The title of the book comes from the salutation (1:1). The author is Paul, as evidenced by the letter itself (1:1; 3:1). Themes and language common in Paul’s earlier letters appear frequently in Ephesians, and the verbal similarities with Colossians are especially striking. The similarities are most easily explained by assuming that Paul wrote Ephesians shortly after completing Colossians. Paul’s devotional and prayerful tone reaches its height as he contemplates the eternal and universal significance of Christ’s church. In this way, he continues his reflections on the subject that dominated his correspondence with the Colossians—the eternal and universal significance of Christ.

This letter may have had a broader audience than the church at Ephesus alone. Some of the oldest Gk. manuscripts do not include “in Ephesus” in the address of the letter (1:1). Many scholars believe Ephesians was written as a general letter to a number of churches in the region, which would be in keeping with the sweeping contents of the letter as a whole. It is possible that Paul originally sent the letter to Ephesus, but as the letter was sent from church to church the address was omitted. Questions about to whom Paul wrote this letter also lead to questions about when he wrote the letter.

The imprisonment mentioned in 3:1 and 6:20 is the same as that in Colossians 4:3, 10, 18, and is probably Paul’s two-year house arrest in Rome (A.D. 60–62), recounted in Acts 28.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It lay between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire and was among the five most prominent cities in the empire during the first century. During Paul’s unusually long stay in Ephesus, it became the center for evangelizing the western part of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). Paul’s affectionate ties with this church are evident in his farewell speech to its elders (Acts 20:16–38).

Ephesus’s most prominent civic monument, the temple of the goddess Diana, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city is described in one inscription as the “nurturer” of the goddess, and the goddess in turn makes Ephesus the “most glorious” of the Asian cities. People from the area would have appreciated the irony of Paul’s words about Christ’s nourishing His own body, the church (5:29). They would have appreciated the point of contrast when Paul describes Christ’s church as a glorious or radiant bride (5:27). It was also in Ephesus that Paul’s preaching of Christ came into dramatic conflict with an important trade dependent on pagan worship (Acts 19:23–41) and that the gospel inspired a great turning away from the occult (Acts 19:17–20). Paul’s call to expose the
deeds of darkness (5:8–14) and prepare for war against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12; cf. 1:20, 21; 3:10) would have struck the original readers with force.

CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES

Ephesians generally follows the standard epistolary conventions of the first century. It contains a standard letter opening (1:1, 2), body (1:3–6:20), and conclusion (6:21–24). As he does in his other epistles, Paul adapts the standard conventions to his own purposes.

The most striking feature of this book is how it reflects a deeply and thoroughly Pauline approach to thinking about the Christian life. Chapters 1–3 build up the “indicatives,” the glorious statements of fact that undergird Christianity. Here Paul lays out the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus through His work of redemption. Chapters 4–6 then offer the “imperatives,” the commands regarding how we are to live in light of our calling and the riches that are already ours in Christ.

One of the key words in this letter is “mystery,” which appears seven times (1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19). The first statement is the most important: Paul tells us that God is now revealing the “mystery of his will,” which is the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. The great evidence that this cosmic redemption is happening is the church, the body of Christ, His new humanity (1:23; 2:15). In the church, God is uniting Jew and Gentile, reconciling them and tearing down the “wall of hostility” between them through the cross (2:14). This “mystery of Christ” was hidden in past times (i.e., before the coming of Christ), but is now seen clearly: “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel” (3:6).

That means, then, that the church is central to God’s purpose in the world because it is a sign of the final reconciliation of all things in Christ. The church is God’s precious possession, a colony in which the Lord of history has begun to fashion the renewed humanity after His own image (1:10–14; 2:11–22; 3:6, 9–11; 4:1–6:9). The church is a community where God’s power to reconcile people to Himself is experienced and shared in transformed relationships (2:1–10; 4:1–16; 4:32–5:2; 5:22–6:9). It is a new temple, a building of people, grounded in the sure revelation of what God has done in history (2:19–22; 3:17–19). The church is an organism in which power and authority are exercised after the pattern of Christ (1:22; 5:25–27), and its stewardship is a means of serving Him (4:11–16; 5:22–6:9). The church is an outpost in a dark world (5:3–17), looking for the day of final redemption. Above all, the church is the bride preparing for the approach of her lover and husband (5:22–32).

