

Introduction

As we turn our hearts to the Word of God, we should never do so casually or without prayer. The Scripture warns us that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Jesus also commanded us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

To truly engage with God's Word, we must approach it with our entire being—heart, mind, and strength. Too often, we approach the Bible with our intellect alone, neglecting our dependence on the Holy Spirit as our teacher. Yet, Jesus promised His followers: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). Before we open the Scriptures, let us always pray—asking God, through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, to grant us spiritual discernment, guide our minds, and bring His truth to life within us.

The Epistle to the Ephesians: The High Ground of the New Testament

We are about to read an epistle that many scholars regard as the *high ground of the New Testament*. That is a bold statement. Just as Isaiah chapter 53 is often called the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament, so Ephesians has been described as the theological summit of the New Testament.

Ephesus: Historical and Cultural Background

Ephesus was the capital of proconsular Asia, using the Roman designation—not Asia as we think of it today, but Asia Minor. In influence and prominence, Ephesus was second only to Rome itself. The city was consecrated to Artemis (also known as Diana), a pagan goddess commonly depicted with a bow, a crescent moon, and associations with fertility and power.

Colonized primarily from Athens, Ephesus became a center of philosophy, art, and learning. Ancient tradition associates figures such as Pythagoras with the city, and it housed schools linked to major Greek thinkers. Its harbor made it a vital commercial hub until silting from the Cayster River eventually diminished its economic power.

Most famously, Ephesus was home to the Temple of Artemis—one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Construction took 220 years. The structure measured approximately 418 feet by 239 feet and featured 127 columns, each nearly 60 feet high. It was four times larger than the Parthenon and stood until it was destroyed in A.D. 262.

Ephesus also possessed the largest theater in the Hellenistic world, seating approximately 50,000 people. This theater features prominently in the Book of Acts and remains one of the most impressive ruins in the region today.

Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other city during his missionary journeys—nearly three years, from approximately A.D. 54 to 57. During this time, Ephesus became the central hub of Christian ministry throughout Asia Minor.

Paul first visited Ephesus during his second missionary journey, leaving Aquila and Priscilla there while he returned to Jerusalem. During Paul's absence, Apollos ministered in Ephesus and later traveled on to Corinth after receiving further instruction from Aquila and Priscilla.

It was from Ephesus that Paul wrote First Corinthians. His ministry there concluded with the riot instigated by Demetrius, recorded in Acts chapter 19.

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

On Paul's final journey to Jerusalem, he chose not to return to Ephesus directly, knowing it would draw a large crowd. Instead, he stopped in Miletus and summoned the Ephesian elders to meet him there—approximately thirty miles away. His farewell address, recorded in Acts chapter 20, offers one of the most moving and instructive leadership discourses in Scripture.

Paul reminded them that he had taught publicly and from house to house, holding back nothing that was profitable. He testified to both Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He warned them that grievous wolves would arise—both from outside and from within—seeking to draw disciples after themselves.

Most importantly, Paul declared that he had not shunned to declare to them *the whole counsel of God*. This phrase is critical. It is our safeguard against doctrinal imbalance and spiritual error. Sound theology must fit together as a whole.

Ephesus After Paul

After Paul's departure, Timothy remained in Ephesus as a shepherd and leader. Later, the Apostle John also made Ephesus his home. Tradition holds that the Gospel of John and his epistles were written there, and Ephesus likely became the final resting place of the apostle.

Ephesus remained a major center of Christianity well into the fifth century, hosting important church councils. Over time, however, the harbor silted up, the city declined, and today it exists only as ruins near a small Turkish village. Yet its spiritual legacy endures.

Christ's Letter to Ephesus

Approximately thirty years after Paul's farewell, Jesus Christ addressed the church at Ephesus directly in Revelation chapter 2. He commended them for doctrinal faithfulness, perseverance, and discernment—but rebuked them for leaving their first love. They were busy with the work of the King, yet had neglected intimacy with the King Himself.

The warning was clear: doctrine without devotion leads to spiritual decline.

Structure and Theme of Ephesians

The Letter to the Ephesians divides naturally into two halves:

- Chapters 1–3: Doctrine — what God has done for us in Christ
- Chapters 4–6: Duty — how we are to live in response

We inherit spiritual wealth by faith and invest that wealth through obedient living. This pattern echoes the Book of Joshua, where Israel entered into possession of its inheritance amid spiritual warfare. Likewise, believers are called to walk in the fullness of their inheritance now, not merely in the future.

Key Verses:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:2)

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:17-20)

Opening Greeting and Central Themes

Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God*. His calling was not self-appointed, nor conferred by men. It was sovereignly ordained.

The phrase *“in Christ”* appears repeatedly throughout the epistle and defines the believer’s identity, position, and inheritance. Every spiritual blessing is found in Christ—secured by His finished work at the cross and affirmed by His resurrection.

Grace always precedes peace. One cannot experience peace with God apart from grace.