



Annotated Scripture Series



The Sacred Epistle of
Saint Paul
to the Ephesians



Christ the King Books

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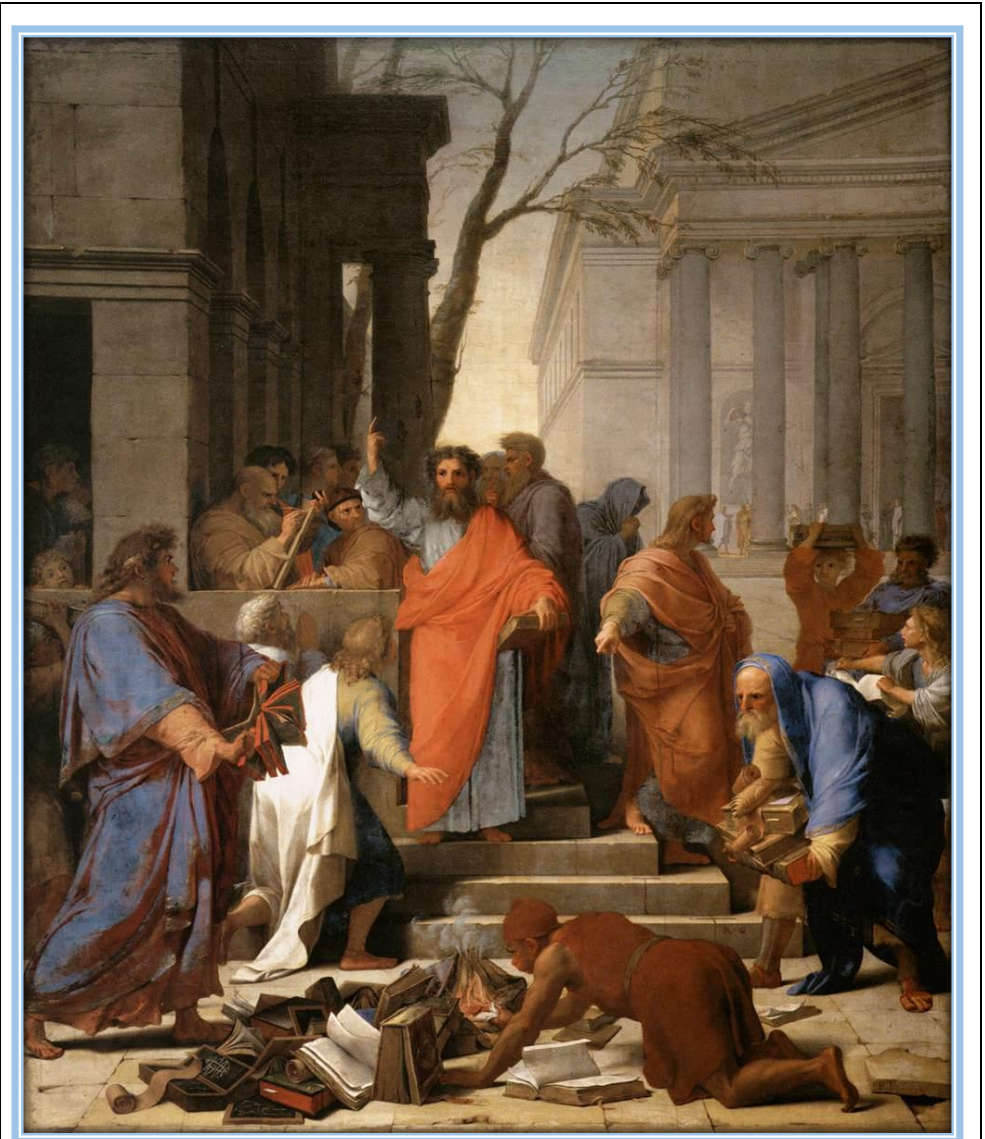
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About Ephesus and the Ephesians...

Ephesus was the capital of Lesser Asia, and celebrated for the temple of Diana, a “goddess” to which the most part of the people of the East went frequently to worship. But “the gods of the gentiles are devils”, as King David tells us in the Psalms (95:5). Pagans would come to Ephesus from all over and join the population to celebrate Diana’s feastdays with revelries and perversions. Such was the state of Ephesus when St. Paul got there.