CHRIST IN EPHESIANS

Ephesians helps us to understand the critical biblical doctrine of union with Christ. The importance of this doctrine is evident from the opening verses of the book. It is “in Christ” that the Father “has blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3) and that in whom He “chose us before the foundation of the world” and “predestined us for adoption” (1:4, 5). It is “in the Beloved” that we have been “blessed” by the Father’s “glorious grace,” and in Christ that we have “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (1:6, 7). In Christ “we have obtained an inheritance” (1:11), and “in him . . . you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13).

Furthermore, it was by being united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection that we were saved by the grace of God (2:1–10). In Christ, the whole church is “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:22) and is the bride of Christ (5:25–33). We are joined to Christ, as the body is to the head, and thus grow into maturity (4:15, 16).

In this letter, Paul particularly emphasizes Christ as raised from the dead as well as our union with Christ in His resurrection. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead made us alive together with Christ (2:5), presently indwells us (3:16, 17), and is at work in us presently “according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (1:19, 20a). Paul’s point is plain—in Christ and by the Spirit of the risen Christ, believers have all the resources they need to walk with God in this age.
Chapter 1
1:1 apostle of Christ Jesus. An authorized delegate commissioned and sent by the risen Lord Jesus, with the authority to receive and declare His special revelation.

in Ephesians. Some early manuscripts lack these words, suggesting that this epistle was a circular letter intended to be read by churches in various cities in the province of Asia in addition to Ephesus (cf. Col. 4:16, Rev 1:4, 11).

1:3–14 The passage, which is one long sentence in Greek, is an expansion on the praise of God's purpose in Rom. 8:28–30. Some early manuscripts omit this sentence on the comprehensive extent of God's will and His sovereign power to enact His entire purpose and plan. Believers have been "predestined" to receive an "inheritance."
1:14 guarantee. The Spirit is not only a fulfillment of God’s promise to indwell His people, but also a guarantee that He will bring them to their final inheritance. As a down payment or first installment on their full redemption (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5), the Spirit is a foretaste of the glory of the age to come (Rom. 8:18–23). This is a prime example that the latter days have begun (the end-time inheritance in the new creation) but are not yet consummated.

possession. God’s people are His “inheritance,” which He will redeem fully and fully in our resurrection (Rom. 8:23). The OT teaches that God chose a people as His inheritance (Deut. 32:9, Ps. 33:12) and purchased them out of bondage to become His prized possession (Ex. 19:5, Deut. 7:6, 14:2, Mal. 3:17). Paul alludes to this theme in v 18, mentioning God’s “glorious inheritance in the saints.”

The goal of the Spirit’s sealing work is that it be “unto the praise of His glory.” This is the main point of vv 3–14, and this phrase is repeated as the goal and main point of the Father’s work in vv 3–6 (cf. v. 6) and of the Son’s work in vv 7–12 (cf. v. 12). Thus, the overriding main point of all of vv 3–14 is that the work of the Trinity in electing, redeeming, and sealing is to the glory of God. If believers could contribute anything independently to their salvation, then Paul could say that they get a share of the glory, but instead, he says all the glory belongs to God.

