALK IN PURITY (4:17-5:21)**
 1. Walk not as other Gentiles (4:17-32)
 2. Walk in love (5:1-6)
 3. Walk as children of light (5:7-14)
 4. Walk as wise (5:15-21)
 - C. **A CALL TO WALK IN HARMONY (5:22-6:9)**
 1. Husbands and wives (5:22-33)
 2. Parents and children (6:1-4)
 3. Masters and servants (6:5-9)
 - D. **A CALL TO WALK IN VICTORY (6:10-20)**
 1. Standing strong in the power of the Lord (6:10-13)
 2. Equipped with the whole armor of God (6:14-20)
 3. **CONCLUSION (6:21-24)**

Sermon 1, “Dear Ephesians,” Ephesians 1 & 6:10-24

Wiersbe’s outline condensed for pulpit use:

- I. Doctrine: Our Riches in Christ, 1:3-3:21
 - A. Our Spiritual Possessions in Christ, 1:3-14
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 2. From the Son, 1:7-12
 3. From the Spirit, 1:13-14
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 - B. Our Spiritual Position in Christ, 2:1-22
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- II. Duty: Our Responsibilities in Christ, 4:1-6:20
 - A. A Call to Walk in Unity, 4:1-16
 - B. A Call to Walk in Purity, 4:17-5:21
 - C. A Call to Walk in Harmony, 5:22-6:9
 - D. A Call to Walk in Victory, 6:10-20

Proposition: Our rich possessions in Christ must motivate us to praise our Father and to walk worthy of our calling.

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to the letter that Paul the apostle wrote to the Ephesians. As you may know, Paul is preeminently the apostle of the Reformed branch of the church. He is the one to whom Reformed theologians turn, as John is the apostle beloved by the Orthodox branch of the church. It is commonly held that this is the most sublime of Paul’s letters. Romans is the grandest, most comprehensive — but Ephesians reaches heights seldom seen, even in the Bible. What is this book about? Two things: our riches in Christ, and our responsibilities in Christ. It is about God’s plan of salvation and the impact that plan should and must have on our lives. And so, before we jump in, I just want to take a sermon and present a large-scale overview of this entire letter. I can’t pretend to summarize what is said here in less space than Paul said it in; all of his works are absolute marvels of compression and terseness. Nor will I do what one pastor in Ft. Collins did and preach three sermons on the word “Paul,” as the first word of our text, in order to get us thoroughly introduced to the book.

Indeed, as far as introduction goes, suffice it to say that this letter was written by Paul the apostle when he was imprisoned in Rome during the two-year imprisonment described at the end of the book of Acts — that is, roughly in A.D. 62. He sent the letter from Rome to Ephesus in the

hands of Tychicus, as you can read at the end of it. Ephesus was a seaport city in what is today Turkey but was then the Roman province of Proconsular Asia. It was one of the largest cities in the Empire after Rome and Alexandria, with a population of over 300,000 — roughly the same size as modern Wichita, Kansas. People have tied themselves in knots to discover why Paul wrote the letter, but the most we can say is that he wanted the saints in Ephesus to know something of their riches in Christ and their responsibilities in Christ. And if they needed to know it, so do we. We need to know our riches in Christ, and we need to know our responsibilities in Christ. (Let me just say here that I have taken the following outline from Warren Wiersbe, and that I think very highly of it as a summary of Ephesians — one which I couldn't improve). Indeed, this letter teaches us that our riches in Christ are so magnificent and enormous that we must praise God for them and walk in a way that befits those who have been granted such riches.

I. Doctrine: Our Riches in Christ, 1:3-3:21

Well, what are these riches? They can be boiled down in one sense to two truths: our possessions in Christ and our position in Christ.

A. Our Spiritual Possessions in Christ, 1:3-14

We have *every* spiritual blessing in Christ. Paul doesn't say that every believer has some spiritual blessings, but that only super-believers have *all* the spiritual blessings. No, every spiritual blessing belongs to every Christian, to everyone who is in Christ.

Now, what does this phrase “in Christ” mean? It appears all through Ephesians and the other letters of Paul. It means being united to Jesus Christ by faith, such that what is true of Him becomes true of us. This concept is found throughout Scripture — for example, when dominion, glory, and a kingdom are given to the Son of Man in Daniel 7 but then to “the saints of the Most High” at the end of that same chapter, or when the nations are described as Christ's inheritance in Psalm 2 but as the inheritance of His people in Psalm 112. So how do you get into Christ? You must believe into Him (as the NT literally says) and be baptized into Him. Baptism is the sign and seal of the reality of union with Christ which is brought about by believing. So if you are in Christ, Paul says, then every spiritual blessing is yours. All three Persons of the Trinity work together to grant these spiritual blessings.

