

Introduction

“POUND FOR POUND” Ephesians may well be the most influential document ever written. Within the history of Christianity, only the Psalms, the Gospel of John, and Romans have been so instrumental in shaping the life and thought of Christians, but all three of these works are much longer than the few pages of this letter. Ephesians has justly been described as “the Switzerland of the New Testament,” “the crown and climax of Pauline theology,” and “one of the divinest compositions of man.” The explanation of the gospel and of life with Christ provided here is powerful and direct. If read receptively, it is a bombshell.

This letter is the most contemporary book in the Bible. Apart from a few terms and the treatment of slavery, Ephesians could have been written to a modern church. It is about *us*. It describes human beings, their predicament, sin, and delusion, but much more it describes God’s reaching out to people to recreate and transform them into a new society. Most of the letter is about two subjects: *power* and *identity*. It describes the power God’s Spirit gives for living. It shows who we really are without Christ and who we become both individually and corporately with Christ. It is about how we understand ourselves and how we can get along with each other and God. The focus on God’s new society also makes Ephesians one of the most important works for understanding the church.

Modern society is in a mess. For all the good things we enjoy, we seem to have lost all sense of definition and direction. Who are we really, and what holds us together? We all have a need to belong, but to what? Is there anything that merits our commitment? This life is hard. Where will we find the resources to make it? Our society’s moral guidelines have been erased. Are there boundaries and values that function as legitimate guides? What is a human life for anyway?

The church is supposed to have answers to such questions, but in our day it has lost both its direction and its voice. The lives of Christians are too often no different from the lives of non-Christians. The gospel has been [p 18](#) diluted to ineffectual pabulum and so garbled by cultural trappings that it bears little resemblance to the pages of the New Testament. The Western church, including the American church, is not the—or even *a*—New Testament church.

We need nothing less than a new reformation, and Ephesians is the document to bring it about. This short little letter is a surprisingly comprehensive statement about God and his work, about Christ and the gospel, about life with God’s Spirit, and about the right way to live.

The Message of Ephesians

THE LETTER IS consistently theocentric and Trinitarian. Its message about God’s grace and love is encouraging and rewarding. God is not some remote being; he is the prime actor throughout the letter. From the beginning the letter shows we were always meant to belong to God and

that God has been and is at work to make the reality of our relationship with him happen. In Christ and by the Spirit God brings us to himself and gives us what we need for life.

All the privileges of life are found in *union with Christ* and conveyed by the Spirit. Ephesians presents a gospel of union with Christ more powerfully than any other New Testament letter. Nothing short of attachment to him will rescue us from the human plight, and nothing can define us as human beings more than attachment to him. From living with him we learn how to live for him.

The understanding of the gospel in Ephesians challenges and redefines the superficial understanding of the gospel prevalent in our day. This gospel requires people to act; this faith works. Believers have a responsibility to make choices and to change the pattern of their lives. An easy believism or passive faith cannot survive under the penetrating message of this letter.

Repeatedly Ephesians distinguishes one's former way of life with life in Christ. These *formerly-now* contrasts offer a painful but realistic assessment of life without God, and they also give engaging descriptions of conversion and its effects. Nowhere else in the Bible is conversion so clearly described as here. In fact, the contrast in 5:8 functions as a summary of much of the letter: "For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." Such portrayals of life before and with Christ are designed to keep people from living like everyone around them and to call them to mirror their relation with Christ in their daily lives.

Consequently, Ephesians provides some of the most direct and practical guidelines for living found in Scripture. Not every subject is covered by any means, but the foundation and guidelines are so clear that application to [p 19](#) other issues follows directly. Be warned, however: Ephesians does not give a list of rules to follow, nor can response be superficial or easy. This letter requires us to change our inner being and character in a radical way. Life can no longer merely happen, for all our activity must now take place in, to, and for the Lord. Truth and love as defined by Christ become the twin forces guiding all else. In fact, Ephesians has more focus on truth and love than nearly all other New Testament documents.

