

A large red tower crane is the central focus of the image, extending diagonally from the bottom right towards the top left. The crane's lattice structure is clearly visible, and it has several platforms and cables attached. The background is a clear, light blue sky.

# The World's Greatest Building Project

## Lesson One

Why Study About the Church? Lessons from Ephesians



BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP RESOURCES

Passing the Baton of Leadership From One Generation to Another

*THE WORLD'S GREATEST BUILDING PROJECT*

Copyright © 2019 by Biblical Eldership Resources.

Published by Biblical Eldership

27 Watchman Ct., Rochester, NY 14624-4930

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher. For more resources refer [www.BiblicalEldership.com](http://www.BiblicalEldership.com).

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible. The NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION, also known as THE NET BIBLE, is a completely new translation of the Bible, not a revision or an update of a previous English version. It was completed by more than twenty biblical scholars who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation project originally started as an attempt to provide an electronic version of a modern translation for electronic distribution over the Internet and on CD (compact disk). Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection is able to use and print out the NET Bible without cost for personal study. In addition, anyone who wants to share the Bible with others can print unlimited copies and give them away free to others. It is available on the internet at [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).

## ABOUT US

The vision of **Biblical Eldership Resources (BER)** is to promote biblical eldership for the glory of God by providing teaching, resources, training, and mentoring for current and future church leaders who will implement, practice, teach, and train others in biblical eldership as the model for church leadership. In other words, we are equipping one generation of elders to equip the next generation of elders, who will in turn equip the following generation.

### WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The Bible teaches that the local church should be led by a team of biblically qualified men called elders, who while being different in gifting are equal in authority, serving as under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our chief or senior Shepherd.

### GLOBAL MINISTRY

Believing the biblical model is universal, adaptable, and sustainable, we have designed this ministry for global use. We are developing regional teams and representatives for adapting and translating the BER material for use among various people groups. The Lord is opening doors around the world.

### TRAINING PROVIDED

Key to this ministry is the interactive BER website ([www.BiblicalEldership.com](http://www.BiblicalEldership.com)). We provide biblical teaching on eldership as God's design for church leadership, along with practical guidelines for implementing biblical eldership. Our extensive effectiveness curriculum is designed to help existing elders function more effectively as shepherds of God's flock, and to help train potential new elders and leaders. The curriculum contains short video/audio presentations of fifteen minutes or less, along with outlines, review and discussion questions, and application assignments. You can use these lessons individually, in mentoring environments, or in a group. BER also provides a one-year intensive elder training program, seminars, conferences, webinars, and speakers for leadership events.

### WHO BENEFITS FROM BER?

Our resources benefit elders, leaders, and potential leaders. Although geared toward church leaders, this material can benefit anyone with a desire to grow in their Christian walk.

*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)*

# WHAT IS BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP?

## SUMMARY STATEMENTS

1. **Biblical eldership is eldership by the Book.** We call this “biblical eldership” because the view of eldership presented here honestly and accurately represents the biblical teaching of eldership.
2. **Biblical eldership is pastoral eldership.** Both the apostles Paul and Peter use shepherd-sheep imagery when defining the work of the elders. Thus, biblical elders are shepherd (pastor) elders.
3. **Biblical eldership is biblically qualified eldership.** Biblical elders are required to meet certain moral and spiritual qualifications, as well as, be able to teach sound doctrine and protect the church from false teachers.
4. **Biblical eldership is Spirit-appointed eldership.** Biblical elders must be Spirit-appointed, not self-appointed.
5. **Biblical eldership is pastoral oversight of the local church by a plurality of qualified elders.** As 1 Timothy 5:17–18 demonstrates, the plurality of elders entails both equality of authority and diversity of giftedness, knowledge, and experience.

## WHY IS THIS SUBJECT IMPORTANT?

1. **God’s Word teaches pastoral eldership.** Many of our church problems are the result of outright disobedience to the clear instructions of Scripture.
2. **Biblical eldership promotes the true nature of the New Testament church.** The church is the family of God, and thus its leadership structure should harmonize with and promote the family nature of the church.
3. **Biblical eldership provides the leaders of the church with genuine accountability.** Because of our beliefs in the realities of sin, human depravity, and Satan, we should require that people in positions of authority within the church have genuine peer accountability.
4. **Biblical eldership provides true peer relationships.** Having true peer relationships within the leadership body of elders, sharpens, balances, comforts, protects, and strengthens the elders themselves.
5. **Biblical eldership provides more balanced pastoral care for the church.** Each elder contributes his own wisdom, perspective, knowledge, and experience to group decision making and the care of God’s people. This provides the local church with a more balanced leadership body, and protects the church from one person’s extremes and imbalances.

