

# An Introduction to Ephesians

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – an introduction to the book of Ephesians as a guidebook for the church
2. aim – to cause us to properly assess our view of the church as we move into a new phase of it
3. passage – Ephesians 2:19-22

### b. outline

1. The Background of Ephesians
2. The Purpose of Ephesians
3. The Value of Ephesians

### c. opening

1. the **anxiety** associated with the coming of a new pastor: **nobody likes change!**
  - a. but: change within a church is inevitable with the coming of a new pastor!
  - b. so: there is (probably!) a small sense of subliminal anxiety that many are feeling today
    1. **IOW**: the excitement of calling a new pastor is *tempered* with a sense of “what now?”
2. the **question** associated with the coming of a new pastor:
  - a. **what is Pastor Mark going to change in our church, and how will it impact me?**
  - b. **reality**: GFBC is entering into a new phase of its existence
    1. the first ten years have established the church, and its previous leadership has departed
      - a. Jeff Hunter did a tremendous job of getting this church solidly planted and growing
      - b. there is deep theological and ecclesiological unity and stability here
    2. but: (**now**) the Lord has seen fit to call someone new to this office
      - a. every pastor has a different style, vision, background and experience, temperament, etc.
      - b. therefore, by definition, things will be different (**e.g.** Wed. night, Fri. morning)
    3. and: the calling of new leadership (often) implies a change of vision and direction (action)
      - a. note how often God purposed new vision through a new leader (**e.g.** Joshua, David, Paul)
    4. therefore: I am convinced that God has purposed for GFBC a new “level” of service, a new “height” of commitment and action by its people
      - a. (**importantly**) built on the *firm foundation* (the core) established during the past decade
      - b. but, rising up to meet a new challenge to personal holiness (individually), a greater sense of corporate worship, ministry and service (as a people), and an increased commitment to connecting our doctrine with our practice (as a church) – generic and obvious realities
  - c. **so, what does Pastor Mark see as this next phase of our church, and how will it impact me?**
    1. honestly: I don’t really know (yet) – assuming that God has ordained a new phase of life for GFBC, I am not yet privy to what it might be and how it would be implemented (time will tell)
    2. but, there is probably something that we need to do **first**, before we discuss new plans
    3. this leads me to my opening preaching series: an examination of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians
      - a. I will start with the background of the letter, move to the purpose of the letter, and then end the sermon with why this letter is appropriate to this new phase of church life

## I. The Background of Ephesians

### Content

#### a. the author of the letter

1. there is *some* dispute about whether Paul actually wrote this letter
  - a. non-traditional scholars contend that the book is “unlike” Paul’s other works, and doesn’t reference specific people in the church (like his other letters do) even though he spent three years in the city
  - b. **IOW**: this letter is *traditionally* attributed to Pauline authorship, but there are some who argue that it was written by a *pseudonymous* (soo-don-a-mus) author – someone “posing” as Paul
2. reasons for the traditional assumption of this as a letter of Saul of Tarsus
  - a. it claims to have been written by Paul, and includes a number of biographical details (**i.e.** 3:1-13)
  - b. differences in style do not have to imply differences of authorship (**e.g.** email vs. voice)
  - c. the lack of mention of friends could be due to his long absence from the city (**i.e.** >6 years)
  - d. a letter forcefully encouraging the readers to “*speak the truth*” (**4:15, 25**) implies a truthful author

