

# Paul's Prison Epistles

Lesson 3

Paul and the Ephesians

Manuscript



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## Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Authorship .....	2
Audience .....	3
Primary Audience .....	3
Secondary Audience .....	5
Purpose .....	8
Kingdom of God .....	8
Challenges.....	11
<b>STRUCTURE &amp; CONTENT.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Salutation (1:1, 2) .....	14
Praise (1:3-14) .....	14
Prayer (1:15-23).....	15
Body (2:1–6:20).....	17
Citizenship (2:1-22) .....	17
Administration (3:1-21) .....	19
Code for Living (4:1–6:20).....	21
Final Greetings (6:21-24) .....	25
<b>MODERN APPLICATION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Honoring the King .....	25
Praise and Worship .....	26
Obedience .....	27
Building the Kingdom .....	28
Temple .....	29
Body.....	30
Conquering the Cosmos.....	33
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>CONTRIBUTORS .....</b>	<b>36</b>

# Paul's Prison Epistles

## Lesson Three

### Paul and the Ephesians

#### INTRODUCTION

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People who have lived in more than one country often talk about how difficult it is to adapt to new cultures. Each nation has its own customs, values and laws. And what is appropriate in one nation isn't necessarily appropriate in another. Business people, students, and even missionaries have to spend a lot of time learning the ways of the new nation where they reside. In many ways, the same is true of the Christian life. We were all born outside of Christ, separated from his kingdom. Many of us spent years learning and following the ways of the kingdom of darkness. And this presents challenges for us as we try to live according to the ways of our new nation, our new kingdom — the kingdom of light in Christ.

This challenge is nothing new. In the city of Ephesus, the first generation of Christians had to learn how to live in ways that were appropriate for the kingdom of Christ. Many Christians had been converted from pagan religions. They had spent much of their lives following the ways of Satan before they came to faith in Christ, and they found it difficult to change how they thought, felt and behaved. So, as the apostle Paul wrote from prison to the Ephesians, he directly addressed this challenge by painting a sweeping, cosmic portrait of life in the kingdom of God in Christ.

This is the third lesson in our series *Paul's Prison Epistles*, and we've entitled it "Paul and the Ephesians." In this lesson, we'll investigate Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus. We'll focus especially on ways he designed this letter to teach the Ephesians and their Christian neighbors how to build, maintain and thrive in God's kingdom. Our exploration of Paul's letter to the Ephesians will divide into three parts. First, we'll examine the background of this letter. Second, we'll look at its structure and content. And third, we'll explore its modern application. Let's begin with the background of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

#### BACKGROUND

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Christ called Paul as an apostle to provide authoritative teaching and leadership to the church. And Paul did this, in part, by writing letters while he was in prison. But Paul didn't just want to spread theoretical doctrine or record it for posterity. First and foremost, he applied his teachings to the challenges facing particular churches. His letters were pastoral and caring, and they spoke directly to the problems that various churches faced in the first century. This means that, as we study Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it helps to begin by asking questions like, "To whom was this letter written?" and "What significant issues were they facing?" Knowing the answers to questions like these will help us make greater sense of Paul's teachings for the Ephesian church.

As we look at the background of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we'll focus our attention on three matters. First, we'll discuss Paul's authorship of the letter. Second, we'll identify the original audience. And third, we'll look at Paul's purpose in writing to them. Let's begin by looking at Paul's authorship of the letter to the Ephesians.

## AUTHORSHIP

A number of modern scholars have argued that Paul did not actually write this letter. Instead, they've argued that Ephesians was written by one of Paul's students in order to continue Paul's legacy and apply his teaching in new ways. And for this reason, Ephesians has been called "Deutero-Pauline." But there are many reasons to reject this notion. Most importantly, the letter itself states that it was written by Paul.

Listen to the words of Ephesians 1:1:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1).

Now, it's true that in the early church, some false teachers forged letters under the names of other people to garner authority for their letters. But whenever the church discovered a letter to be a forgery, they rejected it. Listen to Paul's teaching on this matter in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3:

We ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us ... Let no one deceive you in any way (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

In light of Paul's rejection of forgery or pseudonymity, it's hard to believe that an admirer or student of Paul would have contradicted Paul's own teaching by forging his name on the letter to the Ephesians. Beyond this, Ephesians closely resembles Paul's other letters in both doctrine and language. The connections are especially strong with Colossians. This should not surprise us since Paul probably wrote them both at about the same time. These connections are so powerful and natural that, even if Paul had not stated his name in the letter, it's difficult to imagine the church ever attributing it to anyone else.

Finally, according to Acts 19–21, Paul had planted the church in Ephesus, and he had lived in Ephesus for two years. And even after that time, he had continued to maintain close relationships with its elders. For these reasons, it's simply unimaginable that the Ephesians would not have recognized a forged letter with Paul's name on it. Similarly unimaginable is the idea that the early church at large would not have rooted out a forgery supposedly sent from such a prominent apostle to such a prominent church. For these and other reasons, the proposal that Ephesians was not written by Paul himself should be rejected.

A lot of people dispute the authorship of Ephesians because they see a difference in some of the themes. You have Romans and Galatians, which everybody believes Paul wrote. Those books talk about justification by faith and other issues such as that. You don't really see that in Ephesians. You'd think if it was as important to Paul in Romans, you'd want to add it in in Ephesians, if you could... There's another reason with a lot of these books, I think, that's really, really helpful, is that most of these were probably written or dictated and written by a secretary... If I use one secretary for Ephesians and maybe write 2 Thessalonians in my own hand, and use another secretary for Romans, there would be some differences in grammar, vocabulary, etc. There's nothing in these books that actually contradict one another.

— Dr. Joseph D. Fantin

Having looked at the background of the letter to the Ephesians and Paul's authorship, we should turn our attention to the original audience.

## AUDIENCE

We'll investigate Paul's audience in two ways, turning first to his primary audience, namely the church in Ephesus, and then to his secondary audience, especially the churches of the Lycus Valley. Let's begin by looking at the church in Ephesus as Paul's primary audience.

### Primary Audience

Listen once more at the words of Ephesians 1:1:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1).

In the address of this letter, Paul clearly identified the church in Ephesus as his audience. Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia, which corresponds roughly to the modern region known as Asia Minor. During the first century, it was one of the most populous and important port cities in the Roman Empire, serving as a gateway between the eastern and western worlds. Geographically, it lay on the coast of the Aegean Sea, not too far north of the Meander River.

Now, we should mention that some scholars believe that this letter was not originally sent to the Ephesians. The strongest evidence for this view is that five significant Greek manuscripts do not contain the words "in Ephesus" in the opening

verse. Instead, these manuscripts read, “To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.” And while this is true, most manuscripts do contain “in Ephesus,” and no known manuscript names a different audience. So, for these reasons, most interpreters agree that the church in Ephesus was the primary audience.

A number of internal and external evidences support the outlook that Paul wrote this letter for the Ephesian Christians. On the one hand, many details of the internal content of the letter were well-suited for the challenges facing the church in Ephesus. For example, we know from Acts 19 that during Paul's time in Ephesus, he had clashed with worshippers of the pagan goddess Artemis and with many of the occult practices in the city. Correspondingly, Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:11, that Christians should “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness” — a reference to the immoral practices of pagan idolatry. And in Ephesians 6:12, he taught that Christians are in a battle “against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.”

In addition, we know from archaeological research that Artemis was considered to be the nurturer of Ephesus and was said to have made Ephesus the most glorious city in the province of Asia. This may be why, in Ephesians 5:27-29, Paul described the relationship between Christ and his church using the Greek words *ektrepō* (ἐκτρέφω), meaning to “nourish” or “nurture,” and *endoxos* (ἐνδοξος), meaning “held in honor” or “glorious.” These and similar details resonated particularly well with the situation of the Ephesian church.

On the other hand, several early church fathers provided external evidence that Paul sent this letter to the Ephesians. For instance, Clement of Alexandria, writing near the end of the second century, wrote these words in Book 1, Chapter 5 of his work *The Instructor*:

**Writing to the Ephesians, [Paul] has unfolded in the clearest manner the point in question, speaking to the following effect:**

Clement followed this preface with the full text of Ephesians 4:13-15. Similarly, Tertullian, who wrote at the very beginning of the third century, had this to say in his work *Against Marcion*, Book 5, Chapter 17:

**We have it on the true tradition of the Church, that this epistle was sent to the Ephesians, not to the Laodiceans.**

According to Tertullian, the whole tradition of the church prior to his time had affirmed that this letter was sent to Ephesus. And no early church witness contradicts Tertullian on this point. Tertullian also maintained that this epistle was not the letter Paul wrote to the Laodiceans — a letter mentioned in Colossians 4:16. And although it's possible that these two letters are one in the same, it's unlikely. In any case, the words of these early Christian fathers offer strong external evidence for believing that Paul intended this letter to be read by the church at Ephesus.

