

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 73: The Book of Ephesians, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

The Prison Epistles:

The book of Ephesians is the first of four letters labeled "The Prison Epistles" since they were written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome between AD. 60-62. The other three were Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon and all four make reference to his plight (Eph. 3:1; Phil. 1:7; Col. 4:10; Philemon, verse 9).

From the presentation of the facts in Acts 28 it seems logical that Paul was actually imprisoned twice:

During the first imprisonment, he was under the watch of the Praetorian Guard for a two-year detention in their quarters he rented himself. He was productive. He reached into the very household of Caesar with the gospel (Phil. 1:13; 4:22) and wrote these four great Christ-exalting letters.

None of the letters suggest that Paul expected a quick release, but he does speak of his hope to see his friends in Philippi (Phil. 1:24-26; 2:24) and he did seem to anticipate his release in Philemon 22. He was released from house arrest, probably because his accusers, to whom we are first introduced in Acts 24, did not follow through to press charges before Caesar (Acts 28:30).

We can follow his movements from there:

He visited Ephesus, left Timothy there to supervise the churches, and went on to Macedonia (Northern Greece). While there he wrote I Tim. (I Tim. 1:3) to encourage Timothy's ministry.

He then visited the island of Crete, left Titus to supervise those churches, and went to Nicopolis (Southern Greece, Titus 3:12). From Nicopolis he wrote a letter to encourage Titus.

He next visited Troas (2 Tim. 4:13), where he was rearrested and taken to Rome and... ***Imprisoned for the second time.*** While in prison he wrote his second letter to Timothy (actually a fifth prison epistle). He was tried, sentenced and beheaded.

The City: See map of Paul's second journey in back of your Bible

The city of Ephesus was situated on the west coast of what is now Asiatic Turkey, on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea. It was a port city at the mouth of the Cayster River that flowed down from mountain ranges to its east.

During Paul's time it had more than a quarter million inhabitants and was a commercial, cultural, political, and religious center:

1. Commercially: As a trading center it competed with Alexandria and Antioch. Its deep, protected harbor allowed it to serve as an import/export center and hub city for land and sea trade routes.

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2. Culturally: As a cultural center it was influenced by peoples from the east, west, and south. It boasted of a magnificent road, 70 feet wide and lined with elaborate columns running the entire length of the city and ending in a palatial harbor complex, and many other streets were paved with marble. It also had theaters, public baths, libraries, and universities.

3. Politically: Its importance to the Roman Empire was assured since it was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor, the location of a major Roman garrison, and a complex of government buildings.

4. Religiously: The city derived its religious acclaim from the fact that it contained a great temple dedicated to the fertility goddess, Diana (also called Artemis; Acts 19). The temple, perhaps four times the size of the Parthenon, became one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world and contained a golden image of that goddess who was believed to have fallen from heaven. It was also the favorite place of worship of the current Roman emperor.

The Church:

Paul first arrived at Ephesus, around AD. 51, after he left Corinth near the end of his second missionary trip . He brought with him Aquila and Priscilla, his tent making co-workers in Corinth, and they began a church (Acts 18).

Paul returned on his third trip, staying for three years to pastor the growing church. The ministry was effective and spread through Asia Minor (Acts 19).

After Paul moved on to visit Macedonia, Timothy pastored the church for about a year and a half dealing with the false teaching of influential men including Hymenaeus and Alexander who were probably elders of the church (1 Tim. 1:3, 20).

Later Paul returned to the vicinity of Ephesus and asked the elders of the church to meet him in Miletas, about 50 miles away, to continue his loving involvement with the church. Later the Apostle John made Ephesus his headquarters and thirty years later, Christ gave him a letter of indictment stating that this congregation had *"left their first love"* (Rev. 2:1-7).

The Author:

According to the letter itself, the Apostle Paul was the writer and the early church certainly accepted it as one of his Prison Epistles. It is true, however, that the authorship of most Biblical books has been challenged at one time or another. The only writings of Paul to escape this criticism are the books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians.

The main objections here are a slight variance of style and vocabulary, especially when analyzed by computer, an emphasis on the universal church as opposed to local, and marriage, which some think is not Pauline, and the repeating of material from other epistles, especially Colossians.

