

Ephesians Introduction FEFC

INTRODUCTION:

Today I would like to introduce you to the book of Ephesians. But before I do that I would like to give a brief overview of how the bible is put together. For some of you this might be review but pay attention, there will be a test and your mama will get your grades in the mail.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The bible, simply put is God's special revelation to mankind. God revealed his will and his plan for all people. He did this by speaking to prophets and apostles, and in turn the prophets and apostles wrote down what they experienced and what they heard from the Lord.

The bible is divided into two major halves; the Old Testament and New Testament.

The Old Testament is 37 books from Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament deals with the fall of mankind into sin, and also reveals God's plan to cover over sin.

The New Testament is the 29 books and letters from Matthew to Revelation. The New Testament reveals God's plan for how sin is completely forgiven for those who are in Christ. It also reveals that at the return of Jesus Christ there will be no more sin. In fact we wont even have a sin nature when Jesus returns.

I can't wait until avoiding sin is no longer such a struggle.

The New Testament Divisions include;

- The gospels (the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ)

- The Letters (letters written to churches)
- The Acts (historical account of the start and spread of the church)
- Pastoral Letters (Written to pastors by name eg. Timothy & Titus)
- Revelation (A prophecy of the return of Jesus Christ)

BACKGROUND ON EPHESIANS?

Ephesians is a letter written to the church in Ephesus. Here is how the letter to the Ephesians came to be. The apostle Paul and others went on mission trips planting churches all around the world. Paul focused a lot of his time on planting churches around the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea.

One of the cities at which Paul planted a church was Ephesus. Ephesus had a port to the Aegean sea. Second only to Rome Ephesus was the most important city in the empire. Let me give you an idea of the money invested in the city.

Ephesus was about 4-1/2 times larger than the city of EauClaire. Ephesus had a Colosseum that seated nearly 30,000 people at which athletic events, plays and ceremonies were held. Ephesus had a temple built to honor the false fertility goddess Artemis also known as Diana. This temple was constructed of solid marble and took 220 years to build. Yes, 220 years. This temple was larger than a football field with a statue of the goddess in the middle. It was one of the wonders of the world at the time, larger than the Parthenon. Many thousands of people visited this city each year pouring lots of tourist dollars into the city.

They would come to the temple and then they would visit a souvenir

shop down the street and take home a silver statue of the temple or the temple goddess to remind them of their visit. This city had all kinds of occult influences.

The book of Acts tells us that the Apostle Paul when He first tried to plant a church in Ephesus won many people to Christ. And each person whom was won to Christ was no longer a customer for these expensive silver statues and shrines.

And those people who made the silver statues were losing business. Many souvenir shops would close if Paul converted too many people. So the souvenir shop owners called in the silver union and started a riot and a well orchestrated PR campaign against Paul that almost got him killed.(Acts 19 tells the story)

Despite all of this persecution, Paul eventually planted a church in this city and spent a lot of time there. In fact Paul spent a few years with the people from the church in Ephesus teaching individuals, and small groups as well as preaching the word of God. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome to be killed for his faith.

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and ended up in a prison in Rome and from that prison he wrote several letters to the churches he started. One of those letters was written to the church in Ephesus and it is called Ephesians. And that is the letter we are going to study for several weeks.

PAUL IN JAIL FOR TEMPLE VIOLATIONS

So why was Paul arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome? Acts 21:28 mentions that Paul brought someone who was not Jewish into the temple in Jerusalem. It was a serious breach of Jewish law to allow a

non-Jew to come into the temple. It was for this charge that Paul was in prison.

Many Jews did not want Non-Jews anywhere near them or the temple. So there was a great divide between Jew and Non-Jews. It is as if a great wall has divided the Jews from everyone else. The letter to the Ephesians calls this the dividing wall of hostility. Hostility of Jews toward Non-Jews and Non-Jews toward Jews was like a wall separating them.

Ephesians 1-3 Theme

The first three chapters of Ephesians tells us that God no longer dwells in a temple. He actually dwells inside of people, literally. And everyone that is in Christ is one piece of the temple into whom the presence of our Holy God moves and lives.

THE INVISIBLE TEMPLE - LIVING STONES

Paul paints a picture of a spiritual and invisible temple. He gets the reader to imagine that there are many Jews and many non-Jews gathered together in one place. All of them believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. All of them gathered have the same Holy Spirit living inside of them. Together Jewish and non-Jewish believers form a sort of invisible temple which is the new dwelling place for God. The dwelling place of God is no longer a temple built with the hands and machines of people. The new dwelling place of God is inside his people.

Three thoughts came to mind as I read about this new temple comprised of people that have a common faith in Jesus Christ.

1. God never intended for people to live the Christian life alone. One brick does not make a temple or a church. The temple is not built the right way

unless people who have the Spirit of Jesus come together in relationships that are glued together with the Holy Spirit.

2. The church is not a building. Yes it is a norm of language to say we are going to church. However, it is more accurate to state that we are the church. So if we gather together in a gym or in the park or in homes in small groups, we are the church. It is not about us going into a church. It is about the Holy Spirit going into us. His attendance matters most.

3. We who believe in Christ for salvation are members of the same family. Part of the same bride of Jesus Christ. We are truly one in Christ. In fact one scripture actually says that we belong to one another.