The concern for truth and love undergirds an emphasis on relationships, both between God and human beings and among people. Ephesians is relentlessly relational. All relations in this letter are viewed—not individualistically—but from the perspective of union with Christ. From life with Christ we relate to God and to others. We are part of Christ and part of each other (cf. 4:25; 5:30), a statement that also functions as a fitting summary of what it means to be a Christian. Not surprisingly, then, the themes of unity, peace, and the body of Christ have a dominant role in the letter. We come to God bound to Christ and to the other believers in him. God is honored in the company of people bound together in Christ.

In explaining what this group is and how it functions, Ephesians provides some of the most insightful theological thinking on the church in the New Testament. Various images—body, building, family, and marriage—combine to stress interrelatedness, belonging, connection, and mutuality. Our world is fractured by racism, individualism, and classism, and all of us know the pain and the enormity of these problems. Ephesians holds up another model, one that destroys racism and divisions, for it tells of God's providing a wholeness that binds us together. Our churches need to recover their identity as corporate representations of people being joined together in Christ. Ephesians tells us how to be the church.

One of the largest failures of the church is in worship and prayer. Ephesians does not discuss these subjects; rather, a good deal of Ephesians *is* worship and prayer. The first chapter is entirely praise and prayer, a primer on worship that demonstrates how to worship and engages us in worship. Possibly the first three chapters are prayer. Also, Ephesians throughout incorporates worship language from the early church, so much so that large chunks of the letter have been identified by scholars as tradition or hymns that Paul borrowed from earlier sources. Not all such identifications are convincing, but Ephesians is prime material for learning how to worship and pray.

Furthermore, Ephesians focuses on evangelism, though the focus is much different than the halting attempts of the modern church. The theology of [p 20](#) the gospel and the understanding of the church presented in Ephesians require us to rethink how evangelism is done. This letter has the potential to revitalize how we do evangelism.

With all the concern about Christian identity, Ephesians also has a pervasive emphasis on the mind. The revelation that comes in the gospel changes our thinking process. Conversion is a renewal of the mind, a transition from a darkened stupor to alert and enlightened wisdom. Too often Christians neglect the treasure of their own minds, and our churches and our society show it. Life's problems are large, and threats to life and right living are real, but Ephesians will not allow us to fear or retreat. Rather, it calls us to think, to learn, to become wise, and to act. If you are not willing to work mentally, Ephesians asserts that Christianity is not the religion for you.

Ephesians truly is the letter for today. This is the message we need, for it tells us who we are, who God is, and what we are to do. It tells us that for Christians the origin and recipient of every act is Jesus Christ (see esp. 6:5–9). This letter, almost two thousand years old, comes as the word of God, seeking entrance with us and response from us. It offers both direction and confidence for living. We and our churches need to make this letter part of our very being.

What Is This Letter?

DESPITE THE GRANDEUR of the letter and the breadth of its influence, Ephesians is something of an enigma. We do not know to whom the letter was sent, from where it was sent, or why it was sent. (Those who do not accept Paul's authorship would add *by whom it was sent*.) All of Paul's letters include a co-author like Timothy or Silas except Romans and Ephesians, the two most influential Christian letters. It is startling that precisely for these two New Testament letters their purpose continues to be a matter of serious debate.

More detailed treatment of introductory issues may be found in the standard New Testament introductions and technical commentaries. In this commentary a summary of the most important issues is provided, as well as an assessment of the options and an indication of how decisions affect the application of the letter. The most important subjects requiring analysis are the letter's destination, purpose, and authorship, which are to some degree intertwined. [p 21](#)

Destination

TWO FACTORS MAKE Ephesus unlikely as the destination of the letter. (1) The words “in Ephesus” are omitted in several early witnesses, including p46, which dates to the beginning of the third century and is the earliest manuscript we have of this letter. A few scholars argue that Ephesus was the original destination and that the city’s name has been removed to make the letter acceptable to a broader audience. Most scholars, however, recognize that “in Ephesus” has been added later to the text. The problem is that without the “address,” verse 1 does not make much sense. Several emendations have been proposed, but although interesting, none is convincing.⁶ The suggestion that the letter is a circular letter to be read in more than one place is probably correct, but the hypothesis that the original letter left a blank to be filled in by Tychicus, the letter carrier (cf. 6:21–22), is without foundation.

