

Lesson 1: Letter to the Ephesians 1 and 2

God's Plan for Salvation, Generosity of God's Plan, The Church as Christ's Body

Paul spent a great deal of time in Ephesus, more than in any other church community. Scholars today do not all believe that this letter was written by Paul. Raymond Brown states that 80% of biblical scholars believe another writer is responsible for this letter, even though the letter begins by identifying Paul as the author. The language and tone are significantly different here than in Paul's earlier letters. The letter may have been dictated by Paul to another, or a disciple of Paul may have recorded the teaching and theology of Paul in order to preserve it. The actual date for this letter is also disputed. If the letter was written by Paul when he was in prison, the date would be in the early 60's. A much later date is suggested by those who believe that one of Paul's followers wrote the letter after his death. The letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter; it would have been passed from church to church and shared with many, not just the Ephesians.

1. **Read the introduction to the Letter to the Ephesians in your bible and share any interesting comments with your group.**
 2. **Review Paul's time in Ephesus in *Acts of the Apostles* 19:1-7, 19:23-28 and 20:29-38. What do we know about the Church in Ephesus from these verses?**
 3. **Read Ephesians 1:1-10. How does Paul begin this letter?
Compare Ephesians 1:3-6 to the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1077 below.**
 - a. **How are these verses similar?**
 - b. **What does this tell us about the impact of Paul's theology on Church teaching and theology?**
- CCC 1077** "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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us before him in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."
4. **Read again Ephesians 1: 1-10**
 - a. **What does Paul say is the source of our spiritual blessings? (See 1:3)**
 - b. **When was God's plan of salvation for us formed?**
 - c. **What blessings do we receive from Jesus Christ according to these verses? (1:7-10)**
 5. **Read Ephesians 1:11-14 and CCC 1107 on the next page. Look for footnotes on these verses in your bible to share with your group.**

a. In Ephesians *and* in the Catechism below, what is the role of the Holy Spirit?

CCC 1107 The Holy Spirit's transforming power in liturgy hastens the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the mystery of salvation. While we wait in hope, he causes us really to anticipate the fullness of communion with the Holy Trinity. Sent by the Father who hears the epiclesis of the Church, the Spirit gives life to those who accept him and is, even now, the "guarantee" of their inheritance.

6. Read Ephesians 1:15-23 and footnotes. Share interesting or helpful footnotes with your group.

a. In verses 1:15-18 Paul gives thanks for the holy, faithful ones.

b. What prayers or petitions does he make on their behalf?

c. In verses 1:19-23, how is Christ described? (Be specific and cite the verses you use.)

d. How is the Church described in these verses?

7. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and footnotes.

In 2:2-3, how does Paul describe humanity, *before* the coming of Christ?

In verses 2:4-5 *why* did God send Christ to save us? See also CCC #211.

CCC 211 The divine name, "I Am" or "He Is", expresses God's faithfulness: despite the faithlessness of men's sin and the punishment it deserves, he keeps "steadfast love for thousands". By going so far as to give up his own Son for us, God reveals that he is "rich in mercy". By giving his life to free us from sin, Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that 'I AM'". (John 8:28)

8. a. What does grace have to do with salvation?

b. What did we do to deserve God's grace? See also Catechism #1999 below.

CCC 1999 The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification:

Therefor if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself.

9. Read Ephesians 2:10-18 and footnotes. Remember that the earliest followers of Jesus Christ were all Jewish. If a Gentile wished to be a follower and a member of the Jewish-Christian community, the men had to become circumcised.

What do these verses reveal about God's plan for Jews and Christians?