We've seen that the church in Ephesus was Paul's primary audience, but it's also important to recognize that he had a secondary audience. This audience included a number of churches in the Lycus Valley.

## Secondary Audience

As we've just mentioned, several early manuscripts do not contain the words "in Ephesus" in the opening verse. But rather than indicating that Paul did not write this letter to the Ephesian church, these manuscripts more likely suggest that when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he also intended a broader audience. Most scholars agree that this broader audience included several churches in the Lycus Valley.

In the first century a number of churches grew in an area known as the Lycus Valley. We know, for instance, that there were churches in the cities of Colossae and Laodicea, and have good reason to suspect that there was also a church in Hierapolis. Although these churches are not mentioned in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, there is good reason to believe that Paul also had them in mind as he wrote.

There are at least two main evidences that support the idea that Paul had several churches of the Lycus Valley in mind as his secondary audience: first, the evidence that Paul wrote to an unfamiliar audience, and second, the relevance of this letter to the churches of the Lycus Valley. Let's begin by looking at some details that suggest Paul's audience was unfamiliar to him.

*Unfamiliar Audience.* Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 1:15:

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints (Ephesians 1:15).

Apparently, there was a significant portion of Paul's audience whose faith he did not know firsthand, but had only "heard of." His words in Ephesians 3:2-3 suggest the same thing:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly (Ephesians 3:2-3).

As we mentioned, Paul had personally taught the believers in Ephesus. But here Paul stated that his audience knew his gospel, not because he had taught them directly, but because he had "written briefly" about it in the earlier chapters of this very letter. These words strongly suggest that Paul had a wider audience than the Ephesians in mind as he wrote.

Another indication that Paul wrote to many unfamiliar people is that his letter contains no personal references. In all his other canonical letters, Paul indicated that he knew his readers personally by including such things as the names of individuals he knew in his audience; greetings to specific people; mentions of time he had spent with his readers; familiar terms of address, such as "brothers," directed to the readers; expressions of his love for his readers; and his characterization of himself as the "spiritual father" of his readers. Yet, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is his only canonical letter that doesn't



contain any such personal references. And this is despite the fact that he had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. This unusual feature strongly suggests that Paul intended for this letter to circulate to a variety of churches, beginning with the church in Ephesus, but continuing on to churches with which he was unfamiliar.

Having seen that Paul's secondary audience included unfamiliar churches, we're ready to examine the evidence that this letter had relevance to the churches in the Lycus Valley, including those in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

**Relevance.** One connection to the churches in the Lycus Valley appears in Paul's mention of his friend Tychicus. According to Ephesians 6:21, 22, and Colossians 4:7, 8, Tychicus delivered at least two letters for Paul — one to the church in Ephesus and one to the church in Colossae. And it's most likely that he delivered them on the same trip. In addition, as we mentioned earlier, Paul also wrote a letter to the church in Laodicea. A letter addressed to the Laodiceans has not been found, but Paul mentioned it in Colossians 4:16:

When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea (Colossians 4:16).

From this verse, it's reasonable to assume that, along with Paul's letter to Colossae, Tychicus also delivered Paul's letter to the church in Laodicea. This would have been the best method of ensuring that both churches read both letters. So, it's also reasonable to assume that Tychicus carried copies of the Ephesian letter for these other churches to read as well.

A second reason to think that Paul intended the churches in the Lycus Valley to read the epistle to the Ephesians is that these churches were frequently in Paul's mind during his imprisonment. For example, listen to his words in Colossians 2:1:

I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face (Colossians 2:1).

Paul was concerned about the false teachings in Colossae, and he apparently believed that similar problems existed in Laodicea, and perhaps in other churches in the region as well. As another example, Paul mentioned the church of Hierapolis in Colossians 4:12-13, writing:

Epaphras ... has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis (Colossians 4:12-13).

Paul's mention of both Hierapolis and Laodicea probably indicates that several churches of the Lycus Valley were jointly paying for Epaphras to stay with Paul. This would have made Epaphras a constant reminder of the churches he represented. Paul's concern for the churches of the Lycus Valley suggests that he would not have overlooked

an opportunity to minister to them through his letter to the Ephesians, especially if it only required making an additional copy of a letter for Tychicus to carry.

A third factor that should incline us to think that Ephesians was intended for the churches of the Lycus Valley is that Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians address similar problems. And so, it's fair to say that the epistle to the Ephesians would have been relevant and appropriate for the churches of the Lycus Valley. We'll mention just one example for the sake of illustration. As we saw in a prior lesson, the Colossians struggled against false teachers who worshiped and venerated angels and demons. Paul countered their heresies by emphasizing the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ over the entire cosmos, and especially over the demons. Listen to Colossians 1:16, where Paul described Jesus with these words:

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him (Colossians 1:16).

Now, compare this to Paul's description of Christ in Ephesians 1:20-22:

Christ ... [is] seated ... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named ... And [God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things (Ephesians 1:20-22).

In this passage, just as in the one from Colossians 1, Paul used the Greek words *archē* (ἀρχή) and *exousia* (ἐξουσία), here translated “rule” and “authority.” Both of these words referred primarily to spiritual beings. He also repeated his use of the Greek word *kuriotēs* (κυριότης), translated “dominion,” which can refer either to human leaders or to spiritual beings like angels and demons.

Although not in the Colossians passage, Paul also employed the Greek word *dunamis* (δύναμις), here translated “power.” *Dunamis* is often used to mean simply “strength” or “ability,” but first-century Judaism had come to apply this term to the demons that align themselves with Satan to fight against God. As we can see, in both letters, Paul addressed problems in the church by highlighting Jesus' superiority over all things, including over spiritual beings. The role of Tychicus as Paul's messenger, the broad concern Paul had for the churches of the Lycus Valley, and the similar themes between Ephesians and Colossians, strongly suggest that Paul also had the churches of the Lycus Valley in mind as he wrote to the Ephesians.

Now that we've considered Paul's authorship of the letter to the Ephesians and seen that the original audience probably included both the church in Ephesus and the churches in the Lycus Valley, we're in a position to look more closely at his purpose in writing. Why did Paul feel the need to send this letter?

## PURPOSE

Normally, Paul tailored his letters to address the specific problems of a particular group or groups of people whom he knew directly or personally. But in Ephesians, he did something different. He responded to the problems of several churches in different locations, many of which he had never met. So, Paul's purpose in writing this letter was to deal with the kinds of problems that all of these churches were facing.

Our discussion of Paul's purpose will divide into two sections. First, we'll consider the theme of the kingdom of God in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Second, we'll look at how Paul addressed several challenges to the church in terms of God's kingdom. Let's look first at the theme of the kingdom of God.

## Kingdom of God

Most Christians associate the expression "kingdom of God" with the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. But because the kingdom of God was such an important theme in both the Old Testament and in the teachings of Jesus, it was also crucial to Paul. He explicitly referred to God's kingdom sixteen times in his letters, and he often used other royal, kingly vocabulary as well. We know from many of Paul's letters that his eschatology — his teaching about the last days — was at the heart of his theology. Paul understood that Christ was bringing history to its great climax, beginning with the inauguration of his kingdom in his earthly ministry, continuing in the age of the church, and eventually reaching its consummation in Christ's triumphal return.

Like his fellow Jews, Paul spoke of Christ's ultimate role in history in terms of "the age to come," the time when God will pour out ultimate blessings and curses in Christ. But when Jesus and the gospel writers spoke of the age to come, they generally described it using the language of the kingdom of God. They spoke of it as the time when God's kingdom would be manifested on earth as it is in heaven. And of course, Paul believed this too. From this perspective, it would be hard to overstate the importance of the kingdom of God in Paul's theology. In fact, according to Paul's friend and traveling companion, Luke, preaching about the kingdom of God formed the core of Paul's apostolic ministry. Listen to Luke's words in Acts 28:30-31:

[Paul] lived there two whole years ... proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31).

This passage describes what Paul did while he was in prison in Rome — probably the very place and time in which he wrote his epistle to the Ephesians. And notice how Luke described Paul's ministry there. Instead of saying that Paul preached "the gospel," as we might have expected, Luke said that Paul preached "the kingdom of God."

