

CFM 39 – Ephesians “For the perfecting of the Saints”

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All four of these letters were likely written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. They likely would have been written in the early to mid 60's AD. The letters to Galatia and Ephesus are atypical, where the letters to Philippi and Colossus are typical.

Galatians

This letter is strident in tone as an unrelenting attack on Judaizers within the Church at Galatia. The text suggests the Gentile converts to Christianity there at Galatia have been persuaded by Jewish Christians that they need to entirely embrace the Law of Moses. The Gentiles appear to have acquiesced, and Paul is livid. Paul vigorously attacks the Law of Moses in a way he does nowhere else. Contrast this letter to Romans, where he is addressing a Jewish audience and trying to persuade them to accept Jesus as the Messiah. There, his arguments are very carefully worded and he is cautious to never directly attack the Law or Moses, so as to not offend his both ethnically and religiously Jewish audience. This letter is the opposite case, as Paul's clear goal is to destroy the Judaizer's theological argument among the Gentile Christians.

How this rebellion came about is unclear. Throughout the text of this letter Paul refers to the subversive antagonists as "they" (cf. 1:7, 4:16, 5:12, 6:12-13) without ever explicitly identifying who "they" are. "They" are likely Jewish converts who are having difficulty letting go of the Law of Moses, similar to the people appearing in Acts 15, whom Paul alludes to ch. 2. Whether they are disciples of Peter or of John Baptist, or some other faction is lost to history.

Paul's attacks on the Law or Moses are unsparing, especially for someone who was formerly such an ardent and passionate advocate of the Law against the Christians. The passage in Acts 9:5 where the Lord says "It is hard for you to kick against the pricks" implies Saul was having an internal struggle over what he was doing. He was being goaded by his own conscience over his attacks on Christianity. Given Jesus' statement, it suggests Saul was aware of the limits of the Law of Moses, but it took a more direct confrontation to bring those limits front and center. By this time late in Paul's life, it is clear he has sorted out all of the doctrine, whether through internal reasoning or continual debates against Jews outside or Judaizers within the Church.

Ch. 1 Paul starts with an authority statement (v. 1-5). He then censures the Galatians for warping the gospel, as incorporating the Law of Moses is unacceptable, and is not part of the gospel he preached (v. 6-10). Paul makes it perfectly clear that he was commissioned by Jesus Christ himself (v. 11-12, 15-16), is intimately familiar with the Law (v. 13-14), stands in high esteem with the apostles (v. 21-24), but his authority and motivation is not from them (v. 15-20).

Ch. 2 Paul recounts the controversy from Acts 15 (v. 1-10) as well as an additional controversy (v. 11-21) to show the deadness of the works of the Law of Moses. These examples and his

ministry to the Gentiles show plainly the distinction between Gentile and Jew are over with and thus acts of the Law, such as circumcision, which was intended to differentiate between Abraham's lineage and those of other nations, are no longer applicable.

Ch. 3 Abraham preceded the Law and was righteous without the Law of Moses, and is to be father to both Israel and all nations (v. 1-14). The Law was given because of transgression, not for righteousness, the Law points to Christ, and Christ eliminates the difference between Israelite and Gentile, because of the covenant made to Abraham. Paul's argument shows the Law in and of itself served only to condemn the sinner, and Christ fulfilled the covenant with Abraham, ending the Law.

Ch. 4 Jesus Christ redeems us from the condemnation of the Law, making us sons of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven (v. 1-7). They were slaves to sin (v. 8-11), and need to return to their former humility when he was first preaching to them (v. 12-15). These new teachers are only in it for themselves (v. 16-17), and he wishes he could be with them to bring them back to Christ (v. 18-20), so they will be free, not slaves (v. 21-31).

Ch. 5 Jesus Christ set us free from the Law of Moses, which is like the yoke of slavery (v. 1). If they remain in the works of the Law, then they are not free, like Christ taught them to be and are rejecting him (v. 2-12). Love each other and do not fight amongst yourselves (v. 13-15) over the Law of Moses. They need to be spiritual by following Christ and not carnal in following the Law (v. 16-26).

Ch. 6 Support each other, help each other, don't find fault with each other, find fault with yourself instead of others (v. 1-5). Support each other physically, as well as spiritually, especially among those in the church (v. 6-10). Those in the church who are trying to get you to live the Law of Moses are doing so out of fear of being persecuted for being Christian, when the circumcision is now meaningless to God (v. 11-16).