Learn more at [www.BiblicalEldership.com](http://www.BiblicalEldership.com).

*To put it in a different way, the doctrine of the church must be grounded in the doctrine of salvation. Do we wonder why we have so many “consumer-oriented” saints, who shop around for the church that will offer them the most benefits? It is because we have too many misguided folks who think that God needs them. Salvation is about a gracious God, who chose to save a people for Himself, for His own pleasure, and for His glory. It is time for us to see that we have been saved by a sovereign God, and that we are His possession (1:11), subordinate to His purposes.*

# INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiology is a word most of us can hardly spell, let alone define. Simply put, ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church.

Very few people find this doctrine all that exciting. For many, a study of the church is about as exciting as a visit to the doctor for an annual checkup. Unless I am convinced otherwise, I am about as likely to commence a study on the church as I am to initiate a conversation with my wife about how she makes a dress, or about how I change a timing belt on a car.

Here we are, setting out on a study of the church (ecclesiology). If my assessment of the situation is correct, you can see the problem that we face. If we are going to really engage ourselves in this study, we must first be convinced of its importance. Just how important is a study of the church? It is as important as the church is in God's program for this world, and for the world to come.

This in-depth study is divided into six lessons. This is the first of the series from Biblical Eldership Resources ([www.BiblicalEldership.com](http://www.BiblicalEldership.com)).

- Bob Deffinbaugh

# THE CHURCH IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

The primary purpose of this introductory lesson is to convince you that our study of the church is well worth your time and mine, your study and mine. I have chosen to focus on the Book of Ephesians in this lesson because I believe that in this great epistle Paul underscores the importance of the church in God's program, and thus in our lives. Let us listen well to the Word of God, which speaks to us of Christ, of His church, and of our place in it.

It is generally agreed that the Book of Ephesians has two parts.

Chapters 1–3 lay a doctrinal foundation and chapters 4–6 spell out the practical ramifications of this doctrine. I believe the church is central in both sections of Ephesians.

Let us begin by focusing on the doctrinal portion of Ephesians.

I understand that chapters 1–3 expound on the subject of salvation from three points of view:

- [Ephesians 1](#), the source of our salvation: the sovereignty of God in salvation
- [Ephesians 2](#), the outcome of our salvation: reconciliation, with God and with men
- [Ephesians 3](#), the divine purpose of salvation: the glory of God



# 1| THE SOURCE OF OUR SALVATION

## *THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION*

### *READ: EPHESIANS 1:1-14*

These verses are rich with doctrinal truths, but our purpose here is to summarize the nature of the spiritual blessings of salvation that God has bestowed on us:

1. Our spiritual blessings are indeed bountiful. We are blessed with “**every spiritual blessing**” (1:3), and these blessings are “**freely bestowed on us**” (1:6) according to “**the riches of His grace**” (1:7). Indeed, these blessings have been “**lavished**” upon us (1:8).
2. These blessings have God the Father as their source. It is He who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (1:3). It is He who chose us in eternity past, before the foundation of the world (1:4). He predestined us to adoption as sons (1:5).
3. **The blessings of salvation are accomplished through the person and work of Jesus Christ** (1:3–7, 9–13) and are assured through the Holy Spirit, who seals us until our day of redemption (1:13–14).
4. We have been predestined and saved unto good works. He purposed that we should be “**holy and unblemished in his sight**” (1:4).
5. **We have been saved according to the will of God** (1:4–5, 9, 11), to accomplish His foreordained purposes (1:6, 9–12).
6. **We have been saved for God’s pleasure** (1:5, 9), and for the praise of His glory (1:6; 12).
7. Our salvation is a part of God’s program to exalt and glorify Christ, so that He is preeminent in and over all creation (1:9–10).

Now here, my friend, is a view of salvation that we hear all too seldom. Salvation is attributed to neither our goodness nor our choice. It is the work of God. It is not “inviting God into our life,” but God giving us life through His Son. It is not Jesus dying on the cross because He could not bear the thought of living without me, but rather God sending His Son to the cross for His pleasure, and to bring praise and glory to Himself.

Salvation is more about God than it is about me.

