

49. Jesus in Ephesians

January 4, 2018

Some Christians think that the apostle Paul was larger than life who possessed flawless and powerful writing skills with a tremendously deep theology of God. They think that he was practically invincible, never had a day of depression in his life, even tall, dark, and handsome. Of course, they also think that wherever Paul went, he had a softly glowing halo just above his head and people always welcomed him without any objection.

Let's dispel that image, and remind ourselves of the real apostle Paul. The man was neither tall, dark, nor handsome. He didn't possess phenomenal oratory skills, as a matter of fact, according to the Book of 2 Corinthians chapter 10, he probably had a heavy Southern Swedish accent like me. The Corinthians considered him weak in speech, but he was the only impressive in his letters. He struggled with his physical illness that was so severe that he called it his "thorn in the flesh." In addition to that, he was a regular jail bird and a death-row inmate.

He was rejected by his own family and friends, because he chose to follow Jesus; he was beaten and left near death by those with whom he tried to spread the Gospel of Jesus. According to some ancient documents, he was short and bald with a big crooked nose and a pair of bowed legs. Somehow I get the feeling that the apostle Paul had never been a cover model of the Israel GQ Magazine.

But what he lacked in physical stature and eloquence in speech, he made up for in passion and determination to make the message of Jesus Christ known. Apostle Paul possessed a fire for God that no one could quench, not even satan.

Although it is a brief letter, this one to the Church of Ephesus contains a wealth of profound information about the Lord Jesus and His church. It is, in fact, foundational to the doctrine of the church, the body of Jesus Christ. As I've said before, the Book of Ephesians and the Book of Romans are the two pinnacles of the NT Books other than the four Gospels and the Book of Acts.

No serious student of Scripture can afford to remain ignorant of this powerful, yet so practical letter. Its insights, principles, and down-to-earth admonitions are essential ingredients in our growth toward spiritual maturity, as we serve our Lord together in the one body under the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

Wouldn't you think that v1 is the dead giveaway to anyone who was wondering about the authorship of this letter? But believe it or not, some of the Bible scholars who have absolutely nothing better to do than arguing for useless things still argue about the authorship of Ephesians.

This epistle was written by Paul around A.D. 60. If you read Acts 28:30-31, you will see the setting in which it was written. Paul had finished his third missionary journey and had been transferred and detained as a prisoner in Rome. He was chained to a Roman soldier for a two-year period of time while under house arrest. You talk about a captivated audience for those Roman guards who were chained with Paul during their shifts.

Acts 28:30-31 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Even though he was a prisoner and chained to a guard, he was still allowed to have visitors and to write letters. During this two-year period, he wrote four letters which are often called the "Prison Letters" – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of this Book is to help Christians see the value of their position in Christ and their unity with each other.

One word we would see often in this Book is "Riches". This has NOTHING to do with monetary riches, rather spiritual riches that come from joy, peace, comfort, assurance, and strength in Christ Jesus.

While the Book of Galatians offers instructions, particularly important to those churches overrun with legalism, Ephesians deals with topics at the very core of what it means to be a Christian – both in faith and in practice – regardless of any particular problem in the community.

C. THE HISTORICAL SETTINGS IN WHICH THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN

1) Roman Persecution

When Paul was writing this letter, the crazy emperor Nero ruled the Roman Empire. More than any other Caesar, this mad man persecuted Christians with sadistic glee. He blamed them for the infamous fire that almost destroyed Rome – a fire, probably set by his order – and used it as an excuse to brutally murder many of them.

Nero even ordered his soldiers to put the captured Roman Christians in wild animals' skins, then, they were torn to pieces by wild dogs, or crucified, or made into torches by dipping them into hot wax to be ignited after dark as substitutes for his garden light poles.

2) Ephesian Paganism

In addition to the empire's widespread persecution, the Ephesian believers faced a unique challenge. Ephesus was renowned for its paganism, and the temple of the Greek goddess Artemis, a.k.a. Diana, stood as its crown jewel which was one of the seven wonders of the world. This temple not only controlled the mindsets of the people of that region, but also its economy.

