

1 Ephesians Overview

Written by whom?

The author identifies himself as Paul. There has been some dispute about this, since there is an absence of the usual personal greetings. There are also verbal differences between this letter and others. However, it may have been different because it was intended to be a circular letter rather than one written to a specific congregation.

Written when and where?

Most likely around 60 AD, while Paul was in prison in Rome.

Written to whom?

While it is addressed to the saints in Ephesus, most likely it was written to Christians in the area and meant to be shared.

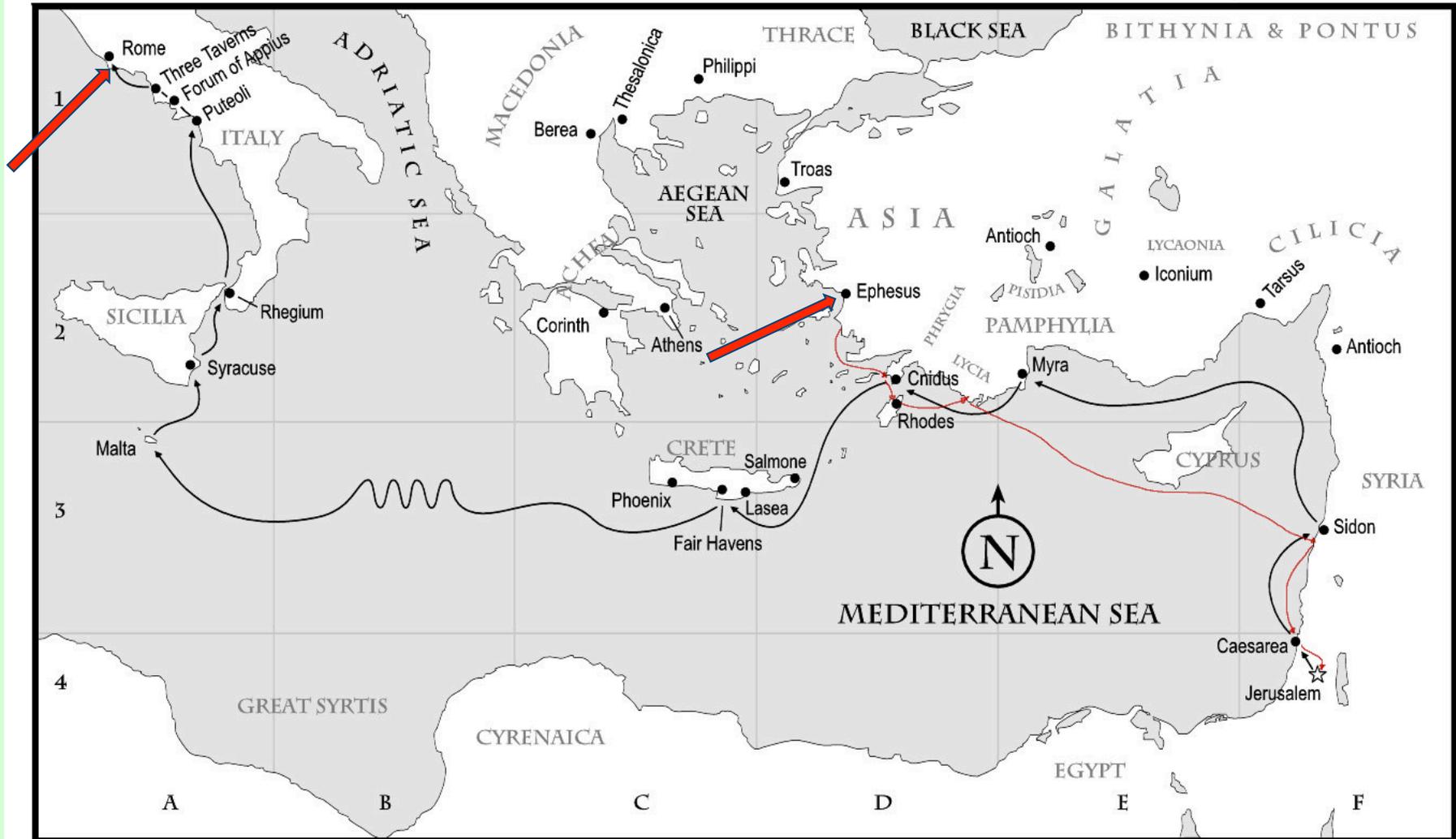
What form?

This was written as a letter, but it was most likely intended to travel from congregation to congregation. It does not address any particular error or heresy.

What's it about?