---

*Salvation is about a gracious God, who chose to save a people for Himself,  
for His own pleasure, and for His glory.*

---

To put it in a different way, the doctrine of the church must be grounded in the doctrine of salvation. Do we wonder why we have so many “consumer-oriented” saints, who shop around for the church that will offer them the most benefits? It is because we have too many misguided folks who think that God needs them. Salvation is about a gracious God, who chose to save a people for Himself, for His own pleasure, and for His glory. It is time for us to see that we have been saved by a sovereign God, and that we are His possession (1:11), subordinate to His purposes.

**READ: [EPHESIANS 1:15-23](#)**

At verse 15, Paul writes of his prayers for the Ephesian saints, based upon the fact that they are now saved through faith in Jesus Christ, a fact that is evident, in part, by their love for *all* the saints (this *all* will be pursued further in chapter 2, in verses 11–22). Paul is ceaseless in his prayers of thanksgiving because the Ephesians have come to faith, and the eyes of their heart have been enlightened. He also petitions God for their spiritual growth, praying that they might come to a deeper knowledge of Him through the spiritual wisdom that God supplies (1:17).

Specifically, Paul prays for three things:

1. That they might come to know more fully the hope of their calling—that is, that they might come to grasp the marvelous future that God has for them, based upon the fact that God has chosen them and called them to salvation (see 1:3–5).
2. That they might come to a fuller knowledge of the “**wealth of God’s glorious inheritance in the saints**” (1:18).
3. That the Ephesian saints might come to a deeper grasp of the immensity of God’s power toward the saints (1:19).

It is this third request that Paul chooses to elaborate upon in the verses that follow. (I should also point out that Paul will once again turn to this subject of God’s power in 3:14–21.) Paul does not leave us in the dark as to the kind of power he is talking about.

The immeasurable power of God available to us is that same power that can be seen in the resurrection and ascension of our Lord (1:20–23). Look at what accompanies the resurrection and ascension of our Lord: He is seated at the right hand of God, exalted above **“every rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named”** (1:21).<sup>i</sup>

Is there anything or anyone that is not subjected to His authority?<sup>ii</sup>

The exaltation of our Lord over earthly and celestial powers is not just for this age, but also for the age to come. Who has greater power and authority than this?

God subjected all things under Christ’s feet, exalting Him as Lord over all. In the last two verses of chapter 1, Paul stresses the relationship between our Lord’s sovereign authority and power and His leadership of the church:

*22 And God put all things under Christ’s feet, and he gave him to the church as head over all things. 23 Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)).*

Elsewhere, we are told that our Lord is the Head of the church ([Ephesians 5:23](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)), but that is not exactly what Paul is saying here in the closing verses of [Ephesians 1](#). It is one thing for someone to be the head of the church. It is something even greater when that person is not just head over the church alone, but over all things. If we are members of His church by faith in Him, Jesus is the Head of the church, in addition to being the Head over all things (just as Paul stated earlier in 1:20–21). Whatever it is that our Lord purposes to do in and through His church, He will accomplish because He is Head over all things.

---

*The church can be assured that what God purposes to do in and through His church will be accomplished.*

---

Let me seek to illustrate what Paul is saying here. Several years ago, I was attempting to purchase a car for a missionary who was returning to the United States for a period of time. I was introduced to the owner of a car dealership in the area, who said he would like to help supply this missionary with a car. He then referred me to his best salesman. When the right car came along, the question of price came up. I asked the salesman if the total price of the car would fall within the amount of money we had to work with. The salesman replied

in words to this effect: “If the owner of this company tells me to sell you a car for so much, then you can be assured that will be the price.” The owner of the company was “head over all things” so far as that car dealership was concerned, so I was assured that I would find a car for the right price. Jesus Christ is the “**Head over all things**,” and He is also the Head over the church. We can be assured that He will employ His power to accomplish His purposes in and through His church.

Paul has prayed that the Ephesians would come to grasp the power of our Lord toward the saints. He points to the power that was exercised in the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of our Lord. He then tells us that Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all, is also the Head of the church. The church can be assured that what God purposes to do in and through His church will be accomplished. But Paul takes this one additional step in the final verse of chapter 1. He informs his readers that the church is the body of Christ, “**the fullness of him who fills all in all**” (1:23).

What does this mean? Consider these words written by Paul in [Colossians 1](#):

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son ([Colossians 1:19](#)).*

All of the fullness of the Father dwells in the Son.

The Son thus manifests all that the Father is, just as we read in Hebrews:

*1 After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, 2 in these last days he has spoken to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world. 3 **The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word**, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. 4 Thus he became so far better than the angels as he has inherited a name superior to theirs ([Hebrews 1:1-4](#), emphasis mine).*

To see the Son is to see the Father:

*7 If you have known me, you will know my Father too. And from now on you do know him and have seen him.” 8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content.” 9 Jesus replied, “Have I been with you for so long, and you have not known me, Philip? The person who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” ([John 14:7-9](#)).*

Paul is telling us that the church is the body of Christ. The church is “**the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**” What an amazing statement! Paul has just told us how great our Lord Jesus Christ is, and he concludes by telling us that the church is His body, His fullness.

