

Ephesians Flyover

God's Plan is God's Purpose

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is about a plan. It is about God's Grand Plan. It is also about God's Purpose. Paul says, "This plan, which God made and designed, God will complete when the time is right, when He brings all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ, His Messiah, as the Head." We could say the end point destination of God's Plan is to bring everything in creation, material and immaterial, under the leadership of His Son—Jesus, the Messiah King. The entire world that God the Father created will be unified and complete—heaven and earth are ONE! There it is—the Plan and the Purpose. And this secret plan, what Paul calls a mystery, God called Paul to reveal to the world.

We have all made plans to do something. Take planning a trip, as an example. We will plan a trip San Diego. But, why do we want to go to San Diego? For vacation, of course! San Diego is the perfect place to go and hang out on a beautiful beach! If we were going there to find work, the plan would look much different. Everything would focus on finding a job, finding a place to live. Obviously, our purpose determines the details of our plan.

So now we have a plan and a purpose. Now stop and think of all the details that have to be part of the planning in taking a vacation trip to San Diego. Airline flights and hotels, rental car, places we want to see—all very detailed planning. And if we forget something, it will not go well. And if something does not go as planned? If the hotel loses our reservation? Then we will not be happy. One point of failure can foil all of our best laid plans. Of course, we know as humans that all of our best laid plans can and do go wrong. And then, our vacation will not be the beautiful experience we had imagined, or hoped for.

Paul knows God's plan. He also knows his part in that plan. His task is to call anyone who will listen, who can hear, to give themselves over to the One who was raised from the dead to a new life. Paul is calling people to a new kind of life under a new kind of King. And when we obey this call? We become God's sons. God's plan and His purposes *will* not fail, can *never* fail, even though from our limited perspective it may *seem as if* God fails, especially if we are not happy with some of His ways. But in the end, it pleases Him and it delights Him to call us Sons. He sees the end point, the long view where His people and His creation are brought together in full unity. It is beautiful in His sight! And that is the ultimate experience we imagine, and what we truly hope for.

What is my plan for our look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians? How can we best approach our study together? How can we get the most out of it so that we are as moved, and as committed, as Paul was when he first wrote to the Ephesians?

First, I am going to do a "fly over" as if we are flying into a great city. The view from an airplane gives us an overview of the city that we will soon be seeing up close when we land. We can see from our high vantage once we do land there is a lot we will not ever see up close, but the things we do see and explore will leave us changed, for better or for worse. So we will we explore Ephesians at "ground level" and that means we are here to explore God's Church up close. Will we see everything? Not a chance!

And some of us may notice different things, and it is those differences that we are actually meant to share.

First, the overview: Paul is going to use two specific themes in talking about the Church. The first is the *UNITY* of God's people under the headship of Messiah. The second theme is the *ONENESS* of Messiah expressed in the way we live. Unity and Oneness sounds like I am saying the same thing, but there is a difference. The *Unity* Paul talks about is guaranteed. God's plan and purpose will not fail. But the *Oneness* is something we must strive and work for as we live in a world that is still immersed in the forces of evil. Our testimony of the *Unity* of the Church is dependent on our *Oneness* in a world that is still in darkness.

The big picture looks like this:

God's Plan: Christ *IN* The Church Eph 1-3
Our Life: The Church *IN* The World Eph 4-6

Paul's whole letter is seen in the light, or the Revelation, of the secret plan of God's love, sacrifice, forgiveness, grace and purity. The plan is as flawless as its execution because God has worked out everything ahead of time, and for Him there are no surprises. God's Son is our Anointed Redeemer-Priest and our Anointed Lord-King. That whole description can be put into one word—Messiah (*Hebrew*) and Christ (*Greek*). He is the One the Father *Anointed* (Heb. *Meshiach*) before there was time and space. Paul talks about this Anointed One, this Messiah, by using metaphors to describe the unity of God's people who are united together under One New King. The Church is a Body united under one head; the Church is a building completed under one cornerstone (sometimes called a "capstone" or "keystone"); the Church is a wife united to one husband. These three metaphors speak of overarching concepts: the idea that the body functions as a living being, that a building has a fixed organized structure, that man and wife are bound in a covenant relationship with a vow of loyalty and faithfulness. We will look carefully at the implications of these three major metaphors.

Now let's fly a little lower over the letter and view the parts a little more clearly.

Chapter 1 is a prayer. It opens with Paul asking for grace and peace for the Ephesian Church. Then he moves quickly to thanksgiving and praise to God the Father for all that He has done and will do. He is calling us to give Glory to God for His plan. And God's Plan is the theme of the entire letter: "... a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph 1:10 ESV) Paul is praising God as Father for what He has done in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Paul is speaking of the One God as a Trinity in the clearest terms possible:

God the Father *Planned* our salvation in the past

God the Son *Accomplished* our salvation by His death and resurrection

God the Holy Spirit *Applies* our salvation in the present

Chapter 1 continues Paul's prayer but he changes his focus and begins thanking God as he prays for the Ephesian Church. He prays for the Holy Spirit's power in their minds and lives, that God's Spirit would apply the mighty power of the resurrection to their hearts. Of course, in praying for them, we could say he is also praying for us. The Church is one body, connected to Head seated in the Throne Room of God.