But St. Paul preached the Gospel there, for two years the first time and later, in a second visit, for about a year. During these visits he converted many. Later, when he was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote this epistle to them and sent it by Tychicus. He admonishes them to hold firmly the faith which they had received and warns them, and also those of the neighboring cities, against the sophistry of philosophers and doctrine of false teachers who were come among them. The matters of faith contained in this Epistle are exceedingly sublime, and consequently very difficult to be understood. It was written about twenty-nine years after our Lord's Ascension.

St. Timothy was converted by St. Paul and became to him a disciple, companion on his travels, and helper. St. Paul eventually made Timothy the first bishop of Ephesus, and after he left, St. Paul wrote two *Epistles to Timothy* to further instruct him here. St. Timothy tried to stop the unconverted Ephesian pagans from their idolatry and filth, but he was eventually stoned to death by them.



St. Paul preaching to the Ephesians. In the background is the colossus Temple of Diana. St. Paul’s preaching is so effective that many of the inhabitants burn their expensive books of paganism.
Eustache Le Sueur [Public domain]

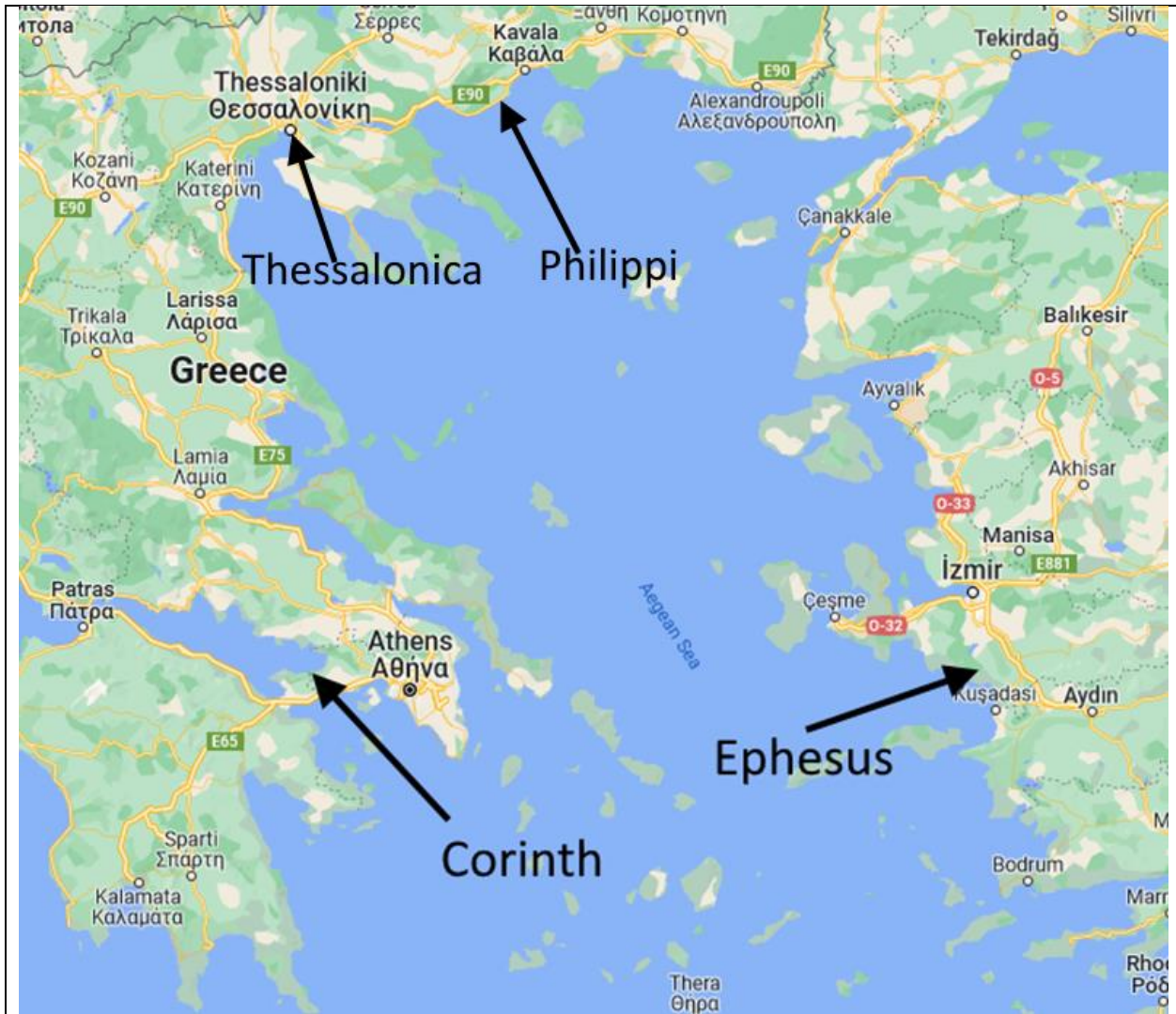
Lesson 1: Ephesians Chapters 1 - 3

Ephesians, Chapter 1

The great blessings we have received through Christ. He is the head of all the church.

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, to all the saints who are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul is writing to the Catholic converts at **Ephesus**.



Ephesus, which will eventually become another Catholic stronghold founded by St. Paul. This was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, and a very important city. It is on the west coast of what is today the nation of Turkey. Other cities in which St. Paul either founded, or greatly strengthened, Catholic communities were: the Greek cities of Corinth, Philippi, and Thessalonica, as well as Rome itself and many other places in the Roman Empire.

Map data © Google, 2023 United States, with our annotations added

1:2 Grace be to you and peace, from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ:

1:4 As he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity.

"In coelestibus": in heavenly things/places.

Romans 8:29: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the firstborn amongst many brethren."

1:5 Who hath **predestinated** us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto himself: according to the purpose of his will:

There is no doubt that St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is deep, covering many hard topics. St. Paul begins by speaking about the very difficult topic of **predestination**. There is a true, Catholic teaching of predestination. St. Thomas Aquinas writes this: "Predestination is nothing else than the foreknowledge and foreordaining of those gracious gifts which make certain the salvation of all who are saved." (St. Augustine) Grace is a gift, and God can give it or not. Predestination is the knowledge in God's mind that He will give to certain men the graces necessary to save their souls; to others, He will not do so. In this latter case, God does not actively condemn the person, but merely withholds gifts that He is under no obligation to give. God does predestine certain men to heaven, but if a man is damned, he damns himself by his sins, and it is not God that damns him to hell. One can read more about this in St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (Part 1, Qu. 23).

But there are various twisted, Protestant-inspired versions of 'predestination', invented especially by Luther and Calvin. These false versions claim that God *actively wills* the damnation of certain men – that is, He made them for damnation. Here is Calvin's version: "... Therefore some men are **born devoted from the womb to certain death, that His name may be glorified in their destruction.** ... [I]t is an awful decree, I confess, but none can deny that God foreknew the future final fate of man before He created him – and that He did foreknow it **because it was appointed by His own ordinance.**"¹ For Calvin, God made certain men *for* damnation, so He could be glorified. This is a blasphemous heresy, but such is Protestantism.

1:6 Unto the praise of the glory of his grace, in which he hath graced us, in his beloved son.
1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace,
1:8 Which hath superabounded in us, in all wisdom and prudence,
1:9 That he might make known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in him,
1:10 In the dispensation of the fulness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in him.
1:11 In whom we also are called by lot, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will.
1:12 That we may be unto the praise of his glory: we who before hoped in Christ:
1:13 In whom you also, after you had heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation), in whom also believing, you were signed with the Holy Spirit of promise.
1:14 Who is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of acquisition, unto the praise of his glory.
1:15 Wherefore, I also, hearing of your faith that is in the Lord Jesus and of your love towards all the saints,
1:16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making commemoration of you in my prayers,
1:17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of him:
1:18 The eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what the hope is of his calling and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

God predestines men for their salvation and His glory.

