

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabible.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabible.org).

**Date:** August 16, 2009

**Title:** An Introduction To The Book Of Ephesians: Part One

**Text:** Misc.

**Theme:** The A.I.M. (Author’s Intended Meaning) of this lesson is to introduce the reader to the book of Ephesians by looking at six key questions.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

**Ephesians as a Letter:**

Initially we need to see the **book** of Ephesians as a **letter**.

1. "A letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, because it was one of the two sides of a dialogue. In other words, to read a letter is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation."<sup>1</sup>
2. "When we read Paul's letters we are not reading things which were meant to be academic exercises and theological treatises, but human documents written by a friend to his friends."<sup>2</sup>
3. "The letters are such a small photograph album from such a crowded career."<sup>3</sup> Paul's activity spanned three decades. Much was done and lived without us able to note what was or was not done or said.
  - a. Paul did not have us in mind.
  - b. He was not thinking he was adding to the Jewish canon.
  - c. He wrote from a shepherd's heart.
  - d. He spoke his thoughts and a secretary wrote them down.

Paul sat imprisoned. He had time to think and to meditate on the thoughts he wrote. There is a prayer-filled quality to the letter. He wrote from a deep well.

This is an enormous insight. Ephesians is only one half of a larger dialogue. It is also written by a friend to his friends. It is not a diatribe or manual for church growth. There is a problem and here is Paul's response to the question. It is with tremendous passion and pathos he writes. Paul did not write the letter with the idea that we would be reading it 2,000 years later. All of this needs to be kept in mind as we study the letter to Ephesus.

**The Place of Ephesians in Paul's Letters:**

**Ephesians** carries largely among the heavenlies. It is characterized by dignity and serenity which is in harmony with the elevation of its thoughts. There is scarcely even an echo of the great controversies which ring so loudly in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians.

It is "the divinest composition of man," wrote Coleridge. It has been called "the crown of St. Paul's writings," "the Queen of the Epistles," and the "greatest and most relevant of his works." W. O. Carver said, "Ephesians is the greatest piece of writing in all of history." It may well be the "most influential document ever written."

"Paul has written nothing more profound than chapters 1 to 3 of Ephesians," writes A. T. Robertson. Stalker termed them the profoundest thing ever written. He sounds the

depths of truth and reaches the heights. It is a letter written in the atmosphere of prayer. Most Christians have never prayed for some of the things which Paul prayed for in these two prayers.

Expositors observes: "It is the grandest of all the Pauline letters. There is a peculiar and sustained loftiness in its teaching which has deeply impressed the greatest minds and has earned for it the title of the 'Epistle of the Ascension.'" <sup>4</sup>

"The central doctrine of the Epistle is the Church, and particularly 1) its universality and 2) its mysterious union with the exalted Christ."<sup>5</sup>

### **THE BIG PICTURE:**

- 1-3 "Christ is God's instrument of reconciliation."
- 4-6 "The Church is Christ's instrument of reconciliation. The Church must bring Christ to the world."<sup>6</sup>

### **The Storyline:**

#### **The Problem:**

There were two reasons for the letter: (1) Paul was imprisoned and his audience was concerned for him. (2) There was apparent division between the Jewish and Gentile believers that needed addressing.

"In the Roman Empire a new unity had come to the world. The *pax Romana*, the Roman peace, was a very real thing." Just as Rome brought a temporary peace to the known world so Christ brings peace to turbulent times and warring factions. To what or to whom do we turn for lasting peace?

Paul is very clear throughout his letter. There is only one church manifested in geographically distinct areas with biblical structure and mission. We have no right to attack and minimize the larger body of Christ let alone this particular community of faith. Paul notes how there are neither Jew nor Gentile inside of the body of Christ. It is only as we recognize the enormous theological themes throughout Ephesians that we as a fellowship can be united as one new man.

We would be in error if we failed to see the necessity of geographically defined assemblies with biblical structure and mission, but we would equally be in error if we did not see the inter-connected of all churches within the larger body of Christ.

What this means is that we have no right to criticize other churches and we must see how even churches in significant theological or practical error are still a part of this one body of Christ. How wide you and I cast this net would perhaps be debated, but let us not think there isn't a larger body of which we are a part.

**Questions:**

1. Define orthodoxy.
2. Define orthopraxy.
3. How do the two ideas interact and what are their individual strengths?
4. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What is one of the big ideas in verse 14?
5. Read Acts 20:28-35. What does Paul warn them against and call them to?
6. Read 1 Timothy 1:3-7. What does Paul warn Timothy against and call him to?
7. Read Revelation 2:1-7. What does John highlight positively and what is noted negatively?
8. How might we make sense of the similarities within each of these sections? What are we to guard against? I believe there are two prominent ideas.
9. How does the Letter to the Ephesians compliment this idea?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that God in Christ has reconciled all things to Himself.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to follow Him and the path of peace and unity.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in the finished work of Christ.

**Outline:**

## I. Who Wrote The Book Of Ephesians?

The author is clearly stated within the letter as Paul (Eph. 1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:7, 13; 4:1; 6:19-20). It wasn't until the destructive criticism of the nineteenth century that some began to seriously deny Paul's authorship of this epistle.

## II. When Was The Book Of Ephesians Written?

The letter was written while in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). This alone staggers me. While imprisoned he remembers those for whom he is responsible.

