

Introduction to Ephesians

How can this study help me

The letter to the Ephesians is like a spiritual multivitamin. It contains all the essentials to sustain healthy spiritual life in just six chapters. There are high potency extracts on the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, praise, intercession, the sovereignty of God, spiritual warfare, fundamental relationships, the structure and purpose of the church and unity.

Paul's perspective as he writes is what today we call 'global.' This means he writes with a big perspective, not just for local churches in and around Ephesus, but for the whole church in the world of his day. This universalises what he says and makes it relevant for us today.

In the early history of the church it became known as a "third way." The first way of managing the world was that of the *status quo*, the dictatorship of the day. It was inevitably corrupt, but held power, often ruthlessly. The second way was that of the opponents of the status quo, who inevitably sought to gain power by violent revolution. It was an attractive alternative because the change promised restoration of rights and identity. Then along came the followers of another Lord, one called Christ Jesus. They lived in the status quo, but apparently didn't prop it up. And they weren't advocates of societal change by revolution. They talked about a change of attitude to God bringing about an internal revolution, a new perspective. It was clear to most observers that they were in fact a third way of living. Hence the name "the third way." The book of Ephesians might well be the manifesto of the Third Way.

No one who studies this letter can afford to neglect the other records in the NT about the church. No other church has so much of its history intersecting with the unfolding story line of the Bible. Firstly, there's the unique events associated with the foundation of the church (Acts 18:18 - 20:1). Then there's Paul's very personal reflection on 3 years ministry and his concerns about the leadership (Acts 20:17 - 21:1). 1 and 2 Timothy is written against the background of the disintegrating situation in Ephesus. Then the exalted Jesus has the last word on the church (Revelation 2:1 - 7). All these records add richness to the picture of a typical church, its struggles and its history.

Any study of Ephesians is also helped by utilising the archaeological information available on the worldwide net. The temple of Artemis in Ephesus,

one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is in the background to Acts 19:23-41 (<http://www.cleveleys.co.uk/wonders/templeofartemis.htm>). So too is the great theatre (<http://www.csanet.org/newsletter/may96/nl059603.html>). Any reader would also be helped by a visual tour of the city (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/qi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ntap.k12.ca.us%2Fwhs%2Fprojects%2Fhistory%2Fephesus.html>).

There are also good introductions to Ephesians on the web (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/ephesians.pdf>).

Why study this book today? Simply because it supplies a comprehensive orientation to all we need to know to get safely to heaven. There is no other compact, enriched perspective on what God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit have done and continue to do.

What can you hope to get from it? It's most likely that you will be stretched in your understanding. But even more importantly you will come away from studying it with new understanding of prayer, a passion for missions and a renewed commitment to the church.