And so I ask the question, “How important is a study of the church?”

Answer: It is as important as the church is, and the church is the fullness of Christ, the One who fills all in all.

## 2 | THE OUTCOME OF OUR SALVATION:

### ***RECONCILIATION, WITH GOD AND WITH MAN***

***READ: [EPHESIANS 2:1-10](#)***

In [Ephesians 2](#), Paul describes our salvation from a human perspective. In verses 1–10, Paul describes our salvation in terms of sinful men being reconciled to God through faith in Christ. He describes our complete inability to save ourselves in verses 1–3, which demonstrates our desperate need for grace. Before we came to faith, we were dead in our sins—not sick, dead. We marched to the beat of a deadly drum, living in accordance with the world. And because we were conformed to the world, we were under bondage to the “**ruler of the kingdom of the air,**” the devil, who even now inspires and empowers those who are lost, the “**sons of disobedience**” (2:2).

The tragedy of our lost condition is that we didn’t even know we were lost and in desperate need of salvation. We lived our lives thinking we were free. In reality, we were enslaved to our fleshly passions and lusts. We pursued the pleasures of the flesh, without even knowing we were in bondage to the flesh. To sum it all up, we were enslaved by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and thereby we were doomed to eternal wrath.

---

*The tragedy of our lost condition is that we didn’t even know we were lost  
and in desperate need of salvation.*

---

Our salvation was not of our own doing. It was the outworking of God’s love as He mercifully saved us by His grace (2:4–10). Even though we were dead in our sins, He made us alive by joining us with Christ in His saving work on our behalf. In Him, we who were dead in our sins were made alive. In Him, we were raised up with Him and seated with Him

in the heavenly realms. In other words, we became partakers with Christ in His exaltation, which was described in [Ephesians 1:19-23](#).

Paul makes two things abundantly clear in the first half of [Ephesians 2](#).

*First*, Paul emphasizes that the salvation we have experienced is the work of God on our behalf, and not the result of any works we have done. We were dead in our sins, the pawns of sin and of Satan. We were saved by grace, through faith, and not of any work on our part ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). Even the good works that we may accomplish as Christians are the works He prepared beforehand (2:10).

*Second*, Paul informs us that our salvation is not primarily for our benefit, but for God's benefit:

*6 and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (2:6-7, emphasis mine).*

God saved us to manifest His grace and kindness, and thus to bring glory to Himself, both now and in the ages to come.<sup>iii</sup>

In verses 1-10, Paul describes our salvation in terms of sinful men being reconciled to God through faith in Christ. Now, in verses 11-22, Paul describes our salvation in terms of our reconciliation with others. Specifically, Paul speaks of the salvation God accomplished in Christ Jesus as that which reconciles Jews and (their bitter counterparts) the Gentiles.

### **READ: EPHESIANS 2:11-22**

In the Jewish mind, no one could be more lost than a Gentile (see [Galatians 2:15](#)). Paul does not minimize the "lostness" of his Gentile readers who have been converted.

In [Ephesians 2:1-3](#), Paul described the hopeless condition of his readers by virtue of the fact that they were sinners, enslaved by the world, the flesh, and the devil. They were, without a doubt, "**children of wrath**," that is, those who were destined to God's eternal wrath because of their sin, which made them enemies of God.

Now, in [Ephesians 2:11-12](#), Paul describes his readers' hopeless condition as Gentiles, from the standpoint of their separation from Israel. Notice all that the Gentiles lacked, from a Jewish point of view. They were ...  
... without circumcision (2:11)

... without the Messiah (2:12)  
... without citizenship in Israel (2:12)  
... without the covenants made with the patriarchs (2:12)  
... without hope (2:12)  
... without God in the world (2:12).

They were in bad shape. From the Jewish point of view, they were hopelessly lost.

You can understand, then, why “uncircumcised Gentiles” were looked down upon by the circumcised Jews. They were considered unworthy of the blessings God promised Abraham and his descendants. The mere thought of God including Gentiles in His blessings sent the Jews into a frenzy (see [Luke 4:16–30](#); [Acts 22:21–23](#)).