Acquisition here, a noun meaning something or someone acquired or gained; a purchased possession.

¹ *A Treatise of the Eternal Predestination of God*, John Calvin, 1552

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Protestants love to imagine a St. Paul who would agree with their heresies, especially that of “faith alone” by which they mean that a man’s works do not save him, but rather, only his so-called “faith”. We say so-called faith because most Protestants do not mean the same thing as Catholic by that word. The Catholic Church teaches that “Faith is the supernatural virtue by which a man firmly believes all the truths that God has revealed, on the word of God revealing them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.” (Baltimore Catechism Qu. 122). But for Protestants, “faith” is merely the firm belief (in reality, the presumption) that Christ has saved them; in fact, they claim, “**If you do not believe you are saved, then you have no faith**”. This is a ridiculous redefinition of the word ‘faith’ as well as a mortal sin of presumption. For them, ‘faith’ means, “I know I am personally saved by the grace of Jesus.” The Catholic Church, however, teaches the truth: Faith has nothing to do with what we think of ourselves or others; rather, it is a divinely-given virtue (a habit in the soul) which helps us believe the many truths God has revealed because we know He has revealed them. The Council of Trent teaches that no man in this life knows if he is saved or not;² it is this very lack of knowing that made the saints tremble not knowing whether they would get to heaven!

What does all of the above have to do with Ephesians? The Protestant super-heresy of “**faith alone**” is just one of the many heresies which they attempt to support by simply “cherry-picking” certain passages from Scripture (such as the very next one – 2:8), while **ignoring others** which *when taken all together* give the bigger picture of what the Church teaches. It is true, that grace and salvation are free gifts of God, and that faith is necessary. It is also true that we are not saved *simply* by our works and merits. But, neither is it true that good works have nothing to do with our salvation, nor that faith alone is sufficient, as Protestants pretend! Faith is *necessary* but not *sufficient* for salvation – even the real virtue of Faith. The Council of Trent teaches infallibly that, for those above the age of reason, good works done in the state of grace are essential for salvation. St. James teaches this explicitly.³ St. Paul also mentions, “with fear and trembling work out [our] salvation” (Philippians 2:12) So Faith AND good works done in the state of sanctifying grace are necessary. Works done in grace do indeed merit grace from God, Who has promised us rich rewards for our good works.⁴ Again, all of this discussion is necessary because heretics have used the next verse to justify many of their errors.

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| 2:8 | For by grace you are saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God. | Does this version mean, as Luther claims, “faith alone ”? |
| 2:9 | Not of works, that no man may glory. | |
| 2:10 | For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them. | |
| 2:11 | For which cause be mindful that you, being heretofore gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision in the flesh, made by hands: | I.e., the Gentiles were uncircumcised in the flesh, having not followed the Mosaic law of circumcision “made by hands”. Note that in the Old Law this circumcision was indeed the way the Jews gained sanctifying grace (<i>Summa Theologiae, Part 3, Qu. 70</i>). This grace was given to them in foreknowledge of God of the Redemption of the Eternal Word of God, yet to become incarnate. |
| 2:12 | That you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the conversation of Israel and strangers to the testament, having no hope of the promise and without God in this world. | |
| 2:13 | But now in Christ Jesus, you, who some time were afar off, are | Not by the blood of circumcision are the Gentiles welcomed in, but by the |

² “... each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that **no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.**” - Council of Trent, Session 6, Ch. IX Again, in Ch. XII we read, “No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he that is justified, either cannot sin any more, or, if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto Himself.”

³ James 2:14, 2:17, 2:24: “What shall it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him? ... “So faith also, if it have not works, is dead in itself.” ... “Do you see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only?” We Catholics can see why Luther wanted, but was not allowed by his followers, to remove the entire Epistle of James from his so-called ‘bible’.

⁴ The ultimate reward of salvation, however, is freely given and not earned by the works of any man. That is to remind men that they need not glory in their works, however good – for nothing is good without charity, and the works of men are worthless apart from God. This refutes the Pelagians, who believed that man may merit his own salvation; this is, in a way, the opposite error of Protestantism.

made nigh⁵ by the blood of Christ.

shedding of Christ's Own Precious Blood, are they admitted to the Body of Christ.