In reality these arguments are weak. The general literary style is Pauline and the differences in vocabulary are minor. The teaching is theologically consistent with his other letters and he wrote many of his letters over a short period of time and dealing with similar topics and problems. And, of course, writing under a pseudonym was not popular in the early church.

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The similarity to Colossians is interesting. It seems that Paul received word of the churches in Asia Minor from Epaphras. In response he wrote a letter to the church at Colossae. At the same time he expanded on that material in a letter sent to Ephesus but intended for all the churches in Asia Minor (Col. 4:16). He sent these letters by his friend and messenger Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7) who was also to inform them of Paul's situation as a prisoner in Rome.

This has led many scholars to label this "an encyclical" or "circular" letter addressed to the church in the capital city of Ephesus, but meant to be circulated throughout the province. Many believe this letter went to all the churches mentioned in Revelations 2 and 3. It also explains why several of the best Greek manuscripts omit the words "at Ephesus" from verse 1. There is an absence of Paul's usual personal greetings and references to friends, even though he had pastored there for three years, and he sometimes speaks as if he does not know them. (3:2; 4:21).

The Purpose:

We know from Revelation 2:4 that the Ephesian church struggled in the area of love for each other and especially for Christ. Paul wrote to address this weakness both here and in his letter to their pastor, Timothy, when he said ". . . *the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" (1 Tim. 1:5).

The verb "to love," *agapao*, and the noun form, *agape*, are used 106 times in Paul's letters, 19 times in Ephesians alone.

The answer to this problem is for them to live "*In Christ*" and so that phrase appears 35 times in the letter. As a bonus, this was also the answer to the ongoing tension between Jewish and Gentile believers ever present in the early church.

The Themes:

1. *The Mystery:* (a hidden truth now being revealed): "*that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,*" (3:6)

All believers are equal before the Lord, His children, members of His eternal kingdom, members of His body, and part of His bride.

2. *The Body:* The church is Christ's spiritual, earthly body. It is not an organization, but a living organism composed of independent but mutually dependent members. Every one is unique, every one is gifted, and every one is vital to the health and activity of the body.

Homework:

Read: Or reread The Book of Ephesians

Think: As believers. what are the "*riches and fullness of blessings*" we have in Christ Jesus.

Apply: This week try consciously to use your gifts to serve someone else in the body.

Bible Survey Lesson 74: The Book of Ephesians, Part II

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OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Introduction:

Churches come in all sizes, shapes, and styles: There are house churches where people meet openly or secretly. There are open-air gatherings in forests and amphitheaters. There are buildings of wood, stucco, or brick. There are many people meeting in store-front churches and thousands in multi-facility mega-churches.

This is the church local and visible.

But, there is more to the church than this: There is a church not confined by walls.

There is the church universal and invisible.

The church of Jesus Christ is people . . . believers of every race and nation who love Jesus and are committed to a personal relationship of obedience and service to Him.

The universal church began in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2) and spread rapidly across the known world through the ministry of the apostles and other first century believers.

Intense persecution and courageous missionary efforts pushed the influence of Jesus Christ into the most remote parts of the world as scores of local assemblies were established.

One of the centers of rapid church growth was Asia Minor. Paul and his co-workers crisscrossed the area presenting the gospel, founding and growing churches, and shepherding them to maturity. One of the prominent churches was at Ephesus, the capital of that Roman province.

Remember, Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, founded that church in AD. 53 near the end of his second missionary trip. He returned a year later, on his third trip, and stayed for three years "*preaching with great effectiveness*" helping the church to grow and mature (Acts 19).

Later, after meeting with the Ephesian elders, he sent Timothy to serve as their pastor (I Tim. 1:3). A few years later Paul was placed under house arrest in Rome with freedom to receive visitors and correspond at will so he was visited by many people with messages from various local churches. Among these was Tychicus from Ephesus to whom he entrusted a letter for the churches of Asia Minor.

Like most of his letters it begins with the teaching of doctrine then moves into application of those truths. Unlike many of his letters, Ephesians was not written to counteract a specific problem of heresy, but was a letter of encouragement. Paul does seem, however, to be concerned about their view of the church.

