

In Christ

Text: Ephesians 1:1-2

Introduction:

1. In this message we will seek to set the scene for the study of the Book of Ephesians.
2. How some theologians have labelled the Book of Ephesians: Coleridge called it the “divinest composition of man.” Other accolades label it the “Holy of holies” in Paul’s epistles, the “Grand Canyon” of Scriptures, the “crown of Paul’s epistles,” and the “Queen” of the epistles with the highest reach of New Testament thought. (N.T. Bible History by R. Hester)
3. For this introductory message, we will consider two headings:
 - An Introduction to the Book of Ephesians
 - The Salutation of the Book of Ephesians

I. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

A. The Historical Background to the Epistle

1. The **Authorship** of Ephesians (Eph. 1:1; 3:1)
 - a. The Person who wrote Ephesians – Pauline authorship is crystal clear, Paul’s name appearing twice in the letter (Eph. 1:1; 3:1). The early church was almost unanimous in support of Pauline authorship. “There is no portion of the New Testament the genuineness of which the church has from the beginning, with more cordial unanimity, acknowledged, than that of this epistle.” (Charles Hodge)
 - b. The Place where Ephesians was written – Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome (See Acts 28:16-31). Paul refers to himself as “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” (3:1), the “prisoner of the Lord” (4:1) and as “an ambassador in bonds” (6:20). Philippians, Colossians and Philemon were also “prison Epistles” written during the same time period.
 - c. The Period when Ephesians was written – a date of A.D. 61 is well accepted for the writing of this Epistle. This is approximately 10 years after Paul planted this church (Richard Hester).
2. The **Area** of Ephesus (Eph. 1:1) Consider the background of Ephesus...
 - a. Geographically – Ephesus was situated on a plain near the mouth of the river Cayster, on the Aegean Sea on the western shores of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). David Cloud writes, “It was the chief city of the region of Lydia in the Roman province of Asia Minor at this time. Its prestige and wealth came largely from its strategic location.” It had a population of some 350,000 people which was very large for that time in history (John Phillips).
 - b. Politically – Robert Boyd writes, “Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia, rich in commerce and industry, a port city through which Orient trade passed.” According to theologian

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Charles Hodge, Ephesus under the Romans, to a great extent, had the right of self-government. "Its constitution was essentially democratic." "The 'townclerk' or recorder was an officer in charge of the archives of the city, the promulgator (publisher, teacher) of the laws and was clothed with great authority." It was the townclerk who put a halt to the riot that took place in the theatre (See Acts 19:35-41).

- c. Commercially – Ephesus was a wealthy city on account of its sea port and because it lay at the intersection of important ancient roads and trade routes. According to Richard Hester, "Ephesus ranked among the top three centers of international trade along with Alexandria of Egypt and Antioch of Pisidia. The wide and deep Cayster River provided Ephesus with a protected artificial seaport which would accommodate the largest ships of the day, thus making it one of the great ports in the ancient world." Robert Thomas adds, "Ephesus was a thriving metropolis by the end of the first century A.D. Commercially, it was the largest city in the Roman province of Asia...Highways connected it with most of the important cities of the Roman provinces composing Asia Minor. The combination of accessibility from land or sea made the city the prominent commercial center of Asia for a long time." There was a large commercial marketplace (agora) next to the port. Paul would have worked there in his tent-making business with Priscilla and Aquila. (Hester) Joh Phillips writes, "Centrally located on the western coast of Asia Minor, Ephesus was positioned midway between two continents. Here east met west. Here oriental luxury, extravagance, and sensuality met occidental enterprise, discipline and ambition. Here sensual oriental religion blended with lofty and progressive Greek culture and firm, but on the whole fair, Roman government. Here crowds of government officials, Roman soldiers, and Jewish businessmen rubbed shoulders with Eastern pilgrims flocking into Ephesus to worship at the notorious temple of Artemis."
- d. Religiously – Ephesus was a hotbed of paganism and its associated licentiousness. Religious life "centered around the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana – See Acts 19). Her 425-foot-long (142m) by 220-foot-wide (73m) temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Each of its 120 columns was donated by a king. The image of Diana was one of the most sacred objects of worship in the ancient world...It was a grotesque, squat, black, many-breasted figure that was reputed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:27, 35)...Prostitution thrived there because the immoral activities were looked upon as sacred, and the prostitutes themselves were viewed as priestesses." (Robert L. Thomas) Due to the multitudes of people who would pour into Ephesus to participate in the feasts to Diana, "the temple became one of the largest and most wealthy banks in the ancient world. Along with this wealth came crime. Ephesus made a law that allowed immunity

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to any one who got within a bowshot of the temple walls.”

(Hester) This temple was central to Ephesus. To illustrate, if I was to say to you, “Oxford England”, which famous institution comes to mind?

