

“Word on Wednesday Bible Study”

“The Church, the Body of Christ”

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A SURVEY OF EPHESIANS FROM AN APOLOGETIC PERSPECTIVE

Date of Authorship: Ca. A.D. 62

Background:

The city of Ephesus (economically) held a place of prominence in the 1st Century. It was an important city during the Roman Empire. It was recognized as one of the major seaports in Asia. In light of its strategic location, Ephesus served as a link between the Mediterranean world and Asia.

In regards to religion, the city of Ephesus engaged in cult worship. They worshipped the cult goddess Artemis (also called Diana). Artemis was viewed as the goddess of fertility and the temple attributed to her was viewed as one of the Seven Wonders of the World during that time.

This splendid temple had a roof covered with white marble tiles and supported by 127 blue-gray granite columns sixty feet long. The temple complex apparently included a statue of Artemis with a large altar in front of it. Several statues of the Ephesian Artemis have been found in the ruins of the ancient city. The statues feature the goddess with a crown or headdress, a necklace, a fitted skirt decorated with animals, and three rows of egg-shaped objects perhaps representing multiple breasts or eggs, symbols associated with her role as a fertility goddess.¹

Purpose of the Letter:

Ironically, the letter to the Ephesians may not have been written to a specific church in Ephesus. Despite Paul’s relationship to the city as we learn from the book of Acts, it is more likely the letter was written to a group of churches in various areas.

This letter may have been intended to circulate around several churches. There are no personal messages in it and not all of the ancient manuscripts mention Ephesus as the place where it was sent.²

¹ LaMoine F. Devries, *Cities of the Biblical World* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 377.

² M.K Batchelor, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Companion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 155.

The overall theme of this letter is “The Church, the Body of Christ.” Paul in this letter deals with unity within the body of Christ. His intent is to reveal the mystery of God unveiled to the Gentiles through Christ. Topics such as predestination, marriage, parenting, and holiness are all addressed in this letter. This letter is essential for all Christians who desire to know God more intimately.

Chapter 1

In his salutation to the believers of Ephesus, Paul immediately identifies himself as an apostle (vs. 1). This term apostle should not be abused. This unique title belongs to the ones who have been called by Christ himself and were a witness to His resurrection. In other words, the apostles were used by God to lay the foundation of Christian teachings for the church. In addition, numerous Scriptures found in the New Testament demonstrate a finality to those that God called to be apostles (cf. Acts 1:21-26; Acts 5:29-32; 1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15: 3-8). In short, there are no present-day apostles according to the Scriptures. As it relates to this topic, apologists Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes assert the following:

The first century apostles understood that God was providing unique revelation through them (1 Cor. 2:13). They were handpicked by the Lord (Matt. 10:1-2; Acts 1:26) and had divine authority (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 7:10). Biblical apostles had to be eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:7-8). The book of Acts clearly attests to the uniqueness and authority of the apostles. In Acts 2:42 the first church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship. Throughout Acts the pronouncements of the apostles were final (Acts 15). By their voice, the church was born (Ch. 2); miracles were performed (Ch. 3); rulers were restricted (Ch. 4); the disobedient judged (Ch. 5); the Holy Spirit was given to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Ch. 10).³

Paul also reminds the Christians in Ephesus that they were chosen before God created the world (vs. 4). He continues to elaborate on this doctrine of predestination. This is an awesome doctrine for all believers. The God of the universe, knew we would accept Christ prior to the creation.

Paul was reminding the Ephesian church that God had a purpose for them. We did not get here by accident as some skeptics conclude. The God of the universe purposefully created us and He knew exactly when we would accept His Son. This reality is called the doctrine of *predestination* (c.f. verse 11).

The doctrine of predestination has been viewed differently within many Christian groups. Some believe that God overrides the free will of humans in order to save them. Others argue that humans compel God to save them. In reality, both of these views are extreme and inconsistent with sound doctrine. This schism within the body of Christ was evident even during the time of the Reformation (16th Century).

³ Norman Geisler, Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (1997: Baker Books, Grand Rapids), 255.

(Martin) Luther believed in predestination of the elect but said little about election to condemnation. (John) Calvin held to a double predestination (to salvation and condemnation) based on the will of God, and he rejected any idea of merit on the part of the elect or foreknowledge on the part of God in the sense that God elected to salvation those whom He foreknew would believe.⁴

The answer to this predestination question is rooted in a balanced view. We are chosen but yet free. God knows who will accept Him and He allows us to choose Him freely. God does not force Himself on any free will agent. He desires to come to Him but some will reject the overture. God chose us in a sense that those who accept Him are part of the whole (human creation). When we voluntarily accept Christ, we then become the selected or predestined.