Chapter 2 describes our hopeless and helpless condition before our encounter with Jesus. This is the Exodus Story in miniature. The story of a people lost and abandoned as slaves in a hostile land who are suddenly rescued and set free. Paul says in 2:11 *“Remember where you came from, what you were, and where Jesus has brought you.”* This is a retelling of the sacrifice of the lamb at the Passover—but now Jesus, as our Lamb, accomplished the salvation the Father had planned. Then God leads us out of slavery into a new land where He built a Temple and lived there among the people. Now God the Son has conquered death by rising from the grave. It is by His resurrection Jesus disarmed the powers of the universe, just as the Egyptians were killed as God’s people were rising out the depths of the sea. Paul says we are now a people in union with the One raised from death, having been rescued from death and seated with Him. He has defeated the powers of darkness. Jesus is our new dwelling. We are the building, the Temple, where God the Holy Spirit dwells today in His people, living in us, empowering us as one witness to the fallen world.

Chapter 3 is Paul again breaking forth into prayer, proclaiming himself not an Apostle but a prisoner. He says in 3:1 *“I pray to God for the sake of you Gentiles”* because *“God in His Grace gave me this work for your good.”* (v. 2) Paul is willing to do for others what Jesus did for him—to sacrifice himself for our good. Without that sacrifice, we would not have this letter, we would not know the majesty of God’s purpose and plan! In 3:13 Paul says, *“...do not be discouraged. I am suffering for your sake—your benefit.”* Paul continues his prayer for us in v.14 *“I fall down on my knees before the Father”* as he asks God to give us the knowledge of the depth of the love that is in the One True God: that we be filled with a presence of the reality of a resurrected life. And Paul closes with a chorus of praise for the Glory of God, who is the Holy Spirit working in us.

Chapter 4 begins with Paul reminding us again he is both prisoner and servant. Being a prisoner is the Lord’s plan for him. Paul accepts this. He says in 4:1 *“...I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”* Measure up to the standard that God has set. What is that standard? For Paul, it is prisoner and servant. For the Church in general I think Paul is saying the standard is “servant”. God may take us to hard places, through difficult trials, and we are worthy of our calling. It is God’s will and plan for us. We are Christ’s body in the world, and as Christ came to suffer, so we, like Paul, find the Mission of the Church is much the same. But we are given great resources through Our Lord-King Jesus. He was raised from death! He ascended and He gifted the Church with all the gifts and power we need to live the new life under His headship and authority. And this idea goes straight into Chapter 5, when he says about our relationship to Christ as our Head in 5:1 *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...”*

In Chapter 5 Paul actually raises the bar. In Chapter 4 he says, “Be like me” but now he says, “No—that’s not good enough...be like Christ!” Paul echoes the Apostle John who says, *“Walk in the light as He is in the light.”* (1 Jn 1:7). Paul also says to walk in the light—to walk as if we are “lights in the world” because our light exposes the deeds of the darkness. Paul says this is the way of wisdom, and he urges us to walk as wise men, not unwise ignorant men. As Paul moves through Chapter 5 he talks about our

relationships; with the Lord, with each other, and then our family relationships. This takes us all the way through Chapter 5 and into Chapter 6, as Paul talks about the task of raising children, and our submission to the headship of the Lord Jesus as we walk through all the demands of life in the family and in our workplace.

Chapter 6 closes with a call “*to stand*”—and to stand firm. Stand firm by building up our strength and shielding ourselves with God’s Armor. This is a metaphor that takes us back to the truths and the promises of the opening chapters. We are able to stand and be strong as we rely on and actually wrap ourselves in the truths and the prayers of the first three chapters. This gives us the strength and the wisdom to walk in obedience and submission to Christ, as outlined in the final chapters. This is what will protect us from the attacks of the wicked heavenly powers. Paul shares in the struggle. He asks for prayer for himself! And he urges us to pray on every occasion. Notice how Paul has bathed this letter in prayer from beginning to end. This gives us a clue how we ought to approach it as we look into these great revelations. And maybe gives us a clue as to how we might start our day—everyday—in praise and thanks and glory to our Father.

The letter to the Ephesians is the supreme revelation of the Church in the world. Paul’s vision reveals the Glory of Christ, our Messiah-King resurrected, as the Head, as the Capstone and as the Husband of His Church. We are going to move through this epistle section by section and pick it apart, try to understand how it fits into our time and our day, then put it back together in a way that hopefully changes the way we think and live in our day to day lives. We are in a culture that would deny these truths. Even Christians, those of us called and baptized into this glorious work of God, can stumble and fall and actually begin to live *as if* we deny the reality of our promised resurrection. We do not want that. We can gird our minds and strengthen our hearts. And we can learn to stand firm against the forces of the evil one.

Paul wants the Ephesians, and us, to have a clear grasp of who we are, what we have, how we live, and why we hope. It is in that spirit we can pray like Paul did:

We fall on our knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives it’s true name. We ask God from the wealth of his glory to give us power through his Spirit, so we will be strong in the Lord, We pray that Christ will make his home in our hearts. We pray that we have your roots and foundation in His love, so that all of us together with all God’s people everywhere may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, Christ’s love really is. We pray to God the Father who by His power working in us, can do in us much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of doing on our own. Glory be to the Father and to Christ Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit for all time, forever and ever! Amen.