2:19–23 These verses distill the NT’s teaching on the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus (Col. 1:18 note). They also make two vital contributions to understanding Jesus’ resurrection and the status of believers. First, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in believers (2:4, 5, 13, 16). Second, Christ enjoys His position as head over everything for the sake of the church. Not only is Christ at the most exalted position in the universe, He is there representing believers (2:16, 20:13) and governing the universe for their sake. The principles of conduct in Ephesians emphasize that authority exists for the sake of service. Jesus’ majestic use of power and authority in the interest of His people is the Christian’s model (4:1, 2–7, 13–22, 22–33). Paul reminds his Gentile readers of two specific ways in which Christ’s power has blessed them: He brought them from death to life (2:1–10) and from alienation from God’s people to inclusion with them (2:11–22). Paul alludes to OT passages cited elsewhere in the NT as fulfilled in Jesus’ heavenly enthronement at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1, cf. Mark 12:36, 14:62, Acts 2:34–36, Rom. 8:34, Heb. 1:3) and in the submission of all things under His feet (Ps. 8:6, cf. 1 Cor. 15:25–27, Heb. 2:8, 9).

1:12 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He 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.

By grace through faith

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—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. 3 Or down payment 4 Or until God redeems his possession 5 Some manuscripts omit your love 6 Greek flesh 7 Greek like the rest 8 Or Greek flesh 9 Greek flesh 10 Greek flesh 11 Greek flesh 12 Greek flesh 13 Greek flesh 14 Greek flesh 15 Greek flesh 16 Greek flesh 17 Greek flesh 18 Greek flesh 19 Greek flesh 20 Greek flesh 21 Greek flesh 22 Greek flesh 23 Greek flesh
4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the inmeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. 9 Not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

**ONE IN CHRIST**

11Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision,” by what is called “the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands”— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 12 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 13 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the
dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were 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, 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.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL REVEALED

3 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that 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. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inexpressible riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of his fullness.

Jerusalem. A wall separated Gentiles and Jews, and signs were posted excluding Gentiles from the inner courts where sacrifices for sin were performed. Paul interprets it as emblematic of the law’s function of keeping Israel separate from the surrounding pagan peoples.

2:15 abolishing the law of commandments. Christ offered in His own body the final sacrifice to which the temple’s sacrifices merely pointed. The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament that separated Jews and Gentiles are no longer appropriate for God’s people after their fulfillment in Christ.

create in himself one new man. Paul repeats the “creation” theme of v. 10, implying now that the age-old division between Jew and Gentile has been overcome in the reconciling death of Christ on the cross (v. 16). As the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, cf. Rom. 5:12–21), Christ is the head of a new human race, which is distinguished not only by unprecedented unity but also by His “true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).

2:19–22 The building of a new spiritual temple replaces the outmoded one in Jerusalem.

2:20 The foundation of God’s house was laid once for all by the NT apostles and prophets (cf. Rev. 21:14). The cornerstone is Christ (1 Cor. 3:10, 11). In 3:4–6, Paul will show that the foundational role of the apostles and prophets lies in their reception of the revelation of the previously undisclosed mystery of Christ, and the Gentiles’ inclusion among His people. The fact that the apostles and prophets make up the foundation of the church is an indicator that these offices have passed away. Since the foundation has been laid, there is no longer any need for apostles or prophets in the church. Until Christ returns, the church will build on this foundation, not by adding new revelation but by coming to an ever fuller understanding of what the apostles have given us and an ever more faithful application of their teaching to believers.

3:1 Paul begins a prayer that his Gentile readers will be filled with the presence of Christ and be able to grasp the truth about their Redeemer’s love and power (vv.14–21). Yet Paul’s mention of his special call to serve the Gentiles leads him to interrupt himself to explain the nature of his own ministry and insight into the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ (vv.2–13).

prisoner. Paul is under house arrest in Rome as he writes this epistle (Acts 28:16, 30).

3:5 as it has now been revealed. The silence of the OT about Paul’s mystery—the union of Jews and Gentiles on equal terms in the church (v.6)—is relative, not absolute. Many OT prophecies speak of the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one people of God, a fact that Paul recognized in his teaching (Is. 19:25; 56:3–7; 66:18; Acts 26:22, 23; Rom. 4, 15:8–12). The membership of Jews and Gentiles in the church on fully equal terms, however, was not explicitly articulated in the OT Scripture, nor was it fully implemented in history until Christ’s death and exaltation inaugurated the new covenant. That is, the precise mystery that was not fully revealed is that Gentiles can become part of true Israel by identification with Christ. They do not need to travel to geographical Israel and become Jews, obeying the kosher laws, being circumcised, and so forth. Christ is now the only identifier for a true Israelite.