Nevertheless, Paul declares that the saving work of Christ at Calvary reconciles Jews and Gentiles who trust in Him. Lost (dare I say heathen) Gentiles who were formerly “**far away**” have been “**brought near**” through the blood of Christ (2:13).

Not only did God bring salvation to lost Gentiles through the work of Christ, making them participants in the blessings promised to the patriarchs, God also brought about reconciliation between these very hostile groups. Those who were once bitter enemies find peace and harmony in Christ (2:14–15). We are not two “separate but equal” groups, but a new creation, “**one new man**” (2:15). The wall which separated Jews and Gentiles in the temple has symbolically been torn down in Christ. Through the body of Christ (“**one body**,” 2:16), believing Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled; hostility has been done away with. We now all have access to the Father through the same Holy Spirit.

In the final verses of chapter 2, Paul once again chooses to bring his argument to a climax by turning our attention to Christ and to His church. We were once “illegal aliens” so far as God’s covenant promises were concerned, but in Christ we are now fellow citizens, members of God’s household.

The imagery now changes from a family, or household, to a temple (2:21). Believing Jews and Gentiles are, on the one hand, one new man (2:15); on the other they are one building – a temple (2:20–21). The foundation of this spiritual temple is the apostolic preaching of the cross. The “**apostles and prophets**” are the New Testament “**apostles and prophets**,” (see also 3:5), who proclaimed the shed blood of Jesus Christ as God’s remedy for sin, and God’s only way of salvation for sinners. In this temple, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone (2:20). He is the One who ties the whole building together, the One common point of reference by which the building can be constructed. This temple is described as still under construction (by

way of evangelism). The end result is a “**holy temple**” which serves as a dwelling place for God through His Holy Spirit (2:21–22).

Notice that once again the church is the finished product of God’s redemptive work.

I do not mean to say that the church is to be preeminent. Christ is the One who is preeminent, as the One who brought the church into existence. Christ is the One who is to be preeminent as the Head of the church ([Ephesians 1:20–23](#); [4:15](#); [5:23](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)). But God’s work at Calvary was meant to produce more than a multitude of individual saints; His saving work was intended to produce a church, a temple, a dwelling place in which He would reside by the Holy Spirit.

I would ask again, now based upon Paul’s teaching in [Ephesians 2](#), “How important is the church, and thus our study of the church?”

The church is God’s dwelling place. The church is the temple of God, composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, who have been reconciled to God and to each other through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Heaven is, more than anything, God dwelling in the midst of His redeemed people ([Revelation 21:1–3](#)).

The church is as close to heaven as men will ever get on earth, because the church is the place where God has chosen to dwell, through His Spirit.

## 3| THE DIVINE PURPOSE OF SALVATION

### *THE GLORY OF GOD*

*READ: [EPHESIANS 3:1–21](#)*

It is not our purpose to give a full exposition of these first chapters of Ephesians, but only to show how important the church is in each chapter. In chapter 3, Paul spells out what he has already alluded to in chapter 1:

*9 He did this when he revealed to us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 toward the administration of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ—the things in heaven and the things on earth ([Ephesians 1:9–10](#)).*

Paul has been privileged to reveal the “**secret**” or the “**mystery**” that was hidden in times past.



Now it is important to understand what a mystery is.

A mystery is not something which has never been mentioned before; a mystery is something at which God has been hinting, but which men have not understood.

One might say that our Lord's death on the cross of Calvary was a mystery to the disciples, as was His resurrection. This is not because Jesus never said anything about dying, or being raised from the dead. It is because the disciples had a very different kind of "**king**" and "**kingdom**" in mind:

*21 From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This must not happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's" ([Matthew 16:21-23](#)).*

The "**secret**" which God privileged Paul to announce was the "**mystery**" of His bringing all things to a head in Christ. Put differently, the "**mystery**" was the "**secret**" of His church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, through faith in Jesus Christ:

*5 Now this secret was not disclosed to mankind in former generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, 6 namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus ([Ephesians 3:5-6](#)).*

*This mystery is great—but I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church ([Ephesians 5:32](#)).*

Looking back, the salvation of Jews and Gentiles should come as no surprise, as we can see from Paul's quotations from the Old Testament in [Romans 9-11](#). But looking forward, no one saw the church coming. It was a great surprise. Paul was privileged not only to proclaim this mystery (a proclamation that was not always welcomed – see [Acts 22:21-23](#)), but to actually preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

My theological training predisposed me to think of the church as a kind of parenthesis, sandwiched between God's working with the Israel in the Old Testament and His working with Israel in the future. But this is not the impression I get from Paul at all.