3. The Assembly (Church) at Ephesus (Eph. 3:10; Acts 19). Consider three truths concerning the establishment of the church in Ephesus:
 - a. The Planting of the Church (Vs. 1-10). Paul visited the city while returning from Corinth to Jerusalem at the close of his second missionary journey about A.D. 52 (Acts 18:19-21). On his third missionary journey Paul returned to the city (Acts 19:1) and spent three years there (Acts 20:31). The planting of the church involved:
 - i. The Establishment of Believers (Vs. 1-7)
 - ii. The Evangelization of Unbelievers (Vs. 8-10). So powerful was Paul’s witness in Ephesus that not only was the city of Ephesus impacted, but the whole region in Asia Minor – “And this continued by the space of two years; so that **all they which dwelt in Asia** heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” (Vs. 10)
 - iii. Paul’s ministry in Ephesus had a powerful ripple effect on the surrounding region as the glowing embers from the Gospel fire in Ephesus were carried by the wind of the Spirit to cities like Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis.
 - b. The Power in the Church (Vs. 11-20)
 - i. Apostolic power (Vs. 11-12; 2. Cor. 12:12)
 - ii. Counterfeit power (Vs. 13-17)
 - iii. Life-transforming power (Vs. 18-20). This is what is known as the great Ephesian bonfire! Salvation for the Ephesians meant a new life! The ‘books’ were likely what were known in antiquity as the “Ephesian letters” which “appear to have been amulets, inscribed with strange characters, which were carried about the body for the purpose of curing diseases, expelling demons, and preserving from evils of different kinds.” (Adam Clarke)
 - iv. Challenge: Much of today’s technology has changed but the principle is the same. For you it might mean a purge of the DVD cabinet, a cleanup of your iTunes account, a wipe of a hard drive, deleting songs and movies that dishonor the Lord, discontinuing your Netflix subscription and disconnecting from destructive social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It means a clean up of the wardrobe and a clean up of the home. Books, posters, pictures, statues; all must be reviewed in the light of God’s truth and holiness.
 - v. Illustration: Chris Killen (Northern Ireland) – Excerpt from chapter entitled “Gallons of drink all down the sink”.

The astounding thing was that he seemed to be seeing everything in a new and different light. It was a strange, almost startling, sensation. On reaching the kitchen in his lingering tour-of-the-downstairs,

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Chris stopped suddenly in the doorway, as though pulled up short by an invisible but nonetheless powerful set of reins, and focused fixedly on the fridge.

The memory of what he had last seen in there jarred him to the bottom of his now saved soul. He took three or four steps across the kitchen with as much haste as the spent state of his body would allow. Then he opened the door of the fridge. What a sight met his gaze! The fridge was jam-packed full, of alcoholic drink of all kinds! There were cans and bottles of beer and lager. They seemed to be fighting for a place in the tray on the door and in six-packs on the shelves. One shelf had been removed to allow the bigger bottles of wine, gin and vodka to stand up straight and tall at the back. Small bottles of schnapps, like rows of little toy soldiers, lined the front of the shelves and other single bottles filled in all the remaining available spaces. There had never ever been much food for food in the Killen fridge. Just drink.

Christ stood stock still. Rooted to the spot. Spellbound. Where once the sight of so much booze all in the one place would have excited him, he now found that it sickened him. He didn't want it. Had no desire for it. Felt he must dispose of it. And at once! "Before I do anything else, Linda, the first thing I must do is get rid of all this drink!" he shouted to his wife, not realizing that she was standing in the doorway he had just left, three yards behind him. "All right, Chris," she replied. If that is what you want to do, go ahead!" She then stood back and watched in total amazement as Chris emptied their fridge. Can after can was ring-pulled open and their contents poured, foaming and frothing, down the sink. Bottle after bottle was uncorked or unscrewed, and their contents followed, foaming and frothing down the sink.

When, after about ten minutes, Chris had finished his banish-the-booze offensive he was left with three distinct and different things. He had a bench littered with empty bottles and cans, a kitchen that smelt worse than any pub he had ever been to in his life, and a deep settled peace in his soul."

c. The Protest against the Church (Vs. 21-41)

- i. The Source of the Protest (Vs. 21-28). Charles Hodge writes, "One of the most lucrative occupations of the people was the manufacture of miniature representations of the temple, wrought in silver, which found an extensive sale, both foreign and domestic."
- ii. The Site of the Protest (Vs. 28-34)
- iii. The Silencing of the Protest (Vs. 35-41)
- iv. Principle: When the work of the Gospel is going forward and lives are being transformed, expect opposition! Satan will not let a genuine work of God go on unchallenged and unopposed. But in the end, Satan cannot stop a Divine work of God. The Bible is an unstoppable Book and the Gospel, an unstoppable Message.