In the modern church, people most often narrow the gospel, or "good news" of the Christian faith, to things like the forgiveness of an individual's sins and the promise of an

individual's everlasting life. And these are wonderful aspects of our hope in Christ. But in the New Testament, the gospel is much greater than what Jesus does for individuals. It is cosmic in scope. It is the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. Paul proclaimed that Jesus, our King, is using his power and authority to defeat all of his enemies and to conquer sin and death. He is making all things new and establishing those who believe in him as the heirs of the new creation when he returns. This is why Jesus and the gospel writers so often spoke of the gospel, or good news, "of the kingdom." When Paul instructed the Ephesians regarding the kingdom of God, he was giving them this larger, glorious picture of the gospel.

**Some people looking at Paul's writings have concluded that since Paul doesn't really echo that message directly that the kingdom of God as a reality, or at least a theological doctrine was really not that important to Paul. But I think that is a serious misunderstanding of the way that Paul takes the language of the kingdom of God in light of the resurrection of Jesus and applies the kingdom of God reality and idea and declares it in a completely new way, but in a way that's very consistent with what Jesus meant... He sees that in Jesus Christ, in the resurrection specifically, that Yahweh really has completed what he promised to complete and that he has come to his people, he has brought salvation, and now in Jesus Christ there is one who is named as Lord over all things... So the kingdom of God is a very important concept in Paul's theology even if he speaks about it in terms different than simply echoing the language of the kingdom of God that we have in the Gospels.**

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

Although Paul explicitly mentioned the kingdom of God only a few times in Ephesians, it's important to realize that he alluded to it frequently. Often, he referred to concepts that recalled both the Old Testament kingdom of Israel and the contemporary kingdom of the Roman Empire. He did this to remind his readers that the Christian gospel was about the victory of a kingdom, specifically, the victory of the kingdom of God in Christ.

Let's consider six ways that Paul drew attention to God's kingdom in Ephesians. First, Paul called on his audience to consider their kingdom citizenship in Ephesians 2:12, 19.

***Citizenship.*** In the Old Testament, God's people were organized as a kingdom, specifically, the kingdom of Israel. God was their king, and every Israelite was a citizen of his kingdom. Similarly, in Paul's day, citizenship in the Roman Empire was highly valued. For these reasons, when Paul spoke of Christians as "citizens," his audience understood that he was speaking to them about their citizenship in a kingdom or empire, namely the kingdom of God in Christ.

***Inheritance.*** The same is true of the concept of inheritance that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 1:14, 18, as well as in 5:5. In the Old Testament, the citizens of the kingdom of Israel were given an inheritance in the Promised Land. And in the Roman Empire, citizens had rights of inheritance. In both cases, inheritance rights were only available to citizens of the kingdom. And for this reason, Paul explicitly associated our inheritance as followers of Christ with God's kingdom in Christ.

***Military service.*** And consider the concept of military service which Paul mentioned in Ephesians 6:10-18. Needless to say, in the ancient world, war was closely associated with the concept of kingdoms. In the Old Testament, all able-bodied male citizens of the kingdom were required to serve in the army of Israel. And, also in the Roman Empire, citizens were required to perform military service. So, when Paul insisted that Christians engage in spiritual warfare, he implied that they did so as citizens of God's kingdom in Christ.

***Rule over creation.*** Further, the rule of God's people over creation, mentioned in places such as Ephesians 1:20–2:6, was also closely associated with God's kingdom in Christ. In the Old Testament, one of Israel's chief goals was to expand its dominion over all the earth in service to God's kingdom. The same was true in the Roman Empire. So, when Paul taught that believers are seated with Christ in positions of authority over all creation, he indicated that Christ was the king, and that believers are both citizens and authorities within his kingdom.

***Source of names.*** Even when Paul wrote, in Ephesians 3:15, that God is the source of the names of every family on earth, he had the concept of Christ's victorious kingdom in mind. In the Old Testament, God's people were called by his name because they were part of his kingdom. For example, listen to the words of Amos 9:11-12:

“In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen ... that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the Lord (Amos 9:11-12).

When the Lord spoke of raising up David's fallen “booth,” he meant that he would restore the kingdom of Israel, under the kingship of David's dynasty, as part of the climax of human history. So, according to the Old Testament, every nation that was conquered by God's restored kingdom would bear God's name. In the context of Ephesus, the practice of naming also had a kingdom connection with the Roman Empire. Specifically, it was common for many who were conquered by Rome to be granted citizenship in the Empire. And they took the name of the one who sponsored them for citizenship or the name of the emperor who granted citizenship. So, when Paul wrote about receiving God's name, the Ephesians would have associated it with becoming part of God's kingdom in Christ.

**Ambassador.** Finally, in Ephesians 6:20, Paul spoke of himself as God's ambassador. In both the Old Testament and Roman settings, an ambassador was an official representative of a king or emperor. So, even here Paul had in mind the kingdom of God in Christ. In these and a number of other ways, Paul revealed that many of the issues he addressed in his letter to the Ephesians were directly tied to his belief in the kingdom of God.

**In the letter to the Ephesians, we see Paul's focus on the kingdom of God. For example, he begins the letter by expressing to the Ephesians that they are called to Christ eternally according to God's good purpose, and in that calling, they're actually, in a very real sense, called to the kingdom of Christ. And Paul begins to develop this in Ephesians 1 where he talks about the fact after Christ died and was resurrected ... he ascended to the right hand of the Father, and then that signifies for us, in a very figurative sense, but real sense, that he has all power given to him, all authority given to him as the king of this kingdom... And then Paul also alludes to the fact in Ephesians 5 that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of righteousness. And so, those outside of Christ, those who are unrighteous, who refuse to bow the knee to Christ and subject themselves to his rule and his will, are not part of his kingdom, because his kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness.**

— Dr. Jay Haley

Now that we've looked at how Paul's purpose in writing to the Ephesians included his emphasis on the kingdom of God, we're ready to turn to some of the specific challenges to God's kingdom that Paul addressed in this letter.

## Challenges

Paul mentioned many challenges that faced the churches in Ephesus and the Lycus Valley, but for the sake of time we'll mention just three: the "old self" or sinful nature within every believer; the racial or ethnic tensions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians; and Satanic, demonic forces that opposed Christ and the church.

**Sinful nature.** First, when Paul wrote about our sinful nature and sinful habits, he appealed to kingdom language, teaching that sin must not characterize the citizens of God's kingdom. In Ephesians 5:5, Paul wrote these words:

Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous ... has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5).

Citizens in God's kingdom may either obey or disobey Christ. If they obey in faithful service to their king, then they will inherit the blessings of their inheritance in the new creation. But if a citizen rejects Christ, rebelling against the King and the salvation he offers, that person has no inheritance in Christ's kingdom.

***Racial tensions.*** Second, in addition to addressing the challenge of our sinful nature, Paul used the imagery of the kingdom of God to address the racial or ethnic tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the first century church. Listen to his words in Ephesians 2:11-13:

At one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision ... were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise ... But now in Christ Jesus you ... have been brought near (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Here, Paul contrasted the condition of his uncircumcised Gentile readers before they came to faith in Christ with their condition after they came to Christ. Before, they were “strangers” rather than citizens of God's kingdom. But once these Gentiles came to faith in Christ, they became full citizens of his kingdom. Paul also said here that the Gentiles used to be “alienated from the ... covenants of promise.”

The Old Testament covenants were the legal arrangements by which God administered his kingdom. Once the Gentiles were “brought near” in Christ Jesus, they came under the authority of Israel's national covenants in the new covenant in Christ. And as a result, they were entitled to the covenant blessings of God's kingdom in Christ. Paul's focus on the church in terms of citizenship and covenants indicated that Paul was speaking of the church as God's kingdom. In short, Paul indicated that believing Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to one another because they are now citizens in the same kingdom.