---

*The church is not a parenthesis but an exclamation point!*

---

As I was reading this week, I found that I was not alone in this conclusion:

*“Several times I have read the Bible straight through, from Genesis to Revelation, and each time it strikes me that the church is a culmination, the realization of what God had in mind from the beginning.”<sup>iv</sup>*

As Philip Yancey puts it, this sense of culmination is not something reached independently of God’s Word, but as a result of reading His Word. Consider whether or not these texts don’t also point to the same conclusion:

*5 Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Receive one another, then, just as Christ also received you, to God’s glory. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God’s truth to confirm the promises made to the fathers, 9 and thus the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, **“Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praises to your name.”** 10 And again it says: **“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”** 11 And again, **“Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him.”** 12 And again Isaiah says, **“The root of Jesse will come, and the one who rises to rule over the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope.”** 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit ([Romans 15:5–13](#)).*

*39 And these [Old Testament saints] all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised. 40 For God had provided something better for us [New Testament saints], so that they would be made perfect together with us ([Hebrews 11:39–40](#)).*

The church is not a parenthesis but an exclamation point! The church is not just an interlude or intermission, something to occupy mankind while God prepares to save Israelites. The church is the culmination and climax of God’s eternal plan. It is the consummation of God’s purposes; the completion of what God had predestined in eternity past.

The Scriptures had spoken of this, but not so clearly that men would understand (and even if it were clearly revealed, it would not be welcomed).

This “**mystery**,” now revealed, puts Paul’s persecution in a different light:

*13 For this reason I ask you not to lose heart because of what I am suffering for you, **which is your glory** ([Ephesians 3:13](#), emphasis mine).*

*20 Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, 21 **to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen** ([Ephesians 3:20–21](#), emphasis mine).*

The gospel is glorious. Suffering for the gospel is glorious.

Paul speaks of his sufferings for the sake of the gospel as being the glory of the Ephesians. The gospel is the “**mystery**,” which is proclaimed by Paul, along with the apostles and the prophets ([Ephesians 2:20](#); [3:5](#)).

---

*The church is not only the place where God dwells;  
it is the place where God is glorified.*

---

The gospel is the good news that faith in Jesus Christ not only reconciles one to God, but also with believing Jews. The gospel is the good news that faith in Jesus Christ joins one to the body of Christ, the church, and thus makes every believer a part of God’s temple, God’s dwelling place.

Is the church worthy of our study of this doctrine? Most definitely.

The church is the climax of God’s eternal purpose. The church is not only the place where God dwells, it is the place where God is glorified ([Ephesians 2:20–21](#)). The church is the stage in human history upon which the wisdom of God is displayed before the celestial beings, to the glory of God:

*10 The purpose of this enlightenment is that through the church the multifaceted wisdom of God should now be disclosed to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord ([Ephesians 3:10–11](#)).*

*10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who predicted the grace that would come to you searched and investigated carefully. 11 They probed into what person or time the Spirit of*

*Christ in them was indicating when he testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory. 12 They were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through those who evangelized you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things angels long to catch a glimpse of ([1 Peter 1:10–12](#)).*

*For this reason a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels ([1 Corinthians 11:10](#)).*

## 4| THE SO WHAT?

Now we know that [Ephesians 4–6](#) has to do with application. As we conclude our study, let's consider what role the church might play in the practical outworking of the doctrine Paul has taught in chapters 1–3, doctrine which places a great emphasis on the church.

### ***READ: [EPHESIANS 4](#)***

Someone may very well ask, “So what does Ephesians have to say *to me*?”

That is always a good question, but it can also reveal an improper perspective and focus. The inclination of our flesh is to be self-centered, and so we immediately seek to see how the Bible impacts me, personally. What we need to see is that God did not save us to become little islands in the sea of His grace. He saved us to become a part of His church.

Baptism is not just about us, individually; it is about us being joined with Christ's body—His body in His literal death, burial and resurrection, as well as His body, the church.

Communion likewise is not merely an individual experience:

*16 Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread ([1 Corinthians 10:16–17](#)).*

---

*He saved us to become a part of His church.*

---

We in the West tend toward rugged individualism. This is very different from the sense of community that one finds in the East, especially in Asia.

In [Ephesians 4–6](#), Paul applies the doctrine he has taught to the church corporately, as well as to saints individually. In fact, I would be so bold as to say that there is more corporate emphasis than individual. This becomes apparent as we begin to think our way through chapters 4–6.

