

Ephesians and the Other Letters of Paul

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Ephesians has long, somewhat rambling sentences, heavy use of the genitive case, more than 70 words not used in other letters of Paul, and a unique vision of the role of the Church. Thus, some scholars believe *Ephesians* was written later in the 1st century by a disciple of Paul. They note differences in vocabulary, thought, and style from the undisputed Pauline letters (1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philipians, Philemon).

However, on closer examination, all major sections and thoughts in *Ephesians* correspond to other undisputed letters of Paul, conceptually and even semantically.

Topic	Ephesians	Other Letters
Believers are 'adopted' into and 'redeemed in Christ'	1:3 – 6	Rom.8:12 – 17, Gal.4:1 – 7
Jesus is a new 'passover lamb' through whom (and into whom) we pass into new life	1:7 – 8	1 Cor.5:7 – 8
God's purpose is to bring people under Jesus' lordship, and join both Jews and Gentiles to him	1:9 – 14	1 Cor.15:22 – 28; Phil.2:5 – 11
Believers have the resurrection power of Christ by the indwelling Spirit	1:15 – 2:10	Rom.8:9 – 11 ; Gal.5:16 – 26
Jesus is the new Adam who has dominion over all things	1:21 – 23	Romans 5:12 – 21; 1 Cor.15:22 – 45 ¹
'Rulers and authorities' oppose Jesus and the Church	1:21; 3:10; 6:12	1 Cor.2:8 and 15:24 - 28; Gal.4:8 – 10
The Christian community is God's new Temple	2:11 – 22	1 Cor.3:16 – 17; 6:12 – 20; 2 Cor.6:16
A large chiasm occurs in 1:3 – 14 and 2:11 – 22	2:11 – 22	Chiasms occur repeatedly in 1 Cor.
The Mosaic Law once separated the Gentiles from God's promises to Israel, but in Christ, God unites the Gentiles with a renewed Israel	2:15	Rom.11, 14 – 15; Gal.3 – 4; Phil.3
Paul has a personal passion to see Gentiles worship Jesus as Gentiles	3:1 – 13	Rom.14 – 15; Gal.2 – 4; Phil.3
Believers must remember the humility and love of Christ in order to live out Christian community	4:1ff.	Rom.12:3ff., Phil.2; 1 Cor.13
The Christian community is referred to corporately as 'the body of Christ'	4:1 – 6	Rom.12:4 – 5; 1 Cor.12
'Spiritual gifts' are the first practical consideration after 'a theology of the church'	4:7 – 16	Rom.12:4 – 8
Entering the 'body of Christ' occurs through our personal transformation of old to new self	4:17 – 24	Rom.6:1 – 11; 1 Cor.12:12 – 13 (baptism language – old to new)
Believers in Christ are to be light in a dark world, calling the world to Christ	5:7 – 14	Phil.2:15; 2 Cor.4
Time is of the essence	5:15 – 16	Rom.13:11 – 14
Marriage between husband and wife is a head-body union	5:22 – 33	1 Cor.6:12 – 20 and 11:1 – 16
Put on the breastplate of faith, helmet of salvation	6:14 – 17	1 Th.5:8
The entire text is wrapped around quotations and themes of <i>Isaiah</i> : new exodus redemption, Messiah ruling, life out of death, peace near and far, new Temple, Gentiles included, shining in darkness, armor of God	throughout	In the same pattern as Rom. and 1 Cor.

Theologically, *Ephesians* contains ideas and language that are central to Paul, so any differences are stylistic, not substantial. Stylistic differences can be explained by the fact that *Ephesians* is not addressing a problem or question

¹ In fact, the whole thought structure of Romans 5 – 8 is basically identical to Ephesians 1:1 – 2:10.

arising from the congregation. And, historically, it is quite difficult to imagine that someone brilliant enough to write *Ephesians* would not be well known in early Christian history.

Moreover, *Ephesians* is very similar to *Colossians*, even sharing 55 verses verbatim. The two letters complement each other. In *Colossians*, Paul discusses the supremacy of Christ; in *Ephesians*, the unique role of the Church as the body of Christ. Apparently, Paul wrote the two letters together, advising Christians to see themselves as the renewed people of God (*Ephesians*) but not returning to the Mosaic Law (*Colossians*). Both letters were carried by Tychicus (Col.4:7; Eph.6:21). *Ephesians* was probably the letter coming to Colosse from Laodicea (Col.4:16).

Audience – Ephesus and/or Churches throughout Asia Minor

Ephesians is a less personal letter, without personal greetings or attention to specific congregational issues. Ephesians 1:15 says, ‘I have heard of your faith in the Lord,’ suggesting that the author did not know the audience directly. Yet Paul spent over 3 years in Ephesus and was very close to the elders of the church (Acts 20). How do we resolve this?

The earliest and best manuscripts of the Greek New Testament do not contain the phrase ‘in Ephesus’ (Eph.1:1). It is much more likely that the letter was intended to be circulated among the churches of the region (of which Ephesus may have been chronologically first) and functioned as a general homily or theological manifesto, rather than a classic epistle which addressed specific issues in the life of the church or combated heresy. *Ephesians* therefore appears to have been Paul’s crowning theological reflection.

The original audience would have had access to the Old Testament. The other epistles of Paul may also be referenced when interpreting *Ephesians* as evidence of Paul’s values and ideas, though the audience probably wouldn’t have had access to them.

Date – roughly 62 AD (disputed)

If indeed Paul is the author, then the letter was written during his Roman imprisonment (AD 60 – 62), very close to the end of his life. He identifies himself as a prisoner for Christ (Eph.3:1; 4:1; 6:20). The other epistles written during this period are *Colossians*, *Philippians*, and *Philemon*. *Ephesians* is first quoted by Ignatius of Antioch in AD 100.