**In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul was very strategic in having to focus on the kingdom of God because of the many cultures, the many people that are within the church of Ephesus. Now, when he would teach in Ephesians 2, he declared that we are no longer strangers. In other words, the church has now become the melting pot of different cultures, ethnicity, backgrounds. We no longer have to identify or think with the mindset of, I'm a Nigerian, I'm an American, I'm a Roman, I'm a Jew. We all become one, one in the kingdom of God. And that unifies the body of Christ... To be a citizen of God's kingdom, as Paul would present in just a summary, is to let go of the flesh and assume life in Christ. It's to let go of those things that we have come to define ourselves by, the lens through which we see things in this natural world, and then assume the lens of Christ. First, rooted**

**in the identity that I am from heaven, and as one that is from heaven, no matter what comes my way, it is through those lenses I must process everything else. Because I am first and foremost a child of God, and then everything else follows. Without this foundation, we lose the fact that we are truly born again and have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior.**

— Pastor Johnson Oni

*Demonic forces.* Finally, not only did Paul use kingdom language in relation to believers' sinful nature and the racial or ethnic tensions in the early church, Paul also applied the concept of God's kingdom in Christ to the matter of the Satanic, demonic forces that challenged the church at Ephesus. As we saw in a prior lesson, the churches in the Lycus Valley were troubled by false teachers. These false teachers borrowed from Greek religion and erroneous understandings of Jewish law in order to persuade Christians to venerate various spiritual powers. These included Satan and demons, as well as the basic elements of the universe: earth, air, water and fire. Paul characterized these demons and basic elements in a number of ways that related to what he believed about the kingdom of God. His most explicit statement to this effect appears in Ephesians 2:1-2:

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Here Paul said that, before they became believers, the Ephesians followed “the course of this world” which is ruled by the “prince of the power of the air.” As we know from the rest of Scripture, that great prince is none other than the evil spirit, Satan. Not surprisingly, Paul later pointed out that Satan and demonic forces oppose the church and battle with the kingdom of God in Christ. Listen to his words in Ephesians 6:12:

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

The church as God's kingdom is in a cosmic battle with the kingdom of this dark world. It is at war not with people or “flesh and blood,” but with Satan and his demons. Paul's original audience, both the Ephesians and the churches of the Lycus Valley, had a variety of problems, ranging from personal sin, to racial tensions, to demonic forces. And Paul addressed these problems by relating them all to a common theme. He cast them all in light of the sweeping, cosmic reality of the kingdom of God in Christ. And in doing so, he gave his readers the grand picture of what God was accomplishing in Christ.

The Lord had created a new people in Ephesus and the Lycus Valley. He had



given them citizenship in his kingdom so that they were no longer enslaved to their sinful natures. He had called them and enabled them to live in harmony with one another as fellow citizens in his kingdom. And he had armed them as the people of his kingdom for victory against their demonic foes. By appealing to the theme of the kingdom of God in these ways, Paul called for the churches in the Lycus Valley to return to the gospel he proclaimed — the good news of the victory of the kingdom of God in Christ.

Now that we've explored some of the background to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, we're in a position to look into the structure and content of Paul's letter. How did Paul present his thoughts as he addressed the challenges facing the churches in Ephesus and the Lycus Valley?

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## STRUCTURE & CONTENT

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Paul's epistle to the Ephesians can be divided into five major sections. It includes:

- a salutation in 1:1, 2;
- praise to God in 1:3-14;
- an explanation of Paul's constant prayer for the Ephesians in 1:15-23;
- the main body contrasting the kingdoms of light and darkness in 2:1–6:20; and
- final greetings in 6:21-24.

### SALUTATION (1:1, 2)

First, like many of Paul's letters, the salutation in 1:1, 2, states that the letter comes from the apostle Paul. It also mentions that he holds his apostleship "by the will of God." This reference to God's will identifies Paul as God's official representative, so that Paul's words carried divine authority. The salutation concludes with a standard greeting in the form of a brief blessing.

### PRAISE (1:3-14)

A section of praise to God appears next, in 1:3-14. This is Paul's only canonical letter in which the salutation is followed by such an extensive doxology. Typically, Paul followed his salutation with a personal reference or greeting. But as we've seen, there are no personal references in the epistle to the Ephesians.

We don't know for certain why Paul decided not to include any personal greetings. Maybe he thought that a section of praise would work better in a circular letter. Or maybe he wanted to lay the groundwork for the doctrinal sections that followed. Some have seen this section as the beginning of a dialogue of prayer that spans the entire first

three chapters of Ephesians. Others have pointed out that, in the ancient world, doxologies to the king were common in official writings. In all likelihood, Paul's reasons for structuring this letter in this way were complex, including at least some of the reasons that we've mentioned here.

Figuring out Paul's motives for including this praise may be difficult, but the *content* of his praise is easy to discern. For instance, strong Trinitarian theology appears throughout these verses as they explicitly honor the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Paul also emphasized salvation through the atonement of Jesus Christ in verse 7, the revelation of the mystery of the gospel in verse 9, and the promise of our future glory, ensured by the gift of the Holy Spirit, in verses 11-14. All of these ideas are worthy of attention, but there is a greater, all-encompassing focus. This focus not only unites all of these threads, but also explains many other details of the doxology. Not surprisingly, this greater focus is the kingdom of God. We see this kingdom focus in Paul's praise in places like 1:4, 5. Here, Paul honored God for his sovereign rule, praising him for predestining certain individuals to be his people in Christ. In verses 9 and 10, Paul also praised God for his sovereign rule over all creation that will eventually bring all things under the headship of Christ. Beyond this, in verses 5-7, Paul praised God for his benevolence toward his people.

Human kings in Old Testament and New Testament times were often praised for the many kindnesses they granted their people. And throughout the Old Testament, God is praised as the king of Israel for his great benevolences. So, it's not surprising that Paul would join his praise for God's royal sovereignty with praise for God's many royal benevolences toward his people. Specifically, Paul highlighted how God demonstrated his mercy by adopting, redeeming and forgiving his people. We should also note that, in verse 14, Paul praised God for our inheritance in Christ. As we saw earlier in this lesson, the theme of inheritance pertains to God's kingdom because, in 5:5, Paul identified our inheritance as an "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." In all of these ways, Paul was so taken by the wonder of God's kingdom and its relevance for the challenges that the Ephesians faced, that he began this entire epistle with a lengthy doxology in praise of God, the King.

After his introductory salutation and praise, the next section, in Ephesians 1:15-23, is Paul's assurance to his readers that he always remembered them in prayer.

### **PRAYER (1:15-23)**

**So one of things when you read Paul's letters is you see that he's mentioning prayer for his readers, prayer for the people that he's writing to. And the reason that you see that is because prayer is an essential part of Paul's ministry... Paul recognizes that, kind of, all of life and all of ministry has this spiritual component to it. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, it's against these evil spiritual powers in the heavenly places and so forth... Preaching of the word, preaching of the gospel, and prayer, these are the means that God uses for**

**bringing growth and for bringing the gospel going to the ends of the earth, and for God using people coming to faith in Christ. And so, for example, in places like Ephesians 1:15-19, Paul prays for his readers and he really prays that they would know the great blessings that they have in Christ.**

— Dr. Jeff Brannon

Paul confirmed that his prayers for the Ephesians consisted of three main elements: his thankfulness for the believers to whom he wrote, a twofold petition that the Holy Spirit would enlighten them, and an extended explanation of that enlightenment. Throughout this section, Paul repeated the themes he emphasized in his preceding doxology. He presented strong Trinitarian theology in verse 17 by explicitly honoring the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He emphasized that salvation comes through the atonement of Jesus Christ in verses 19 and 20. In verses 17-19, his main petition, he prayed for further revelation of the gospel, asking for enlightenment that would enable the Ephesians to understand the blessings they had received. And in verse 18, he spoke of the hope of our future glory. And, just like in his earlier praise, he tied all of these ideas together with the larger, unifying theme of the kingdom of God.

We noted a moment ago how the theme of God's kingdom in Paul's praise focused on three details: God's sovereign rule, which includes his power and authority; God's benevolence, which consists of the good things he freely gives as King to his people; and our inheritance in Christ granted in God's kingdom. Not surprisingly, all three of these kingdom elements are present in his prayer as well. Paul mentioned God's sovereign rule when he spoke of the "immeasurable greatness of his power" and his "great might" in verse 19, and when he spoke of Christ being enthroned above all other rulers in verse 21. He spoke of God's benevolence when he mentioned, in verse 19, that God's power is "toward us who believe," as well as when he taught, in verses 22 and 23, that Christ rules as king for the benefit of the church. And in verse 18, Paul spoke directly of Christ's "glorious inheritance in the saints," which is the hope to which believers are called.

Paul was able to speak of Christ's inheritance as our hope because — as he taught later in the main body of the letter — Christ shares his inheritance with us, making his inheritance our inheritance, too. This focus on the inheritance of the kingdom is drawn from a common Old Testament idea. In passages like Deuteronomy 9:26-29, the kingdom of Israel was God's own inheritance, and the people of his kingdom were greatly blessed as he granted them their inheritance in his kingdom.

Having seen the kingdom focus of Paul's praise and prayer, we should turn to the main body of this epistle, found in 2:1–6:20. This portion of Ephesians draws attention to the contrast between the righteous kingdom of God on the one hand, and the sinful kingdom of demons and fallen humanity on the other.

## BODY (2:1–6:20)

There are many ways to outline the main body of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. But in line with our focus in this lesson, our outline will emphasize how the main body highlights God's kingdom. In this light, the body of the letter divides into three primary sections: first, Paul's teaching on citizenship in God's kingdom in 2:1-22; second, his explanation of the administration of God's kingdom in 3:1-21; and third, Paul's code for living within God's kingdom, found in 4:1–6:20. We'll take a closer look at each of these sections, beginning with citizenship in God's kingdom.