(2) Most likely the author did not know the readers personally. The statements in 1:15; 3:2–4; and 6:23–24 do not sound like comments of someone with firsthand knowledge of his readers. According to Acts, Paul spent better than two years in Ephesus and was emotionally attached to the believers there. If this letter were to Ephesus, one would expect it to have more of the warmth evidenced in Philippians instead of the general tone it has.

Obviously then, specific knowledge of Ephesus—as amazing as this ancient city was—does not help us much in interpreting the letter. We may safely assume that the letter was a general letter to Gentile believers in southwestern Asia Minor and that it became identified with Ephesus as the most important city between Rome and Antioch.

The Purpose of the Letter

THE PURPOSE OF the letter is directly tied to the question of authorship. Over a century ago Adolf Jülicher felt constrained to accept Pauline authorship because no convincing hypothesis could explain why a Pauline disciple would compose such a letter. This is still the case, and the strained explanations of p 22 purpose by those advocating authorship by a Pauline disciple show how embarrassing the problem is. The suggestion of E. J. Goodspeed, for example, that Ephesians was intended to introduce a collection of Paul’s letters, is rarely accepted. What would motivate a pseudonymous author to write just this general material for an unspecified audience?

The difficulty is obvious in the discussion of A. Lincoln, who believes the letter was written by someone other than Paul. After summarizing the letter, he admits this “summary may appear not to amount to very much, hardly to have been worth the effort....” He suggests its original readers needed to be reminded of the debt they owed to Paul, but why was that important twenty or more years after his death, and is this letter the way to achieve the goal? Lincoln further suggests that the local concerns that prompted Colossians were still around and needed addressing,¹² but the more Ephesians is brought into the context of the situation in Colossians, the more likely it was written by Paul at about the same time.

R. Schnackenburg’s solutions are no more helpful. In his view the author addresses pastoral concerns of his time, which are not easy to determine. He suggests a *crisis* of leadership that the author of Ephesians noted in a *nonspecific* manner because of diverse local conditions, but which he nevertheless considered *ominous*. Schnackenburg concludes that “we are justified in talking of a ‘spiritual crisis’ which is mirrored in the muted admonition of Eph.” The juxtaposition of “muted” and “crisis” shows the improbability of the hypothesis.

No crisis appears to be addressed in Ephesians, and no specific opponents are attacked. Why would a pseudonymous author write a general letter with no particular purpose? Until a convincing explanation surfaces as to why someone would compose a letter like Ephesians and what that person was trying to accomplish by sending it out as a letter of Paul, the explanation of non-Pauline authorship cannot be judged as attractive or compelling.

On the other hand, if the letter is from Paul, its purpose is still difficult to detect. It is so general that it almost appears to be a sermon or tract dressed up as a letter. In fact, some have suggested Ephesians is a baptismal homily or a sermon for renewing baptismal vows. This is unlikely, although 4:22–24 is probably a baptismal confession. Even though the subject matter in this document is general, this is a genuine letter and its form should not be slighted. [p 23](#)

The key to understanding the purpose of Ephesians lies in Colossians. There Paul did address a problem, one in which Christians were being belittled and disqualified and were in danger of being led astray by other religious teachings (Col. 2:4–23). The problem was exacerbated by the embarrassment of Paul's imprisonment. The Colossians also were Christians Paul had not met, but notice the depth of feeling expressed for these Gentile believers in 2:1–5. Even though he did not know them, they belonged to his ministry. His desire for them was that they would be *encouraged and united in love and would understand* fully the mystery of God in Christ. That is precisely the purpose of Ephesians. After addressing the specific problem in Colosse, and with the same depth of feeling for Gentile Christians, Paul wrote a more general letter to encourage, unite, and inform all the believers in that area.

