



Ephesians

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The following is the Preface to Ephesians by John Phillips that Charlie read in today's study.

“In some ways the city of Ephesus is unique in the New Testament. It was not a religious center like Jerusalem, a cultural center like Athens, or a political center like Rome. It was a Christian center.

Pagans knew the city as a center of heathen activities. Its famous temple of Diana (Artemis) was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and a source of terrible moral and spiritual pollution. But Ephesus is known around the world today not because of the temple that attracted thousands to its courts and courtesans, not because of its trade, but because of the Biblical truth that was taught there. Ephesus is known to all who know the Bible.

Paul spent several years in Ephesus and a truly great church resulted from his ministry. Paul's final farewell words to the Ephesian elders reveal how diligently he had preached and pastored there (Acts 20). Mark and the apostle John also ministered in Ephesus. Timothy is believed to have been martyred there for denouncing the licentiousness of a feast of Diana.

It was from Ephesus that John was exiled to the offshore island of Patmos. During that exile he wrote to Ephesus one of the letters to the seven churches. In that letter, dictated personally by the ascended Lord, he exposed the church's lack of love for the Lord Jesus (Revelation 2:1-7). Their labors were commended, their loyalty was praised, but their lack of love was lamented. The Lord took this lack of love for Himself so seriously that He warned that if there were no repentance and revival, He would remove the lampstand.

Light without love is a barren thing. The Lord has no use for a church that no longer loves Him.

When Paul wrote his Ephesian letter, the events foreseen by John were still over the horizon. Yet the warnings Paul had issued several years before in his farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus show that he had his own private fears. The onslaught of a cult at nearby Colossae alerted Paul to growing dangers, but what destroyed the Ephesian church in the end was not falsehood, but formality. It became, so to speak, a cold, fundamental, orthodox, evangelical, Bible-believing church that lacked even a spark of its original love for Christ.

As we read this Ephesian letter, what impresses us is Paul's emphasis on love. He told us about our blessings, he talked about our behavior, and he warned us about our battles. But it is our Beloved—Christ—who dominates it all.

Come, then; join me in a tour of this letter, perhaps the grandest of all Paul's Epistles. Doctrine will thrill us in the book of Romans and discipline will confront us in Corinthians. We will read of deliverance in Galatians, deception in Colossians, discord in Philippians, duty in Philemon, and discovery in Thessalonians. But in Ephesians devotion is the theme. There Paul was saying, "Take another look at the Beloved. Fall in love with Him afresh. He is the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One, fairer than the fair, the glorious Bridegroom of our hearts." (1)

*In His matchless love,
John Phillips*

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:1

Welcome to the book of Ephesians! It is comprised of 155 verses, and so it will take us (one day at a time, just like your vitamins) about one half a year to analyze it. I hope you will be blessed as each day unfolds with new insights into this beautiful epistle from the mind of God and through the hand of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

He begins by introducing himself right off the bat. The letter bears his name and though many have challenged the authenticity of his authorship in this and in all of his letters, there is no valid reason to suggest that he is not the true author. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the letter is written to a Gentile-led church.

He next identifies his apostleship with the words, "an apostle of Jesus Christ." He is a messenger of the Lord, having been called by Him personally to perform this weighty duty

which has been so amazingly fruitful for the past two thousand years. This is his one claim to the authority of writing a letter of doctrine to them, and it is with this authority that he thus writes.

After this, he notes that his apostleship is “by the will of God.” This is the same phrase as is seen in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy. It is what further defines his calling and which affirms his authority. It also is a note of humility in that he was selected, and therefore it was not of his own merits. Instead it was by the sovereign decision of God that he is so designated an apostle.

In his letter to the Romans, he gave a more formal declaration of his commission, and in Galatians the opening statement was considerably more direct and even abrupt. In other letters, the opening varies as well. The opening statement is given in each epistle to set the tone for the rest of the letter.

Finally, he states that the letter is written specifically “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.” They are to be the initial recipients of this beautiful letter of doctrine, and they are to be blessed with having been the first to read the subject matter of which Paul felt it necessary to put into writing for the instruction and edification of those in the church.