1. From the Father, 1:4-6

The Father has blessed us with the spiritual blessings of election, adoption, holiness, love, and acceptance. Again, it's not that weak Christians have one or two of these but strong Christians have them all. No! Every Christian has every spiritual blessing. We'll talk more in coming weeks about the blessing of election, but for now, recognize that it is the blessing of being chosen by God as the recipient of His benefits. We know what holiness is; we have beautiful examples of adoption right here in the adoptive families among us; and we all desire love and acceptance. These are the blessings that our Father grants us, Paul says — and Paul can't resist praising Him for these blessings!

2. From the Son, 1:7-12

God's Son, described as the Beloved one, grants us forgiveness. We have His overflowing good favor and good pleasure poured out on us. We get front-row seats and first-reconciled status in this cosmic drama of reconciliation in which the Father and the Son are engaged. We have an inheritance — and again, every one of these blessings leads us to praise Christ's glory! Do you desire these benefits? Do they sound like benefits to you? According to Paul, they are part of the sum total of every spiritual blessing which belongs to all believers in Jesus. We will talk more about them all in the weeks to come. But for now, recognize that if you don't have these blessings, you should want them. If you don't have this Christ, you should seek Him. And if you do have Him, you should praise Him for His glory!

3. From the Spirit, 1:13-14

From the Holy Spirit we have the blessing of sealing. We have been marked as genuine, as really saved, by the Holy Spirit, who is simultaneously a down payment proving that God will someday give us all of Himself and His benefits, and not just His Spirit.

Do you have the Spirit? Do you live as one who has the Spirit? Do you anticipate the day when you will receive the fullness of your inheritance, to the praise of His glory? Right now we are minors. The estate belongs to us, but we will not actually get to use it until we turn 21 — or rather, until we arrive in Heaven. It's ours already in possession, but we will receive the use of it someday soon.

4. First Prayer: for enlightenment, 1:15-23

At this point, Paul launches into a prayer for the Father to enlighten the Ephesian believers with understanding of the greatness, glory, and richness of God's work towards us. Do you have the understanding of that work that you'd like to have? That Paul had? That you ought to have? If not, then you need to pray this prayer for yourself and for our whole congregation. We need to grow in our understanding of these truths, just as the Ephesians did. We need to recognize that grandeur of the fact that in His Mediatorial kingdom, Christ is already head over all things and that He exercises that dominion on behalf of His church. Can you believe it? Do you accept by faith the unseen reality that Christ is sitting at the Father's right hand and that all His and our enemies are being put down so that the church can flourish?

B. Our Spiritual Position in Christ, 2:1-22

But not only do we have all these possessions, which we need to make use of in our daily walk. We also have a new position in Christ.

1. Raised and seated on the throne, 2:1-10

Formerly, Paul says, we were dead in trespasses in sins. But in Christ, we have been saved by grace, raised with Christ, and seated on the throne with Him in Heaven. What does that mean? We will talk about it much, much more in weeks to come. For now, it means that we really are united to Christ and that what is true of Him is true of us in a limited, inaugurated sense. Someday we will consummately reign with Him — but already we have been raised from spiritual death and live a spiritual life with Him. Paul's entire narrative emphasizes that this was

not our doing. He doesn't talk about preparations for grace. He doesn't look at all the ways in which God made us ready to accept the message and change our attitudes and lifestyles in repentance. His narrative is a death and resurrection story. We were spiritually dead, dead in Adam — but made alive in and by Christ.

Do you recognize this truth? Do you live as one who reigns and will reign with Christ? Do you try to work for your salvation, or do you willingly receive His forgiveness and His gift of life and righteousness?

2. Reconciled and set into the temple, 2:11-22

But Paul goes on to tell us that salvation is not only individual. In fact, it has a strong corporate component as well. To those of you who are sceptical about church membership, I will say the second half of Ephesians emphasizes very clearly that salvation means becoming an official member of God's household. If you are a Christian, then you are an integral part of the dwelling place of God by the Spirit, and you need to make that official in your daily life. It is not the universal church which partakes of Communion together; it is the local church. You are part of this building, but you need to take action to demonstrate that (just as the later part of the book tells us that we are children of light and so we need to walk as children of light). We have been placed into the Temple; we are the dwelling place of God in this New Covenant era.

