

## Ephesians-by Rick Stark

### Chapter 1

Might the church have cause to feel itself quite ordinary? If so, Paul right off the bat explodes in praise and thanksgiving, reminding them of their new identity – ‘saints’ – believers “in Christ Jesus” set apart in order to proclaim God’s excellencies (1 Pet.2:19). It’s the *gaze-n-gance* pattern of the apostle Paul. In 3-14, he *gazes* upward in praise, and in vv.15-22 *heglances* downward in prayer. Praise for what God has done – “*chose us in Christ...* (3,4).” But for what purpose? Check out v.6 (a deliberately repetitive phrase). This “*grace*” is never abstract but concrete: new belonging (5); new purpose (5); new freedom (7); new future (10-11); new hope (12); new assurance (13-14). So how do you imagine the church felt reading this letter, sent by the very “*will of God*” (1)? The *gaze of praise* is contagious, but for the ‘*glance*’ downward (15) Paul must pray for the church! What do we need? What must God give? Discover for yourself: “the *knowledge of God*” (17), ‘*hope*’ (18), ‘*power*’ (19), and the order his sovereign ‘*rule*’ (21-23). Why, this will be more than enough for this life and the next!

### Chapter 2

Why begin a new paragraph with the Greek *kai* (‘and’)? Because while having faith, even “*sealed with the Spirit*” (1:13), these Ephesians were subject to great temptations (like us). “*Nothing is more vital that that we should be clear about the power of God that is manifested in this Christian salvation.*” (J.C. Ryle) What is this “*immeasurable power*”? (1:19) Hint: the provocative ‘*But*’ (4)... “*Dead.... BUT made alive.*” How? **G-R-A-C-E:God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense** (8,9). Again we ask - for what purpose? Hint: God’s *trophy case of grace* (7), as if the Creator-Redeemer says, “*Look what I can do!*” What else was “*dead but made alive*”? How about unity in community? It’s Jew and Gentile... the black and white, rich and poor, churched and un-churchd... the “*far and near*” (13). Impossible! There’s been a “*dividing wall of hostility*” (14) forever... it’s the way we were... “*BUT!*” (ok, that’s twice) How is the impossible made possible? It is by Jesus’ active and passive obedience (13,16). No more ‘*insiders-outsiders*’ or ‘*one-upmanship*’; the ground is “\_\_\_\_\_” for all at the foot of the cross. Does that describe the church you belong to?

### Chapter 3

The Good News: what God has done in the world, even among outsiders (‘*Gentiles*’)... even our own church! We are not alone, but together (‘*we*’)... one body. Who would have ever dreamed this up (5)? Only God – ours is a divinely revealed religion: God’s plan, purpose, power, and promise (3,4) revealed in Christ. “*For this reason,*” Paul willingly suffers as “*a prisoner of Christ*” (1). Self-aggrandizement? Hardly. “*No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save*”(Denney). It’s always “*grace... the unsearchable riches of Christ*” (8). Therefore, what? Do not “*lose heart*” (13) or be afraid of suffering. The church must stand, so Paul prays (14-21). The posture of humility “*is never a matter of indifference*” (Hendriksen). God is a good Father. His storehouse is unlimited (16), distributed by the supply chain of His Spirit. What do they need? What do you need? Just ask! Paul does... “*Fill ‘em up, Father!*” A large prayer for little people, and God is more than able to make it happen (20-21).

### Chapter 4

Ch. 4 makes an *urgent* shift (1) from the vertical to the horizontal. The church is a kaleidoscope of “*different people with different priorities who must work together for the church to fulfill its grand calling...*” (Chappell) Take up arms... is that the way? Raw power? No (follow Paul’s thought here)... transforming power comes from where (2,3)? Pulling together is the secret (4-7), but does sharing the same identity, same testimony, and same family mean the loss individuality? Not at all. Both oneness

and individuality is from Christ (7-8). See how Paul illustrates this (11). And for what purpose? Discover for yourself (12-13): not independence but interdependence in the context of sacrificial service (14-16). But there are parts of our world that holds this as a dark idea (17-19). The true Christian is to 'walk' differently: that is "they," but that is not "you." (20-22) "The gifts of grace do not annul the calling to a separated life" (Chappell), but mark out the better path: "put off the \_\_\_\_\_ self" (22) and "put on the \_\_\_\_\_ self" (24). The vertical settled, Paul says, "let's talk about the horizontal..." (25-32).

### **Chapter 5:1-21**

One theologian calls gospel relationships (4:1-6:9) "The Smell of Jesus" (from "fragrant offering," 2). Isn't this what 2 Cor.2:15 says? But what two formidable sins (3) will Paul say create a stench and utterly incompatible with the "kingdom of Christ" ((5)? It's as if "Paul now comes after our heart through our nose." (Chappell) No clever gimmicks here – Paul's one motivating factor is simply what? Our identity in Christ: As "beloved children" we 'walk' (live, act) as loving others the way God in Christ has loved us. As "children of light" we reflect and wisely promote what is "good, right, and true" to the benefit of others. And as those "filled with the Spirit" ("under-the-influence") our disposition and speech carry to others a song, an attitude, and humility. But to be "imitators of God" (1) in our relationships is not merely pragmatic. Paul connects such as acts of worship (2, "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God").

### **Chapter 5:22-6:9**

If you've been following Paul in Ephesians, recall how the apostle has been painting a beautiful portrait of gospel relationships – unity and purity. Fine art is meant to be provocative, and no less here. Do we really understand the gospel of grace? If so, where else does Paul expect the portrait to be displayed? (Hint: think bedroom, breakfast table, and boardroom.) "In contrast to 'holiness-in-a-vacuum'" (Stott), Paul magnifies gospel ethics (duties) in these foundational relationships of culture and society: husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee. It's about leading and following, love and respect, and purpose and order. What directional cues given here must one be aware of and which help explain how this works? (Hint: think upward, inward, outward... or vertical and horizontal). Lastly, consider the divine mystery at play in all three: oneness, promise, and reward. Now this is worthy of gospel anticipations and expectations. But watch out! Keep reading! There's an enemy lurking!

### **Chapter 6:10-24**

The realities of spiritual warfare remain: personal temptations and the pressures fracturing society and family... a culture where sin is always crouching at the door. There are no shortcuts to preparing for spiritual conflict. "Finally" indicates there's been a pattern for the Christian and the church: identity in Christ (ch.1-2), unity in diversity (ch.3-4), and gospel relationships (ch.5-6). Ultimately God's power alone equips us (10), fits us with spiritual armor and enabling our wills to follow the pattern. Why? Because of our helplessness and the nature of our enemy (note the description, 11-13, 16). In humility, we are to confess our need in this arming process: putting on the full armor of God and praying in the Spirit (10-20). Our weaponry is not "fleshly... but divinely powerful..." (2 Cor.10:4-5). Meditate on each piece of armor. And while envisioning a Roman soldier donned in armor may be helpful, ask yourself: Who supplies such armor? Our responsibility is to "take up" (trust in) the armor God has already put in place. "Safeguarded by his armor, we can and do stand against the Adversary." (Chappell) Maybe that's why the apostle ends the letter the way he does (23-24).

### **Reflecting on Ephesians-**

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Ephesians. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck

you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Ephesians before we move forward?

*"The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple." Psalm 119.130*