This letter is for teaching. Paul describes God's blessings and emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. Paul discusses God's high goals for the church, and near the end gives practical examples of the type of life expected of believers.

2 Paul's World



3 Ephesians Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. To whom was the letter written? (vs. 1)
2. Paul's long doxology is filled with praise and thanksgiving. (vs. 3-14)
 1. God has blessed us with every spiritual _____ in Christ.
 - 2.. He chose us before the _____ of the world.
 3. We have been _____ as children.
 4. In him (Christ) we have _____ through his blood, the _____ of sins, lavished on us.
 5. He made known to us the _____ of his will.
 6. We are for the praise of his _____.
 7. Having believed in him, we are marked with the seal, the Holy _____.
 8. The Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our _____.
3. What was Paul asking for the Ephesians, in his constant prayer? (vs. 17)
4. What three things did Paul want them to be enlightened about? (vs. 18, 19)
5. How did God use his power? (vs. 20)
6. Where was Jesus seated? (vs. 20, 21)
7. Over what was Jesus to be head? (vs. 22)
8. How does Paul describe the church? (vs. 23)

4 Ephesians Chapter 1 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). The province of Asia was one of the jewels on a belt of Roman lands encircling the Mediterranean. Ephesus had a harbor that at that time opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also at an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center. No city in Asia was more famous or more populous. It ranked with Rome, Corinth, Antioch and Alexandria among the foremost urban centers of the empire. Ephesus had many impressive civic monuments, including, most prominently, the temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for about three years, and the church there apparently flourished for some time. Here in Ephesus Paul preached to large crowds of people. The silversmiths complained that he had influenced large numbers of people in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

The letter opens with a sequence of statements about God's blessings, which are mixed in with a remarkable variety of expressions drawing attention to God's wisdom, forethought and purpose. Paul emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. God's ultimate purpose is to bring all things in the universe together under Christ. Paul feels that it is crucially important that Christians realize this.

The churches in Asia were becoming more mature, and Paul felt that they needed specific instructions in theology and application. This letter, which was meant to be shared among the churches, is as important to us as it was to the Ephesians.

5 Ephesians Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. Paul spends an extravagant amount of time praising God and his gifts. How much time do you guess that we spend in worship, each week, specifically praising the God of the universe? Should we increase that time? How much?
2. What do you think it means to be 'chosen' or 'predestined'?
3. Paul says that since we believed, we were 'marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit'. What do you think this 'seal' is, since we are pretty sure it isn't a glowing tattoo on the forehead?
4. Paul also mentions 'his incomparably great power for us who believe'. What can we do with this power?

6 Ephesians Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. When were we dead in our transgressions and sins? (vs. 2)
2. Why did God make us alive with Christ? (vs. 4)
3. Why did God raise us up with Christ and seat us with him? (vs. 7)
4. “For it is by _____ you have been saved, through _____. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by _____ so that no one can boast.” (vs. 8, 9)
5. Why were we created in Christ Jesus? (vs. 10)
6. What was our condition when we were separate from Christ? What is our condition now? (vs. 12, 13)
7. How did the blood of Christ make the Israelite and Gentile community one? (vs. 14-16)
8. What did Jesus preach to those far away and those near? (vs. 17)
9. What is the consequence of this access to the Father through the Spirit? (vs. 19, 20)
10. As chief cornerstone, what effect does Jesus have on the church? (vs. 21, 22)

7 Ephesians Chapter 2 – What Did it Mean to Them?

In the first chapter, Paul wrote of God's purposes and plans, leading up to Christ's universal headship. All of this was to be for the "praise of his glory" (vs. 1:14). Now, he proceeds to explain the steps by which God will accomplish his purposes, beginning with the salvation of individuals.

Unity was a topic of general interest in the first century AD. One philosophical system, Stoicism, saw an orderliness in the universe which they attributed to what they called the cosmic Reason, or Logos. The fact that much of the Mediterranean world was politically unified under the Roman imperial government made most people comfortable with the vision of a universal commonwealth. At the same time the mystery cults, which were gaining in popularity as conventional religion declined, offered a certain sense of oneness in the common quest for deliverance from demonic forces and the achievement of personal growth and wellbeing.

In Ephesians Paul was able to show that this almost obsessive search for unity found its ultimate goal only in Christ. In Jesus alone was the coordinating principle of all life. The ideal of world citizenship which was cherished by the philosophers was realized in the church for which Jesus died.

There was still a tension between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, even though they knew that they were supposed to accept and care for one another. Hearing the words from this chapter would have been both an encouragement and a comfort, since Paul makes it clear that the joining of these two very different groups of people is accomplished by Christ himself.

