

Ephesians

Part 1: Ideological Part: Mystery of Christ in the Church 1:3—3:21

1:1-2: Formal letter opening; greeting (Superscription)

1:3-14: Acknowledgment of God's past beneficence; blessing

1:15—2:10: Brief thanksgiving followed by intercession: Asking God for the readers' enlightenment, especially that they might know God's power at work in them

1:15-19: Thanksgiving and prayer 1:20—2:10: (Digression I) The workings of God's power

1:20-23: Unity of Judeans and Greeks: Translate intent into action

2:1-10: The consequences of life together with Christ (2:1-10) 2:11-22: Reconciled through Christ: Victory over alienation

The unity of Judeans and Gentiles created by Christ

3:1-13: (Digression II) The apostle Paul, proclaimer of the mystery of Christ among non-Israelites

The apostle as interpreter of the divine mystery

3:14-21: An intercession for the unity of the faithful with Christ

End of formal opening

Prayer and doxology

Part 2: Exhortation Part: A Life Befitting the Jesus-Group Calling 4:1—6:20

4:1-16: A call to maintain Jesus-group unity The unity of the Spirit

4:17—5:20: A Two-Ways form

The Sons of Disobedience and the Children of Light

5:21—6:9: A household management

The households of believers

6:10-20: A call to stand firm

Doing battle with evil

Epilogue 6:21-24

Conclusion: Personal matters and final blessing

PERSPECTIVES FOR READING THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

1. To understand language, a reader must have a common context with the writer/speaker. The present form of this document suggests that the context for this letter is first-century Ephesus, the Roman capital of the province of Asia Minor. The difficulty is that some significant manuscripts of this document make no mention of Ephesus. What can one do with a contextless document?

2. Furthermore, this letter makes no reference to any specific problem and rarely defines the significance of any terms. The lists of virtues and vices are presented with no definitions. Like the whole letter, one is left floundering as terms indicate abstract references to qualities and directions of behavior. The outcome is that modern readers are left, as a rule, to provide meanings from their own experience.

3. In sum, the most we can say is that Ephesians is a general letter directed to Jesus-groups (where?) with generalized content.

PART 1: IDEOLOGICAL PART: MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH
1:3—3:21

1:1-2: FORMAL LETTER OPENING; GREETING (SUPERSSCRIPTION)

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.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 1:1-2

Hellenistic letters opened with a formula consisting of the name of the sender(s), then the addressee(s) and a greeting. These three elements are called a superscription (or prescript). The next element, connecting the superscription with the body of the letter, is called a thanksgiving. The thanksgiving consists of a statement of indebtedness to God for something done in the past plus wishes for the proximate future. **Hellenistic Letter.**

1:1: While the presumed sender of this letter is Paul, there is no such presumption concerning the addressees or recipients. While in some manuscripts the addressees are Jesus-group members in Ephesus, other equally ancient manuscripts have no mention of any addressees. By this time (about 70 c.e.) Paul, who was already dead, was remembered as someone of notable preeminence in the region of the western Israelite Diaspora. However, this region must not be confused (or fused) with the eastern Israelite Diaspora (Palestine and points east). There was a language divide and two systems of communication that produced a serious gap between the western Jewish Diaspora and the eastern one (see Edrei and Mendels 2007:91).

Paul and his successors belonged to the western Israelite Diaspora, where they spread the gospel of God: that the God of Israel raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead with a view to the forthcoming Israelite kingdom of God.

1:1: “By the will of God.” It is important to notice how the post-Pauline writers adopt Paul’s perspectives, outfitting his activity with essentially theological motivation. “Theologically” means God motivated, with God as the main actor in Jesus-group formation, support, and activity. “The will of God” means what pleases God. It is equally important to note that in the Pauline tradition, the word “God” invariably means the God of Israel. After all, Pauline Jesus-group members lived in a world where “there are many gods and many

lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

1:2: In this greeting, the writer pretending to be Paul calls the God of Israel “father,” a word deriving from the kinship institution and often used in the kin-like relationship of social superior to inferior called patronage. For Paul, the God of Israel is most often described as “Father” or patron of the gathering summoned by God. **Patronage System.**

When this letter was written, the inhabitants of Ephesus were mainly various Roman and Hellenistic colonists in this capital of the Roman province of Asia. Many of these inhabitants were Israelites living in the area as well. Antiochus the Great (223–187 b.c.e.) had relocated hundreds of Israelite families from Mesopotamia to this region. They seem to have been more hellenized than the Israelites in the neighboring province of Galatia to the east.

