# Overview of Ephesians

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# Intro

This morning we are starting a new series on the letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:1-16 has been a key passage in the work we’ve been doing on unity and variance in our conference, and one thing we could do is just spend some time there. But that passage is embedded in a larger story, and it would be a shame to miss that. Plus, Ephesians has so much good in it, it’s really worth learning from.

Usually, we use a lectionary passage, and that’s good, but the lectionary tends to cherry pick. Looking at a whole letter means we have to look at everything being said, not just the easy parts. To look at the whole letter is to take me/us into some dangerous territory:

* 1. Did Paul even write this letter?
  2. We will have to look at what Ephesians has to say about husbands and wives; slaves and masters and these are passages that have been tender and terrible for many women and many enslaved people.

# Origin of the letter

Some have noted with surprise that Paul doesn’t seem to know the Ephesians very well (“I have heard of your faith” 1.15), although he spent a lot of time there; and that the language is very different from other letters most likely to be Paul’s. On the other hand, Ephesians 1:1 says it is from Paul, and to the saints who are in Ephesus. But see the first footnote in our pew Bibles: it might be that “to Ephesus” is missing from the original. There are many parallels to the letter to the Colossians, which mentions a letter to the Laodiceans (Colossae and Laodicia were close to each other; Ephesus is about 100 miles away).

I think it is reasonable to ascribe the letter to Paul, especially for our purposes:

* 1. Perhaps the generic “I have heard…” is part of the general nature of the letter (very few personal details)
  2. Language differences are in fact very difficult to detect with certainty (I say this as someone who knows a little bit about forensic authorship)

So I’ll just use “Paul”, apologizing to those who (on the one hand) think my not taking it for granted is wrong and to those who (on the other hand) think I’m being naïve. I will do for one more reason at least: we are not dong a book about the theology of Paul, but a study of what the letter says to us.

# The opening verses

Given our time, let’s just look at one sentence in the introductory part of the letter. Except in Greek verses 3-14 are all one sentence! Let’s read that, and be ready to answer some questions. This reads to me as an “ecstatic” passage as Paul meditates on the blessings of God for us. So let’s read verses 3-14:

**3**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, **4**just as he chose us in Christ[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29194b)] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. **5**He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, **6**to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. **7**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace **8**that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight **9**he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, **10**as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **11**In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29201c)] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, **12**so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. **13**In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; **14**this[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29204d)] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

What are some repeated expressions you read? Here are some I found: God, glory, Christ, blessing, the heavenly places, adoption and inheritance, will/plan/purpose, good pleasure. Let’s look at one which is especially piquant to us, a church full of adopters and adoptees: adoption and inheritance.

# Adoption and inheritance

First, note that it was God’s plan all along to adopt us. He chose to do this “before the foundation of the world.”

Second, God takes delight in this: it was God’s “good pleasure” in thinking about and acting on this plan. We adoptive parents know the delight of thinking about our children to come (as well as the anxiety).

Third, the adoption comes at a price: Christ’s own death, which results in the forgiveness we need.

Fourth, God did not do the bare minimum to adopt us, but “lavished” his love on us. He didn’t just to a cursory home study; God loved us to the end.

Fifth, as adopted children, we have an everlasting inheritance, which can’t be rescinded. We are as much “real” children of God as anyone (as, I suppose, Jesus himself).

Sixth, as a seal and down-payment, we have the Holy Spirit.

Seventh, Paul promises to his readers that they can look forward to many new brothers and sisters (“in the fullness of time to gather all things in him”). Hey, that’s us! We can see God’s plan unfolding, and we too can continue to participate in God’s unfolding plan.

# Application

Such insight into the plans of God call for praise; take time now to praise God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ…”