Unity is a central theme in this book and it is a central part of our faith. It is a unity built on our common membership in the same family. The family of God. It is said that blood is thicker than water. The idea is that relatives stick together even if they have difficulties. We share something more powerful than human family blood in common. We share the blood of Jesus Christ in common.

The answer to all prejudice and hatred and feuds and dividing walls between people is still Jesus Christ. And that is what the first three chapters are about.

Here is a sample of what we will encounter in the first three chapters that deals with people who are reconciled with one another.

Jew and Gentile Reconciled Through Christ

2:11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth ...15...His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of

the two,20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

READ THIS LETTER IN ONE SITTING

This letter was delivered to the church in Ephesus. It was meant to be read out loud in one sitting in a church service.

I would like you to sit down sometime in the next week or two and read through this entire letter in one sitting. If you get a letter from someone, even a long letter, you read it in one setting. We miss a lot in our bible reading because we read one or two verses at a time, but we often fail to read an entire letter in context.

One more thing....this letter was meant to be distributed to all the churches in the area of Ephesus. This letter has principles that are for all churches. And now after that long introduction lets begin our journey through this book by looking at the first two verses of this letter. This is Paul's introduction.

EXPOSITORY TEACHING

Ephesians 1

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

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN APOSTLE?

Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus. He took on that ministry because God chose him. It is the will of God that decided Paul would become an

apostle. The truth is that each one of us has been given a spiritual gift and passion for ministry to other people within the body of Christ. It is God who chooses our gifts.

So what does it mean to be an apostle? What is the authority of an apostle? Are there apostles today? Let's take a look. Acts chapter one gives us the qualifications for serving God's family as an apostle. The term "apostle" means one who is sent. However, these apostles whom were sent by God to all the churches had supernatural gifts because they had to give the sign of a prophet in order to write scripture.

Let's look at the qualifications that were needed as a prerequisite to serving as an apostle.

ACTS 1:21-22

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

So we know that if someone claims to be an apostle they must meet these qualifications. They must have been with Jesus when he was baptised and witnessed his death and resurrection. Apostles were witnesses to the resurrection. Today, no one meets the qualifications of an apostle.

However, there is a lesser apostolic role for people like district leaders whom are sent to many churches as a blessing. But to be an apostle in the same way that as the original apostles in not possible today.

Those who claim to be prophets or apostles today in the same way that Paul was an apostle either don't understand scripture, or they are after money or power.

vs 1 cont...To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus (NIV)

The New American Standard Version uses the term "saints" rather than "God's holy people";

vs 1 cont...To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus (NASB)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SAINT?

A saint is anyone who is in Christ Jesus. Like the girl whom was asked about saints and thinking of the saints in the stain glassed windows replied, the saints are people through whom the sun shines. And God can shine through every believer.

But doesn't a saint have to be a really holy person and perform a miracle and really stand out from all other Christians? No. The word of God calls every believer a saint. Our goal is to live like the saints that God created us to be in Christ. We can only do that as the Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome sin and live for God.

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

GRACE

Grace comes from the Greek word *charis*. This was a common greeting among Gentile Christians. In Ephesians 2 Paul will state that it is by God's *charis* or grace that we are saved, and it is not by good works lest

anyone should boast. It is a gift of God.

Grace is a reference to God's unmerited favor. This concept takes some prayerful meditation to take in the fullness of what is meant. Let's work it out a little bit.

For us, we get in someones good graces when we treat them right and earn their favor. I remember getting into good graces with more than one person, but then when I did something stupid or insensitive I fell out of favor. So our favor with one-another is often based on how well we perform in that relationship. God's grace is different.

Romans 5:8 says that ***while we were yet sinners Christ died for us***. We did not get into God's good graces because we performed well. We got into God's good graces because Jesus Christ performed well. Jesus Christ is in the good graces of the Father. He performed perfectly. And we are in the good graces of The Father when the perfect works of Jesus Christ and the good graces of Jesus Christ are given to us as a gift.

This occurs when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and repent of our sins. At that moment the good works and the good graces that Jesus has with His Father are given to us as a free gift of God's grace.

PEACE

Peace is a Hebrew greeting *Shalom*. Paul tells us that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. We were once enemies of God. We were due punishment from the God whom we have ignored and disobeyed. The bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. And then it

goes on to say that the penalty for sin, for any sin, is death. But Jesus Christ took our punishment on himself. And the Father counted the punishment that Jesus took on himself as full payment for sin. It is in this way that we have peace with God. Because of what Jesus did on the cross it is now consistent with God's holiness to forgive us. We have peace with God. God is not at war with you.

Paul used both the Jewish blessing shalom and the non-Jewish blessing of charis together in the same sentence to greet the Ephesians. This greeting of Paul shows us the unity of both Jews and non-Jews in the family of God.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Will you take the time to read this letter through in one setting? If so, will you plan a time to do that as soon as you get home?
2. Did you realize that the first three chapters of this book are about unity and tearing down walls between people?
3. What are some ways that God wants to tear down walls that exist between people here in the church, in our families, in our relationships, and in our community?
4. Do you have the grace and peace of God right now? If you are not certain that you have peace with God I would like to speak with you after the service.