

Ephesians is going to be the first of the prison epistles (letters) we study. Most appear to have been written about the same time except for Philippians. They were carried by the same messengers (6:21; Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12). We know of one other letter Paul wrote from prison that is now lost (Colossians 4:16).

Paul spent his life teaching Gentiles that they could be Christians without becoming Jewish proselytes (converts). This was very displeasing to Jews generally, for they thought of the Mosaic Law as binding for all people, and they were bitterly prejudiced against any uncircumcised Gentiles who presumed to call themselves disciples of the Jewish Messiah.

While Paul taught gentile Christians to stand like a rock for their liberty in Christ, as he did in the letters to the Galatians and the Romans, he did not want them to be prejudiced against their Jewish fellow Christians but to regard them as brothers in Christ.

Paul did not want to see two churches, a Jewish church and a gentile church, but one church: Jews and Gentiles one in Christ. Paul's gesture on behalf of unity made to the Jewish elements in the church was the great offering of money from gentile churches.

This offering was gathered at the close of his third missionary journey and delivered to the poor in the mother church at Jerusalem (Acts 21). His hope was that this demonstration of Christian love might make Jewish Christians feel more kindly toward their gentile brothers and sisters.

Paul's gesture on behalf of unity to the gentile elements in the church was this letter, written to the leading center of his own gentile converts, exalting the oneness, universality, and unspeakable grandeur of the body of Christ.

To Paul, Christ was so marvelously great that in Him there is room for people of all different races, viewpoints, and prejudices. He is One who has power to solve all the problems of mankind and to bring all earthly social and family life (even the myriads of beings in the infinite, unseen universe; 3:10) into unity and harmony with God (5:22-6:9).

(Information above is primarily from Halley's Bible Handbook.)

(The following comments come from James Montgomery Boice's Commentary)

As I study books of the Bible I find that those who write commentaries invariably extol their particular book as deepest, most important, or most relevant. Writers on Ephesians are no exception. William Barclay calls Ephesians "the queen of the epistles."

The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge termed this book "the divinest composition of man" because, as he believed, "it embraces, first, those doctrines peculiar to Christianity, and, then, those precepts common with it in natural religion."

John Mackay, a former president of Princeton Theological Seminary who was converted at the age of fourteen through reading Ephesians, called it the "greatest ... maturest ... [and] for our time the most relevant" of all Paul's writings. "This letter is pure music," he said.

Boice said, "I want to begin by emphasizing the simple clarity of this letter. If Ephesians is profound, it is so not for the mysterious nature of its unfathomable deep secrets, but for the clear way it presents the most basic Christian truths."

In his unfinished but valuable exposition of this letter, B. F. Westcott included an appendix in which he discussed the letter's distinct doctrines. He found twenty-seven of them. Not one of these doctrines is unique to Ephesians. They are just basic Christianity.

What is the appeal of this book? In my judgment it is just this: It presents the basic doctrines of Christianity comprehensively, clearly, practically, and winsomely.

I can put it another way. The focus for all the other doctrines in Ephesians is the church as God's new society, so in a sense the book links these truths of Christianity to us, God's people. In other words, it is practical. We are told who we are, how we came to be as we are, what we shall be, and what we must do now in light of that destiny.

John R. W. Stott writes, "The whole letter is thus a magnificent combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, Christian faith and Christian life, what God has done through Christ and what we must be and do in consequence."

The letter is addressed to the Ephesians, but there is some question about its destination in scholarly circles. The words "in Ephesus" are absent from three of the oldest Greek manuscripts: the Vatican and Sinaitic uncials and the Chester Beatty Papyrus, which predates them.

Nor is it just a question of two missing words. We know from the account of Paul's travels in Acts that the apostle spent two years at Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). Ephesians was written from prison (Eph. 3:1), presumably from Rome, which means that it was composed following his extended mission in the city.

It is surprising that the letter is without any of the personal greetings found in such letters as Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians. Whatever the explanation for the missing words in some manuscripts and the lack of personal greetings in all, from early on it was identified as a letter from Paul to the Ephesian Christians.

In the commentary referred to earlier, Westcott cites references to Ephesians from Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origin, and Clement of Alexandria, as well as others.

What was Ephesus like? Ephesus was the capital of proconsular Asia and as such was the political and commercial center of a large and prosperous region. That is why Paul spent so much time there. Ephesus was on the Cayster River, not far from the Aegean coast.

Its port was large and so became the chief communication and commercial link between Rome and the East. Merchants flocked to it. It became a melting pot of nations and ethnic groups. Greek and Roman, Jew and Gentile mingled freely in its streets.

Ephesus boasted the largest of all Greek open-air theaters; it held twenty-five thousand spectators. There was a stadium for chariot races and fights with animals. Chiefly, however, Ephesus boasted of its great temple to Diana or Artemis.

It was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It measured 425 by 220 by 60 feet (about four times the size of the Parthenon) and housed the statue of Diana, believed to have come down from heaven. This temple was a depository for huge amounts of treasure and was, in effect, the bank of Asia.

It was served by hundreds of the priestesses of Diana, who were temple prostitutes. To this city the apostle Paul came to preach—briefly on his second missionary journey and extensively on his third. In this city God was pleased to establish a faithful church.

To the Christians of this city Paul wrote to help them live for God in the midst of a pagan culture. Due to the silting in of the river, Ephesus was a dying city by the end of the first century. [Note from Pastor Weerts] Certainly this helps should help us as we see people turning from Jesus and going their own way.

#### Luther on Ephesians

In this epistle St. Paul teaches, first, what the gospel is, how it was predestined by God alone in eternity, and earned and sent forth through Christ, so that all who believe on it become righteous, godly, living, saved men, and free from the law, sin, and death. This he does in the first three chapters.

Then he teaches that false teachings and the commandments of men are to be avoided, so that we may remain true to one Head, and become sure and genuine and complete in Christ alone. For in him we have everything, so that we need nothing beside him. This he does in chapter 4.

Then he goes on to teach that we are to practice and prove our faith with good works, avoid sin, and fight with spiritual weapons against the devil, so that through the cross we may be steadfast in hope. (AE 35:385)

#### OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

- I. Salutation (1:1–2)
- II. Prologue on Unity (1:3–23)
  - A. Prayer (1:3–14)
  - B. Thanksgiving (1:15–23)
- III. Proofs for Unity (chs 2–3)
  - A. New Creation by Grace Alone (2:1–10)
  - B. Gentiles and Israel (2:11–22)
  - C. Paul’s Apostolic Mandate to the Gentiles (3:1–13)
  - D. Prayer and Doxology (3:14–21)
- IV. Baptism Unites (4:1–5:20)
  - A. Baptism into One Body (4:1–16)
  - B. Baptism Clothes the Believer (4:17–32)
  - C. Baptism Directs the Believer’s Walk (5:1–14)
  - D. The Liturgy of the Spirit (5:15–20)
- V. Baptism Reorders Relationships (5:21–6:9)
  - A. Husband and Wife (5:22–33)
  - B. Parents and Children (6:1–4)
  - C. Masters and Servants (6:5–9)
- VI. Baptism Equips with Armor (6:10–17)
- VII. Conclusion (6:18–24)
  - A. Exhortation (6:18–20)
  - B. Commendation to Letter-Bearer (6:21–22)
  - C. Final Greeting and Blessing (6:23–24)

Luther on Ephesians & The Outline are copied from, *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 2015).

I encourage you to print and keep handy the Outline for our continued study of Ephesians. Tomorrow we will begin to study the actual text. I believe you will find this study enriching for your life with Christ.