

INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

Message #1

Various Texts

There is a book in the New Testament which, more than any other book in the New Testament, displays the plan and the purpose and the theology of God for the Church and the Grace Age. It is, as Harold Hoehner said, “one of the most influential documents in the Christian church” (*Ephesians, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 1). In fact, the great reformer John Calvin said that it was his favorite book of the Bible, and from May 1558 to March 1559 he preached forty-eight messages in his exposition of it. **Mr. Calvin’s favorite book of the Bible was Ephesians.** Church history says that as John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, lay dying in his bed, he had his wife read to him Calvin’s sermons on Ephesians every day.

Ephesians thoroughly presents God’s grace and it shows the Church to be the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ. Unfortunately, about all many people really know about the book are two key verses, which are some of the most memorized in the Bible-Ephesians 2:8-9. Although we never want to minimize the importance of these two powerful verses, the fact remains that there are a total of 155 verses in Ephesians, which often have been somewhat overlooked. What ends up being lost when a book like Ephesians is neglected is real church Grace Age theology and real doctrinal and spiritual maturity. In fact, D. Edmund Hiebert said that Ephesians is generally considered to be “the deepest book in the New Testament” (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 267). What we certainly see with Paul is that, as William Hendricksen said, “doctrine is doxology” (*Ephesians*, p. 63).

Jesus Christ has two bodies. One body is His literal, physical body which was born into this world. The other body is His spiritual body comprised of His people, of which He is the head, which has been born again out of heaven. To miss this important point in the Church Age is to miss the wealth of God and to miss the wealth of God is to live your life spiritually malnourished.

One commentator told the story of an elderly couple in Los Angeles who were found dead in their apartment and the autopsies revealed they had both died of severe malnutrition. They were not eating proper food. In the closet, investigators found paper bags that had \$40,000 in them. Had they used some of their wealth they would not have died. Many Christians are dying of spiritual malnutrition because they do not know the doctrine found in the book of Ephesians, and as a result they do not know how rich they really are. You who know the Lord are rich, and Ephesians is a book that tells you how rich you actually are. It is an exciting, wonderful journey, and in the next weeks we would like to guide you on this journey.

Now to introduce the book of Ephesians we would like to ask and answer four simple introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 - Why study Ephesians?

There are seven reasons why we will study Ephesians.

Reason #1 - Because it is an inspired book in the Bible.

God has given only sixty-six inspired books and Ephesians is most definitely one of them. In fact, “the canonicity of Ephesians has never been in dispute” (A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, p. 19).

Ephesians is one book that appears in every known canon listing of inspired books of the Bible starting with Marcion (A.D. 140); Muratorian (A.D. 170); Apostolic (A.D. 300); Cheltenham (A.D. 360); and Athanasius (A.D. 367).

Furthermore, all major Church Council meetings declared that Ephesians was an inspired book of the Bible, such as Nicea (A.D. 325-340); Hippo (A.D. 393); Carthage (A.D. 397) and Carthage (A.D. 419).

Plus all the early church fathers either said it was an inspired book of God or quoted from it as an inspired book of God. Clearly, **Ephesians has powerful inspiration credentials, proving it is an inspired book of God.**

One thing about the Greek text concerning Ephesians is that there are very few textual uncertainties among all the existing Greek manuscripts. What this indicates is that Ephesians is one book of the Bible that we possess that is virtually identical to what Paul wrote in every manuscript that is available today. In fact, a papyrus page of Ephesians, which is dated A.D. 200, is housed today at the University of Michigan.

For the church, Ephesians has been called “the most authoritative and most consummate compendium of the Christian faith.” It has been called the most “sublime and momentous” book on Church thought and doctrine. It is truly a rare book inspired by God.

Reason #2 - Ephesians is a book that exalts God and not man .