Ephesians, then, has as its main purpose *identity formation*. It seeks to shape believers by reminding them how wonderful God's work in Christ is, how significant their unity with Christ is, and what living for Christ looks like. It is a letter of definition and encouragement.¹⁶ Paul sought to ground, shape, and challenge his readers so that they might live their faith.

Authorship

THE WITNESS OF the early church for the influence of Ephesians as a letter from Paul is extensive. It was referred to early and often, from Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) on. It is quoted by Ignatius and Polycarp and included both in Marcion's canon of Paul's letters (about 140) and in the Muratorian Fragment (usually dated about 180).

Moreover, Ephesians claims to be by Paul and has Pauline language and theology. Not until the nineteenth century was its authenticity as a Pauline letter questioned.

Yet in our day, the authorship of the letter is heavily debated, and in academic circles it is increasingly not respectable to argue for Pauline authorship. However, despite the frequency with which Pauline authorship is denied, the case against Ephesians is *not* obvious. The situation is not like [p 24](#) the Pastoral Letters, where major differences in language exist. The language and thought of Ephesians are still very much Paul's own. Even those who reject Paul's authorship speak of the writer as pondering Paul's letters (especially Colossians) so intimately that they became part of the equipment of his mind. But if Ephesians is so Pauline, why was the authorship ever questioned?

Usually obstacles to Paul's authorship are divided into several categories:

- (1) *Linguistic and stylistic arguments.* For example, Ephesians uses “in the heavenly realms” (which Paul’s other letters only use as an adjective) and “the devil” instead of “Satan” (as in his undisputed letters). Ephesians is much more liturgical and expansive, having long sentences and numerous prepositional phrases and genitive (“of”) constructions.
- (2) *Historical arguments.* The Jew-Gentile controversy is settled, and “the barrier” broken down in 2:14 is easier to understand after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.
- (3) *Literary considerations.* The relation of Ephesians to Colossians and other New Testament letters suggests dependence of the author on these other writings. Furthermore, the comments in 2:20 and 3:1–13 suggest too lofty a view of the apostles and of Paul to be understood as coming from Paul. Would Paul have spoken of the “*holy* apostles” (3:5)?
- (4) *Theological differences with the authentic letters.* The word *church* in Ephesians refers to the universal church, whereas in Paul’s other letters it usually refers to a local church. The death of Christ is supposedly diminished. The terms *body* and *mystery* are supposedly used in slightly different ways from other Pauline letters.

Such issues are not irrelevant, but they are not difficult to treat. The linguistic and stylistic variations are not out of bounds, particularly given the subject matter and the fact that much of Ephesians is doxology and prayer. If the letter was written around A.D. 60, the problem of the Judaizers would not be at the fore. In fact, the tone of Romans is already different from Galatians, and the concern for the unity of Gentiles and Jews in Ephesians is similar to Paul’s concern in Romans. The other theological differences can be accounted for if the letter was intended as a circular letter and if a primary concern was unity. The death of Christ is still very much a theme of Ephesians, despite assertions to the contrary (see 1:7; 2:13–16; 5:2). p 25

True, Ephesians *is* different in some respects, but most of the objections raised are a smokescreen. At bottom, the rejection of Pauline authorship is based on two items: its relationship with Colossians and the description of Paul and the apostles and prophets in 2:20 and 3:1–13 (especially 3:4–5), which seems to exalt Paul’s own role and that of the apostles excessively. Decisions on these items usually determine conclusions about authorship.