8 Ephesians Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. Following the ways of the world, gratifying the desires and cravings of our sinful natures, makes us dead to God. These “desires and cravings” include what many people see as simply their inborn nature, therefore something good. How can we show that there is another way to live?
2. Paul may have meant that the ‘good works’ are the new way of being human, the way which conforms to the standards that God always intended. What are some ‘good works’ which show the love of Christ? Are they any different if they are performed by unbelievers?
3. In this country, at least in most places, the church no longer faces the question of the integration of Jew and Gentile into a single church family. We do, however, have churches which are largely racially divided, even if that division is based on comfort rather than hostility. In Paul’s viewpoint we may be radically missing one of the meanings of Jesus’ death—the bringing together of those who were far apart. What should we do to make this better?
4. The idea of God’s Temple being composed of his people, rather than a physical location, was a radical idea when Paul discussed it. This means that when the community meets, it is a potent gathering that creates a space for God himself. Should we foster this idea of our gathering as a holy act of temple-building, as a mystical creation? If so, how?

9 Ephesians Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. What was Paul certain that his readers had heard? (vs. 2)
2. What was the mystery to which Paul referred? (vs. 6)
3. How did Paul become a servant of the gospel? (vs. 7)
4. What specific task was Paul given? (vs. 8)
5. “In him and through _____ in him we may approach God with _____ and with _____.” (vs. 12)
6. What did Paul pray would happen for his readers? (vs. 16, 17)
7. Paul prayed that his readers would be rooted and established in _____. (vs. 17)
8. Paul wanted them to have the power to grasp something important. What was it? (vs. 18, 19)
9. How does Paul describe God? (vs. 20)

10 Ephesians Chapter 3 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Paul moves on to the next step: since God has saved people individually by his grace, and reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Christ, God also now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. Paul makes clear that this step, which he calls a “mystery”, was not fully revealed in previous times. Greek mystery cults offered people eternal life through rites of purification and initiation into secret lore. In Judaism the divine secrets mostly concerned God’s plan for the end of history by sending the Messiah and the launch of the kingdom of God. Paul believed that the inclusion of the Gentiles was a part of a total plan for the unification of the universe, both on earth and in heaven. This secret purpose of God he now proclaims to the whole world.

From Paul’s prayer (from chapter 1 as well as chapter 3), we can get an idea of how he thought the church should be: (1) people who have faith in and are faithful to the Lord Jesus, and who have love for and act in loving ways toward fellow believers; (2) people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and have the understanding and experience of God that the Spirit brings; (3) people who live in hope and have glimpses of their wonderful future as the people of God; (4) people who possess, inwardly, the great power of God; (5) people who live in union with Christ, under his lordship, and gain their life and their witness from him.

In chapter three, Paul seems to spend a great deal of time talking about the unification of Jews and Gentiles. While the actual joining was important, he also understands that this unification was to stand as an example to the rest of the world of the power of God. In this joining of separate, even hostile, peoples together in love and worship, the immense power of God was shown. Paul’s readers needed to understand that they were not just followers and worshippers of the One True God and his son Jesus Christ. They were living consequences of the power of the creator of the universe.

11 Ephesians Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. Paul speaks of 'mystery', by which he means things that were once known to God alone but can now be known by all believers. In our time, there has been much emphasis on scientific understanding and explanations. What are some of our Christian beliefs that are beyond understanding? Is this good or bad, in terms of our witness to the unchurched?
2. Paul asks God to give his readers lavish spiritual blessings. What do you think these 'spiritual blessings' are?
3. God's power strengthens our inner beings, creating a place where Christ indwells, resulting in love. This love, Paul says, is too large to be confined by any measurements. What will this love demand of us? How will we act when we truly recognize and use this powerful love? What difference will it make in our church?
4. What does it mean to have 'free and confident access' to God? What should we do with this access? What difference should it make in the way we live our lives? Does the life of our church pose a challenge to the power of evil in this world?

12 Ephesians Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. What traits does Paul mention when urging his readers to live a life worthy of their calling? (vs. 1-3)
 1. Be completely _____
 2. Be _____
 3. Be _____, bearing with one another in love.
 4. Make every effort to keep the _____ of the Spirit through the bond of _____.
2. Paul mentions body (church), Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God: how many of each? (vs. 4-6)
3. What logic does Paul use to show that Jesus had been on earth? (vs. 9, 10)
4. Why were God's people given different gifts? (vs. 12, 13)
5. What are the benefits of being mature Christians? (vs. 14, 15)
6. How is the body (church) held together? (vs. 16)
7. When people are separated from God, how are they affected? (vs. 19)
8. What were the Christians taught to do? (vs. 22-24)
9. Paul gets very specific about how his readers should be learning to live. What behaviors are to be removed from their lives?