After apostle Paul had taught that a god made by human hands was no god at all, a silversmith named Demetrius, who made idols and shrines for the temple, gathered his fellow tradesmen together to stir them into action. Paul would put them out of business with this teaching, Demetrius warned, but more than that, Paul would discredit their beloved goddess Artemis according to Acts 19:23-27.

3) A brief history of the Ephesian Church

From a Christian's perspective, Ephesus was a hostile environment, to say the least. Paul had experienced it personally, yet he still encouraged the believers there to do

more than just “hang in there.” He exhorted them to walk – to live openly – according to their calling.

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

On Paul’s second missionary journey, he met two fellow tentmakers, Priscilla and Aquila, while passing through Corinth. He soon became their friend and business partner and stayed with them for some time, making tents and teaching in the local synagogue. They traveled with him to Ephesus, where he left them and journeyed on to Caesarea and Antioch.

According to Acts 19, on his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Ephesus and found a group of disciples there, possibly the congregation of Priscilla and Aquila’s house church. The apostle baptized the converts and stayed in the city again, teaching first in the synagogue and later at a local school. In all, Paul’s second visit to Ephesus lasted two years, during which many miracles took place and the Gospel spread like a wildfire.

Why did the Ephesian church continue to grow despite the anti-Christian nature of its city? Perhaps because of the amount of time Paul invested in it. He spent almost three years with the believers there – more than he had with any other local church.

D. THE STRUCTURE OF THE LETTER

The Book of Ephesians can be largely divided into two sections: the first section contains theological foundations through Jesus Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation from chapter 1 to 3; the second one with practical applications as the believers of Jesus Christ from chapter 4 to 6.

1) Chapter 1: What God the Father has done for us through Jesus Christ – Sovereignty

2) Chapter 2: What Jesus Christ has done in us – Reconciliation to the Father and to one another

3) Chapter 3: What the mystery means to us – Grace

In these three chapters, the apostle Paul teaches us the Christian riches that are ours in Him. He gives us probably one of the deepest teachings in the Bible other than the Gospels on what it means to be the church, the body of Christ.

While Paul was not responding to a particular theological or moral problem like he did in 1 Corinthians, he wanted to protect against future problems by encouraging the Ephesians to mature in their faith. So after laying out profound theological truths in the first half of the Book, Paul made his purpose clear: he expected that this community of faith would walk in accordance with its heavenly calling. As a result of the theological realities Christians accept by their faith in God, several practices should follow in their relationships within the church, in the home, and in the world.

4) Chapter 4: The walk of the prisoner of Jesus: Humility, maturity, gentleness, stability, patience, honesty, unity, harmony, tolerance, kindness, love, compassion, knowledge, and forgiveness.

5) Chapter 5-Chapter 6:9: As the imitators of God, Paul teaches us how to emulate our Lord Jesus in the world, in the home, and in the workplace.

6) Chapter 6:10-20: Instructions and strategy of the spiritual warrior.

In the Book of Revelation chapter 2 and 3, Jesus Himself wrote seven letters to seven churches. The first church was the church of Ephesus. The Lord Jesus commended them for being doctrinally solid. But He rebuked them for losing their first love for God. This is the same problem every Bible believing church and Christian MUST keep in mind. We can be soaked in our doctrinal purity, but if we lose our first love for our Lord Jesus, we can be like the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

This is the one we should practice at all time:

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

E. THREE THOUGHTS WE MUST KEEP

1) We are all under the headship of Christ as Lord.

Because we serve Jesus and answer to Him, we're to be submissive, both to Him and to each other.

2) We belong to one body.

We're not alone; we don't have to act on our own or handle our problems by ourselves. When we are committed to Christ and to each other, we can take refuge in the Lord and the body of Christ.

3) We can stand against the assault of our enemies with the power of Christ.

We have God's resources available to us. To take advantage of them, we need to become equipped to utilize them properly.