### Citizenship (2:1-22)

**What does it mean to be a citizen of God's kingdom? When we think of citizenship, for example, we think of our being born into this world and into a country, and by birth we're citizens of that country, and we have rights and privileges given to us as citizens. And the same is true with being a citizen in the kingdom of God. In Christ, we have all the rights and all the privileges of his kingdom. And as Paul talks about, for example, this is not exclusive to certain members of the kingdom but to all the members of the kingdom of God. So, in other words, just like Abraham and Moses and Isaac and Jacob and David, all of us who are in Christ enjoy the same rights and privileges as part of his community, the community of Christ and his kingdom.**

— Dr. Jay Haley

Paul's teaching on citizenship in God's kingdom divides into three sections. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul focused on the fact that fallen human beings are born into the kingdom of darkness, and are by nature enemies of God. Following this, in Ephesians 2:4-10, Paul detailed how God grants citizenship in his kingdom when we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Lastly, in Ephesians 2:11-22, he discussed the nature of citizenship in the kingdom of light. Let's look first at how Paul talked about the kingdom of darkness.

***Kingdom of Darkness (2:1-3).*** First, Paul reminded his readers that all human beings are born sinful and fallen. We are spiritually dead, we have evil natures, we are God's enemies, and as a result, we are liable to fall under God's wrath on the day of judgment. Listen to Ephesians 2:1-3 where Paul described the condition of the Ephesians and all people apart from Christ:

You were dead in the trespasses and sins ... following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air ... among whom we all

once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Before we come to Christ, we are all God's enemies. Before God saves us, we willingly follow our sinful natures, and serve Satan, "the prince of the power of the air." Here, and in a number of other places, Paul associated Satan's rule with spiritual darkness.

***Kingdom of Light (2:4-10).*** Second, Paul stressed in Ephesians 2:4-10, that God uses his royal prerogative to transfer all who trust in Christ from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. As part of this process, God renews our spirits, so that we are spiritually alive, and he recreates us in Christ, so that we have new natures that love God. He also predestines good works for us to do, so that we serve God. And, as a result, we look forward to incomparable riches in the coming age, rather than to God's wrath and judgment.

***Nature of Citizenship (2:11-22).*** Third, after highlighting our transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, Paul discussed the nature of our citizenship in God's kingdom in Ephesians 2:11-22. In this section, Paul addressed how God has now fulfilled the Old Testament ideal of extending his blessings from Jews to Gentiles. He has brought his people together into one worldwide kingdom under his sovereign rule. This ideal is mentioned throughout the Old Testament. As just one example, in Psalm 22:27-28, David laid out this vision for the future of the kingdom of God:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations (Psalm 22:27-28).

In Paul's day, the status of Gentile Christians was highly controversial. Jewish Christians didn't generally object to the conversion of the Gentiles, but some of them felt that Gentiles were second-class Christians. Before Christ came, the Jews received preferential treatment in God's kingdom. God's covenant people consisted primarily of the nation of Israel, and the fullest blessings of God belonged to free male Jews. Paul knew this was true of Old Testament faith, but he also knew that the faithful of Israel were to spread the salvation they enjoyed to the Gentiles as well. The New Testament reveals that all believers — whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free — receive God's eternal blessings through union with Christ. In Christ, each believer is justified in the court of God and imputed with the righteousness of Jesus himself, and they will all inherit the eternal blessings of God.

As we mentioned earlier, it appears that erroneous Jewish teachings were influencing the Gentile believers in Ephesus. So, Paul sought to disempower these false teachings by insisting that the old distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in God's kingdom are obsolete. Everyone gains salvation in the same way, so the new standard is

equal status for every citizen of God's kingdom, regardless of ethnicity. And because of this, all citizens of the kingdom of light are full citizens with the same rights and privileges, including full access to God. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:13-19:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near ... For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:13-19).

**In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Paul says. We all have been brought in. He says you who were far away have been brought near through Christ. He's the leveler of the ground because no matter where you come from, whether you're Jew or Gentile, there's only one way to God and that is through faith in Christ. So Gentile believers in that first century church were as much a son of Abraham as any Jewish believer in Christ. He says in a couple of places in the New Testament that anyone who comes to God by faith, the same faith as Abraham, is a son of Abraham. So, they're equal, equal in the household of faith. They're both — both Jews and Gentiles — are a part of God's family and precious in his sight.**

— Dr. Chris Lohrstorfer

Now that we've looked at the idea of citizenship in God's kingdom of light, we should turn to the next section of the main body of Paul's letter. In Ephesians 3:1-21, Paul taught about the administration of the kingdom.

### **Administration (3:1-21)**

It should be obvious that every kingdom needs some sort of administrative structure. Kingdoms simply fall apart if they don't have sufficient organization. Government offices must exist through which the king administers his kingdom. In typical human governments, these include various levels and types of leadership, such as those who make the laws, those who execute the laws, and those who judge violations of the laws. And the same is true in God's kingdom, especially in the authority structures that God established in the church.

In Paul's day, false teachers were challenging the authority structure of the church. In fact, just before his arrest in Jerusalem, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would arise from their own ranks. In Acts 20:28-30, Luke recorded these words from Paul to the Ephesian elders:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers ... I know that after my departure fierce

wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

Paul knew that false teachers would arise, and that they would trouble the church. So, he instructed the elders to guard the flock against these false teachers. But what gave Paul the right to assign this task to the elders and to condemn the false teachers? Well, God had ordained another church office through which God administered his kingdom. This was the office of apostle. In Paul's day, the office of apostle existed as a foundational office, but it no longer exists today. It was held by those who were chosen and trained by Christ himself, and who had met the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ — men such as Paul. The apostles were vested with Christ's authority and ruled over the entire church, including over the elders. In Ephesians 3:2-7, Paul described his apostolic authority in relation to the administration of God's kingdom with these words:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation ... which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets... I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power (Ephesians 3:2-7, NIV).

To counter those who led the Ephesians astray, Paul insisted that the apostles possessed special grace from God that authorized them in their ministry, and special revelation from God that taught them infallible truth. And the apostles received the assignment from God to teach this revelation to the church. So, as an apostle, it was Paul's obligation and right to administer God's kingdom under Christ by explaining the rules of the kingdom to its citizens, and by condemning those who stood against him.

**Why did the apostles, including Paul, have the right to administer the kingdom of Christ? Well, we know that the disciples — the eleven besides Judas who lived with Christ, were taught by Christ, witnessed Christ — we can see how they had authority just by their experience and witness. But they are specifically commissioned at the end of the Gospels to go forth and be Christ's witnesses. Well, what about Paul? Did he meet Jesus? Was he instructed by Jesus? Well, yes. On the road to Damascus he encountered the risen Christ and was converted. But also, as he speaks in Galatians 1, that he spent a period of time in the Arabian wilderness in the presence of Christ being instructed and commissioned by Christ, so that Paul specifically was commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles. And that's what he speaks of in Ephesians, that his special commission was to take the good news of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles.**

— Rev. Michael J. Glodo

God appointed Paul to be his official representative on earth, his apostle. And this apostleship made Paul's word authoritative, as if it had been spoken by God himself. But why was Paul's authority so important at this point in his epistle to the Ephesians? To put it simply, some in Ephesus were rejecting Paul's teachings, and the church needed to know whom to trust. Even today, if we are to please God, we have to know what God requires of us. In Paul's day, there were so many false teachings circulating that it was hard to know what God's requirements really were. The false teachers said one thing; the established leadership of the church said another. Paul addressed this problem by exerting his apostolic authority. He reminded his readers that, because he was an apostle, his authority and insight were greater than others. No false teacher could rightly claim to be an apostle. And therefore, no false teacher could have Paul's insight, or speak with divine authority. As an apostle, Paul spoke God's words to God's people to lead them into the truth.

Wisely, Paul's teaching on the administration of the kingdom did not end with his assertion of his authority as an apostle. Instead, he ended with a prayer, found in Ephesians 3:14-21. Paul had been a missionary, pastor and apostle long enough to know that people don't recognize or accept the truth simply because they hear it. He knew that he had the words of life, but he also knew that, in his own power, he couldn't make the Ephesians believe them. And so, he prayed that the Holy Spirit would illumine their minds, so that they would accept his authority and teaching. And he prayed that, consequently, they would live in ways that built up the kingdom of God and blessed its citizens.

Now that we've seen how the main body of this epistle touches on citizenship and administration in relation to God's kingdom, we should turn to the code for living in the kingdom of light, recorded in Ephesians 4:1–6:20.