B. The Theme of the Epistle (Eph. 1:3; 2:6)

1. The key phrases are "in Christ", "in him" and "in whom". Paul writes to unveil to the Ephesian believers the glory and wonder of God's saving grace. Paul's prayers reveal that his heart's desire, as moved by the Holy Ghost, was that the believers might know the riches of their salvation (See Eph. 1:16-23; 3:14-21) and the dimensions of God's love. "The great design of Ephesians is to unfold the glories of the plan of redemption, as embracing both Jews and Gentiles, and designed to be the great medium for the manifestation of the grace and wisdom of God to all intelligent creatures." (Hodge)
2. Ephesians gives us a heavenly view of things. Another key phrase is "heavenly places", occurring 4 times (1:3, 20; 2:6, 3:10). In Ephesians, we follow the river of God's grace all the way to its Divine source at the throne of God and in His Eternal heart.

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3. Pastor Richard Hester summarizes the purpose for writing as follows:
 - a. To instruct them of their privileges and responsibilities in Christ.
 - b. To explain more about the mystery of the church, which was God's institution to take out a new people from all nations and make them one in Christ.
 - c. To prepare them for Christian warfare.
4. In Ephesians we see God's ultimate purpose is His own glory. "In chap. 1 our blessings in Christ are for "the praise of his glory"; in chap. 2 Jew and Gentile are made alive "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace"; in chap. 3 through the church the manifest wisdom of God is displayed.

C. The Structure (outline) of the Epistle

1. One suggested outline of the Book is as follows:
 - The Believer's Wealth in Christ (Eph. 1-3) – these chapters introduce us to the immense wealth we have "in Christ" through salvation.
 - a. For example, we are chosen (1:4), predestinated (1:5), accepted (1:6), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), given an inheritance (1:11), sealed (1:13), quickened (2:1, 5), raised with Christ (2:6), seated with Christ (2:6), saved by grace through faith (2:8-9), ordained to good works (2:10), made nigh by the blood (2:13), reconciled to God by the cross (2:16), made a fellow citizen with the saints (2:19); and made a part of God's household, the church (2:19-22).
 - b. Riches in Ephesians:
 - i. Riches of grace (1:7; 2:7)
 - ii. Riches of glory (1:18; 3:16)
 - iii. Riches of mercy (2:4)
 - iv. Riches of Christ (3:8)
 - c. Illustration as told by Wiersbe: Hetty Green went down in history at "America's Greatest Miser" ('miser' means "a person who lives in wretched circumstances in order to save and hoard money"). She ate cold oatmeal because it cost to heat it. Her son had to suffer a leg amputation, because she delayed so long in looking for a free clinic that his case became incurable. She lived like she was poor but when she died in 1916, she left an estate valued at over \$100 million. She was so foolish that she hastened her own death by bringing on an attack of apoplexy (stroke) while arguing about the value of drinking skimmed milk! "But Hetty Green is an illustration of too many believers today. They have limitless spiritual wealth at their disposal, and yet they live like paupers."
 - The Believer's Walk with Christ (Eph. 4-6:9) – the word 'walk' occurs 6 times in the second half of the book (Chap. 4-6). See 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15. We are to walk...
 - a. Worthy (4:1)
 - b. Differently (4:17)

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- c. Lovingly (5:2)
- d. Purely (5:8)
- e. Circumspectly (5:15)
- The Believer's Warfare for Christ (Eph. 4:10-24)
- 2. Another suggested outline of the book is as follows:
 - Sit (Our Position) (Eph. 1-3)
 - Walk (Our Practice) (Eph. 4-6:9)
 - Stand (Our Posture) (Eph. 6:10-24)
- 3. A simply two-point outline is:
 - Doctrine (Eph. 1-3)
 - Duty (Eph. 4-6)

II. THE SALUTATION OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS (VS. 1-2)

A. The Author (Vs. 1a)

- 1. His Ambassadorship for Christ
 - a. The word 'apostle' in its general sense = means "a sent one, one sent on a mission".
 - b. The word 'apostle' in its official sense = means one of the twelve, chosen to a special and temporary office for the establishment of the church (Eph. 2:20)
- 2. His Appointment by Christ

B. The Audience (Vs. 1b-2)

- 1. The Position of the Ephesian Christians (Vs. 1b)
 - a. The word 'saint' means "set apart, holy". The word is translated 'holy' 161 times in the N.T. and 'saints' 61 times.
 - i. Nine times in this brief letter, Paul addresses his readers as saints (1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18).
 - ii. Warren Wiersbe: "Many thing 'saints' are dead people who have achieved such spiritual eminence that they have been given that special title 'saints'. But these saints are alive (Eph. 2:1-3)!"
 - iii. Phillips: "To be a saint at Ephesus was to be like a lovely lily in a stagnant pond. Ephesus rivaled Corinth as the "filth capital" of the Roman world."
 - iv. Note: It is of interest that Paul uses the word 'temple' to describe the Ephesian church (2:21).
- 2. The Prayer for the Ephesian Christians (Vs. 2)
 - a. Prayer for Grace = the word occurs 12 times in this book. The word means "God's kindness towards undeserving people" (Wiersbe).
 - i. Saving Grace
 - ii. Sanctifying Grace
 - b. Prayer for Peace
 - i. Saving Peace
 - ii. Sanctifying Peace

Conclusion: Are you in Christ? Are you walking the separated path as a believer now that you are saved?