

# Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (and to us)

## Session 1. Staging the Study of a Pauline Letter (Eph. 1:1)

1. Two speculations about the prepositional phrase, "in Ephesus."
  - A. Implications of its omission in the first edition of Ephesians
  - B. Implications of its addition to the final (i.e., canonical) edition of Ephesians.
2. A way of reading Ephesians as Scripture: A Pauline "Shorter Catechism"

## Session 2. Theological Foundations: Paul's Eulogy of God (Eph. 1:3-14)

1. Stanza 1 (1:3-6): God's gracious initiatives that locate the letter's recipients "in" the exalted Christ. Three theological tropes that identify this people as "special" and privileged in the economy of God's salvation:
  - A. God chose them (i.e., "the holy and faithful people in Christ Jesus;" 1:1).
  - B. God destined them.
  - C. God lavishly graced them.
2. Stanza 2 (1:7-10): God's redemptive acts "through" Christ have located this people in Christ. Four divine actions are mentioned:
  - A. God ransomed them.
  - B. God forgave them.
  - C. God poured out a proper understanding of God's way of salvation into them.
  - D. God put creation to rights to which they now testify.
3. Stanza 3 (1:11-14): The benefits received by the people who exist in Christ Jesus.
  - A. They receive an inheritance from God (as God's adopted children).
  - B. They receive a calling from God to honor God's reputation in the world.
  - C. They receive the word of truth (from the apostles and prophets).

D. They receive the holy Spirit who marks them out as God's people and who enables them to embody already what is not yet fully realized: God's new creation.

### **Session 3. Teaching Paul: Paul's "Shorter Catechism" (Eph. 1:15—5:20)**

**Affirmation #1** (catchword: "fullness" that links 1:23 with 4:10): We believe the church embodies the fullness of Christ in every way (1:20-23); therefore, we should expect the church to practice the diverse charisms distributed by the Spirit of the risen One in order to mature the church into the fullness of Christ in every way (4:1-16).

**Affirmation #2** (catchword: "walk" that links 2:2, 10 with 4:17, 5:2,8,15): We believe the church was redeemed from sin and death and brought back to life by God's grace to "walk" in the good works of new creation (2:1-10); therefore, the works the church now engages and the wisdom it now possesses as "children of light" contrast sharply with the works and know-how that once characterized their walk as unbelieving "children of darkness" (4:17—5:20).

**Affirmation #3** (trope: "household" found in 2:20 but then worked out as a type of Christian household envisaged by the household code found in 5:21—6:9): We believe the church is God's household comprised of once rival groups of now reconciled believers whose cornerstone is the cruciform Christ and foundation is Scripture, in which God's Spirit dwells (2:11-22); therefore, form Christian households whose relationships are ordered by a common devotion to Christ who is our peace (5:21—6:9).

**Affirmation #4** (catchphrase: "to make God's plan known" found in 3:3, 5 and 6:19), whose audience is, ironically, "the cosmic rulers and authorities" (3:10), which is then repeated in "rulers and authorities" (6:12) as the leaders of the opposition in the church's spiritual slugfest that characterizes the present age. So here's the affirmation: We believe the church has received the gospel made known to the apostles, which testifies to God's complete victory over evil to the powers and principalities in the heavens (3:1-21); therefore, stand firm against these powers and principalities by acting upon the this apostolic testimony (6:10-20).