3. Saul of Tarsus (later Paul after his conversion)
  - a. date of birth unknown, although a “*young man*” in **Acts 7:58** (c. 4BC-10AD?)
  - b. born in Tarsus (SE Asia Minor) of Cilicia – a city of great importance (rivaling Athens)
  - c. his father was a Pharisee (**Acts 23:6**), a Roman citizen, and (apparently) wealthy and influential
    1. Saul was a *natural-born* Roman citizen (**Acts 22:25-28**)
  - d. highly educated under the rabbi Gamaliel; fluent in Hebrew, Latin and Greek
    1. his *rhetorical* skills and *logic* are clearly evident in the letter
  - e. Paul probably employed an *amanuensis* (a-man-u-en-sis; a professional scribe) for this letter
    1. there is evidence that the letter was hastily composed (**e.g.** long sentences)
    2. there is evidence that the letter was jointly composed with Colossians (**e.g.** much repeated)
- b. the dating of the letter**
  1. Ephesians was written c. 62AD – as dated from:
    - a. Paul mentioning his imprisonment (**4:1**), which is probably his Roman imprisonment of **Acts 28**
      1. he was three years in Ephesus (c. 52-56AD), through Greece and Asia, arrested in Jerusalem, two years in Caesarea, a year to Rome, and two years under house arrest in Rome (6 years)
      2. Ephesus (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) was written late from Rome
  2. the letter was carried to Ephesus by Tychicus (**6:21**), along with Colossians and Philemon
    - a. Tychicus was a traveling-companion of Paul on his Third Missionary journey, and probably went with him to Rome – Paul now sends him back to Asia Minor with a report of his situation
- c. the audience of the letter**
  1. written to those “*who are in Ephesus*” (**1:1**) – however:
    - a. some early manuscripts do not contain that phrase, leading some to conclude that this was not intended *specifically* for Ephesus, but for the churches “around” Ephesus (**see Rev. 2-3**)
      1. **e.g.** a “fill-in-the-blank” heading, for copying around the area
    - b. however, given the *preponderance* of manuscripts containing the phrase, it is likely that Paul wrote generally to the Ephesians, under the assumption that the letter would be passed around to others
      1. **e.g.** in Colossians 4:16, Paul instructs that church to read the letter “*from Laodicea*”
  2. therefore, Ephesians became an *encyclical* – a letter written to a wide audience
    - a. its content (**see below**) verifies that conclusion
    - b. Ephesus was a great and wealthy city on the W coast of Asia Minor – it was a center of learning, commerce, and religion (i.e. temple of Artemis)
      1. the “hub” of Christian activity in the smaller towns and villages all around it
  3. written to a church that was divided over small matters and struggling with cultural approbation
    - a. the Jew / Gentile split is referenced within the letter (**e.g. 2:11, 3:6**)
    - b. the loss of their “*first love*” (**Rev. 2:4**; much later) may indicate the beginnings of a church (now) struggling to remain faithful to the initial teachings of the apostle (now some years later)
      1. the message of unity amongst diverse peoples is key to recognizing the audience

## II. The Purpose of Ephesians

### Content

#### a. the purpose of the letter

1. Ephesians is a letter about **the church**
  - a. the term *ecclesia* is used nine (9) different times in the letter (**in chaps. 1, 3, 5**)
  - b. not about a *problem* in the church *per se* (like Galatians or Corinthians) – it is very positive in tone
  - c. rather about the nature of what it means to **be** the church and the implications for its members
    1. **e.g.** in chapter 1, Paul outlines how God purposes to bring the church into being
      - a. touching on various aspects of the divine decree and its implications
    2. **e.g.** in chapter 2, Paul outlines how God purposely brings his elect into the church
      - a. touching on various aspects of conversion and how the church is built up through it
    3. **i.e.** a powerful contrast of the power of God to bring into being his “temple” of worship over against the pagan temples that dominated the city
2. the *purpose* of the letter (the **umbrella** over the internal structure)
  - a. **to (re)establish in the minds of the believers at Ephesus the divine nature of the church – to remind them of the fact that the church is established by God for his eternal purposes**

“There is mass confusion about what the church is to be in our time, especially among so-called evangelical Christians. The problem is not with biblical terminology. Evangelicals know that the church is ‘the body of Christ’, ‘the bride of Christ’, [etc.] But for many people [these] are only slogans. The important questions have to do with how the church comes into being: Is forming the church something we do, or is it God’s doing? How is the church to function? Are we free to organize it any way we want or does God have determining ideas in this area? Perhaps most important, What is the church for anyway? Does the church exist merely to reach others with the gospel? Does it exist only to make us happy? Or is there some greater plan involved, something perhaps that even the angels look into (Eph. 3:10-11)?” (James Boice, Ephesians)

### III. The Value of Ephesians

#### Content

##### a. the value of this letter for a new phase of church life

1. **axiom: our actions flow from our nature – what we do comes from what we are**
  - a. **e.g.** we are not sinners because we sin – we sin because we are sinners
  - b. **e.g.** every “innocent” newborn baby will eventually *prove* he or she is a sinner
2. this axiom is also true for the church – what we do comes from what we are
  - a. **e.g.** the church that is committed to “happiness” will do those things that make people “happy”
  - b. **e.g.** the church that is committed at its core to the glory of God will seek to do those things that bring the greatest glory to God, primarily by turning attention away from itself
3. therefore, the value of Ephesians is that it is an **ontological** tome – it is a letter, written by an apostle, to describe the divine nature of the church *in the hope* that the church will then reflect that nature through the things that it does
  - a. **e.g.** Paul will contend in the letter that the actions of individual believers must flow from an understanding of the very nature of the church herself (**e.g. 5:25a**)
  - b. **IOW:** Paul will contend that the church is the “heart” of the lives of believers, defining their priorities and establishing how they choose to act in the world (**2:19-22**)  
*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*
4. so, in terms of this “new phase” in the life of GFBC, **the most prudent place to start** is by assessing who we are – and *only then* begin asking the question: what should we be doing (differently)?
  - a. this is *not* to imply that GFBC is somehow “off track” – rather it is to begin as Paul always does: assess the indicatives first, and then discuss the imperatives that flow from them (a check-up)