

Ephesians Week 2 TDs

1. Explore the Introduction (1:1-23).

Prescript: 1:1-2

Paul's letters open with a Prescript, which includes an **Address** (whom it's to) and **Greeting** ("Grace and Peace to you . . ."). We get our first hints or echoes of the purpose of Paul's letters by how he describes himself and his audience in the Prescript.

Did you know that the phrase "in Ephesus" is not included in several of our best ancient manuscripts, which raises questions about the original recipients of the letter? Here's how it looks literally: "to the saints the ones being" or "who are [in Ephesus] also faithful in Christ Jesus." So without "in Ephesus," the Address reads, ". . . to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus." On the other hand, we do have many manuscripts with the whole phrase "to the Christians/saints in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus," and thus we should explore how such a description reflects (anticipates) the content to come.

Some believe that Ephesians was a "circular" letter, intended to be delivered/read to more than one church (we'll come back to this later). The brevity of the modifying description of the audience ("the . . . faithful in Christ Jesus") certainly doesn't contradict this idea. But why address them as "faithful"? (Perhaps we should compare the very last phrase of the letter.) And, though the word "saints" is a general description of Christians in Paul's letters, it's always worth considering the meaning of the word in relation to the rest of the book: are there any nuances of the word "saints" that may help us understand who Paul means in the Address.

From your reading thus far, how does the phrase "an *apostle* of Jesus Christ by *the will* of God" connect to any themes or emphases of the letter?

What about the description of the audience as "saints . . . who are also faithful in Christ Jesus" or ". . . faithful ones in Christ Jesus." Does being "faithful in Christ Jesus" anticipate something significant?

Blessing: 1:3-14

Observe that verse 3 is an introductory, summary statement; 1:4-14 fleshes out that statement.

What are the "spiritual blessings" enumerated in 1:3-14?

Who are the recipients of those blessings?

The first and obvious answer to that question—based on 1:3-14—is that "we" are—those who are "in Christ." (Did you notice how many times the phrase "in Christ" is used in this opening

blessing/prayer?) On the other hand, there is an important transition in vv. 12-13 from “we” to “you”—one that raises a fascinating question about the purpose/function of this passage.

If “you” in v. 13 is the audience (the recipients of the letter)—and there is a clear transition to and accentuation of the fact that those hearing this vaunted description of the incredible advantages of being “in Christ” are *also* now partakers of such divine grace—who is “we” in vv. 3-13? If “you” in v. 13 are the Ephesian Christians or other predominantly Gentile/non-Jewish churches of Paul established in his missionary outreach . . . To put it briefly, if “you” are Gentile Christians, who are “we”?

Is there any difference between the “we” group and the “you” group? Clearly there is or the transition of v. 13 makes no sense. The real question is, is “we” inclusive or exclusive? Does “we” include the audience (and by extension you and me)? Notice that in addition to an obvious switch from “we” to “you” in v. 13, Paul identifies who “we” is in v. 12: “we who were the first to hope in Christ.” And notice that he saves that identifying description until the very end of the paragraph (cf. the withholding of the name Onesimus in Philemon 1:10).

Whom does “we” refer to in Eph 1:3-14? (And what are *their* spiritual blessings in Christ?) Whom does “you” refer to? Could this distinction help us understand the place/purpose of this “first” Introduction in Ephesians?

Extra, Extra . . .

Could there be a gradual shifting or sharpening of the meaning of “we” as the passage unfolds (as a rhetorical device), becoming more discrete, so that by the end of the paragraph, the listeners are forced to retrospectively separate themselves from the “we” group (only to “rejoin” them in v. 13, as they too are now a part of the blessings of “in Christ”)? (And notice “we all . . .” in 2:3.) And isn’t that the way it happened? Jews first (“we who were the first to hope in Christ”) and then Gentiles (“you too”)? But at the very beginning of this letter, “we” and “you” are one (rhetorically and psychologically). What is the primary purpose of Ephesians and how might this relate to it: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: There is one body . . .”?

Thanksgiving: 1:15-23

The “Thanksgiving” is the early/opening part of Paul’s letters where he thanks God for the recipients of the letter (or actually reports his prayerful thankfulness). The expression of thanks quickly becomes an enumeration of the things for which he prays on behalf of the audience. From a literary/reading perspective, *it’s extremely helpful to understand this section of material as introduction.* (For more on various conventional/stereotyped forms of Paul’s letters, see *Rediscovering the books of God*, 89-101, and Appendix 2 [344-51].)

List the primary topics introduced to us in Ephesians 1:15-23? Is there anything in the way the paragraph is structured that helps to isolate the topics?