Paul also highlights a message of redemption. To further crystallize the point, He adopts Old Testament imagery. In ancient Israel a perfect lamb was slain to atone for the sins of Israel. Paul suggests that the same thing has occurred through the process of atonement (vs. 7).

This chapter also introduces this idea of *inheritance*. Paul's message is a reminder that all who accept Christ become beneficiaries of God's numerous blessings (vs. 11). Moreover, Paul details the steps it took for the Ephesians to gain their inheritance.

1. They listened to the message of truth (vs. 13).
2. They believed in the gospel which also led to their salvation (vs. 13).
3. They were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit (vv. 13-14).

The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is God's pledge to us. He (the Holy Spirit) reminds the believer that God is with us.

This chapter concludes with Paul's encouragement towards the church. He commends them for having love for all saints (vs. 15). Christians should always demonstrate love for other people. Selfishness and self-centeredness should not be associated with a follower of Christ. It is also noteworthy that Paul continues to pray for them (c.f. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We learn from Paul's writing that prayer is very important. The Doctrine of prayer was highly emphasized by Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jesus arose early in the morning to spend time with the Father. In the same way, Christians should seek the face of God daily.

This first chapter concludes with an itemization of Paul's prayer request for the Christians in Ephesus.

1. He wanted them to have knowledge about God based on wisdom (vs. 17).
2. He wanted their hearts to be open so they would know their calling (vs. 18).

Finally, Paul reminds His readers about the position of Christ. He is the head of the church. Furthermore, He has rule and authority over everything (vv. 19-23).

⁴ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 302.

Chapter 2

In chapter 2, Paul provides insight into the spiritual state of his audience (the recipients of his letter). Prior to accepting Christ, they were dead in their trespasses. This term **death** signifies a state in which we are unresponsive to spiritual matters. In addition, Paul paints a clear picture of a person that is spiritually dead.

In their dead state the Christians in Ephesus engaged in the following:

1. They walked according to the course of the world (vs. 2), under the power of the prince of the air.
2. They formerly lived in the lust of the flesh (vs. 3).
3. They indulged in the lusts of the flesh and mind (vs. 3).
4. They were by nature children of wrath (vs. 3).

Paul, after characterizing the sinful state of humanity juxtaposes this reality with the believer. As sinners we were at odds with God. However, in Christ, believers have been made alive (vs. 5). Due to the grace of God, believers are beneficiaries of his mercy (vv. 4-7).

Verse 8 gives us a glimpse of the salvation process. Paul wanted his readers to know that they had been saved by grace, through faith. Salvation is indeed a gift from God. There is nothing man can do to work for it (vv. 8-9).

We must avoid any theology that suggests humanity can **work** their way into heaven. Groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach their members that **salvation** is based on works. This is the primary reason their members knock on doors in the community. Paul's statement in verses 8-9 is clear. Salvation is God's gift to us. It is up to everyone to either accept or reject His invitation. Christians do not work to be saved but they work because they are saved.

It is God that produces the good works in us because we have made ourselves available to the Holy Spirit (vs. 10).

Paul's contention is that God has been good to us. As Gentiles, He did not want them to forget their testimony (vs. 11). Paul reminded them of the following:

1. They were once separated from Christ (vs. 12).
2. Separated from the commonwealth of Israel (vs. 12).
3. Strangers to the covenant of promise (vs. 12).
4. Their hope was not in God but the lust of their flesh (vs. 12).

Paul continues his theological discourse regarding the salvation and sanctification process. How did Christ deliver the Christians in Ephesus?

1. He broke down the wall between the Jews and Gentiles (vs. 15).
2. Both groups now have access to the same God (vs. 16).
3. Christ has abolished the schism between the Jews and Gentiles. This unity in Christ is a fulfillment of an Isaiah passage (Isaiah 57:19).

“I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him.”- Isaiah 57:19.

Paul reminds His readers that Christ is the chief cornerstone that all Christian privileges are built on.

Chapter 3

Paul characterizes himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. This term infers he is willing to preach the truth of the gospel for life. Despite what happens to us in life, we have no one else who can help us but God. His benevolence motivates us to live for Him. This is the message Paul was trying to communicate to his audience.

It is also noteworthy that Paul was commissioned to be a witness to the Gentiles. God called Paul to share with both Jews and Gentiles. Believers should not be hypocritical with their love. Christians should be open to share with all people as the Spirit leads us to proclaim.

Paul also talks about the mysteries concerning Christ. The mystery refers to the prophecies that would come at time when Gentiles would be grafted in to the Kingdom. The mystery is concerning God's *omniscience*. No one knows the mind of God (this is the mystery). Why did He choose to include the Gentiles? The mystery of the prophetic messages is now fulfilled in Christ (vv. 4-7). This particular message of the Gentiles becoming part of God's family is not new to Him (God). God made it known to Paul so he could share the information with both Jews and Gentiles. All of this was in accordance with God's eternal plan that He carried out through Christ.