He chooses a great analogy to explain the nature of the universal church. It is the "*Body of Christ*" on the earth, a living organism rather than an organization. ***And that changes everything!***

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I. BELIEVER'S POSITION (Chapters 1:1--3:21)

Paul begins his letter with a thorough discussion of the doctrine of Redemption that will provide the basis of explaining a mystery: God's eternal purpose to establish and complete His body, the church of Christ, on earth.

A. Saints (1:1-2)

He identifies his audience as faithful saints, by definition, those whom God has sanctified (set apart from sin) unto Himself and made holy through their faith in His Son Jesus.

B. Chosen (1:3-23)

Paul gives all the credit to God for His redemptive activity which involved the entire trinity. This section including verses 3-14 is one long sentence of praise made up of three stanzas, each revealing an aspect of God's glorious grace.

1. Predestined (3-6)

God, the Father, *"chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, . . . "* (vv. 4-5).

We are saved because God loved us and wanted us to be saved. It was His choice! How did He save us? We are . . .

2. Redeemed (7-12)

"In Him (God, the Son) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us." (vv 7-8)

We are saved because Jesus bought our freedom from our enslaving sin debt by becoming our substitute sacrifice. And we are . . .

3. Sealed (13-14)

We are *"sealed in Him (God, the Holy Spirit) of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the (final) redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory"* (vv. 13-14).

The presence of the Holy Spirit is God's pledge, deposit, or guarantee that our salvation will be consummated.

4. Empowered (15-23)

Having explained what God has done, Paul prays that his readers will have spiritual insight to understand those truths.

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He prays that they will:

1. Know and experience God;
2. Know the hope of His calling;
3. Know of His glorious inheritance;
4. Know of His great power.

The power available to believers is the same power that was displayed in Christ's resurrection, ascension, and kingly rule.

C. Saved (2:1-10)

In chapter two, Paul continues his thoughts about God's eternal purposes in Christ. Man is sinful, deserves nothing but God's wrath. We were:

1. ". . . *dead in our trespasses and sins.* (v. 1)
2. Ensnared by the power of Satan. (v. 2)
3. Cut off from God and controlled by our selfish desires. (v. 3)

Apart from Christ we were without life, freedom, and hope. But, by His grace God has granted us new life. (v 4-6) We were dead, enslaved, objects of wrath. In Christ we are alive, enthroned, and objects of grace.

Verses 7-9 express the central ideas of Paul's theology:

1. The nature of God is to give freely because of His own love.
2. God did not deal with men because of their achievement or merit, but their need.
3. God provides salvation as His free gift to men and women.
4. God creates faith in them so they can receive His gift.

Salvation is completely God's achievement--"*For by grace you have be saved through faith; and not that of yourself, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" (vv 8-10)

D. United (2:11-22)

One of the missions of Christ was to unite Jews, those of the covenant, with Gentiles, those who were afar off. Paul exclaims the good news in verses 11-18. Apart from Christ the Gentiles were hopeless. "*But now in Christ Jesus*" (v 13) Gentiles and Jews are reconciled to God and to one another.

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Expanding this concept to the entire world in verses 19-22 Paul says that, in response to the cross, peace exists vertically between man and God and horizontally between humans. This new united grouping is called The Church and is pictured as a nation ("*fellow citizens*," v 19), a family ("*a household*"), and a "*building*" (v 21). The purpose of the church is for believers to be "*built together into a dwelling place of God in His Spirit.*" (v 22)

E. Equal (3:1-21)

Now that Paul has completely discussed redemption and has introduced the mystery, "God's eternal purpose to establish and complete His church on earth" (a nation, a family, a building), he reveals the mystery still further.

He must have known this would be hard for them to accept because he spent much of his effort to reinforce his right and authority to make this claim. What is the claim? "*Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" (v. 6) Jew and Gentile are made equal, brought together into one body by the Messiah, one in God's sight, but also one in the actual working out of God's mission on this earth.

Now, in verses 14-21 Paul prays that the church, which is in theory united, will be experientially united. This will only happen if they know and experience God's love toward each other. In this context of supernatural need for the love of God when love is not natural, Paul states, "*He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that worked within us, . . .*" (v 20)

This is a typical Pauline letter, a perfect balance of doctrine and duty, theory and practice, systematic theology and practical living. The first three chapters present the doctrine of a believer's spiritual blessings in Christ. The last three focus on their responsibility to live that doctrine out in unity and "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*" (4:1)

II. BELIEVER'S PRACTICE (Chapters 4:1-6:9)

So, here we are: predestined, redeemed, sealed, empowered saints who are a united nation, family, building, a body. How does it work? What happens when we hit the street and confront the real world?