Ephesians

This letter is one encouraging transcendent spirituality, where Paul encourages the Church to be united in Christ. Paul wants them to forget about Jew versus Gentile, and focus on what Jesus has made possible for them. The content is much different from the others of Paul's letters, likely owing to his familiarity with the Church there, having lived there three months and then again three years, and his knowledge that they were well ahead of other nascent Churches that were struggling.

The differences in this text compared to the other letters (along with the "at Ephesus" missing from a few of the most ancient available texts in 1:1, and the lack of salutes) cause modern scholars to assume it was not written to Ephesus, or it was not written by Paul, or both. However, this letter is very intimate and is not intended as a general letter to the churches abroad. This is a letter that encourages people whom Paul knows well to aspire to unify with Christ through the Spirit. Paul's pathos and appeals are not generic. This is not the kind of letter that would be sent out to aspiring Christians who were struggling with the basics. His omission of specific salutations can easily be seen as an effort to protect the church from hostile Hellenists (cf. Acts 19:23-41, also note in Acts 20:17-38 the farewell does not occur in Ephesus, it occurs some 60 miles south in Miletus, probably to avoid mobs and hostile individuals). He also has no need to cite locals as references as he knows the ecclesia at Ephesus quite well.

Paul told the ecclesia at Corinth that they were young in the gospel, so they were only ready for milk and not solid food (cf. 1 Cor. 3:2). This epistle to the Ephesians shows they were ready for solid food. This letter is more theologically dense than any of the letter he wrote, even Romans.

Ch. 1 Gentiles were foreordained to be adopted into Israel and made God's children through Christ (v. 3-14). Paul wants their faith to increase their knowledge by revelation so they may fully understand Jesus Christ's nature (v. 15-23, reiterated in 3:14-19).

Ch. 2 Saved by Grace through faith, their sins are forgiven as a merciful gift from Christ (v. 1-10). Christ's sacrifice ended the separation between Israel and Gentiles (v. 11-22).

Ch. 3 Paul comments on his calling as an apostle (v. 2-12), and glories in the Lord in their accepting the Gospel, and he hopes they will continue to progress in it (v. 13-21).

Ch. 4 Christians should be united through the Spirit, in serving each other in the Church (v. 1-16). Shed all of the old bad customs of the Gentiles, and be renewed in the Spirit (v. 17-31).

Ch. 5-6 are a unity, the division is artificial. The overarching theme is the ecclesia should be united in Christ and should reject the world and the adversary by taking advantage of what Christ has done for us.

Ch. 5 Be imitators of God, following the example of Christ. Reject all of the worldly behaviors around you (v. 1-21). Husbands and wives be united, and serve one another like Christ serves the ecclesia (v. 22-33).

Ch. 6 Children and parents be united (v. 1-4), masters and slaves be united (v. 5-9). Put on the armor of God, that Christ has prepared for you and offers you (v. 10-22).

Armor of God. This is a theologically dense analogy Paul lays down for the church at Ephesus. It presupposes a deep knowledge of Isaiah, particularly the messianic passages. It presents the armor the Lord Himself wears as something the ecclesia can put on in defense of the adversary, as a result of what Jesus has accomplished for them.

v. 14	Loins girt about with truth	Isa. 11:5
	Breastplate of righteousness	Isa. 59:17
v. 15	Feet shod...gospel of peace	Isa. 52:7
v. 16	Shield of faith (implicit via Ps. 91:4)	Isa. 49:2
v. 17	Helmet of salvation	Isa. 59:17
	Sword of the Spirit	Isa. 49:2

Philippians

This letter is more typical of what we would expect Paul to write to a nascent Christian church among Gentiles. He informs them of his current situation, bearing testimony of it's benefit (ch. 1). He then encourages them to have a godly walk and be good examples (ch. 2). He warns them to beware of Judaizers, and endure to the end (ch. 3). He urges them on to aspire to the best thing God has to offer, His peace in Christ, and thanks them for their generosity (ch. 4). The letter closes with salutes to specific people.

Colossians

Another typical letter from Paul. Paul praises the Church in Colossus for their faithfulness, and bears testimony of Christ (ch. 1). He encourages them to remain grounded in Christ, and not be deceived by worldly philosophy or the Judaizers (ch. 2). Keep seeking Christ and aim for spiritual things, not being dragged down by worldly things. All in the church should be united in Christ (ch. 3). He then closes with general encouragement to have a godly walk, and a series of specific salutes and instructions (ch. 4).