### **Code for Living (4:1–6:20)**

This code for living in the kingdom contains many different instructions on Christian attitudes and behaviors, but it can be summarized in four points: first, ecclesiastical order in the kingdom in Ephesians 4:1-16; second, purifying the kingdom in 4:17–5:20; third, domestic order in the kingdom in 5:21–6:9; and finally, the warfare of the kingdom in 6:10-20. We'll start by considering ecclesiastical order in the kingdom.

***Ecclesiastical Order in the Kingdom (4:1-16).*** The section on ecclesiastical order focuses primarily on positions of leadership, influence and authority in the church. And Paul's teaching emphasizes the ways these roles — or “offices” as we often call them — work together for the good of all. Citizens are not to be envious of one another, but rather appreciative of the contributions their brothers and sisters make. When each person does his or her assigned tasks, it benefits the whole kingdom. Consider this idea in regard to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:8:

When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to



men (Ephesians 4:8).

In this passage, Paul referred to Psalm 68:18, which portrays the Lord as a victorious king returning from battle. In Psalm 68, the Lord receives spoils of war from his conquered enemies. Paul, however, focused on what the Lord does with these gifts. Just like wise ancient kings, he shares the spoils of his victory with his army. So, in a very real sense, these gifts benefit all the people of his kingdom. And, in Ephesians 4:7-12, Paul described some very special gifts:

Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift... And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:7-12).

Christ has poured out gifts on all of his followers, but here Paul drew attention to the very special gifts of the leaders of the church: “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.” These leaders enable the citizens of his kingdom to serve one another and to build up the body, or kingdom, of Christ.

**So, in Ephesians 4:11, Paul makes it very clear that Christ himself has gifted those people for the purpose of verse 12, which is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Now, the reason I want to seize upon that is not to turn a blind eye to Paul's other lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians and other places, not to turn a blind eye to that, but to highlight there that the giftings that the people that we oftentimes talk about being in the ministry and gifted by the Spirit of God or by Christ himself to serve the church, we oftentimes put them on one pedestal, and then we, ourselves, sort of relegate our spiritual gifts as to something secondary to theirs, or somehow less important in the overall body of Christ. And in that particular place I want to grab hold of that and emphasize the importance of those who are gifted by Christ, gifted in a particular way. And one of these ways, whatever exactly those things mean for our contemporary time, that these people are gifted, not because they have a superior ministry to everyone else in the body of Christ, but because their ministry is central to the other people who are then in the ministry.**

— Dr. Benjamin Quinn

*Purifying the Kingdom (4:17–5:20).* Next, following his focus on ecclesiastical order in the kingdom, Paul focused on purifying the kingdom in 4:17–5:20. The corruption of sin was bred and nourished within each of us when we were citizens of Satan's kingdom of darkness. And, as a result, those who have entered the kingdom of light have new natures that they can rely on to overcome sin. Yet, as we all know from common

experience, our old, sinful natures have not entirely vanished, even among citizens of the kingdom of light. So, in Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul instructed the Ephesians in this way:

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

God's kingdom is to be as morally pure as possible. It is to reflect the character of its king. And this is for the benefit of the whole kingdom. After all, God blesses and rewards moral purity. So, by refraining from sin, and by doing good works, the citizens increase the blessedness of the kingdom and ensure their inheritance in it.

*Domestic Order in the Kingdom (5:21–6:9).* After his instructions regarding ecclesiastical order in the kingdom, and purifying the kingdom, Paul then turned to the subject of domestic order in the kingdom in Ephesians 5:21–6:9. In this section, Paul spoke of maintaining the proper authority structures that exist within households. He also discussed how each party within the authority relationships is to relate to one another. In many ways, this section resembles Paul's teaching on ecclesiastical order. In that section, Paul taught that everyone should honor and respect those who hold positions of leadership, influence and authority in the church. And he taught those in positions of leadership to work for the benefit of all.

Here, Paul apparently addressed domestic controversies in Ephesus by affirming the authority structures between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. He also taught each party in these relationships to serve in ways that honored and benefited all parties. And again, his reason was that these structures enhance life in the kingdom of God.

**Paul often talks about the relationships that we have with one another and, in particular, when you get to Ephesians 5, he's talking about relationships that are very common relationships in everyday life. And he's talking about the nature of authority in those relationships, but also about a mutual submission that should happen in these relationships. It's interesting to note that in verse 21, Paul says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So that's a statement to all of us to submit to one another. And then he goes on to give these three pairs of relationships as examples: husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters. And in each one of those, he acknowledges that somebody has a greater responsibility to rule — husband, parents, master. But yet, at the same time, he makes it clear that each of those — the husband, the parent, and the master — needs to, in some way, submit themselves to the one that they are serving... And so, I think Paul is really getting to a truly biblical servant leadership on the part of one-half of that relationship, keeping**

**their authority but doing it as a servant, and yet at the same time, for others to honor them in the midst of it. And so, it really plays out as a mutual sacrificing of yourself for the sake of somebody else who is in your care.**

— Dr. Dan Lacich

*Warfare of the Kingdom (6:10-20).* Lastly, having touched on ecclesiastical order in the kingdom, purifying the kingdom, and domestic order in the kingdom, Paul spoke of the warfare between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Here, Paul spoke of the fact that everyone in the kingdom of light is called to serve in God's army, fighting the spiritual war against the kingdom of darkness. Paul summarized this final point in Ephesians 6:11-12, where he wrote these words:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:11-12).

The Devil and his demons war against the church, and our divine King demands our loyalty in this battle. To make sure that we can stand firm against the evil spirits who attack us, Christ suits us in "the whole armor of God." And he arms us with his Word as we go into the world with the gospel of peace, now offered to all.

**The full armor of the body of Christ is extremely important for us to acknowledge. In Paul's teaching about the kingdom of God he makes this very clear. Now, if you're part of God's kingdom and you don't have the full armor of God on you, you're then exposed. Understand this that the same devil that brought about the fall of man in the Garden of Eden is the same devil that tempted Jesus Christ, and he's still at work today. But it's one thing to have the armor on you to be able to quench every fiery dart of the enemy, but it's another to have the armor on you because of the mission that we have as a child of God, to expand the kingdom of God. Having the full armor of God upon us allows us to ward [off] the enemy but also effectively fulfill the purpose of our mission, which is to save souls, increasing the kingdom of God.**

— Pastor Johnson Oni

## FINAL GREETINGS (6:21-24)

After the main body of Ephesians, Paul turned to the last section of his letter, his final greetings found in Ephesians 6:21-24. In this short passage, Paul offered a closing blessing, and indicated that Tychicus would deliver this letter. Paul's letter to the Ephesians addressed a number of challenges facing the believers at Ephesus by pointing them to the kingdom of God. He prayed for them and instructed them how to live as citizens under the administration of Christ, not in the kingdom of darkness, but in God's kingdom of light.

Now that we've looked into the background of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, and explored its structure and content, we're ready to address the modern application of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians.

## MODERN APPLICATION

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There are countless ways to apply this letter to our lives, but we'll draw attention to three issues, moving from narrower to broader aspects of our lives in God's kingdom in Christ. First, we'll talk about honoring the King. Second, we'll discuss building the kingdom. And third, we'll turn to conquering the cosmos. Let's begin with honoring the King.

### HONORING THE KING

As we've seen, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians appeals to the Christian belief that God is the divine King over all creation, and especially over the kingdom of all who are redeemed in Christ. And our divine King has done so many wonderful things for us that we should eagerly respond by honoring him with thankfulness, obedience and loyalty. In keeping with the ways that Jesus and the Old Testament, and even other ancient societies, spoke of kings and their people, Paul described God's royal benevolence to us as demonstrations of his love. And he described our obligations to him in the same way.

For example, listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 2:4-7:

God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

The larger context of this passage is Paul's explanation of how God makes us citizens in his kingdom. In these verses, he highlights how God demonstrates his great

love when he regenerates us, transfers us into his kingdom, places us in a position of authority and honor, and gives us our inheritance. In the ancient world, human kings not only expressed love for their subjects, they also required their subjects to love them as well. In these contexts, the word “love” signified faithfulness and devotion, much like we speak of loving our countries today. Kings showed their love through benevolence and protection, and the citizens of their kingdoms expressed love through obedience and loyalty.

This is precisely what we see in Paul's description of God's love for his people in the book of Ephesians. The historical facts of the gospel prove that God loves the people of his kingdom and that he values us highly. His faithfulness to us is demonstrated through his kindness and protection, as expressed in things like our predestination, Christ's death on our behalf, the regeneration of our spirits, our citizenship in God's kingdom, our union with Christ the heavenly King, and the glory we'll inherit in the future. And because God has done all these wonderful things for us, we are called to love and to honor him in return. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words in Ephesians 3:17–4:1:

[I pray] that you ... may have strength to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge ... Now to him ... be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 3:17–4:1).