3:6 Gentiles are fellow heirs. Only in the light of Christ’s sacrifice does God’s plan become clear: in one magnificent act,
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, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family, in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

He removed the enmity between Himself and humanity and also took away the divisions that fracture humanity (2:14–18).

3:10 the rulers ... in the heavenly places. For Paul, there is no more basic division in the human race than that between Jew and Gentile. That they can be united with each other in Christ displays the profound wisdom of God (Is 55:8, 9; 1 Cor 2:6–10), and it proves even to supernaturally powers that Jesus is Lord of the universe (1:20–23).

3:16 strengthened with power. Paul returns to the motifs of power and knowledge (v 19, 20) that were the subject of his prayer for illumination of believers’ minds (1:19–22).

3:17 grounded in love. The strength and knowledge for which Paul prays for believers are directed not toward their individual achievements but toward their love for one another, in response to the immeasurable love of Christ for them (v 19, 4:32–52).

3:20 the power at work within us. See 1:19–23, 2:5, 6. This power is the Spirit of the risen Christ.

3:21 glory. Because of the power that God has given to the church, Paul gives glory to Him. Paul’s doctrinal exposition opened in doxology (1:13–14) and now closes in doxology, laying the groundwork for his outgoing of the ethical implications of God’s gracious calling to His people in Christ (4:1). As in 1:13–14, 3:21 indicates that God’s “glory” is the goal and main point of everything expounded in chs. 1–3. Believers should live to give God glory and to reflect God’s glory.

4:1 calling. Paul earlier spoke of a hope to which believers are called (1:8, 4:4), now he focuses on the life to which they are called. God’s call is both sovereign and gracious (1 Cor 1:26–31), and in the ethical and relational instructions that follow, Paul will repeatedly ground his exhortations in the gospel truths already expounded in chs. 1–3.

4:3 maintain the unity of the Spirit. God’s Spirit has united believers by drawing them to the Father through faith in the Son and indwelling them as a new temple (2:18, 21, 22). Christians have a responsibility to retain and express their unity through the Spirit’s fruit, which include humility, patience, and love (v 2, Gal 5:22, 23).

4:4–6 one. This word is repeated seven times in vv. 4–6—three times regarding the persons of the Godhead and four times regarding aspects of His salvation. Just as the first half of Ephesians begins with the all-important work of the Trinity (1:3–14), so the second half of the book begins that way.

4:8 Ps 68 celebrates God’s triumphant march from Mount Sinai in the wilder-
9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into 'the lower regions, the earth?' 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended 'far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for 'building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to 'the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, 14 to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of 'the fullness of Christ, 15 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 16 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 17 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.

THE NEW LIFE

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, 'in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, 19 alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to 'their hardness of heart. 20 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 21 But that is not the way you 'learned Christ! —22 assuming that 'you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 23 to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 24 so that you may be mature in the fullness of Christ.

prophets. The NT prophets conveyed special revelation to the early church. Their functions included prediction, exhortation, encouragement, warning, and explanation (Acts 15:32, 21:9–11, 1 Cor. 14:3). The teaching of the NT prophets and apostles laid the foundation of the church (2:20; 3:5), and certain aspects of their work related to that unique task have been discontinued. However, teachers and elders continue to be responsible for exhorting, encouraging, and warning believers through the explanation of God’s Word (2 Tim. 4:1, 2).

evangelists. People especially gifted to proclaim the gospel (Acts 21:8, 2 Tim. 4:5).

shepherds and teachers. The two words may go together to refer to a single set of individuals who both shepherd and instruct God’s flock. On the other hand, too distinct but related offices may be in view: “teachers” and other elders who provide spiritual oversight with less of a focus on teaching (1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Tim. 5:17).

4:12, 13 It is not primarily those mentioned in v. 11 who do the work of the ministry, it is the people they equip. Effective teachers help believers find their own way to benefit the rest of the church.