Ephesians exalts God and it exalts Him for His sovereignty in salvation. Walter Liefield said, “from the very first sentence, Ephesians exalts God as sovereign” (*Ephesians*, p. 20). Ephesians does not praise man for choosing to believe in Jesus Christ; it exalts God for predestining and choosing all who believe in Jesus Christ. God is to be praised and God is to be worshipped for His grace (i.e. 1:6), and His grace demands predestination and election.

Grace is all about the sovereignty of God. The first three chapters of Ephesians are some of the most God honoring chapters you will ever study. The chapters exalt and praise God for what He has done in offering grace salvation. Those chapters place all of the emphasis for salvation on the sovereignty of God. God is a God of election, redemption, predestination, adoption. God is a God who gives spiritual life to those spiritually dead. He did it all by His grace. This book will cause us all to exalt God and praise God-praise God the Father (1:6); God the Son (1:12); God the Holy Spirit (1:14).

Reason #3 - Ephesians is a book that unlocks truth about dispensationalism .

There are three key dispensations that you must understand if you are to accurately understand the Bible. There is the dispensation of the Law, there is the dispensation of the Kingdom, and there is the dispensation of Grace. Each system has its own biblical data.

The dispensation of grace is the dispensation that is clearly discussed and developed in this book-Ephesians 1:10; 3:2, 9. We are not in the Kingdom, we are not under the Law; we are in the Age of Grace and it is about time that God's people grasp this point. This dispensation is clearly revealed in Ephesians.

This dispensation was not known in other time periods. In fact, the idea that anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, could be linked to God by faith in Christ to form a separate entity called the Grace Age church was a great mystery (Eph. 2:3-4). You and I live in a dispensation of grace and Ephesians brings this dispensation to life. It is time to get a handle on grace and herald grace and Ephesians is a book that will help us do just that.

Reason #4 - Ephesians shows us God's solution for a wicked world.

We live in a time when many believe if you can change man's environment and make it better you can improve man. If you can improve his external quality of life you can end misery and make men happy. Ephesians says that will never work. This world is satanically depraved (2:2) and man is spiritually dead (2:1). He will not get better.

What Ephesians says is that man does not need to be reformed, or improved, or rehabilitated; he needs to be reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Wickedness dominated the world in Paul's day, just like our day, and it sure dominated Ephesus. Man is dead in his relationship with God and he needs to be brought to life. It is God who has the cure. God is able to make one alive and deliver one from sin and guilt. This book will convict us to evangelize the world with this message.

Reason #5 - Ephesians shows believers what their focus should be when living in a wicked world.

Paul's solution to living life in a wicked evil world was to elevate our concept of God. Don't focus on the world or its politics; keep your focus on God's grace and all He has given you. Believers in Jesus Christ need to keep their focus on exalting God. No matter what is going on in this depraved world, we, who know the Lord, are rich and Ephesians shows us just how rich we are. In fact, Paul prayed that we would understand our riches (3:16).

Paul says don't waste your time in a focus thinking about evil cults or an evil world; invest your time exalting God. Paul basically says, you need to know how high and holy God is and how privileged you are in having a relationship with this God. That is the mindset he wanted the Ephesians to have.

Reason #6 - Ephesians is a book that elevates God's grace.

Ephesians is a book that exalts God's sovereignty in providing grace. That word "grace" shows up twelve times in Ephesians (1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24). Ephesians elevates the doctrine of the grace of God.

The greatest need in the world and in the church today is to grasp the important doctrine of the grace of God. Grace salvation has nothing to do with a person's works. Grace has nothing to do with human effort or merit. Grace is a gift of God. In fact, if it is grace it cannot possibly be works, because if works are involved it is not grace (Romans 11:6). The book of Ephesians will truly cause each of us to grasp grace.

Reason #7 - Ephesians is a book that is practical .

It challenges believers to live out their election: Don't live like heathens (4:17); Don't be given to sensual immorality (4:19; 5:3); Don't lie, tell the truth (4:25); Control your temper (4:26); Don't steal anything, pay for it (4:28); Carefully guard your speech (4:29; 5:4); Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30).