Paul drew two applications from God's love for us in this passage. First, he honored God in praise by ascribing glory to him. But second, Paul also exhorted his readers to honor God by living a life “worthy of the calling” they had received from God.

It will help to unpack how the letter to the Ephesians handles both of these ways we are to honor God the King. We'll begin with the praise and worship we are to render to him, and then move on to our lives of obedience to him. Let's turn first to praise and worship.

## **Praise and Worship**

In Ephesians 5:19-20, Paul explicitly instructed his readers to honor God through praise and worship by:

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:19-20).

Christians are to be thankful “always for everything,” for all of God's blessings.

And we are to express our heartfelt gratitude in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and music in our hearts. These are all forms of praise and worship, whether we express them outwardly to others, or inwardly to the Lord alone.

**We were created for worship. We were created out of the love of God, the abundant, extravagant love of God with the idea, then, that we would turn our lives over to him and turn our lives back to him in loving obedience and in praise and in worship. So, everything we do, really, subsists in worship.**

— Dr. James R. Hart

Paul's letter to the Ephesians includes several models of praise for us to follow. We see examples in his introductory praise in Ephesians 1:3-14, and in his doxological prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. Both of these passages show us how to honor God through similar praise and doxology. As we've seen, in both of these sections, Paul focused on the work of each person of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus, God's revelation to us, and the future glory God has planned for us. And he mentioned these things in the context of honoring God for his kingship over us. He spoke of God's sovereign rule, his benevolence toward us, and our inheritance in Christ.

Besides praise and worship, Paul also taught us to honor God as our divine King by rendering obedience to him.

## Obedience

One way that we are to express our obedience to God is by remaining fervently and persistently loyal to him, seeking to please him and forsaking all powers and principalities. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:8-10:

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.  
Walk as children of light ... and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord  
(Ephesians 5:8-10).

We used to be citizens of Satan's kingdom of darkness. But now our loyalties have shifted. Because God has brought us into his kingdom, we owe him our obedience; we owe it to him to leave behind the sinful ways of the kingdom of darkness, and to live in ways that please our new Lord and King. Paul wrote again of this obedience in Ephesians 6:24 where he pronounced this conditional blessing:

Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible  
(Ephesians 6:24).

Our love, or loyal service to the Lord, is to be "incorruptible," never-ending,

persistent, devoted, steadfast.

The letter to the Ephesians makes it clear that God wants and demands our complete devotion and dedication. It won't work simply to add him to a pantheon of gods that we serve. He insists on our undivided loyalty. And he doesn't just want our passive loyalty, as if we might simply rest in the blessings of his kingdom. No, he wants us to obey all his commands, not only forsaking other gods, but also actively doing the many good works he has planned for us.

Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-10 offer insight in this regard:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

As this passage indicates, God did not save us simply to keep us from perishing, or so that we would enjoy a comfortable, easy life in his kingdom. Rather, God also created us anew in Christ so that we would be productive citizens in his kingdom, doing the good works he has assigned to us.

In God's kingdom, good works play a specific role. They are designed to bring God glory, but they are also designed to expand and purify his kingdom and to minister to his people. And, according to Paul, God's purpose in saving us was to ensure that we would do these good works. So, the proper response to God's grace is to accept our appointment as his servants and ministers. It is to adopt his goals as our goals, his purposes as our purposes. This is why Paul so often encouraged the Ephesians to live in a "worthy" manner, one that reflected the glorious calling we have as the people of God's kingdom in Christ.

Now that we've considered how we should apply Paul's focus on honoring the King to our daily lives, we should turn to the modern application of Paul's outlooks on building the kingdom. Just as God requires our loving praise and obedience, he also requires that we expand and grow his earthly kingdom.

## **BUILDING THE KINGDOM**

Paul employed a number of metaphors in his letter to the Ephesians to help us understand how we are to build God's kingdom in Christ. Each one offers insight into how the citizens of God's kingdom are to relate to one another and to Christ, as well as how we are to serve together in expanding God's kingdom. We'll mention two of these metaphors, beginning with the way Paul compared the kingdom to God's temple. Then, we'll consider his focus on the body of Christ. Let's look first at Paul's metaphor of the temple.

## Temple

Listen to Paul's words to the Gentile Christians in Ephesians 2:19-22:

You are ... members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Here Paul taught that Gentile Christians become full citizens in God's kingdom, with equal status to the Jewish Christians. And to emphasize this fact, he described the kingdom of God as a building with each Christian being a stone in the structure.

**Paul compares the church to God's temple in Ephesians 2 by describing Jesus as the cornerstone and the apostolic teaching as the foundation, and then what the church does is build upon that foundation... And so, the cornerstone is the most important stone in a building, and everything has to be built in reference to the cornerstone. So, if the cornerstone is not true or if the cornerstone fails, the building falls. And the apostles are like the foundation of a building. It's their teaching, it's their bearing witness, it's their testimony about who Jesus is and what he did that is the basis for everything else. And therefore, the people of God — or to use Peter's metaphor from 1 Peter 2 — the people of God are living stones being built upon that foundation. And so, what it reveals to us is our purpose as the church is to be the place where God dwells in and through Christ, and that Christ's teaching and authority is the foundation of all that we do and say and teach.**

— Rev. Michael J. Glodo

In this metaphor, Christ has the position of preeminence, being the cornerstone of the foundation, the one on whom all the other stones rely. The apostles and prophets of the first century held positions of high authority because Christ established them as his foundational representatives. All other Christians are stones in the structure, without distinction among us. The goal of this building was to become God's dwelling, so that God would live in the midst of his people. The nation of Israel experienced this blessing in small ways in the Old Testament, especially in the Tabernacle and in the temple in Jerusalem, just as Solomon proclaimed in 2 Chronicles 6. But the Old Testament also taught that the Gentiles would eventually live in God's presence, too. For example, listen to God's words in Isaiah 66:19-20:

They shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all



your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord ... to my holy mountain Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:19-20).

In this passage, God taught that when he restored a faithful remnant of Israel after the exile — which he began to do in the New Testament through Jesus — the Israelites would return to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the Lord. But beyond this, Gentiles would come with them, actually bringing the remnant of Israel to God as a holy offering from the nations. So, when Paul taught that both Jews and Gentiles would live in God's presence together as his temple, he indicated that God's kingdom was moving toward its final goal. This meant that God's kingdom blessings were now being extended to all races. But why did Paul use this specific metaphor? Appropriately, he used it to foster racial reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church.

In Paul's day, some Jewish Christians perpetuated the idea that Jews were superior to Gentiles because they were the chosen people of God. They had received preferential treatment from God for so long that they had begun to think they deserved it. But the truth is that all nations, Jew and Gentile alike, are lost without Christ. None of us is the least bit deserving of blessing. Only Christ is deserving of God's blessing. Thankfully, because we are united to Christ by faith in him, God counts us as deserving of his blessings too. So, as we build God's kingdom today, we must focus on living in his presence and striving to increase Christ's glory in the world rather than our own. And we must be humble toward one another, recognizing that no believer is more deserving of blessing than any other.

Paul's metaphor of the church as God's temple means that we must repent of every way we wrongly divide from one another or wrongly elevate ourselves to the detriment of others. Nationality, ethnicity, and the like should never divide the temple of God. Church leaders should never consider themselves more important than the laity. Wealthy Christians should never receive more honor than poor Christians. We should never value our local congregation or our denomination so highly that we look down on those in other churches and seek to exclude them as we build God's kingdom. In all such cases, Paul's teaching is that we must put aside our vanity and arrogance and embrace all believers as we build the temple, the church of God, together.

Now, as wondrous as Paul's metaphor of the temple is, the metaphor that Paul used most frequently in his letter to the Ephesians to explain how we are to build the kingdom is that of a body — specifically Christ's body.

## Body

Paul taught that Christ is the head and that all believers collectively compose Christ's body. He used this metaphor in chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5 in order to draw out several different points of application. In Ephesians 1:20-23, Paul introduced this metaphor with these words:

[God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the

heavenly places, far above all rule and authority ... And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Like the metaphor of the temple, this metaphor also describes the kingdom of God. Christ is seated as king in heaven and rules for the benefit of his body, the church. Paul continued with this imagery in Ephesians 3:6, adding:

The Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:6).

Paul's emphasis on reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles was evident again in this passage. He pointed out that, as members of the one body of Christ, Jewish and Gentile Christians are all united to Christ and to one another in Christ. And he affirmed that both receive blessings only because they partake of the promises in Christ.