However, the intent of Paul’s letters is not that they would be read and then secreted away for only the Ephesians to refer to. Rather, the anticipation is that it would be circulated among the churches, having copies made and having sessions where the content could be repeated and analyzed. This is seen in the words, “...and faithful in Christ Jesus.” The Ephesians are the main addressee, but all who are faithful in Christ are also included in the words from Paul’s hand.

This is seen in the truth that we have, in fact, a copy of the letter before us now. It became well known enough to be considered for inclusion in the Bible, and its contents made it rightly selected for that same purpose. Each step of the process was guided by the Holy Spirit to ensure that we have the sure and perfect word of God to refer to.

Life application: As Paul wrote, he probably didn’t think that we would be reading his words two thousand years later, but the personal nature of the note includes us in the epistle nonetheless. It is a letter directed to each person as an individual who would pick it up and read it. Consider this as you read it, or truly any portion of Scripture.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:2

In his initial words of verse 1, Paul identified himself, his position as an apostle, his calling by the will of God, and to whom he was addressing. Now he gives the standard greeting which is found in most of his epistles, "Grace to you and peace to you."

Grace is unmerited favor which cannot be earned. This is the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing to them "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one - Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not making some type of great division, but a harmonious blending of the two.

Throughout Paul's letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can't be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

Life application: Outside of God's creation, which reveals Him in a general way, we cannot comprehend Him except through His special revelation. One way we receive special revelation is through the mouths of His prophets. But these prophets all testified to the same thing - Jesus Christ (John 5:39). The most magnificent special revelation of God that we have received is the incarnation of Jesus. But for us, even this isn't sight, it is found in the testimony of those who have recorded what they knew into the New Testament. So, in order to understand God, one must know Jesus Christ, and one cannot understand Jesus Christ unless they know their Bible. Today's life application.... know your Bible.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, Ephesians 1:3

This verse, although divided with periods in the English, is actually one continuous thought which ends at the close of verse 12. In the thought, he begins with the words, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “*be*” is inserted in the English for our clarity. And the word “blessed” is different than the word which is used in the beatitudes which is also translated as “blessed.” It is the word *eulogétos*, and it literally indicates, “worthy of praise.” It is where the term “eulogize,” or “eulogy” comes from. It is only used of God the Father and Christ (meaning God the Son). Thus it shows that the Godhead is worthy of all praise.

The term, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in no way negates the deity of Christ. In fact, it highlights it. As there is One God and He is the Father of Christ, then it shows that there is more to the character of God than just being a monad. Rather, it shows that the two are one, but are yet different persons within the Godhead. The Spirit, although not mentioned here, is the third member of the Godhead.

His next words are “who has blessed us.” The “us” is not referring to the world at large, because the world at large has not been blessed with the spiritual blessings which he will next refer to. Nor is it specifically speaking of the Gentiles, because Paul uses the term “us,” and he is a Jew. Therefore, “us” must be referring to “the saints” mentioned in verse 1, of whom Paul includes himself. All saints, meaning believers in Christ, are included in the words of this epistle which Paul now sets forth for us.

It is the saints of the ages who have been blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.” These spiritual blessings include peace with God, pardon from sin, redemption through the blood of Christ, adoption as sons of God, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, etc. These are those spiritual blessings that are unique to the follower of Jesus Christ.

The word “places” is not in the Greek, but is inserted for clarity by the translators. Rather, it says more literally, “in the heavenlies.” It can mean “heavenly places,” “heavenly things,” etc. The intent is that all that relates to heavenly matters (things related to or pertaining to heaven) is what the believer is endowed with. It is through the work of Christ that these things are made available, and are also guaranteed.

Paul will refer to these “heavenlies” five times in this epistle; in 1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, and 6:12. Nowhere else will he speak of such things using this particular form of the word. Thus, the letter of Ephesians is especially directed toward an understanding of the spiritual matters which lead to our heavenly inheritance because of our position “in Christ.”

From the moment that we call on Him, we are termed “in” Him, and the benefits to be derived from this exalted position will never be taken away. Paul will confirm this as he winds his way through the epistle. It is remarkable that the very tone of the entire epistle, that of “spiritual blessings,” is that which is highlighted at this introductory moment. His words will follow naturally and specifically from the words of this verse.

Life application: If you want to have a fuller understanding of our position in Christ, and the spiritual blessings which accompany that glorious state, stay tuned as we follow Paul’s thoughts through to the end of this marvelous letter.