3. Second Prayer: for enablement, 3:1-21; with verses 2-13 as a parenthesis)

With that background, then, Paul describes the mysterious fact, once hidden but now revealed, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jewish believers. We need God's help to understand this amazing truth. Indeed, based on this truth Paul prays that the believers would be able to serve this God rightly based on their understanding of His glorious work. Again, this is a prayer that we at Harvest desperately need. Brothers and sisters, do you pray this prayer for each other? Do you pray this for me? Paul wants us to understand something that he frankly confesses to be past knowledge, and he wants us as finite creatures to be filled with the infinite fullness of God. It's like praying that God would help you put the Pacific Ocean in a paper cup. Only the power of God can do this. It's our job to pray that He would do it, for His glory and for our good. It's also our call to recognize that the instant we begin to really recognize the glory of Christ's work, and the majesty of what He has done for both Jews and Gentiles, we will begin to worship. That's why Paul breaks into this doxology! He can't help himself. In the same way, when you see what God is really like, you will begin to praise Him. You will also begin to obey Him.

II. Duty: Our Responsibilities in Christ, 4:1-6:20

And that is what the second half of the letter is about. Chapters 4-6 deal with our responsibilities in Christ. Paul uses the verb "walk" throughout this section because he's describing the Christian's lifestyle. He describes this walk in general as a walk "worthy" of the calling God has called us with. That means that it is a lifestyle fitting for someone who has received such a calling. If you have the possessions in Christ and position in Christ that Paul described in

chapters 1-3, then you need to walk in a way appropriate to that calling. What kind of lifestyle does that look like? Paul describes it in fairly intense detail.

A. A Call to Walk in Unity, 4:1-16

A Christian with the position and possessions described in the first three chapters will be a meek, humble, gentle person — not an arrogant loudmouth know-it-all. A Christian will live in unity with other Christians. This unity is a unity based on the Holy Spirit. It's a spiritual unity, not necessarily an institutional unity or even a creedal unity. Paul describes how it is a seven-fold unity: body, spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God. Each of these things is one, and together they teach us that we as Christians must walk in unity. This unity is the fruit of the ascended Christ's gifts to His people of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. You need this fivefold ministry to make the sevenfold unity real in your life. You need to be taught by this ministry so that you don't wander around, tossed by every wind of doctrine. Christ is building His church, and He's doing it through the ministry of His people who are taught and equipped for that ministry by the pastors and teachers that He gives. Do you participate in this unity? If someone looks at your life, will that person say, "Wow, you really believe in and stand for the unity of God's people!" Or will he say, "Boy, you could use some help. You are the poster child for the immaturity and disunity that Paul talks about"? What are you self-consciously trying to show? The unity of the body and the ministry of the body to itself in love, or the special privilege of yourself and your friends?

B. A Call to Walk in Purity, 4:17-5:21

Well, in addition to unity, someone who has the possessions and position that come with being in Christ also needs to walk in purity. Don't walk like the Gentiles do — that is, as people who don't know Christ walk. Christ has taught you to put off the old Adam and put on the new man who is created in righteousness and true holiness. If you are walking in holiness as you have been called to do, then your mouth will be clean. Your sex organs will be clean. Your hands won't steal and your eyes won't peek at things they shouldn't be seeing. You will walk wisely. Brothers and sisters, does this passage describe your life? If you claim to be in Christ, then this passage should be a recognizable depiction of who you are.

C. A Call to Walk in Harmony, 5:22-6:9

And the following passage, called the household code, ought to describe your home life. It describes how men ought to love their wives and wives ought to submit to their husbands. It tells children to obey their parents and urges parents to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It requires slaves to obey their masters but tells masters that they have a master in Heaven who will judge them if they threaten (much less carry out those threats!) those who are enslaved to them. Again, I have to ask — is your household and business marked by harmony? Do the people who live with you and work for you recognize the influence of this code on your daily life at home and in the workplace?

D. A Call to Walk in Victory, 6:10-20

Finally, Paul calls those who have possessions and privileges in Christ to walk in victory. Put on the armor that God wears to vindicate His people, and stand. Yes, that's right — most of chapters 4-6 tell us to walk, but the end of the book tells us to stand. Don't fall down; don't fall apart. Stand in the evil day. He concludes with a prayer request and notice that the carrier of the letter will tell how he is doing.

Do you pray for me as your minister? Do you pray for Gospel ministers the world over to stand firm? And do you walk in purity, harmony, unity, and victory? Brothers and sisters, this book of Ephesians is a majestic piece of praise to God and instruction to us. Are you prepared to receive its teaching? Will you commit to pray the prayers of Ephesians for one another and for me? And will you strive with me to understand the mysteries of God which are disclosed in this book?

Let me close with the apostle's words: "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." (Eph 6:23-24 NKJ)