

# joining the saints

ephesians



# Welcome to Ephesus...

The transient nature of greatness is rarely as clearly displayed as it is in Ephesus, a city once renowned throughout the Classical world as a major trading port, a metropolis of some 250,000 inhabitants and a religious and cultural center. It was also the home of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the monumental Temple of Artemis, known as Diana to the Romans. Nearby, nestled on a mountain, is a tiny chapel built on the spot where, according to tradition, stood the last home of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. For a modern traveller's eye view, take a look at [www.the-eye.com/ephesus.htm](http://www.the-eye.com/ephesus.htm)...



Paul spent a number of years as pastor of the Ephesian church, teaching publicly and from house to house. Some time later, he met with the Ephesian elders on his way back to Jerusalem. And now, in prison in Rome, Paul writes his famous letter.

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Imagine... you've finally been invited to join the ultimate country club. The leather armchairs are worn smooth by countless generations of members who came before you; trophies line the walls, silent tribute to battles fought and won before your time. The scent of pipe tobacco mingles with a musty oak and leather undertone, while a balmy summer breeze caresses the first tee of the world class golf course just beyond the balcony. And now, at last... you're part of it...

That's exactly the tone set by the first two chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. All God's plans are coming together in a sensational bunch of people. They're much more than just a club... they're "the church." And recently added to the founding members, there's a bunch of people just like us.

What's involved in being part of "the church"? Where does it fit in God's plans for the universe? How do I become part of it? What's the dress code? And how should I behave now I've joined? All these questions, and more, are answered in Ephesians.

### Meet the "life-members"

Any exclusive country club has its venerated "founding members." Their names are usually painted in gold leaf on an honour roll in the foyer. To properly understand Ephesians, we need to meet "the saints." Who are they? (The Roman Catholic church is currently debating whether to add Mother Theresa to the approved list of saints. On that view, "saints" are a kind of "super-Christian." Paul's use of the term is different.)

Read Ephesians 1:15, 1:18, 3:18 and 6:18 (Also, there are hidden references in 2:19 and 3:8, where "saints" is translated as "God's people.")

Paul is pleased that his readers \_\_\_\_\_ the saints. He wants them to know the rich \_\_\_\_\_ of the saints. He wants them, together with the saints to \_\_\_\_\_ the depths of Christ's love. He wants them to keep on \_\_\_\_\_ for the saints.

### Here's a new thought...

**While the New Testament often calls all Christians "saints" - which simply means God's "set-apart" people - here in Ephesians Paul is using the term to refer particularly to Jewish Christians, the "founding members" of the church.**



## Who are “we”, and who is “you”?

A quick reading of Ephesians 1 and 2 shows that Paul is addressing two different groups of people. Sometimes he’ll talk about “us” or “we”... and other times he’ll switch to “you.” This is puzzling. Different commentators have different ideas about who he means by “we” and who he means by “you.” The most common option is to simply ignore the distinction and read the section as if “us” refers simply to “us.” But maybe that misses Paul’s point!

Read Ephesians 1:3 to 2:2. Where does Paul change from “we/us” to “you”?

## Have a stab...

What distinction do you think Paul is making with the use of “us” and “you”? Who do you think the two groups may be?



**us**



**you**

Let’s get some help from a little further on in Ephesians. Paul makes it absolutely clear who he’s talking to in 2:11 and 3:1

**2:11**

...you who are \_\_\_\_\_

**3:1**

...for the sake of you \_\_\_\_\_

**3:6**

...heirs together with \_\_\_\_\_

By a process of elimination, it’s no surprise to find that the other group Paul talks about (and counts himself part of) is...

### The invisible “AND”...

The NIV Bible chooses not to translate the Greek word “kai” (and) in Ephesians 1v1. The sentence can read “to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus in Ephesus”, or “to the saints AND the faithful in Christ Jesus in Ephesus.” (Colossians 1 opens in a very similar way. Check it out.) Translating the AND highlights that Paul is addressing these two distinct groups!