4:13 the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Saints’ ministries to each other, which further the building of the body of Christ, will continue until all believers attain maturity or perfection, as defined by the norm of Jesus Christ Himself. This process will last until Christ’s return from heaven. So the mark of increasing maturity is believers’ ongoing pursuit of conformity to Christ and of helping one another in that pursuit as they await the return of Jesus (Phil. 3:12–16, 20, 21).

4:16 body. Believers are not given gifts for their own private benefit, and no one can grow to maturity in isolation (1 Cor. 12:7, 12–26).

4:17–19 While the letter to the Romans shows God as giving Gentiles over to a reckless and wanton life (Rom. 1:24–31), Ephesians presents the same progression from the human side: those who have turned aside “have given themselves up” (v. 19). Similarly, in Exodus, God is said to harden Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 4:21, 7:3), but Pharaoh also hardens his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32, 9:34).

4:22–24 put off . . . be renewed . . . put on. Belonging to Christ involves replenishing an old life, the way of living “in Adam” (the “old self,” or “old man”) and embracing a new one, the way of living “in Christ” (the “new self,” or “new man”). The image is that of taking off frayed...
belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

WALK IN LOVE

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that no one who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,
Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

WIVES AND HUSBANDS

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

Christians’ presence alone may expose sins through contrast, or Christians may openly denounce such sins.

5:18 be filled with the Spirit. While the sealing of the Spirit (1:13, 14; 4:30) is a once-for-all initiation into the Christian life, the filling of the Spirit applies to all the Christian life. This filling is progressive and is to be sought on an ongoing basis. In the parallel passage in Colossians, Paul tells Christians to let the “peace of Christ” govern their hearts and to allow the “word of Christ” to dwell in them richly (Col. 3:15, 16). The one who is filled with the Spirit is filled with Christ, God, and His Word (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; cf. John 14:16, 26; 16:12–15; 17:17).

5:19–21 addressing . . . making melody . . . giving thanks . . . submitting. These three actions make explicit the actions that result from and exhibit the Spirit’s filling in believers’ lives.

5:22–6:9 At least as far back as Aristotle (fourth century B.C.), Greek ethics had addressed relationships within the household in a familiar pattern: husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. Consistently, the interest was to help the male head of household learn to govern his family and slaves. In their treatment of such rules, Paul and Peter (1 Pet. 2:18–3:7) transform the question from how husbands, fathers, and masters dominate to how they can imitate the love of Christ in their own lives by nurturing those under their care. Simultaneously, as wives, children, and slaves understand their roles in terms of service to Christ, they turn from being passive objects in a social world that devalues them and become instead active partners with God in expressing Christian love before a world divided by gender, age, and economics. Jesus gives life to a new community of love—the church, His own body. His love also defines the marriage relationship for His people. Paul teaches that the genders are complementary and a man and a woman are equal before God. Yet in marriage, God has called the husband to exercise leadership. This leadership is not absolute, for the husband is not to be followed if he calls his wife to sin. Nevertheless, the husband’s leadership role gives him the initiative in directing his family in glorifying the Lord, to which the wife responds. Paul’s understanding is grounded in the creation order (1 Cor. 11:8, 9; 1 Tim. 2:13), and he takes account of the lingering effects, even among Christians, of the fall (1 Tim. 2:14). Redemption in Christ restores the intimacy men and women were created to enjoy in marriage.

5:23 submit. A Christian wife is called to grateful acceptance of her husband’s care and leadership.

of the church. In other passages on Christ’s headship in this letter, Paul speaks of the way Christ governs the universe and the church (1:22) and serves as the source of the body’s health and growth to maturity (4:14–16).

Savior. It is especially in His role as Savior that Christ serves as the husband’s model (vv 25–27).

5:24 as the church . . . so also wives. The church’s subjection to Christ is a revealed and heavenly order, not a natural order. Christ’s disciples were His friends, not just His servants, and He died for them (John 15:12–15; cf. Luke 22:25–27).