1:3-14: ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S PAST BENEFICENCE; BLESSING

1:3 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 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on 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 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 1:3-8

Hellenistic letters open with an opening statement of grateful acknowledgment and indebtedness for God's beneficence (see the reading scenario HELLENISTIC LETTER) to the recipients of the letter, first for the past (vv 3-8) followed by a wish for their well-being in the proximate future (vv 9-14).

Thanksgiving. Even if this is a general letter to Jesus-group members, all must have received beneficence from God the father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:4-6a: God's gracious acts before time began were and continue to be of benefit to all Jesus-group members: (1) election: God chose Jesus-group members from the foundation of the world; (2) predestination: God chose Jesus-group members for the praise of his beneficent activity. In Israel, talk of such elective and predestinational activity are rooted in the present, a sort of after-the-fact predestination. Once something happens, one may say that God chose it to happen and predestined that activity because it happened. Jesus-group members were chosen to be in the group, predestined to be Jesus-group members, because they presently are.

1:6b-9: These verses specify further manifestations of God's beneficent actions rooted in subsequent historical experience of Jesus: (1) redemption (1:6b-7) and (2) revelation of the mystery of God's will (1:8-9). Redemption refers to the restoration of a person's or group's honor and standing in society. Revelation of the mystery of God's will refers to the making known of the persons and events that make known God's proximate intentions; here "to bring all things together in Christ."

1:11-14: Such revelation is not simply information but implies God at work effecting what the revelation entails: we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory." And "in him [you] were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit . . . [awaiting] redemption . . . to the praise of his glory."

1:15—2:10: BRIEF THANKSGIVING FOLLOWED BY INTERCESSION: ASKING GOD FOR THE READERS' ENLIGHTENMENT, ESPECIALLY THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW GOD'S POWER AT WORK IN THEM

1:15-19: THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

1:15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord

Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 1:15–19

1:15–16: A brief acknowledgment praising God for the reader's faith and love.

Thanksgiving

1:17–19: An intercessory prayer asking God for the readers' enlightenment, especially that they might know God's power at work in them.

Two digressions follow (1:20–2:10 and 3:1–13). The first digression focuses on God's power at work in Christ and in Jesus-group members.

1:20–2:10: (DIGRESSION I) THE WORKINGS OF GOD'S POWER

1:20 God put this power to work 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 age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

2:1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through 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 ages to come he might show the immeasurable 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 the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 1:20—2:10

1:20–23: First of all God's power was manifest in Christ, notably by raising Christ from the dead. God thus exalted him over sin and the evil powers and over the church.

2:1–10: God's power is at work in Jesus-group members (2:1–10). When all were dead in sins (2:1–3), God made us alive together and seated us together through Christ (2:4–7).

2:8–10: All this is God's doing through Christ.

2:11–22: RECONCILED THROUGH CHRIST: VICTORY OVER ALIENATION

2:11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in

the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 2:11-22

This is the second part of the first digression (1:20—2:10). It focuses on non-Israelites (often called “Gentiles”). Ethnocentric Mediterraneans divided the population of the world into two, a binary division consisting of Romans and barbarians, Israelites and the rest of humanity. This “the rest” were variously labeled “the [other] nations” (in Latin, *gentes*), or Gentiles. **Gentiles.**

We are now told that Gentiles were reconciled with Israelites through Christ and his victory over alienation. The argument develops in a chiasm of three segments:

A: Gentile readers before and after Christ; emphasis on before (2:11-13).

B: Explanation of believers’ changed status; Christ’s twofold activity (2:14-18).

Horizontally: Christ is our peace because he has made two people one. How? He destroyed the hostility (2:14-15).

Vertically: Christ proclaimed peace because through him both peoples have access to the Father. How? He destroyed the hostility (2:16-18).

A’ Gentile readers before and after Christ; emphasizing “after” (2:19-22).

3:1-13: (DIGRESSION II) THE APOSTLE PAUL, PROCLAIMER OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AMONG NON-ISRAELITES

3:1 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2 for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, 3 and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4 a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 5 In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the

same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. 8 Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. 13 I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 3:1-13

This is the second of two digressions in this section of the letter (first digression 1:20–2:22) dealing with God's power.

3:1: "For this reason" refers to 1:20–2:22, and develops the topic of God's power at work in and through Christ's apostle, Paul. This verse clearly notes that Ephesians is directed to non-Israelites. There is little in the letter about Israel and its traditions. Instead the focus is on the sky.

