

EPHESIANS

HIS GLORIOUS RICHES

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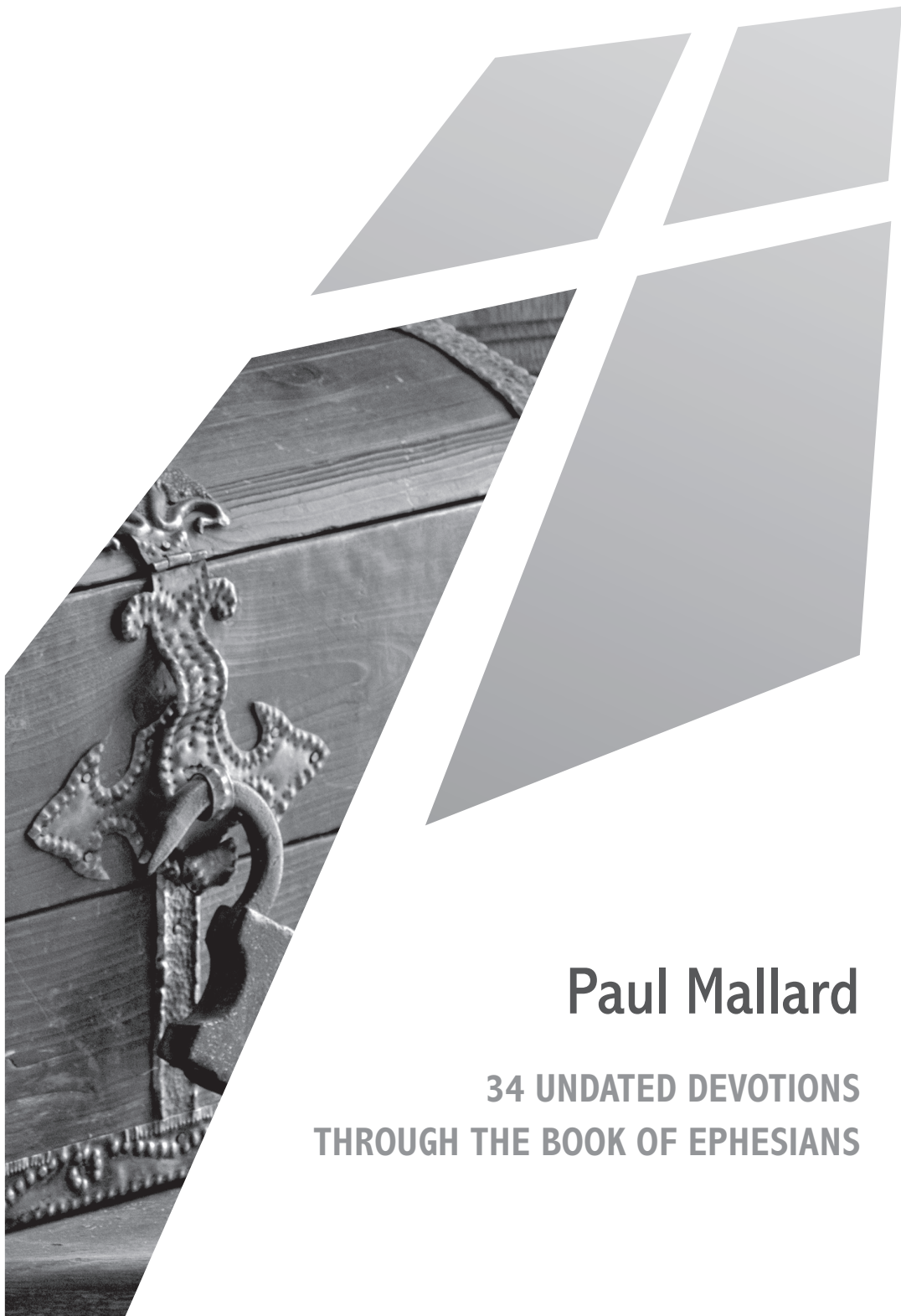
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Paul Mallard

**34 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**



INTRODUCTION

Getting to know Ephesians

Ephesians has been called the crown and climax of Paul's writings and the most comprehensive statement of the Christian faith ever penned. If we reverently absorb the teaching of this letter, it will change our lives.

Paul wrote Ephesians from prison (1:1; 3:1; 6:20). He had been a religious terrorist, but Christ broke into his life and called him to be an apostle, sending him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul is aware that he belongs to Christ and speaks with his authority (2:20; 4:11).

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was a wealthy, religious and self-confident city, dominated by the temple of Diana and steeped in witchcraft. It was both intellectually proud and morally corrupt. Paul planted the church there and stayed for three years (Acts 19:1-22). The Ephesian Christians were under extreme pressure because the gospel had impacted the economy of the city (Acts 19:23-41).