Paul's fullest use of the body of Christ imagery, however, appears in 4:1-16, where he focused on ecclesiastical order in the kingdom. There he wrote primarily on positions of leadership, influence, and authority in the church as means through which the rest of the church is empowered for ministry. He also explained that the good works God has prepared for us consist largely of services to one another, for the purpose of building up the church, so that it becomes a fitting kingdom for the Lord of the universe to rule. Listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:11-13:

[God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

God has established leaders in the church who are to prepare the rest of us to minister to one another. And these leaders are to guide the church toward two goals. The first of these is reaching "the unity of the faith." Here, Paul had in mind that the church is to be doctrinally unified, having a mature and true understanding, and not being satisfied with only a basic understanding of the gospel. This is in keeping with Paul's earlier prayers that God would enable Paul's readers to understand God's kingdom blessings in Christ.

**One of the important things that created unity in the church was the election of leaders: apostles, bishops in the church, deacons, presbyters. Eventually, from Acts 6 onward, as things grew and the numbers increased, problems occurred, and you need leaders to make decisions, you need leaders to organize. And so, the leadership of the church became important as a unifying factor in the early church.**

— Dr. Las Newman

The second goal is to attain to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This goal is cosmic in scope; it is to further bring all of creation under the rule of Christ, just as Paul taught in Ephesians 1:10. As amazing as it might sound, through proper church leadership and dedicated ministry among Christians, the church will lead the way to Christ's exaltation as the Lord of the entire universe. Paul continued the metaphor of the body in Ephesians 4:15-16, where he explained some specific things the church leaders were to teach the people to do:

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

As each church leader speaks the truth in love to the body of Christ, the body learns that truth. As a result, each Christian is able to minister meaningfully to others, performing works of service and encouragement. But notice something else as well: The church is to grow and build itself up “in love” as each member does its work. Love must characterize both the leader's teaching and the church's works of service.

Just as God's love for us and our love for God are defined primarily in terms of loyalty and dedication within the kingdom, our love for other Christians is also defined in this way. Our love for our neighbors goes far beyond a personal connection. Rather, it is a loyal commitment and dedication that seeks the benefit of others in Christ, even if we don't know them personally. But this love is not mere cooperation or synergy. Rather, Christian love understands that our fellow believers are part of Christ's inheritance. Christ was willing to die in order to make them his, and he receives glory and honor because they belong to him. This truth should inspire us to value our fellow believers highly too, and to put forth the effort it takes to minister to them.

**If you want to see a united body of believers, go to the book of Acts and look at, again, the Day of Pentecost in chapter 2, and you will see that following Pentecost they came together around the apostles' doctrine, that is, they were teaching the Word; they came together for the breaking of bread, which certainly included the Lord's Supper, and I would think, baptism as a corollary, but also fellowship. They were also caring for one another, ministering to one another, and they were exercising the gifts that God had given them. Of course, I'm tapping into Ephesians 4 as well. So, the Word, the gospel, the ordinances, mutual love and concern for one another is what brought the body together as a family. And of course, if you want to think what unites a family, look at that. The same thing is what unites the body of Christ as well because we are a big family.**

— Dr. Danny Akin

Now that we've explored honoring the King and building the kingdom, we should turn to a third way we can apply the book of Ephesians to our modern world: conquering the cosmos. Jesus is the king over the church right now, but a day is coming when he will conquer all of his enemies and rule without resistance over the entire universe.

## CONQUERING THE COSMOS

As we've seen, during the inauguration and continuation of God's kingdom in Christ, God's kingdom co-exists or overlaps with the present age of sin and death. So, in our day, opposition to Christ's kingdom continues. And God's forces — including his church — battle against the demons and seek to rescue human beings under the tyranny of sin. But at the consummation of the kingdom, Jesus will return. And when he does, he will deliver final judgment against his enemies. This future victory over the powers of darkness is certain, but until that day, we are obligated to stand and fight against them in service to Christ and his kingdom.

But, even as we wait for Christ to return, we have the upper hand in the battle against the demonic forces. Our King is already seated in power and authority above them, and we are seated with him. God has already rescued us from their evil dominion, and he continues to rescue more and more. And because of God's great blessings, Christ has empowered us with his Holy Spirit to withstand the worst attacks our enemies can muster. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 6:13, 16:

Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm... take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one (Ephesians 6:13, 16).

Through his grace and Spirit, God provides us with power to stand against the demonic hordes. Because of the many blessings that the church receives now, the demons know that their defeat is certain. In fact, Paul went so far as to say that the very fact that the church is spreading throughout the nations testifies to the doom of all of God's enemies. Listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:8-11:

To me ... this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:8-11).

According to this passage, God's "eternal purpose" has been "realized in Christ." God kept "the mystery hidden for ages." But now that Christ has come, God is using the spread of the church throughout the nations to demonstrate "to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places," his "manifold wisdom," or his "diverse, multi-sided wisdom," as it may be translated.

Even before the creation of humanity, God planned to use his church to reveal his glory to his demonic enemies. And now that Christ has come, the growing and spreading church displays God's ability to defeat even the greatest schemes of the Devil. Christ's church is proof of God's power to reconcile all things to himself. After all, if he can redeem more and more human beings from the corruption of sin, and can reconcile even the likes of us to one another, and to himself, there is nothing he cannot accomplish in Christ.

But the church is not just the glorious display of God's eternal power and wisdom. The church is Christ's prize. We are the treasure he has fought for and won from the kingdom of his enemies. We are the people God saves, the beloved bride that Christ gave his life to protect and to marry. Listen to Paul's description of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:23-27:

For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church ... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:23-27).

Christ loves and values the church as his bride. And the process of reconciling all things to himself and renewing and purifying the cosmos, starts with us. The existence of the church, the forgiveness of the church, and the sanctification of the church, all prove that the kingdom of God is growing on earth. And because God's kingdom is expanding right now, it will certainly be completed. And when it is, the demons will be utterly destroyed, and Christ's reign will be absolute. As Paul wrote of Christ in Ephesians 1:22-23:

[God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Paul's words here are stunning. Christ has been exalted as King of the universe in order that the church might be blessed. We are his fullness, his body. Christ deserves to rule because of his own status and merit, but he has so cherished his church that he also rules to bless us. In the church, Jews and Gentiles, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves are reconciled to each other and to God. This astonishing blessing is proof positive that God is powerful and good and wise, and that he has begun to renew the entire creation in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson we've explored Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. We've looked at its background to understand why Paul wrote this letter. We've also examined the letter's structure and content to see how Paul encouraged God's people as they faced many challenges in their day. Finally, we've considered the modern application of this epistle, its relevance for our lives today.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has many important lessons, not only for the first century churches in Ephesus and the Lycus Valley, but also for followers of Christ in every generation. It teaches us that our faith is not simply about the salvation of individuals from their sins. Rather, the Christian faith is about the destruction of Satan's kingdom in all of its manifestations, and it is about building and expanding God's kingdom in Christ. As we grow in our awareness of the wonder of God's kingdom in Christ, we'll be better prepared to resist all the forces that stand against us. We'll be equipped to live in ways that please God. And we, and all of our fellow believers everywhere in the world, will receive the blessings of Christ's kingdom.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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**The Very Rev. Dr. Reggie M. Kidd** (Host) is Dean of the Cathedral Church of Saint Luke and Professor of New Testament Emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary. He received his M.A.R. and M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in Christian Origins from Duke University. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and is an ordained priest in The Episcopal Church. Dr. Kidd teaches at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies and has served as a pastor and elder at multiple churches. He is the author of *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (BakerBooks, 2005) and has contributed to many other publications, including *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2003) and *The Reformation Study Bible* (Ligonier Ministries, 2005).

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**Dr. Danny Akin** is President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Dr. Steve Blakemore** is the Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Wesley Biblical Seminary.

**Dr. Jeff Brannon** is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Belhaven University.

**Dr. Joseph D. Fantin** is Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo** is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

**Dr. Jay Haley** is adjunct professor at Birmingham Theological Seminary.

**Dr. James R. Hart** is President of the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies.

**Dr. Dan Lacich** is a pastor at Northland, A Church Distributed in Orlando, FL.

**Dr. Chris Lohrstorfer** is Associate Professor of Wesleyan Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary.

**Dr. Las Newman** is the Global Associate Director of the Lausanne Movement, having served previously as President of the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology.

**Pastor Johnson Oni** is the Lead Pastor and founder of Flowing Grace Ministries.

**Dr. Benjamin Quinn** is Associate Dean of Institutional Effectiveness for the College at Southeastern and Assistant Professor of Theology and History of Ideas at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.