

Mount Pisgah A.M.E Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 51: Ephesians

The Book of Ephesians

The Book of Ephesians is a letter written to a church (or set of churches) in the western region of Asia Minor (now known as Turkey). It appears to be written to believers who are living below their privilege. In other words, the readers don't understand the spiritual treasures that believers have received through their faith Jesus Christ, and what this should imply about how they should live their lives individually and in the context of community. To explain this, it moves very effectively from the spiritual to the practical.

Author

The traditional view is that Paul was the author of Ephesians, as is indicated in the first verse. In more recent centuries, many have argued against Paul's authorship for a variety of reasons, primarily concerned with seeming inconsistencies with Paul's other writings. Among other things, critics argue that:

- the style of writing is different from other letters,
- certain themes emphasized are themes that Paul never talks about elsewhere
- No personal greetings to individuals in the city as was Paul's practice normally

The suggestion that the author named in the book "Paul" is not the real author is not meant to be an indication that there was something fraudulent going on. In Greco Roman culture was not uncommon for students of a great master to write under the "pseudonym" of that master due to humility, and as a means of paying tribute to that master.

In my view, these arguments against Paul's authorship do not consider the possibility that Paul's writing and understanding evolved over time, and that his purposes for writing each epistle were different. Also the failure to greet individuals could be an indication that the letter was written with the intention of passing the message to other churches in Asia Minor besides just Ephesus, such as the cities named in Revelation 2 and 3. During Paul's extended visit to Ephesus (Acts 19) it is clear that Paul's influence was not just in urban Ephesus, but throughout the region of Asia. Thus, these arguments do not require that we reject Paul's authorship. Assuming Paul's authorship, he wrote it while imprisoned in Rome (Eph. 3:13, 4:1, 6:20)

The Times and context of Ephesians

Ephesus was a very important city in Asia Minor the same reason that Corinth was in the region of Achaia: it was a seaport city that had important trade routes running through it. It contained a special canal that had to be maintained so that ships could reach the harbor. Ephesus was a religious center as well, famous especially for its magnificent temple of Diana (Roman name) or Artemis (Greek name), a structure considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The practice of magic and the local economy were clearly related to this temple.

Paul visited Ephesus briefly on his way back to Antioch at the end of his second missionary journey. He left Priscilla and Aquilla there to build the church (it's not clear whether Paul started the church or

whether it already existed). Paul returned there during his third journey for a three year stay in which he mentored the leadership and ministered in and outside the synagogue, often in spiritual confrontation with magicians, idol makers and the cult of Artemis. Eventually after a riotous confrontation he departed. At the end of his third journey, he passed nearby by sea, and met with the Ephesian elders in Miletus to bid them farewell. This was his last documented visit

The letter to Ephesians was written while he was imprisoned in Rome in about 60 AD.

Overview

Paul wrote this epistle to make Christians more aware of their position in Christ and motivate them to draw upon the resulting spiritual power for everyday living. As their mentor, Paul wanted to have access to everything that was available to them, and for the witness of the church to stand strong over against the spiritual influences in Ephesus. In order for them to understand how to live as Christians, they needed to understand the significance of (1) their place as members of the body of Christ, (2) the significance and role of the church, (3) that the body is affected by their individual and collective holiness, and (4) how to be equipped spiritually for effectiveness.

Outline

I. The Believer's Wealth (1:1-3:21)

- A. Greetings (1:1-1:2)
- B. Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ (1:3-1:14)
 - 1. Eternally Chosen By God (1:3-1:6a)
 - 2. The Mystery of Redemption Through The Son (1:6b – 1:12)
 - 3. Sealed by The Spirit (1:13-1:14)
- C. Prayer For Their Understanding (1:15-1:23)
 - 1. For Revelation of God Himself (1:15-1:17)
 - 2. For Enlightenment of The Benefits of Being In Christ (1:18-1:23)
- D. The Position of The Christian (2:1-3:13)
 - 1. Once Dead (2:1-2:3)
 - 2. Made Alive By Grace for God's Purposes (2:4-2:10)
 - 3. Included in One Body (2:11-2:22)
 - 4. Part of God's Eternal Purpose For The Church (3:1-3:13)
 - a) Paul as Chosen to Include the Gentiles (3:1-3:9)
 - b) The Eternal Purpose of The Church (3:10-3:13)
- E. Prayer For Knowledge and Fullness (3:14-3:21)