Ephesus was a hub church and other churches were planted from there. The letter to the Ephesians was probably a round robin that Paul expected to be read in these daughter churches.

The letter is written to strengthen and encourage Gentile Christians living at the heart of a pagan society. The first part (Eph. 1-3) describes God's plan to transform the world under the lordship of Jesus Christ. One day God will mend this broken world and unite all things under the headship of Christ (1:9-10). This plan is Trinitarian (1:3-14). It concerns both individuals, who are saved by grace alone (2:1-10), and the church, which is the supreme expression of God's purpose in this world (2:11 - 3:21).

Knowledge of this plan should affect every part of our lives in the present time. Paul addresses this in the second part of the letter (Eph. 4-6). He urges us to live a life which is consistent with our position in Christ in:

- the church, displaying unity (4:1-16)
- the world, displaying purity (4:17 - 5:21)
- the home, displaying harmony (5:21 - 6:4)
- the workplace, displaying integrity (6:5-9)
- warfare, achieving victory (6:10-20)

We must never detach the two parts of the letter – Paul expected them to be read at one sitting. If separated, the first part becomes merely hypothetical and the second half legalistic. But together the first part enlightens us (3:4) and the second part exhorts us (4:1). We live a life that is pleasing to God because we have been enraptured by the glory of all that he has done for us.

Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome (Acts 28:30–31; Eph. 3:1; 6:20). He is facing an uncertain future, yet this letter expresses great confidence in God. Paul knows two things about his circumstances.

Firstly, he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. He has seen the Lord and he therefore speaks with authority (Gal. 1:1). His message can be trusted and is foundational for the church and its ministry (2:19–20).

Secondly, he knows that this is by the will of God. Paul never forgets that he has been saved and his life turned around by divine grace. No wonder he speaks of this grace in such glowing terms (vv. 6, 12, 14).

In verse 1 he describes the Christians he is writing to in these four ways. They are *'holy people'* – people set aside to belong to the Lord. In the darkness of Ephesus they are called to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16). We must not conform to the world, but separation does not mean isolation.

They are *'in Ephesus'* – Ephesus was a large, cosmopolitan and sophisticated city, where Paul planted a church (see Acts 19:1–22). Christians do not opt out of the world. While God calls us out of it, he then sends us into a particular place and time in the world to glorify him there.

They are *'faithful'* – by God's grace they have followed Christ and have not

lost their saltiness.

They are *'in Christ'* – all the blessings of God come to us through Christ. Notice how many times Paul uses the phrase *'through him'* or *'in him'* in Ephesians.

Paul's greeting to them contains the two gospel blessings of grace and peace (v. 2). These two words summarise the salvation we receive in Christ. Grace is God's unconditional good will and unmerited love in action towards people who deserve his judgement. God moves heaven and earth to save sinners who could not save themselves. Peace is the result of grace. Even though we were once his enemies, we are now reconciled to God.

Read verses 3–14 and notice the way in which the three Persons of the Trinity are interwoven in Paul's benediction. How should our knowledge of God and his purposes (Rom. 8:28–30) affect the way in which we behave in this world? Ask the Lord to help you to be aware of your position in Christ.

REFLECTION

You are where you are because God put you there and he wants you to be faithful there. God is at work in all circumstances.

This section consists of a 202-word sentence, one of the longest sentences in the New Testament. It is a rhapsody of praise and a song of salvation. There is nothing quite like it in all of Paul's letters.

As Paul describes our salvation, he seeks to stretch our minds:

- *Salvation is far richer than you think* – it is the eternal purpose of the triune God. It is planned and administered by the Father (vv. 4–6). It is purchased and accomplished by the Son (vv. 7–12). It is applied and communicated by the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14).
- *Salvation is far older than you imagine* – it originated in eternity (v. 4) and stretches forward to a future time when all things will be united under the rule of King Jesus (vv. 10, 14).
- *Salvation is far bigger than you can comprehend* – it concerns individuals, the church and the cosmos (vv. 9–10).

Look at verse 3. The source of all our blessings is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He delights to grant us 'every spiritual blessing'. These blessings are secure because they are 'in the heavenly realms'. As you work through the letter, begin to make a list of the blessings of salvation.

The great purpose of salvation is holiness (v. 4) and adoption into God's family (v. 5). It is quite incredible to think about this! The great and glorious God of heaven brings us into a personal and intimate relationship with himself. We can turn our hearts to him and call him our Father. How will this affect the way you pray today? Adoption involves access to God our Father, confidence in all circumstances and confident hope for the future (Rom. 8:15–17, 29–30; Gal. 4:1–7). We will be saved to glory in God's grace (v. 6; Ex. 34:4–7).

How can these blessings help us when we face temptation or trials?

REFLECTION

The proper response to election is not arrogance or complacency but worship, service and holiness (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Pet. 1:3–4).