The date of this letter must correspond with Paul's Roman imprisonment of Acts 28:16-31 (cf. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), which is approximately **AD 60, 61**. He is a prisoner in his own rented house in Rome. "Paul may have written it about the same time as Colossians, while he was in prison at Rome (3:1; 4:1; 6:20)."<sup>7</sup>

## III. To Whom Was The Book Of Ephesians Written?

This church was Paul's main work in Asia. The Gospel message was spread throughout most of Asia as a result of the work in Ephesus. On his second journey, Paul came to Ephesus and taught the twelve disciples who knew only the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-7) and "went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). He later taught in

the school of Tryannus for two years, and as a result, “all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:9-10).

Paul sends this letter, along with the letter to the Colossians and another to the Laodiceans and one to Philemon, through Tychicus and Onesimus (Col 4:7-9, 16; Ephesians 6:21).<sup>8</sup>

“The indication is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. 6:21-22; Col 4:7-9; Phm 10-12).”

The letter was written to a predominately Gentile audience (2:11; 4:17). In all probability the letter was intended to be circular in so far that it was to be passed on to others. The letter was not written to a specific individual but rather to a local church or local churches. Regardless as to what position one maintains, the letter was to have a far greater audience than just the churches of Ephesus.

### **The City of Ephesus:**

- Location:

West Coast of Asia Minor, which was a port city off the Aegean Sea. It is ranked with Antioch and Alexandria as one of the 3 great trading centers of the Eastern Mediterranean.

- Importance:

“Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor that at that time opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also at an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center.”<sup>9</sup>

- Religion:

It was the center for the worship of Diana (Rome) / Artemis (Greek). She is the Greek goddess of fertility. She was a comely woman with a multiplicity of breasts. Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple had a two-fold function: 1) it housed temple prostitution and 2) it acted as a central bank for all of Asia Minor. Ephesus was also a center for witchcraft (cf. Acts 19:13-19).

- Church:

Paul is given official credit for starting the church on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 19:1). Paul had initially left Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus and Apollos later joined them (Acts 18:24-28). They began the groundwork but Paul established the church over the course of the next two+ years (Acts 19:8-10). Paul later sent Timothy to pastor the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).

Church tradition and the witness of the Church Father say that the Apostle John came and pastored the church at Ephesus until he was exiled to Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

“The epistle, directed primarily to Gentile Christians, expounds their position in Christ and their corresponding responsibilities in Christian living.”<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. From Where Was The Book Of Ephesians Written?

Paul was apparently a prisoner in Rome under house arrest when he wrote this letter. It appears Ephesians has clearly a close connection with Colossians. It would seem that Tychicus was the bearer of both these letters (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21).

"These two Epistles show closer contacts in content, language, and style than any other Epistles."<sup>11</sup>

#### V. How Was The Book Of Ephesians Written?

The book is written as a formal letter using a standard epistolary format. Colossians and Philemon are closely associated because of the proximity of both to each other. Ephesians followed both because of its content. Fifty percent of Ephesians is represented in the book of Colossians. Ephesians appears to be an expansion of Colossians.

#### VI. Why Was The Book Of Ephesians Written?

"The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. The universe is "dead in trespasses and sins," radically depraved, and can only reach its eternal destiny when every thing bows in submission to Christ "who fills all in all." Mankind is restored to its original purpose when it is reconciled to God in Christ."<sup>12</sup>

"Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers."<sup>13</sup>

"This emphasis persists throughout the letter: it is plain everywhere that who Christ is and what he does is at the heart of the Christian way."<sup>14</sup>

There does not seem to be an urgent problem (i.e., Galatians = Judaism) that Paul addresses but because of the numerous parallels to Colossians it may be addressing the same heresy that the Colossians letter addresses (that heresy will be addresses in the introduction to Colossians). Therefore, it has been suggested that there are two basic purposes: 1. Informative or instructive. 2. Protective (Both of which are integrated into the book outline).

Since there is no immediate or apparent problem, we are safe to assume that the truths stated are foundational and fundamental to a healthy Christian life. This epistle, along with Colossians, emphasizes the truth that the Church is the body of which Christ is the Head.

"Ephesians is a greater version of Colossians. The whole thought of Colossians is based on the complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ. The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. The central thought of Ephesians is the realization of the disunity in the universe and the conviction that it can become unity only when everything is united in Christ."<sup>15</sup>

“The theological insight and depth of this epistle are so great that some have considered it to be the most profound work in the entire Bible. The dominant theme of Ephesians is the church as the body of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul’s intent was to tell them that the destined unity of all men and of all things could never be found except in Christ, and to tell them of the supreme task of the Church – that of being Christ’s instrument in the universal reconciliation of man to man and of man to God.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Shepherding the Sheep** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

- Ephesians has much to tell us concerning His body that is the Church.
- The unity secured by the cross is to be manifested in His church.
- How one is included in His body is clearly spelled out for those who wish inclusion.
- How one is to act once included is equally spelled out for the believer.
- Disunity is a work of the devil. Biblical unity shows the work of the cross; it is the work of the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, xi).

<sup>2</sup> (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, xiii).

<sup>3</sup> (N.T. Wright, *Justification*, 170).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/ephintro.html>

<sup>5</sup> (Alfred Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, 428).

<sup>6</sup> (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 67).

<sup>7</sup> (*The NIV Study Bible*).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.licoc.org/Sermons/Introduction%20to%20Ephesians.htm>

<sup>9</sup> (*NIV Study Bible*).

<sup>10</sup> (*The Criswell Study Bible*).

<sup>11</sup> (Alfred Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, 429).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/ephintro.html>

<sup>13</sup> (*The NIV Study Bible*).

<sup>14</sup> (D.A. Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 314).

<sup>15</sup> (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 62, 65, 66).

<sup>16</sup> (*The Open Bible*).

<sup>17</sup> (William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 71).