13 Ephesians Chapter 4 – What Did it Mean to Them?

Paul believes that God has called the church into being to serve as his means of unifying the cosmos. In this chapter he teaches that it must have a certain spirit (4:2-3), a theology (4:4-6), a structure (4:7-11), and a task (4:12-16).

In the first three chapters, Paul praises God, Christ, and the Spirit who has been working out in the divided earthly and heavenly worlds. He mixes prayer and praise for the reader's full understanding. However, this chapter makes clear that there were struggles in the churches. Based on what Paul says, they were struggling with the functions of the local members of the congregations, doctrines, and moral issues.

The section on unity is significant. It has the shape of an oft-quoted teaching, something that may have been used in the local congregations as a memory device and as a way to help new converts learn. We lose sight of the fact that Paul's readers did not have written teachings, for the most part, though it is thought that there might have been a collection of Jesus' sayings and instructions. Seven unities are presented here. It begins with the church, in which the Holy Spirit dwells (one body, one Spirit, one hope); next is the source of the church's life in Jesus (one Lord, one faith, one baptism); and ending with God, who is over all and through all and in all.

There seems to have been confusion or argument about the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul makes it clear that the reason for the gifts is to bring all the members to maturity. Then, as now, people preferred to stay in the easy lane rather than make the effort necessary to become fully mature in their faith. Paul seems to stress that it was necessary for each believer to do the work required to "put off" the old self and "put on" the new self. This is not to be confused with earning salvation, which is by God's grace, but is to be seen as a reaction brought about by gratitude for this gift of salvation.

14 Ephesians Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. Paul calls his readers to live up to their calling by being “completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love and making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” In practice, how can we do this? Do you know anyone who comes close to this? How do they manage?
2. In what seems to be an early form of doctrinal creed, Paul focuses on the ‘one-ness’ of Christianity: one body (church), one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. In the American culture, this is a very hard saying. What do we have to lose by being clear about this belief? What do we have to gain?
3. Paul has a laundry list of behaviors that need to be changed: lying, grudge-holding, thieving, foul talk, bitterness, rage, slander, malice. Which one do you think is the hardest? Which one should be pretty easy to stop?
4. Think of someone in our congregation that has ticked you off. (For most of us this shouldn’t be too hard.) What practical steps can we take to be kind and compassionate to them, to forgive them as God has forgiven us?

15 Ephesians Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. What kind of life should we live? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why should we avoid lust, filthy practices, greed, obscenity, or gossip? (vs. 3)
3. What is the link between immorality, impurity, and greed? (vs. 5)
4. What kind of actions are appropriate for living in the light? (vs. 9)
5. What makes all things visible? (vs. 13, 14)
6. If we are filled with the Spirit, what kind of words will come out? (vs. 18-20)
7. How will reverence for Christ affect our relationships with one another? (vs. 21)
8. In marriage, what is supposed to be the basis of action for wives and husbands? (vs. 22-25)
9. Paul teaches that as Christ and his bride (church) are one, when a man and a woman marry, they become one _____. (vs. 31)
10. Using Christ's example, husbands must _____ their wives and wives must _____ their husbands. (vs. 33)

16 Ephesians Chapter 5 – What Did it Mean to Them?

It is necessary, when reading letters and instructions to those who lived long ago, to keep a balanced perspective. On one hand, we know that “all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. (2 Timothy 3:16) On the other hand, we are well aware that all people, including the writer of Ephesians, are a product of their time and culture. This makes it important to find the principles that are basic to the writing.

For instance, at the beginning of this section Paul speaks of ‘imitating’ God. This concept was common in the Hellenistic, or Greek, world. Art was spoken of as an imitation of reality. Students were taught to imitate their teachers. Paul takes this common idea and adapts it. Because God sent his son into the world for all to see what he was like, when we imitate Christ we are actually imitating God. Since Christ’s love for us involved self-sacrifice (even to offering up his life), we then are called to be sacrificial in our lives, in imitation of Christ.

In the domestic section, we see the ethical standards and practices of the Greek world. Christians had to meet many problems in their everyday lives. When they had no specific instructions, they took the best parts of their culture and, in a sense, ‘baptized’ them into Christ.

In that world, male leadership was taken for granted. So too was unquestioning obedience of children to parents. Fathers had absolute power of life and death over children. Slaves were common property, which could be treated and disposed of according to the whim of the owner.