The relation to Colossians. Colossians should be read repeatedly when interpreting Ephesians, for the two are intimately related, somewhat like the relation of Romans and Galatians, (though the parallels there are not as extensive). Approximately 34 percent of Colossians is paralleled by about 25 percent of Ephesians. The parallels are not exact and rarely exceed five words in succession. The one exception to this is—of all places—the instructions to Tychicus, for which the two letters have thirty-two words in common and are almost in verbatim agreement.²⁰

These are the facts; all else is theory. Are the parallels evidence of one mind (Paul’s) writing two letters in the same time frame—one addressed to a specific church with a specific problem and the other more general and addressed to a broader area? Or are the parallels evidence of a Pauline disciple who is responsible for one or both letters?

The description of Paul and the apostles (2:20 and 3:1–13). The description of the apostles and prophets as part of the foundation of the church (2:20) is understandable, at least as long as metaphors are not viewed inflexibly. The apostles and prophets do have a founding role, as evidenced also in Revelation 21:14, where the wall of the heavenly city is said to have twelve

foundations, on which are the names of the twelve apostles. The focus of Ephesians 2:20 is not on the apostles and prophets personally, but on their contribution as teachers who established the faith. The intent with this verse is no different from Colossians 2:7 (“rooted and built up in him, p 26 strengthened in the faith as you were taught”), even though Colossians makes no reference to the people doing the teaching.

The material in 3:1–13 presents at the same time the strongest argument against Pauline authorship (3:5) and some of the strongest arguments for Pauline authorship. The seemingly self-centered statements about Paul’s own apostolic role, for example, have led those who reject Pauline authorship to conclude these verses are the attempt by a pseudonymous writer to claim Paul’s authority and theology for himself. At the same time, they see the self-identification in 3:8 (“less than the least of all God’s people”) as “theatrical ... artificial exaggeration ... forced and unnatural.” On the other hand, those who accept Paul’s authorship reject such judgments, see the description in 3:8 as the “very hallmark of apostolic authenticity,” and argue no disciple of Paul would dream of giving him so low a place. At least we must recognize that the tone and attitude of verse 8 is close to the words in 1 Corinthians 15:8–10 and 2 Corinthians 10–12.

Tension clearly exists between Paul’s exaltation of his apostolic office (3:3–7) and his humility (3:8), but this phenomenon is common in his unquestioned letters. Paul had a high view of his apostolic office, insisted on the legitimacy of that office, and would take a backseat to no one. In 2 Corinthians 3:1–4:6 he even saw the revelation in his gospel as superior to the revelation to Moses and comparable to the creation of light! His rank as an apostle depended on the revelation of the risen Lord to him, and both the book of Acts and his letters insist that the revelation to him included a call to take the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Rom. 1:1–5; Gal. 1:15–17). At the same time he knew he was unworthy of this ministry, for he had persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:8–10).

The most troublesome language is the expression “*holy* apostles and prophets” (3:5), for which no parallel exists in Paul’s letters. Is this indication of a later age venerating people like Paul? At first glance this seems convincing and would explain 2:20 as well, but a closer look diminishes the force of this argument. The worrisome word is *holy*, but that is because we read into that word an aura that suggests exaltation, reverence, and veneration. Remember that Paul’s most common way to refer to Christians is *the holy ones* (NIV *saints*). The word means nothing more than “those whom God has set apart.” If that is the connotation in 3:5, then no veneration by a past age p 27 is present. The word *holy*, in other words, is not a sufficient basis to reject Pauline authorship. I would suggest that nothing more is intended by 3:5 than one finds in Romans 1:1–5, where Paul describes himself as “called to be an *apostle* and *set apart* for the gospel of God” and as one who has received “grace and apostleship” to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. This description of the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 3 fits with the purpose of encouraging the readers and should be compared to Paul’s self-description as an ambassador of Christ in 6:20.

Moreover, what would a pseudonymous writer have gained by using such language (including 3:1–13)? Why would he refer to Paul as a prisoner and make nothing of his imprisonment? We can understand Paul’s feeling deeply about his Gentile mission and trying to emphasize it, but why would a pseudonymous author do that? Nor may we argue that

pseudonymity is a mere innocent literary device with no intent to deceive, and yet say that statements such as those in 3:1, 13 and 6:19–20 are “attempts at verisimilitude.”