Paul then gives thanks to God for giving the Gentiles access to the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-16). It is also Paul's prayer that God would give them power so their hearts would be grounded in love. In addition, he prayed for them to learn the depths of the knowledge as illuminated by the Holy Spirit (vv. 16-19).

This chapter concludes with a Pauline message. Paul gives us an insight regarding God's nature. God is able to do what is beyond what anyone can do and His power works within us. These words of assurance are intended to encourage the faith of the church. His prayer is for continual glory in the church through Christ Jesus for all eternity.

Chapter 4

This chapter opens with a call to Christian conduct built on the following virtues:

1. Humility (vs. 2).
2. Gentleness (vs. 2).
3. Patience (vs. 2).
4. Tolerance rooted in divine love (vs. 2).
5. Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (vs. 3).

Chapter 4 continues Paul's thesis from chapter 3. There ought to be unity within the Family of God (vs. 4). He informs them that there is ***One Spirit*** not multiple spirits of God. Paul outlines a series of Ones to buttress his point.

1. There is ONE body. We (Christians) are all a part of God's body (vs. 4).
2. There is ONE Spirit (vs. 4).
3. ONE hope of your calling (vs. 4).
4. ONE Lord (vs. 4).
5. ONE faith (vs. 4).
6. There is ONE baptism (vs. 4).
7. ONE God (vv. 5-6).

The list was written by Paul to prove a point. We are one in Christ. It is not acceptable for Christians to have divergent views in regard to major theological doctrines. The teachings of the Bible based on healthy teachings are the spiritual fetters that unites All Christians.

Indeed, Paul draws attention to a whole series of unities, including one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father, one body and one hope, one faith, one baptism (4:4-6), even though there are diverse gifts of apostles, prophets, and others in the church (4:11-13). Clearly, the writer wants his readers to catch the splendid vision of one church, thoroughly united in the Lord, though it contains members of various races and is equipped by God to render significant service in this world.⁵

The next section deals with a passage from the Old Testament. Paul quotes from Psalm 68 which speaks of a victorious King (Psalm 68:1). He compares it with the defeat of death through the victory of Jesus. Paul wanted his readers to know that Christ was the ultimate conqueror. He has defeated everything (including death). The victorious King always has the prerogative to appoint whomever he desires. Paul illustrates this point by letting the converts know that it was He (God through Christ) who appointed men to their positions.

1. He gave some as apostles (vs. 11).
2. He gave some as prophets (vs. 11).
3. He gave some as evangelists (vs. 11).
4. He gave some as pastors and teachers (vs. 11).

Paul further unpacks his previous statement. He explains the reasons for God placing certain people in various positions.

1. For the equipping of the saints for the work of the service (vs. 12).
2. To build up the body of Christ (vs. 12).

For them to fulfill their position in Christ, Paul urges them to remain theologically sound. Paul cautioned them about the following:

⁵ D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 496.

1. Do not act like children who are easily deceived by what they are told (vs. 14).
2. Do not be persuaded by every doctrine (vs. 14).
3. Look out for those who bring devious doctrines (vs. 14).

Paul then quickly shifts to what believers must do. He encourages them to do the following:

1. Speak the (doctrinal) truth in love (vs. 15).
2. Grow up in Him (Christ).

In the middle of his encouragement, Paul shifts gears again and warns the church about returning to the past. Paul again cautions his readers about walking like other Gentiles (vs. 17). He contrasts their former lives with the present.

Gentiles	Believers
Futile in their thinking	Truth is found in Jesus
Darkened in their understanding	Mind renewed in the Spirit
Hardness of the heart	Created in righteousness and holiness of truth
Gave themselves over to sensuality	
Practice every kind of impurity with greediness	
Lusts of deceit	
Practice falsehood	

Paul concludes this chapter by again reminding them about the **truth**. He wants the church to avoid all falsehoods. This admonition is important because the Devil will use various people to bring **heresy** in to the church. In short, ideas have consequences, and he did not want the church to be led away from the truth of the gospel.

In order to foster his teaching on unity Paul encourages the saints to do the following:

1. He wants them to lay aside falsehoods (vs. 25).
2. He wants them to speak the truth to each other (vs. 25).
3. Be angry but not sin (vs. 26).
4. To not let the sun go down on their anger because doing so would give the enemy ammunition. (vs. 26).
5. They must stop stealing now that they are saved. They must work with their own hands in order to obtain something for themselves as well as others (vs. 28).
6. They are to abstain from unwholesome conversation and embrace words that edify (vs. 29).
7. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit who also sealed us during the time of our redemption (vs. 30).
8. Put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice (vs. 31).
9. Finally, he encourages them to be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgive one another just as God through Christ has forgiven them (vs. 32).