3:2–4: Here is an interpretation of the episode presented by Paul in Gal 1:15–16.

"Mystery of Christ" refers to something hitherto unknown, as explained in 3:5–6, that is, that non-Israelites "have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

3:7–10: This mystery about the union of all human groups, Israelites and non-Israelites, hidden by the creator God from the beginning is now also revealed to "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

3:10–11: This mystery ("God's eternal purpose") has been realized through Christ Jesus, resulting in access to God through faith in him.

3:14–21: AN INTERCESSION FOR THE UNITY OF THE FAITHFUL WITH CHRIST

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16 I pray that, according to

the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 3:14-21

3:14-19: A second intercession for the readers' empowering, infilling, and enlightenment.

3:20-21: A doxology praising God for his cosmic power at work among Jesus-group members.

**PART 2: EXHORTATION PART: A LIFE BEFITTING THE JESUS-GROUP
CALLING 4:1—6:20**

Now (4:1—6:20) the writer uses the language of exhortation in an appeal to demonstrate Jesus-group identity: unity in diversity.

4:1-16: A CALL TO MAINTAIN JESUS-GROUP UNITY

4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." 9 (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13. until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 4:1-16

4:1-6: These verses focus on unity. Awareness of unity produces social identity.

4:1-3: The call to maintain the unity of the group: humility, gentleness, patience, love, and a bond of peace result in unity of the Spirit.

4:4-6: The basis of this unity is the seven unifying realities of the faith: one body and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

4:7-16: Here the focus is on diversity: while Jesus-group members share the identity of unity, they also share in diversity.

4:7-11: The basis of Jesus-group diversity is Christ's diverse gifts traced to the event of the ascension—thanks to an Israelite quotation from Israel's Scriptures.

4:13-16: The goal of the diverse gifts is unity, maturity, stability, and growth of the church.

4:17-5:21: A TWO-WAYS FORM

4:17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ! 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to

put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. 5 Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” 15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and

making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 4:17—5:21

Teaching moral behavior in terms of Two Ways (i.e., good versus evil) was common among moralists in the first-century Mediterranean. This unit on the Two Ways consists of four sections, each marked off linguistically by the opening phrase: (1) 4:17 “therefore . . . walk; (2) 5:1-2 “therefore. . . walk; (3) 5:7-8: “therefore . . . walk; (4) 5:15: “therefore. . .walk.” “To walk” means to behave, conduct oneself. While the section is compact, it presents a readily memorable Two Ways segment.

(1) 4:17-32: Do not be led by hardness of heart like Gentiles, but follow Christ as “living law.” Put off the old self and put on the new. There are five exhortations about what this might mean:

1. Put off falsehood, speak truth (to ingroup members).

Lying.

2. Do not nurture anger.
3. Thieves should not steal but rather work and share.
4. There should be no negative speech; speech should benefit others and not grieve God’s spirit.
5. Have no malicious fits toward others, but be kind and forgiving, as God forgave through Christ.

(2) 5:1-6: Imitate God and love as Christ loved, who was an offering and sacrifice to God.

A List of what to avoid (two sets of three vices): “But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you. . . . Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving.

B Why: as is proper among saints

A’ Three types of persons to avoid: 5:5 “Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

B’ Why avoid such persons: 5:6 “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.”

(3) 5:7-14: The focus is on light and darkness as metaphors. The pattern here is as follows:

- A What not to do and why (5:7-8a)
- B What to do (5:8b-10)
- A' What not to do and why (5:11-14)

(4) 5:15-21 The focus here is on drinking and its outcomes. In first-century culture, the Spirit is a liquid, poured into the believers and resulting in song (5:19) or giving thanks (5:20). In such settings of ebullience resulting from the Spirit, Jesus-group members must show respect to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21).

5:21—6:9 A HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. 33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. 6:1 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: 3 “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” 4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in

singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; 6:6 not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, 8 knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free. 9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 5:22—6:9

This unit is on household management. In antiquity, there was no “economics” pure and simple. Economics, the social institutions concerned with provisioning society, was embedded either in the household or the “city.” The word translated “family” (*oikos* or *domus*) referred to the household with its personnel and resources. *Oikonomia*, or household management, described what is involved and who is involved in family production. Here the writer sets out who is involved in the process in proper Jesus-group order: first, husbands and wives, then fathers and sons, and finally masters and slaves.