QUESTION #2 - Who wrote Ephesians?

There can be no doubt that Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul . In fact, until the late 1700's, all students of Scripture said Ephesians was written by Paul. Even the heretic Marcion (A.D. 140), whom Polycarp called "the first-born of Satan," said Paul wrote Ephesians. This truth that Paul wrote Ephesians is corroborated by the first verse of Ephesians which actually names Paul.

In 1792, a liberal English clergyman named Edward Evanson started to cast doubts on whether or not Paul wrote Ephesians, and that started a series of attacks against Pauline authorship saying it was a forgery. One argument was based on the fact that forty-two words are found in Ephesians that Paul does not use in other places. This has led to nearly 80 % of all liberal critics now saying Paul did not write Ephesians.

It is very interesting and almost hilarious that one of the key arguments against Pauline authorship is that there are resemblances between Ephesians and Colossians and I & II Timothy and Titus. Well I wonder why? Do you think it could be because the same author wrote all those books? We believe Paul wrote Ephesians for the following reasons:

Reason #1 - The writer calls himself "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ" in Ephesians 1:1.

There was one and only one apostle named Paul so that pretty much solves the authorship issue.

Reason #2 - The writer specifically names himself as "Paul" in Ephesians 3:1.

The same Paul who wrote verse 1 is still writing in chapter 3.

Reason #3 - The writer sends specific information about himself to Ephesus to comfort the Ephesians and this only makes sense if it is Paul . Eph. 6:21-22

Paul had a very close relationship with the people of this church. He was used mightily by God in Ephesus (Acts 18) and he taught this church for three years (Acts 20:31) and when he went to leave, they wept (Acts 20:37).

Now here is what is most interesting. **The people of Ephesus loved Paul probably more than any other church in existence, but the book of Ephesians is the least personal book of any Paul wrote.** One thing these believers loved about Paul is that he taught them God exalting truth. People will end up loving men of God who teach them the truth, not one who tries to make everything so personal.

Reason #4 - The book of Ephesians has clear Pauline language as other letters of Paul.

John Chrysostom, the “golden-mouthed orator” of Constantinople said that Ephesians is “full of Paul’s sublime thoughts and doctrines...” Dr. Harold Hoehner analyzed statisticians who examined the words, the sentence structures and the grammar of the Greek text of Ephesians and here is what he said: “The study of sentence symmetry and rhythm substantiates that Ephesians was written by Paul and not an imitator” (*Ephesians, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 29).

Reason #5 - The great leaders in the history of the church said it was written by Paul.

Great men of the church have all said Paul wrote Ephesians: Eusebius, Luther, Calvin, Bengel, Meyer, Eadie, Alford, Hodge, Moule, Godet, Lightfoot, Robinson, Westcott, Lenski, Barclay, Bruce, Scofield, and Chafer.

This is not rocket science; **Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul**.

QUESTION #3 - When did Paul write Ephesians?

Three times in the book Paul says that he wrote Ephesians while he was a prisoner - 3:1; 4:1; 6:20.

It is generally agreed that there are four books Paul wrote as a prisoner near the end of the book of Acts (Acts 28:30-31): Ephesians, Philippians (1:7, 13), Colossians (4:3, 18) and Philemon (10, 13, 22, 23). Three of the books form a church trilogy and one (Philemon) is a personal letter.

Since Paul mentions Tychicus, who would be the carrier of the letter, this definitely places this around the same time as Colossians (Eph. 6:21-22/Col. 4:7-8).

Based on this data, we may assume that Paul wrote Ephesians in A.D. 61-62, during his first imprisonment in Rome, which is described by Luke at the end of the book of Acts (Acts 28:30-31).

QUESTION #4 - Why did Paul write Ephesians?