In fact 3:13 and 6:19–20 may be keys in this discussion. If they are from Paul, these verses show the same concern he has in Philippians that Christians not be depressed because he is in prison. If written by a pseudonymous author, these verses accomplish little. Why warn people not to be discouraged over a man who has long been dead or ask people to pray for him?

In the end a decision about authorship will be made on some understanding of why 3:1–13 is included. In my opinion these verses express ideas passionately held by Paul and are paralleled in his unquestioned letters. Why they would be included by a later pseudonymous writer is unclear. I have a hard time imagining such an author investing so much and making so little of what he wants his readers to do with the material.

Other factors. Three additional factors deserve consideration. (1) Although pseudepigraphy is a proven literary device in the ancient world, too little attention has been given to the subject of pseudepigraphal letters. p 28 Paul warns about the possibility in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 in such a way that it is clear he does not condone the practice. Also, from all the evidence we have, the early church rejected known pseudepigraphal writings.³¹ Until we do a better job explaining both the specific motivations of a pseudepigraph, who the real readers are, and how the letter addresses them, any theory of pseudonymity must be viewed as inadequately based.

(2) The hypothesis of an imitator of Paul creates problems. The author would be a person who had read Paul’s letters, especially Colossians, so much that he (or she) became a *mirror* of Paul, not just someone who sounds a bit like Paul. Does the human mind even operate this way, particularly on the basis of a letter as short as Colossians? Would a first-century imitator even attempt to adhere to the style of his source? No evidence exists that this happened. Who is this marvelous mystery theologian who mirrors and even exceeds Paul, but has left no other known trace? Why would this person copy verbatim the instructions to Tychicus, the least important part of the letter? As G. B. Caird indicated, there are difficulties in attributing Ephesians to Paul, but these are insignificant in comparison with the difficulties of attributing it to an imitator.³⁴

(3) Most important, Ephesians has extensive parallels in language and style with the Qumran scrolls. Despite the fact that these extensive parallels were detailed over thirty-five years ago, few people have done justice to their implications. No other document in the New Testament is as close to the Qumran material as Ephesians, especially in the liturgical sections. These parallels not only show the writer was Jewish, they virtually require an early p 29 date for the letter. The later the date of Ephesians is set and the more the letter is removed from a Jewish context, the more difficult it is to account for the parallels.³⁷ The Qumran community was destroyed in A.D. 66, and Judaism changed significantly after A.D. 70. If the letter is dated between A.D. 80 and 95, what made a Jew in Asia Minor sound so much like the Judaism of Qumran?

Options concerning authorship. Various possibilities exist for resolving the authorship question. Alternatives include the following:

- (1) The letter was written by Paul. Whether an amanuensis was used is of little relevance. The date of the composition depends on which of Paul’s imprisonments are alluded to:
 - (a) if Ephesus, the letter would date about A.D. 55;

- (b) if Caesarea, about A.D. 58;
- (c) if Rome, about A.D. 60.

While a case can be made for any of these imprisonments, the Roman imprisonment is most likely.

- (2) The letter was written by Paul, but has additions added by another hand. This is unlikely, but evaluation of such hypotheses depends on the specific form the suggestion takes. On this approach, the main part of the letter would stem from one of the dates above.
- (3) The letter was written by a close disciple of Paul under his direction and/or following his intent, either while Paul was still in prison or closely after his death. The date again would be between A.D. 60 to 64 or in some variations as late as the early 70s.
- (4) The letter was written by a disciple and imitator of Paul some distance removed from his death. Often this person is left anonymous, but others suggest this disciple was Onesimus or Tychicus. On this approach the date of composition is assigned as early as A.D. 80 and as late as 95.

Almost forty years ago H. J. Cadbury asked cogently, “Which is more likely—that an imitator of Paul in the first century composed a writing ninety or ninety-five percent in accordance with Paul’s style or that Paul himself wrote a letter diverging five or ten percent from his usual style?” For me, the answer is obviously the latter. [p 30](#)

What Difference Does it Make?