Just as economics was embedded in the kin group, so too was religion. **Religion, Economics, Politics.** Paul’s rules for behavior of Jesus-group members when gathered “in church” (e.g., 1 Cor. 14: 23) in a domestic religion setting were focused on egalitarianism. But the rules for households concentrated on production, self-sufficiency, and family business organization. The rules here are specifically about household business management.

5:21–33: The first set of business partners is the husband and wife. While it may seem odd to us to find relationships with the Lord involved in such family business, obviously such was not the case for the writer of this letter and his fellow Jesus-group members. What is obvious to first-century family business partners is that males deal with those outside the group, while wives focus on the inside.

5:21–24: These verses describe the procedure of running the family business. “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.” For the husband is in charge of the business; hence he is the head of the wife “just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

5:26-27: This is an analogy taken from marriage rituals; the wife is washed by the women in attendance before being dressed for the ceremony.

5:28-29a: The statement points to Jesus-group marriage as a blood relationship (not a legal one). Husbands and wives form one body deserving of mutual love (i.e., active concern and affection) with a quotation from Gen. 2:4 serving to underscore this point with a hermeneutical use of the Bible.

5: 29b-30: The relationship of husband and wife serves as an analogy for the relationship between Christ and the church—hence, Jesus-group members are members of the body of Christ.

5:31-32: These verses review the points made previously. “Mystery” refers to a hitherto unknown reality. “This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.”

5:33: This verse concludes this section. “Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.”

6:1-4: This set of duties looks to children, who work in the family business. Children are to obey father and mother, for this is right. The writer now cites one of the Ten Commandments of relevance to children “‘Honor your father and mother’—this is the first commandment with a promise: ‘so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” Finally, fathers are reminded not to provoke their children to anger but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Finally, a third segment involved in household management includes slaves, described as Jesus-group members, “slaves of Christ.” For slaves, obedience to the master is doing the will of God.

6:5-6: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”

6:7-8: Slave obedience will be rewarded by God: “Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.”

6:9: This is the motivation for masters: “And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.”

6:10–20 A CALL TO STAND FIRM

6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

TEXTUAL NOTES: EPH. 6:10–20

The scenario here is that of an army unit ready for a defensive stand. The Jesus-group member, like an infantryman, is to stand firm, keep the infantry line in order. The unit here has three subunits: 6:11–13 (beginning with “put on”), 6:14–16 (beginning with “stand”), and 6:17–20 (beginning with “receive”).

6:10: In the introduction with a general exhortation, note that the Lord empowers, not the Jesus-group member.

6:11–13: Subunit 1: To put on the clothing of another person indicates a change in or empowerment of the person being thus clothed. The image is frequently used metaphorically, meaning to be empowered by whatever it is that has clothed that person (e.g., “Clothe oneself with Christ” [Gal. 3:27] means to be empowered or enabled by Christ). To put on God’s armor means to be enabled or empowered by God (or Christ). The purpose of the procedure is “to stand,” (vv. 11 and 13), that is, to maintain the military line against the attack of the devil and the celestial cohort of “rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the

heavenly places.” Hence the need of the “whole armor” of God (vv. 11 and 13). In Ephesians (1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 4:8, 27; 6:11-12) the struggle is against negative celestial powers.

6:14-16: Subunit 2: Once more, the emphasis is on “stand,” that is, maintain the line. Of course this is a collective task, although the metaphorical equipment (truth, righteousness, gospel of peace and shield) looks to the individual, yet for the shield to work it must be watered down and put next to the shield of another, thus quenching flaming arrows shot at the defensive life.

6:17-20. Subunit 3: The last two items put on before battle were the helmet and sword (here: salvation and the Spirit). The conflict consists of action accompanied by prayer, here for all one’s fellow Jesus-group members. The “as if” letter writer here also asks for prayers for Paul.

What “Paul” seeks is boldness, that is, the ability to set aside the fear of being publicly shamed. “Paul” is considered an ambassador of God; hence, those who chain him dishonor God.

EPILOGUE 6:21-24

6:21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus will tell you everything. He is a dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts. 23 Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

TEXTUAL NOTES: *EPH. 6:21-24*

These lines provide a “personalized” conclusion to this letter. Tychicus is known from Col. 4:7; Acts 20:4; and 2 Tim. 4:12; he was from the province of Asia, where Ephesus is located as provincial capital. Given the recommendation here, Tychicus would be the perfect messenger.

The final words consist of a concluding peace wish (as in 1 Thess. 5:23) and a prayer for God’s patronage to all.