2. Highlight Key Words and Phrases.

Rule #4 of the “Ten Rules” is to “Highlight recurring words and ideas.” A good time to do that is when you’re looking at the Introduction, assuming you have read the rest of the book (to help you see which words and ideas appear to be key). Highlighting key words and phrases throughout a Bible book can be a time-consuming process, but it’s extremely helpful for learning what the most important ideas are and how they relate to each other. To cut down on the time involved, I recommend that you do this as we work through the book.

Highlighting key words works best with a more literal version. The NASB (New American Standard Bible), ESV (English Standard Version), New King James Version (NKJV), and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) are some options. I’m going to give it a try with the ESV (I usually do it in Greek—so I’m going to test the process using an English version). The basic idea is that you use various colored markers or electronic formatting to highlight words and phrases that are repeated and/or appear to be significant. Then continue to color/highlight those words as you go through the sections of the book. And obviously, you should do this on a photocopy of the text or an electronic version—not your real Bible.

Here’s a very simple example from the opening of the book of John:

In the beginning was the **Word**, and **the Word** was with God, and **the Word** was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was **life**, and the **life** was the **light** of all people. The **light** shines in the **darkness**, and the **darkness** did not overcome it. . . . (John 1:1-5).

Word = blue

life = green

light/darkness = yellow

the Word being (with) God = red letters

Go through Ephesians chapter 1 (1:1-23) and highlight/color-code key words, ideas, and phrases. What are some of the key words/phrases in 1:1-2, 1:3-14, 1:15-23?

As an example—and this is only an example—I’m including a copy my colorings of chapter 1. I copied the ESV version from www.biblegateway.com and then did some highlighting in Microsoft Word. It’s best if you do the exercise yourself rather than just relying on my highlights, however.

Sample Highlighting of Chapter 1

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by **the will** of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are **faithful** in Christ Jesus:

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

3 **Blessed** be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed** us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he **chose** us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In **love**⁵ he **predestined** us for adoption as sons/adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to **the purpose of his will**,⁶ to the praise of his glorious **grace**, with which he has **blessed** us in the **Beloved**.⁷ In him we have **redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to **the riches** of his **grace**,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all **wisdom and insight**⁹ **making known** to us **the mystery** of **his will**, according to **his purpose**, which he set forth in Christ¹⁰ as **a plan** for **the fullness** of time, **to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth**.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an **inheritance**, having been **predestined** according to **the purpose** of him who **works** all things according to **the counsel of his will**,¹² so that we who were the **first to hope** in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.¹³ In him you also, when you heard **the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed** in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our **inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of **your faith** in the Lord Jesus and **your love** toward all the saints,¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ 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,¹⁸ 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**,
¹⁹ and what is **the immeasurable greatness of his power**

toward us who **believe**, according to **the working** of his great **might**²⁰ that he **worked** in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above **all rule and authority and power and dominion**, and above every name that is named, **not only in this age but also in the one to come**.²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as **head** over all things to **the church**,²³ which is **his body, the fullness** of him who **fills** all in all.

3. Trace Out the 3 Subjects/Themes of Eph 1:17-20.

Trace out the “themes” set forth in Eph 1:17-20, especially those enumerated in vv. 18-19 (I call these the “enumerated” or “triadic” themes—or, more simply, “the theme list”). Paul prays that God

. . . 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, [“the hope of his calling”]
- 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 great might . . .

Where is the theme of “the hope of his calling” referenced or developed in the remainder of the letter? What is it?

Where is “the glorious riches of his inheritance among the saints” referenced and developed? What are they?

Where is “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” referenced and developed? What is it?

Expert’s Corner

Key Questions Review

Ephesians 1:3-14

- Why does Paul start a letter to Gentiles (non-Jews) praying like a Jew?
- Why does Paul add a second introductory section (in the form of a Jewish blessing/prayer)—a “Preface”—to his usual Thanksgiving/Introduction?
- What role does the movement from “We” to “You” play in the “double” introduction?

Ephesians 1:15-23

- Why is there so much emphasis placed on the need for wisdom/knowledge/understanding in the book of Ephesians?
 “. . . give you a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know . . .” (1:17-18; cf. 1:8-9; 3:3-5, 9-10; 18-19; 4:13-14, 17-18, 23; 5:15-17, etc.).
 How does (the theme of) “understanding” relate to (the theme of) “power”?
- What one idea or phrase would you use to summarize the most important concept that they/we need to understand? (This might make a good title for the book of Ephesians and is something we’ll need to come back to at the end of our study.)
- How do the themes listed 1:18-19 relate to the primary point/purpose of Ephesians? (Check out the flow and conclusion of 1:15-23: understanding . . . themes . . . place of Christ for the church/body.)