WHETHER EPHESIANS IS from Paul or a disciple of his is of major importance for two reasons. (1) If it is not by Paul, it cannot be used to reconstruct Paul’s thought and that of the earliest church. Even if only subconsciously, all readers of the Bible carry in their heads a framework by which Scripture is understood. Assumptions about the occasion and time in which a document was written determine how it is understood. We do not read 1 Thessalonians the same way we read Philippians because of differing ideas about Paul the missionary in A.D. 50 and Paul the prisoner in A.D. 60. Do we include Ephesians in the attempt to understand Paul? Numerous books written on Paul’s theology disregard Ephesians completely. If Ephesians is by Paul, the picture these works present is skewed.

(2) If Ephesians is not by Paul, it will likely be considered less important than Paul’s other letters and will be used with less confidence. Those who date Ephesians to the latter part of the first century often see Ephesians as a movement toward “early catholicism” (usually a negative connotation). On this approach Ephesians is less focused on the Spirit, has less concern for the Parousia, salvation by faith, and Christology, and has more concern with ecclesiology and order. True, Ephesians does show development, but it is not early catholicism.

Those who reject Pauline authorship often argue that no devaluing of Ephesians should result. In reality, however, most of these scholars do consider it less authoritative. So while decisions about authorship and purpose do not necessarily make Ephesians less authoritative, in practice Ephesians is given less attention and less voice. But Ephesians is “the real thing,” and it deserves maximum attention and application.

Outline

WHILE EPHESIANS IS easily divided into large sections, disagreement exists over how the first three chapters should be outlined. Paul's doxology and prayer could extend from 1:3 to 1:23, to 2:10, to 2:22, or all the way to 3:21. Although the second half of the letter focuses on ethics, Ephesians should not be halved into theological and ethical parts. The second half is also theological and the first half is also ethical.

- I. Salutation: Identification of Author, Recipients, and a Greeting (1:1–2)
- II. The Body of the Letter (1:3–6:20)
 - A. A Meditation on God's Gift of Salvation (1:3–3:21)
 1. Doxology (1:3–14)
 - p 31 2. Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession (1:15–23)
 3. Salvation Viewed Comprehensively in Terms of Plight, Event, and Result (2:1–10)
Contrast between formerly and now in 2:2 and 4–10
 4. Salvation Viewed from the Perspective of the Recipients: A Reminder for Gentiles of Their Plight, Their Salvation, and Its Result (2:11–22)
Contrast between formerly and now in 2:11–13
Contrast between formerly and now in 2:19–22
 5. Salvation Viewed Personally: Paul's Role as a Steward of God's Grace to the Gentiles (3:1–13)
 6. Prayer for Strength and Comprehension of God's Love (3:14–19)
 7. Doxology (3:20–21)
 - B. Instructions to Live Worthy of God's Call (4:1–6:20)
 1. The Church's Task of Unity (4:1–16)
 2. Descriptions of the Old Life and the New Life in Christ (4:17–24)
Contrast between formerly and now
 3. The Practical Consequences of New Life (4:25–6:9)
 - a. Instructions for Living Together: Live in Love (4:25–5:2)
 - b. Instructions for Distinction from the Old Dark Ways: Live in the Light (5:3–14)
Contrast between formerly and now in 5:8
 - c. General Instruction to Live Wisely in the Spirit (5:15–21)
 - d. Specific Applications of Spirit Life to Home Life (5:22–6:9)
 - i. Instructions for Wives and Husbands (5:22–33)
 - ii. Instructions for Children and Parents (6:1–4)
 - iii. Instructions for Slaves and Masters (6:5–9)
 4. An Emotional Appeal to be Strong and to Live for God (6:10–20)
- III. The Closing of the Letter (6:21–24)
 - A. Instructions Concerning Tychicus, the Letter Carrier (6:21–22)
 - B. Benediction (6:23–24)¹

¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 17–31.