A. Other Believers (4:1-6)

The first evidence of a loving person is how they treat their own body, and how they treat the members of their family. Remember Jesus said, "*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:35) The Spirit gives supernatural unity to all true believers because we have the same body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, Baptism, and Father God. We also have . . .

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B. Spiritual Gifts (4:7-16)

Another evidence of a true believer is the exercise of their Spiritual gifts. Even though we are one, we are also unique and uniquely equipped.

Borrowing from Psalms 68:18, Paul introduces gifts given sovereignly and generously by God to the church. In this case the gifts are gifted persons, *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."* (v 12)

The goal of the church is to grow up in Christ so it will avoid immaturity, instability, and gullibility. Maturity is attained by, *"speaking the truth in love,"* . . . and *"growing up in all aspects of Him, who is the head, even Christ."*

C. Daily Walk (4:17-5:17)

More evidence of a true believer is the purity of their life-style. Paul first showed how they should not walk, then how they should walk. True conversion is a turning from a life of the flesh to a life in the Spirit.

1. Former Life (4:17-22)

Unlike the Corinthian letter, Paul is not dealing with people who have come out of sexual immorality and overt evil. Their past is characterized, rather, by phrases like, *"walking in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, and hardness of heart."* (vv. 17-18)

This group is characterized as being *"the old self"* (v 22) and is in contrast to their . . .

2. Present Life (4:23-5:17)

"renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness, holiness and truth." (vv. 23-24)

The bottom line instruction is to be grounded in theological truth, be rid of bitterness, anger, and slander (4:25-32), walk in love (5:1-7), avoid evildoers (5:8-14), and walk in wisdom (5:15-17).

All this is only possible by the empowering of the . . .

D. Holy Spirit (5:18-21)

When the body is full of the Holy Spirit, believers will praise God, constantly offer thanksgiving in all things, and mutually submit to each other.

E. Authority (5:22-6:9)

Part of this present, Spirit-filled life of mutual submission spills over into personal and professional relationships.

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1. Wives and Husbands (5:22-33)

"Wives, be subject to your own husbands," "Husbands, love your wives,"

2. Children and Parents (6:1-4)

"Children, obey your parents ""Honor your father and mother ""fathers, do not provoke your children to anger;"

3. Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)

"Slaves, be obedient to your masters" "Masters, . . . give up threatenings"

The first person in each relationship is to be submissive or obedient, but the second person also shows submissiveness by Christ-like love. (5:25) All relate to each other in submission and service to Christ, under His Lordship.

III. BELIEVER'S PROTECTION (Chapters 6:10-6:24)

It sounds so perfect. A new life in a new relationships with a new family; experiencing blessing, goodness, and power. Nope! The battle isn't over, in fact, it has just begun, and it is fierce.

A. Enemy (6:10-12)

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (v 12) The enemy is supernatural so we need supernatural . . .

B. Armor (6:13-17)

The armor of God includes five defensive elements:

1. The enabling nature of truth that resists false doctrine.
2. The covering quality of righteousness that resists false accusation and protects the heart.
3. The stabilizing quality of peace that resists anxiety.
4. The protective ability of faith that resists doubt.
5. The encouraging nature of salvation that resists fear, questioning and discouragement.

The armor only included one offensive weapon:

1. The Word of God, more powerful than any of the enemy.

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C. Prayer (6:18)

I think you could call this the ultimate weapon.

Put on the whole armor, *"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance for all the saints."* (v 18)

D. Partners (6:19-24)

The battle rages outside the immediate local assembly, so Paul finishes by asking them to pray for him, keep in touch, and remember to love the Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.

Lessons:

1. According to God's own eternal loving will He plans, directs, fulfills, and sustains our salvation.
2. The church is a live body, under the control of Jesus, the head. God gives gifts to the members of the body to bring it to health and maturity.
3. With membership in the body (or family) comes the responsibility to "lay aside "the old self" and "put on the new self."
4. Even as a believer, life is still a spiritual battle demanding preparation (armor) and prayer.