Paul begins his application by emphasizing the urgency of maintaining the unity within the church:

*1 I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all ([Ephesians 4:1–6](#)).*

The unity of which Paul speaks must surely be the unity that he described in [Ephesians 2:11–22](#), that is the unity which resulted from the reconciliation God brought about between Jews and Gentiles, in Christ.

The church is the body of Christ, and it is the temple in which God dwells by His Spirit. It is “**one new man**” made up of Jews and Gentiles, who come from very different cultures, and who have lived all their lives in hostility toward each other.

---

*This diversity of gifting is not designed to undermine unity,  
but rather to facilitate unity.*

---

The work of Christ at Calvary accomplished a great reconciliation, but maintaining this unity is something for which all the saints must strive.

*7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Therefore it says, “**When he ascended on high he took captives, he gave gifts to men.**” 9 Now what is the meaning of “**he ascended**,” except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 He, the very one who descended, is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things. 11 It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. 14 So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried*

*about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. 15 But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. 16 From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love ([Ephesians 4:7-16](#)).*

The church not only comes from very diverse backgrounds; the church is, by design, made up of individual believers whose gifts and ministries are diverse. This diversity of gifting is not designed to undermine unity, but rather to facilitate unity.

The spiritual growth Paul speaks about here is not individual, but corporate. It is the whole body which is to grow up into Christ (4:15). It is the growth of all (4:12-13). It is brought about as each individual member of the body utilizes his gift for the building up of the whole body (4:16). The church grows corporately as the church functions corporately.

Note how central the church is here.

The remainder of chapter 4 contains Paul's instructions to the church pertaining to relationships with one another. We are not to seek our own good at the expense of others; rather, we are to strive to promote the good of others at our expense.

#### ***READ: [EPHESIANS 5](#)***

In chapter 5, Paul has more instructions for the church.

Verses 1-5 speak of our responsibility to love one another in a way that is very different from the "love" of those who are lost in their sins.

We are to love others as Christ loved us (5:1-2), as Christ loved His church (5:25-31). We are likewise to stand apart from this world, the world which once enslaved us (2:1-3; 5:3-14).

Paul said earlier that the church is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (2:22). Paul now instructs the church to be "filled with the Spirit" (5:18).

How does this filling of the Spirit evidence itself?

---

*The manifestations of the filling of the Spirit are described in corporate terms, rather than in individual terms.*

---

Is it something individual, so that people look at us, so that people conclude that we are spiritual? No.

*15 Therefore be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for each other in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ ([Ephesians 5:15–21](#)).*

The manifestations of the filling of the Spirit are described in corporate terms, rather than in individual terms. Those who are Spirit-filled walk in wisdom, and they make the most of the opportunities to live righteously (5:15–16). Those who are Spirit-filled grasp God's will (5:15). They speak and sing spiritual truths to one another.

They are characterized by thanksgiving and by submission to one another. The filling of the Spirit is evident in the corporate life of the church.

I see the same thing in the early church following Pentecost:

*38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself” ([Acts 2:38–39](#)).*

*Here is the promise of salvation for all who will believe, a promise which includes the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are told that many who heard this promise trusted in Jesus Christ and were added to the church ([Acts 2:41, 47](#)).*

What were the evidences of the Spirit's presence and power in the church?

*41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added. 42 They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Reverential awe came on everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and held everything in common, 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. 46 Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, 47 praising God and having*

*the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved ([Acts 2:41-47](#)).*

In [Ephesians 5:22-33](#), the doctrine of the church which Paul expounded earlier is applied to marriage. The relationship between our Lord and His church is the pattern for the way husbands and wives relate to each other in their marriage.

Here is an interesting thought. How many different kinds of marriage counseling exist today? How many approaches are there to marriage? It would seem to me that a good marriage would be established on the basis of [Ephesians 1-3](#). Christian marriage is the application of the church truth taught in the first half of Ephesians.

Can you believe it? Ecclesiology is the key to a godly marriage!

### **READ: [EPHESIANS 6](#)**

One may think that in [Ephesians 6](#) Paul finally gets to the individual application.

There are implications for individuals, it is true, but these seem to stem from the corporate nature of the church. The church is a corporate body, encompassing a very diverse group of people: parents and their children, slaves and their masters. All have a unique stewardship as a result of being a part of the larger body, the body of Christ.

When I come to the “spiritual warfare” section of Ephesians (6:10-20), I must admit that I have always viewed these instructions as individual. But seeing the corporate (church) emphasis in Ephesians, I am obliged to consider these instructions as having a corporate dimension.

