

Bible Survey, part 9 – The New Testament

The Epistles (Ephesians)

“The Mystery of the Church”

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Paul spent **almost three years** in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (A.D. 53-56).

“All who lived in Asia [half of Turkey] heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles.” Acts 19:10



“The Prison Epistles”:

- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- Philemon

Paul left Ephesus (A.D. 56)

Went to Jerusalem (Acts 21)

Spent **two years** in jail (Acts 21-26)

Appealed to Caesar (Acts 27)

Spent **two more years** in jail in Rome (A.D. 61-62) awaiting trial (Acts 28)

Paul’s letters to the churches all follow a similar pattern:

- **1st section** = Theological issues
- **2nd section** = Christian life issues

“... **WE** who were first to hope in Christ...” Ephesians 1:12

“... In Him, **YOU** also believed...” Ephesians 1:13

“**YOU** were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Ephesians 2:1

“**WE** also used to live in the lusts of our flesh...” Ephesians 2:3

“And He came and preached peace to **YOU** who were far away, and peace to **WE** who were near.”
Ephesians 2:17

Question: “Who is the **YOU** and who is the **WE**?”

“Therefore, remember that **YOU**, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘uncircumcision’...”
Ephesians 2:11

“**YOU** also trusted in Christ after **YOU** heard the Gospel of your salvation.” Ephesians 1:13a

YOU = Gentile believers in Jesus

“... **WE** who first trusted in Christ being to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:12

WE = Jewish believers in Jesus

“Remember, that **YOU**, the Gentiles in the flesh [before being saved, Paul says] **YOU** were separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to God’s covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Ephesians 2:12

“... **YOU** were **far off** [from God] ...” Ephesians 2:13

“... **YOU** were **strangers and aliens** ...” Ephesians 2:19

“**BUT NOW** – in Christ Jesus – **YOU** who were formerly far off [Gentiles] have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13

“For He [the Lord Jesus Christ] is our peace, who has made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one ... He made the two groups into one new man ... reconciling them both to God **in one body** through the cross ...” Ephesians 2:14-16

“So then, **YOU** [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but **YOU** are fellow citizens with all the saints and equal members of the household of God [with us Jewish believers].” Ephesians 2:19

In Paul’s day this was **revolutionary truth**!

“And when I came back to Jerusalem, I was praying ... and the Lord said, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about Me here.’” Acts 22:17

“And God said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” Acts 22:21

“And the crowd listened to Paul until this word [Gentiles], and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! He should not be allowed to live!’” Acts 22:22

The New Testament makes it clear that after Gentiles began getting saved – many **Jewish believers** discriminated against them.

“Now the Apostles and other Jewish believers in Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God.” Acts 11:1

“So when Peter came to Jerusalem, they criticized him, saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised people and eat with them?’” Acts 11:2

“When they heard this, they were silenced ...” Acts 11:18

Even after Jewish believers were forced to accept that Gentiles could come to Christ – many kept seeing them as “**second-class Christians**” and **not fully equal with Jewish believers**.

“But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” Galatians 2:11

“For prior to the coming of some men from James [Jewish believers from Jerusalem] Peter would eat with the Gentile believers; but when these men came, Peter withdrew and separated himself from Gentiles, fearing those of the circumcision.” Galatians 2:12

“And the rest of the Jewish believers [there in Antioch] joined Peter in his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away in their hypocrisy.” Galatians 2:13

So can we see – how revolutionary Paul’s declaration here in Ephesians was – that Gentile believers and Jewish believers are **completely equal** in Christ [“... **fellow** citizens and **equal** member of the household of God.” Ephesians 2:19]?

This theological truth is what Paul refers to [in Ephesians 3] as the “**mystery of the church**” that no one knew about until now.

The Old Testament was clear that the Gentiles would get to share in the blessings of the Messiah. [to Abraham] “. . . and **ALL** the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:3

But the “**mystery of the church**” is that God would create an entirely new entity – “the church” – where **Gentile believers in Christ would be equal in every way with the Jewish believers in Christ.**

“**By revelation** [directly from Jesus] this **mystery** was made known to me . . . which was not made known previously . . .” Ephesians 3:3, 5

“**Namely**, that the Gentiles are **fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body of Christ and fellow-partakers of God’s promises in Christ** through the Gospel.” Ephesians 3:6

“All this was in accordance with God’s eternal purpose which He purposed to do in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Ephesians 3:11

“In Christ, there **is** no Jew or Gentile . . . for we are all **one** in Christ.” Galatians 3:28

Point: When we meet another **true believe in Jesus** – earthly differences no longer matter! We are all brothers and sisters in Christ – fully, freely, and without discrimination of any kind!

SO WHAT?

“Now to Him, who by the power at work within us [Holy Spirit], is able to do **exceedingly abundantly more** than we can ask or imagine – to Him be glory . . .” Ephesians 3:20-21a

“I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is **anything** too hard for me?” Jeremiah 32:27

Because God **has “unlimited power,”** we as His followers should approach every obstacle in life with “**unlimited expectations**” of what God **can and will do** – according to His perfect will for our lives!

“Call unto Me, and I **will** answer; and I will show you great and mighty things that you know not.” Jeremiah 33:3

A.W. Tozer

“Truth faith is never found alone; it is always accompanied by expectation. The person who believes the promises of God always expects to see them fulfilled.”

“One characteristic that marks the average Christian today is lack of expectation. When we pray, we don’t expect anything unusual to happen; consequently nothing does.”

“**Holy expectation**” is the confident assurance that **when I call on God, He is going to answer in power** . . . And in accordance with His perfect plan for my life . . . bring His exceeding, abundant power to bear on the affairs of my life.

His answer may not always be **exactly what I ask for** – but it will always be **exactly what I need** for godliness and true blessing in life.

The Bible calls us to live a life that’s **saturated** with “**holy expectation.**”

“Call unto me, and I **will** answer; and I will show you great and mighty things that you know not.” Jeremiah 33:3

“. . . is able to do **exceedingly abundantly more** than we can ask or imagine . . .” Ephesians 3:20