In most of Paul’s writings he typically offers some sort of explanation for the reason for his letter, but Ephesians is different in that there doesn’t seem to be any reason stated. There does not appear to be any key crisis or conflict, and there is no place in the book of Ephesians where he precisely states his reason for writing the letter. **So if we are to determine the reason he writes we must do so on the basis of the contents of the letter.**

The noun that is used the most in Ephesians is the proper noun “Christ” (Χριστός). It is used some forty-seven times in the book (1:1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 20; 2:5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 20; 3:1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 17, 19, 21; 4:7, 12, 13, 15, 20, 32; 5:2, 5, 14, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 29, 32; 6:5, 6, 23, 24). The preposition that is used most in the book of Ephesians is “in” such as “in Christ,” “in Him,” “in whom” or “in the Lord.” That preposition occurs some 120 times in Ephesians. **It has been well observed by grammarians that the biggest word in Ephesians is the little word “in.”**

There are **three key prepositional phrases** that are used over and over again in Ephesians, which must be a tip-off to the theme. The key phrases of the epistle are “**in Christ**” used some 14 times (1:1, 3, 10, 12, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32; 5:32), and “**in Him**” that occurs some eight times in the book (1:4, 7, 9, 10, 13; 4:15, 21), and “**in the heavenlies**” that occurs some five times in the book (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Harold Hoehner said the phrases in Christ, in whom, in the Lord, or similar expressions occurs a total of thirty-eight times in Ephesians (Ibid., p. 103).

God wants us to understand that His grace has given us an eternal relationship with Him, and He wants us to understand that any union we have in a relationship with God is because of our being “in Christ,” which is all due to the grace of God. This grace union with Christ actually makes us part of His family and His body (1:22-23; 4:4, 16; 5:23, 30). The Church is the Body of Jesus Christ and it is the Bride of Jesus Christ (5:25-27, 32), and it guarantees that we share in the eternal wealth and riches of heaven. **If you do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ, Ephesians says you have no hope and no relationship with God (2:12).**

The number “one” is used some 14 times (2:14, 15, 16, 18; 4:4, 5, 6, 7, 16; 5:33). The word “unity” (ἑνωσις) is only used in Ephesians by Paul and it is used twice (4:3, 13). The verb “love” occurs some ten times in the book and the noun “love” occurs some ten times in the book. Out of the twenty occurrences, there are eight references to God’s love for us; eleven references to the believer’s love for one another and one reference to a person’s love for Christ. The word “church” (ἐκκλησία) occurs some nine times (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32) and the word “body” (σῶμα) also occurs nine times. The word “mystery” occurs six times (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).

If we take all of this into consideration, we must be very near to the theme of Ephesians when we conclude: **Ephesians was written for the purpose of giving believers deep knowledge of the amazing grace of God that permits sinners to have a real dynamic union and family relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and having knowledge of God’s amazing grace should cause us to be united and gracious to each other.**

In this Grace Age, there are three kinds of people on this earth:

- 1) There are those who are “in Adam”- a non-Jew who is spiritually dead.
- 2) There are those who are “in Abraham”- a physical Jew who is spiritually dead.
- 3) There are those who are “in Christ”- Jews and non-Jews who have believed on Jesus Christ and are spiritually alive.

The thing that is so critical to all Pauline theology is that all of God’s grace is found “in Jesus Christ.” That grace found in Jesus Christ seats us in the heavenlies. **Because God has loved us enough to provide an amazing grace salvation through Jesus Christ so we could be united to Him, certainly we should honor God and love each other enough to strive to be united in grace with them.** In Ephesians Paul is promoting a true biblical love that is based on a real union that we have with Jesus Christ.

John Calvin said the first three chapters are occupied with the idea of commending the grace of God found in Jesus Christ to the point that believers would have no desire to know anything else. In the final three chapters the book spells out the pattern by which we live out grace in our lives (*Ephesians*, Vol. 21, pp. 191-193).