Let us remember our Lord’s first words regarding His church in Matthew:

*16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven! 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.” 20 Then he instructed his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ ([Matthew 16:16-20](#)).*

Peter’s great confession (that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God) was the foundation of the church.



The first thing that Jesus says about the church is that **“the gates of Hades will not overpower it”** ([Matthew 16:18](#)). This strongly suggests to me that our spiritual warfare should not be individualistic, but corporate. It is the church that will withstand the attacks of Satan.

Should we therefore not wage our spiritual warfare as a part of the church, and not merely as an individual?

The last verses of Paul’s instructions regarding spiritual warfare call for our prayers **“for all the saints”** (verse 18), as well as for Paul (verses 19 and 20). Paul does not wish to go it alone, but rather urges the Ephesians to join with him in his warfare against the kingdom of darkness.

When the apostles faced persecution for preaching Christ, where did they go as soon as possible? Was it not to the church?

*23 When they were released, Peter and John went to their fellow believers and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, “Master of all, you who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them, 25 who said by the Holy Spirit through your servant David our forefather, ‘**Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot foolish things? 26 The kings of the earth stood together, and the rulers assembled together, against the Lord and against his Christ.**’ 27 “For both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, 28 to do as much as your power and your plan had decided beforehand would happen. 29 And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage, 30 while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously ([Acts 4:23–31](#)).*

*8 The angel said to him, “Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.” Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” 9 Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 After they had passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went outside and walked down one narrow street, when at once the angel left him. 11 When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of*

*Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen.” 12 When Peter realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered together and were praying. 13 When he knocked at the door of the outer gate, a slave girl named Rhoda answered. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she did not open the gate, but ran back in and told them that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 But they said to her, “You’ve lost your mind!” But she kept insisting that it was Peter, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!” 16 Now Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were greatly astonished. 17 He gave them a signal with his hand to be quiet and then related to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, “Tell James and the brothers these things,” and then he left and went to another place ([Acts 12:8-17](#)).*

*When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia’s house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then departed ([Acts 16:40](#)).*

It was the church that sent out missionaries ([Acts 13:1-3](#)), and when they had completed their mission, they returned to report to the church ([Acts 14:25-28](#)). Paul understood that the church was intimately involved with him in the preaching of the gospel ([Philippians 1:3-5, 19; 4:15-20](#)).

We do not live our lives in some autonomous fashion, but as a part of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We could go on to show other ways in which the doctrine of the church is applied in [Ephesians 4-6](#). But have we not made the point that the doctrine of ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) is vitally important? It was to Paul, as we can see from the Book of Ephesians.

Should it not be important to us as well?

If so, then we should proceed with our study of the church, convinced that this is an endeavor well worth the time and effort required. May God grant that we might better grasp the glorious relationship between Christ and the church, His bride, His body, His dwelling place, His fullness, His glory.

## END NOTES

---

<sup>i</sup> The same argument is employed by Paul in [Romans 8](#). In chapter 7, Paul demonstrated from his own experience the agony of the Christian who seeks to live the Christian life in his own strength. The fact is that we are overpowered by sin, and the reason is that our flesh is weak. Paul concludes with these agonizing words, **“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”** ([Romans 7:24](#)) The answer comes in chapter 8: **“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you”** ([Romans 8:8-11](#)). The Spirit Who raised the dead body of Jesus from the grave is the same Spirit who indwells the Christian, and Who gives life to our dead bodies, thus enabling us to live in a way that pleases God.

<sup>ii</sup> We must keep 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 in mind, for here Paul tells us that once everything is subjected to the Son, He hands it all over to the Father, as the Son, Who is submissive to the Father.

<sup>iii</sup> I am utterly baffled by the theology of contemporary Christian songs which speak of our Lord dying on the cross of Calvary because He could not bear the thought of living without us. How arrogant. Salvation is not nearly so much about us as it is about God. As Paul said elsewhere, all things (which surely includes salvation) are from Him, through Him, and to Him ([Romans 11:36](#)).

<sup>iv</sup> Philip Yancey, Church: Why Bother? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), pp. 37-38.



## Online Courses for Local Church Elder and Leader Development

Check out the **School of the Shepherds** (SOTS), the BER online curriculum designed to supplement local church elder and leader development. Preparation for shepherding God's people is much more than cognitive study, but there needs to be a biblical understanding of what is involved. This curriculum provides that element, not only for preparing future elders, but also leaders in various other roles in the local church; the principles apply broadly. Also, existing leaders can use this curriculum to fill in the gaps that are lacking in their own preparation.

Find out more at <https://biblicaleldership.com/school-of-the-shepherds/>