5:25 Husbands, love. The emphasis in the passage is not the husband’s authority to govern, but his responsibility to love.

as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Nowhere in the New Testament is Christ’s self-sacrificing love applied more directly to a specific relationship as a pattern to be emulated (cf. v. 2). Christ did not give up His kingly authority or become subject to the church when He “gave himself up for her,” but His authority was expressed through His sacrifice, especially since this accomplished redemption and victory over Satan.

5:28–32 A person’s union with his or her own body is intimate and permanent, so
He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 

2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 

4 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 

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

BONDservants AND MASTERS

5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 

6 not by the way of eye-service, as if people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 

8 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 

10 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 

12 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, 

13 against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 

14 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 

15 Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 

16 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 

17 Therefore put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 

18 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and for the messenger who takes the gospel to the heathen (Is. 52:7). Paul has in mind conformity to His image gives them confidence in resisting temptation. As believers taking on the righteous character of Christ (4:25; 5:9) while their growing familiarity with the truthfulness of God’s Word is seen as a powerful weapon in the believer’s arsenal (Col. 1:23). The Lord is the "shield" of His people (Gen. 15:1; Ps. 144:1, 2). Paul sees believers as having in mind the confidence that comes from certainty about the truthfulness of God’s Word.

6:13 the whole armor of God. Paul combines the weapons of a Roman foot soldier with a number of OT images of God, or the Messiah, as a warrior (see esp. Is. 11:1–5). Strikingly, what is said of God and the Messiah in the OT is applied to believers.

6:14 fastened on the belt of truth. The Roman soldier’s leather belt supported and protected his lower abdomen, gathered his tunic together, and held his sword. Paul seems to have in mind the confidence that comes from certainty about the truthfulness of God’s Word.

breastplate of righteousness. Believers are protected by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them (Rom. 4:6–11; Phil. 3:9), and they can stand up to the accusations of the devil, whose title in Greek means “slanderer” (Rom. 8:31–34). Simultaneously, Paul sees believers taking on the righteous character of Christ (4:25; 5:9) while their growing conformity to His image gives them confidence in resisting temptation.

6:15 shoes for your feet. This is a clear allusion to Is. 52:7. Paul has in mind the messenger who takes the gospel to others. The image here is of the Roman soldier’s sturdy sandals, which gave him stability and protection in battle, so that Isaiah has been combined with this Roman background.

6:16 shield of faith. The Roman shield was large enough to cover the whole body; it was made of wood, covered with animal hide, and bound with iron at the top and bottom. When dipped in water before a battle, it could extinguish arrows that had been dipped in pitch and set ablaze. In the OT, the Lord is the ‘shield’ of His people (Gen. 15:1, Ps. 144:1, 2).

6:17 helmet of salvation. This part of the armor is what God is predicted to be wearing when He would come to judge and defeat the opponent in the end-time battle (cf. Is. 59:17). Believers are to identify with this armor in Christ. For Paul, salvation is a present experience (2:8 and note) as well as a future hope (1 Thess. 5:8). The believer’s final ground of confidence is the faithfulness of God to complete the salvation He has begun (Phil. 1:6).

sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The one offensive weapon in the believer’s arsenal is compared to the Roman sword, short and designed for hand-to-hand combat. Jesus used the Word of God in His battle against the temptations of Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13). The Lord was prophesied to make the mouth of His messianic Servant like a sharp sword (Is. 49:2; Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15). Christ has begun to fulfill this prophecy at His first coming (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16), and the prophecy will be completed at Christ’s final coming (Rev. 19:15). Christ’s followers also have this offensive weapon when they believe in Christ and come into union with Him.

6:18–20 The battle theme in this passage ends with an urgent call to militant prayer (“keep alert”) on behalf of all believers and on behalf of Paul’s ministry (Col. 4:2–4). It is possible that, together with “the sword of the Spirit,” prayer is one more offensive weapon in the believer’s arsenal.

6:21–24 The absence of personal greetings in this letter may be an indication that it was intended for circulation to more than one church.