II. The Believer's Walk (4:1-6:24)

- A. Emphasis on Unity in the Body (4:1-4:16)
 - 1. Unity is Critical (4:1-4:3)
 - 2. Unity Explained (4:4-4:6)
 - 3. Unity YET Unique Gifts Given (4:7-4:11)
 - 4. Gifts Contribute to Unity and Victory of the Body (4:12-4:16)
- B. Holiness as Key to Fulfillment of God's Purposes (4:17-5:21)
 - 1. Put off the Old Mind and Behavior (4:17-22)
 - 2. Put on the New Mind and Behavior (4:23-24)
 - 3. Behavior that Benefits the Body (4:25-5:7)
 - 4. Living as Children of Light (5:8-5:20)
- C. Relationships In The Body (5:21-6:9)
 - 1. The Marriage Relationship (5:21-5:33)

- a) Summary (5:21)
- b) Wives (5:22-5:24)
- c) Husbands (5:25-5:33)
- 2. Children and Parents (6:1-6:4)
- 3. Slaves/Workers and Masters/Employers (6:5-6:9)
- D. Contending In The World: Spiritual Warfare (6:10-6:24)
 - 1. Spiritual Equipment (6:10-6:18)
 - 2. Prayer for Boldness (6:19-6:20)
- E. Final Assurances (6:21-6:24)

Some Keys to understanding The Book of Ephesians

- Ephesians focuses on the believers' responsibility to walk in accordance with their heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. Ephesians was not written to correct specific errors in a local church, but to prevent problems in the church as a whole by encouraging the body of Christ toward maturity.
- Some of the believers in Ephesus were of Jewish decent, but many of the Ephesians were Gentile background: Roman citizens, pagans, and people loyal to various cults, especially the cult of Artemis. Helping the Ephesians to understand where the body of Christ stood in relation to Artemis and other cult and idol gods was important to Paul, as was equipping them to demonstrate Christ's superiority to such beliefs.
- Paul's phrase "in Christ" (or equivalent phrases) appears about 35 times, more than in any other New Testament book. The idea of being a part of something larger than oneself was important to emphasize. This theme also occurs in Romans, and 1 Corinthians.
- It appears that Ephesians and Colossians were written with similar concerns in mind, as much of the language and structure of Colossians are repeated in Ephesians. It appears they were written about the same time.
- Evidently sometime after Paul, the apostle John settled in Ephesus and spent some time with other churches in Asia Minor. Ephesus was one of the seven churches that he wrote to while he was exiled on the isle of Patmos (Revelation 1-3). What is believed to be the tomb of John is located in Ephesus.
- The city of Ephesus was partially destroyed by earthquake in 614 AD. Due to silting and erosion the seaport was destroyed. The city was completely abandoned in the 15th Century.

Some Lessons from Ephesians

- We must understand who we are in order for us to understand the significance of how we act. Our behavior doesn't just affect us, but the very witness of the Body of Christ. If we really knew the power that we had access to, and the value of our inheritance, we would be less likely to compromise it with behavior that is below our privilege.
- The first and most important step in understanding our role as Christians is that of *knowing God better*. Knowing God, being in God's presence, will change our entire perspective on the world.
- We must understand that EVERYTHING that we have and ALL that we are spiritually was GIVEN TO US. The spiritually dead have NOTHING to contribute to salvation. Even the ability to cry out for it is GIVEN to us. We are saved complete by grace through faith. If we understand this about ourselves, it will increase our compassion in reaching for others.
- God has brought ALL people together into ONE family with Christ as cornerstone. Although there are individual and local and cultural houses of worship, THERE IS ONLY ONE CHURCH.
- The purpose of the church is to demonstrate God's sovereignty and superiority of all cosmic powers. As individuals, we all help to demonstrate that purpose through transformed lives.

- Divisions in the body of Christ, regardless of their bases, affect the church's witness in the world
- The gifts, particularly the "five-fold ministry gifts" are given to equip God's people for UNITY and VICTORY as a part of something larger than themselves. If they are used in any way to promote self, or in a way that causes division, they are being misused.
- Behaviors that divide people in the body of Christ are part of the "old way of thinking" and must be abandoned. The renewing of our minds is an active, intentional process which believers engage in.
- Believers must be equipped spiritually if they wish to engage in a spiritual endeavor and be a part of God's purpose for the church. We ought to armor up every day.