Christianity did not overturn basic structures, but it changed them and made them better. Paul recognized the dominance of the husband, in keeping with contemporary custom, but changed the husband’s responsibility to one of loving self-sacrifice. He was required to remember that Christ stood over both husband and wife as judge. The wife was called to respect and follow her husband’s leading, and both were called to subordination to one another and under Christ’s lordship.

Not only was Paul turning the commonly understood rules of marriage on their heads, he elevated the bond of marriage even further by saying that it was a reflection of the relationship between Christ and His church. In this Christ/church relationship there was no cruel dominance and forced obedience, but self-sacrifice, loving care and respect.

Paul seems to teach that human marriage, as originally instituted, was a prophecy of the new creation God brought into being in the church. Using the Genesis 2:24 quote, Paul teaches that God is promising that the Messiah would take a bride to be his own. This appears to be the secret meaning that Paul finds in this passage.

17 Ephesians Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. What is “improper” for God’s holy people today? What behaviors should we avoid in order to be different from the lost people around us?
2. How do we ‘expose’ the evil and sin that ‘darkness’ (unsaved nature) causes?
3. Paul makes a large distinction between those who are in the light (Christians) and those who are in the dark (non-Christians). Do you actually know any people in the ‘dark’? How are your activities different from theirs?
4. The idea of marriage as a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church is complicated. What are the basic characteristics of this relationship, outside of cultural ideas and understanding? For instance, the word ‘submit’ means ‘to yield one’s own rights’. What does that mean from Jesus’ standpoint? From the church? How is this acted out in marriage?

18 Ephesians Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. Why are children encouraged to obey their parents? (vs. 1-1)
2. Instead of exercising their rights over their children, what are fathers told to do? (vs. 4)
3. What attitude are slaves supposed to have toward their masters? (vs. 5-8)
4. Why are masters told to behave in the same way toward their slaves? (vs. 9)
5. Why does Paul tell his readers to 'put on the full armor of God'? (vs. 11)
6. Against whom is the true struggle? (vs. 12)
7. What will this armor do for us? (vs. 13)
8. We are to put on: (vs. 14-17)
 1. The belt of _____
 2. The breastplate of _____
 3. Feet covered with the readiness that comes from the _____
 4. Carrying the shield of _____
 5. Wearing the helmet of _____
 6. Holding the sword of the _____
9. How did Paul say to pray? (vs. 18, 19)
10. In his closing, Paul wants them to have _____ and love with _____.

19 Ephesians Chapter 6 – What Did it Mean to Them?

A common thread through Paul's writings is taking a known fact or relationship and applying the gospel in such a way that the relationship is changed. One standard change is that the stronger person has obligations to the weaker. In parental responsibilities, he insists that the feelings of the child must be taken into consideration. In a society where the father's authority was absolute, this was revolutionary.

Next, Paul deals with the relationship between slaves and masters. He is still speaking to the Christian household, for the majority of slaves were employed in homes. It is estimated that there were over sixty million slaves at this time in the Roman empire—about one third of the total population. More and more slaves were becoming Christians. Most of them would have had pagan employers, though a few may have had Christian masters.

The fact that Paul has more to say to slaves than to masters may reflect the social structure of these Asian churches. He speaks to them both on an equal level, and assumes that they all have the Christian vocation. In a society that regarded slaves as no more than living tools, this was a radical change of attitude. Paul reminds the slaves that they are really working for the Lord. He reminds the masters that they also serve a heavenly master, one that looks on slave and free as equals.

Previously, Paul has emphasized inward growth and the edification of the church. The body of Christ needed to be united and built up so as to be ready for the inevitable encounter with evil, and each believer needs to be prepared for the fight. This passage, describing the 'putting on' of the armor of God, may represent a kind of baptismal charge, one read to new Christians. It is significant that Paul warns his readers that they are to be armored and armed not against other people, but against the powers of the dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.

20 Ephesians Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. What is the difference between exasperating, or frustrating, children and teaching them things they need to know but don't necessarily want to learn?
2. Paul says that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. What do you think these 'rewards' will be?
2. If our true struggle is against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil, then what does that tell you about the people who do bad things in this world?
3. If we consider that our true struggle is against spiritual forces, then what is actually being attacked by the evil that occurs? For instance, when evil forces lead a drug cartel to expand into a new area, what are these forces actually trying to accomplish? When evil forces delude advertisers into using unrealistic body images of young women, what are they actually trying to achieve? Without choosing a specific topic, what do the evil forces gain by political chaos?