2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh:

2:15 Making void the law of commandments contained in decrees: that he might make **the two** in himself into one new man, making peace,

The two: the Israelites and the Gentiles. Remember Christ said, "And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

2:16 And might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, killing the enmities in himself.

2:17 And coming, he preached peace to you that were afar off: and peace to them that were nigh.

To the Gentiles, afar off, and to the Hebrews, the good of which were already "nigh unto Him, Our Lord preached the same: Peace.

2:18 For by him we have access both in one Spirit to the Father.

2:19 Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners: but you are fellow citizens with the saints and the domestics of God,

They are no longer Gentiles, strangers to God's people; now they are God's people, now incorporated into "Israel".

Above we saw St. Paul use the metaphor of the Mystical Body. Now we will see him use the metaphor of the Mystical Temple, making each of us is like a stone or block in that building, with Christ being the chief corner stone, the apostles and prophets being the foundation stones, and we, the other, lesser stones. All of us together make a habitation for God – very beautiful!

2:20 Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone:

2:21 In whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord.

The body of Christ is likened to the Temple: this new temple is His Body, which is a living Temple to God.

2:22 In whom you also are built together into a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians Chapter 3

The mystery hidden from former ages was discovered to the apostle, to be imparted to the Gentiles. He prays that they may be strengthened in God.

3:1 For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles:

Prisoner: here, *vincetus*, a participle signifying "bound, tied up, laced, fastened" Paul is a *loving slave* of Christ, bound to the Good Master. On the literal level, he is writing this from Rome, where he truly is a prisoner. Read our *Annotated Acts of the Apostles* to learn about that.

There are many reasons the New Testament / Covenant is superior to the Old. In the next few verses, St. Paul teaches us yet one more reason: in the New Testament, God makes it clear that He wishes all men to be saved (Epistle to St. Timothy 2:4), whereas in much of the Old Testament, God had a favored nation – that of Israel (who were promised His covenant as long as they avoided serious sin). Through sin, they lost that privileged status and now, all we are also invited into salvation through the teachings and grace of Jesus Christ. St. Paul is called the "Apostle of the Gentiles" and is so eager to share these teachings with the Ephesians.

⁵ **nigh:** near, at or to a short distance away.

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5:9 For the fruit of the light is in all goodness and justice and truth:

5:10 Proving what is well pleasing to God.

5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness:
but rather reprove them.

St. Paul says to “reprove them” – that is, to reprimand / rebuke men who do wrong. In his *Commentary on the Ephesians*, St. Thomas says, “God sometimes punishes innocent companions because those who are good do not reprimand the evil ones. ‘And he gave every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor.’ (Sirach 17:12). Hence, Paul says ‘but rather reprove them’. ‘Reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine’ (2 Tim. 4:2).” St. Thomas adds that although there are times when we need not rebuke someone (if we think charity will suffer for it), yet we sin if we fail to rebuke someone out of mere fear of losing friendship and other such selfish motives. Again, this does not mean that next time we are at Walmart and hear someone use bad language, we should walk up to them and scold them. But it *does* mean we should at least do so for those that are close to us, or under our care, etc.

5:12 For the things that are done by them in secret, it is a shame
even to speak of.

5:13 But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light:
for all that is made manifest is light.

“But he that shall confess and forsake them [his sins], shall obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13). For all evil that is made manifest through confession, is light, that is, is turned into light.

5:14 Wherefore he saith: Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the
dead: and Christ shall enlighten thee.

5:15 See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly: not as
unwise,

5:16 But as wise: redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Not wasting time, as foolish men do, but using it well, because the days are dangerous, full of trouble and temptations to evil.



Saint Paul and the burning of pagan books at Ephesus, Lucio Massari, 1612

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a4/Saint_Paul_and_the_burning_of_pagan_books_at_Ephesus.png Lucio Massari, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

5:17 Wherefore, become not unwise: but understanding what is the
will of God.

5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury: but be ye filled
with the Holy Spirit,

5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual
canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord:

5:20 Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord

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