## Where we’re heading...

The Jews of Paul’s day had very little time for non-Jews, who they lumped together and simply called “the gentiles.” (A rough equivalent of the word “gentiles” is “ethnics.”) Likewise, your average Ephesian “gentile” may not have had a lot of time for Jews, either. With their quaint customs and Saturday synagogues, they weren’t exactly the social elite. But the point we’re about to see is important. **JEWISH CHRISTIANS** are God’s **SAINTS**. **JEWS WHO HAVE TURNED TO JESUS** are the culmination of God’s long-term project in the world. They’ve had God’s promises all along; theirs is a history and a heritage second to none. Theirs was the hope that has been fulfilled by the Messiah, Jesus. And now ordinary Gentiles are invited to join in. But let’s hear it in Paul’s words...



### the story of us Jewish Christians

1:2 God has \_\_\_\_\_ us in Christ

1:4 God has \_\_\_\_\_ us before creation

1:5 God has \_\_\_\_\_ us to be his sons

1:7 God has \_\_\_\_\_ us through his blood

1:8 God has \_\_\_\_\_ his will to us

1:11 In Christ we were \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_ according to God's plan.

1:12 We were the \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ, for  
the praise of his glory.



### the story of you gentile Christians

2:1 You were \_\_\_\_\_ in your sins

2:12 Remember that at that time you were  
\_\_\_\_\_ from Christ, \_\_\_\_\_ from  
citizenship in Israel, and \_\_\_\_\_ to the  
covenants of the promise...

without \_\_\_\_\_

and without \_\_\_\_\_.

**the no hopers**



**It's easy to forget where we ordinary Australians fit in the picture above. We're among the hopeless Gentiles!**

Clearly, in some ways there's all the difference in the world between the background of the Jews and the background of the Gentiles. But there are some significant similarities, too.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3. What do the Jews and the Gentiles have in common?

According to 1:10, what has God's intention always been?

Read 1:13 and 2:13. What surprising thing has happened to these Gentile Christians? How?



# CHRIST



### **Implications for getting to know God...**

Relating to God is not something we should take for granted! It's easy to be glib about it, but we need to remember that before Christ came, we "Gentiles" were a hopeless case. Israel was the only nation that knew the true God - the rest of us simply followed "the ways of the world."

- a) How does Paul describe our predicament in 2:12?
- b) What has changed to bring us near to God?
- c) What word does Paul use to describe God's action in doing this, in 1:7, 2:5 and 2:8?
- d) What does it actually mean that we have been "saved by grace, through faith"?
- e) From 2:8-10, what's the point and purpose of doing "good works"?

How have well meaning "religious" people tended to reverse this?

Why is there no room for pride or boasting among Christians?

### **Implications for getting to know one another**

Read through the book of Acts, and it's clear that Jews were the first to follow Jesus. These Jewish Christians were exactly what God intended his Israel to be - they'd had the hope of His promises for generations, and now in Christ they had the fulfillment. They truly are God's "saints." Now, though, the doors of this exclusive club have been thrown open.

Read Ephesians 2:14-20

- a) Jews saw a huge division between themselves and the rest of humanity. What was it, and what happened?
- b) What gives both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians access to God?

What are the implications of this for us in the area of "spiritual status"? Can anyone claim "superior access" to God? Why or why not?

- c) From 2:19-22, what is God's "vision for the church"?

### **This is no mere club!**

God is gathering his people, his treasured possession - and we're invited to be part of it. He's building his reputation, and the reputation of his Son, on us (we are for "the praise of his glory") United in a world of divisions, hopeful in a world that's hopeless, we Gentiles are invited to be "fellow citizens with God's saints" (2:19). This is God's church. Membership is free - but certainly not cheap.

In Acts 20, Paul meets with the elders from the church at Ephesus.

How does he describe the church in Acts 20:28?

What did it cost? How should that influence the way we value being part of God's church?

**To ponder for next time:** God is seriously committed to his church. Are you?



**Advanced Study Option:**

Work through the passage again, replacing “we” or “us” with “we Jewish Christians” at every point.

Typically, we haven’t read Ephesians this way. Does it make a difference to your understanding of any key doctrines?

You may like to think through any implications for your understanding of...

- a) the doctrines of election and predestination
- b) redemption
- c) echoes of the “death and resurrection of Israel” foreshadowed by Hosea 6

Stop when your brain hurts.