

AN EXPLORATION OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

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To my lovely wife Nene Rita, and to all students and instructors in Beulah Heights University, I give my unreserved wishes for your steadfast love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two	3
Contents and Purpose of the Book of Ephesians	
Chapter Three	5
Authorship and Significance of the Book of Ephesians	
Chapter Four	7
The Theology and Ethics in Ephesians	
Chapter Five	9
The Summary of the Book of Ephesians	
Conclusion	10
Bibliography	

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ephesus was an ancient port city located in present day Turkey. It was once considered the most important trading center in the Mediterranean region. Previous history revealed that Ephesus survived multiple attacks and changed hands many times between conquerors. It was also a hotbed of early Christian evangelism and remains an important archaeological site and Christian pilgrimage destination.

Ephesus is located near the western shores of modern day Turkey, where the Aegean Sea meets the estuary of the River Kaystros, about 80 kilometers south of Izmir, Turkey.¹

Much of Ephesus's ancient history is unrecorded and sketchy. What is known is the seventh century BC; Ephesus fell under the rule of the Lydian king and became a thriving city where men and women engaged equal opportunities. It was also the birth place of the renowned philosopher Heraclitus.²

The Lydian king Croesus, who ruled from 560 BC to 547 BC, was most famous for funding the rebuilding of temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Artemis was the goddess of hunt, chastity, childbirth, wild animals and wilderness. She was also one of the most revered Greek deities. Modern day excavations have revealed that three smaller Artemis temples preceded the Croesus temple. In 365 BC, a craze man named Hero stratus burned down the temple of Artemis. The Ephesians rebuilt the temple even bigger. It was estimated to be four times larger than the Parthenon and became known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.³

Moreover, the temple was later destroyed and never rebuilt. Most its remains can be found today in the British museum, including a column with Croesus's signature.

Ephesus played a vital role in the spread of Christianity. Starting in the first century AD, notable Christians such as Saint Paul and Saint John visited and rebuked the cults of Artemis, winning

¹History.Com Editors, "Ephesians"; A & E Television Network, August 21, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ephesus> (accessed July 02, 2020)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

many Christian converts in the process. Mary the mother of Jesus is thought to have spent her last years in Ephesus with Saint John. Her house and John's tomb can be visited there today.⁴

Ephesus is mentioned multiple times in the New Testament, and the biblical book of Ephesians, written around 60 AD is thought to be a letter from Paul to Ephesians Christians, although some scholars question the source.⁵

Although not everyone was open to Paul's Christian message as the case of Demetrius reported in Acts chapter 19, who made silver coin featuring the likeness of Artemis. His worried over the spread of Christianity necessitate a plot to entice a large crowd to riot against Paul and his disciples.

⁴History.Com Editors, "Ephesians"; A & E Television Network, August 21, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ephesus> (accessed July 02, 2020)

⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTENTS AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Perhaps no letter in the Pauline corpus takes the readers to such mountain heights of adoration, and to such level fields of practicality as the six short chapters of Ephesians do. One might call it a feast for the Christian imagination, for it lays out the gospel with great depth and intellectual texture. Paul reflects on the magnificence, even lavishness of God's redemptive work, established in Christ and continued in the spirit.⁶

Ephesians covers key fundamental aspects of the gospel including Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. In Ephesians we find much to reflect upon as God's plan of redemption, and our own part in the story, is laid before us. The first chapter of Ephesians presents with rhetorical flourish and fanfare the praise rightly due to the one true God, father, son, and spirit. The stage lights are first focused on God the father, who chose to redeem the world for his good purpose, including creating a people unto himself in Christ.⁷

The primary theme of Ephesians is the church, its basic nature and character as the "body of Christ", predestinated from the beginning of creation. Members of the church are adopted as God's sons and are no longer considered to be gentiles, but "citizens of Israel". As such they must be holy and the writer gives a number of instructions as to their spiritual attitude and moral behavior included among these are that they must refrain from sexual impurity and drunkenness, filling their lives instead with music and the spirit.⁸

The letter is controversial because of its attitude toward women, who it says must submit to their husbands and be "cleanse" by them. Ephesians was also used as a justification for slavery, as it instructs slaves to obey their masters "with respect and fear."⁹

⁶C. Martin Kitchen, *New Testament Reading*: eBook, London; Routledge: Taylor & Francis e-library, (2002)

⁷Ibid.

⁸"Ephesians", *New World Encyclopedia* .org, retrieved from www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ephesians (accessed July 02, 2020)

⁹ Ibid.

Ephesians does not seem to have originated in any special circumstances related to a particular church, but to have sprung from the author's concern for the Christian church in general. It is an indication of his desire that Christians should be fully instructed in proper doctrine and practice. Unlike Romans , which is an exposition by Paul of the gospel of salvation, or 1 and 2 Thessalonians , which deal with issues of eschatology, Ephesians is concern mainly with matters of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church itself.¹⁰

A number of theories have been presented regarding its purpose. Some view it as a circular letter sent to a number of churches of which Ephesians was one. Indeed, in the second century at least one source (the heretic Marcion) referred to it as a letter to the Laodicians. Many modern scholars see it as addressing the needs of the post- Pauline Christian communities. Clearly, a main theme in Ephesians is to foster the unity of the church. A number of passages also demonstrated a concern for ethical issues such as immorality, excessive drinking, family problems, and treatment of slaves.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹“Ephesians”, New World Encyclopedia .org, retrieved from www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ephesians (accessed July 02, 2020)

CHAPTER THREE

AUTHORSHIP AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EPHESIANS

There are many scholarly views and opinion in respect of the authorship of the book of Ephesians. Such argument and opinions counter opinions provide an opportunity to delve deeper into the discourse. There are four main theories in biblical scholarship that address the problem of Pauline authorship. The first agrees with the traditional view that the epistle is written by Paul to the Ephesians or that it was a treatise written by Paul and sent with slight variations to several churches. The second theory suggests that part or sections of Ephesians were dictated by Paul but that either his scribe or another author later edited the work into its present form. A third theory respects Paul as the author altogether, holding that a later author-one who certainly admired Paul and quite familiar with his writing-penned the letter instead. Finally, a number of analysts simply admit that there is a lack of conclusive evidence and that it is best simply to accept that we do not know who wrote the letter.¹²

If Paul was the author, then Ephesians was probably written from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there, soon after his carnival in the year 62 CE. However, scholars who dispute Paul's authorship, date the letter anywhere between 70-140 CE. The fact that the document concerns itself with the issue of community with Israel indicates a point in time where the Christian audience had begun to lose its sense of connection to the Jewish tradition from which it had sprung.¹³

Unlike other letters written by Paul, there seems to have been no special issue or occasion for writing of the letter. Moreover, a number of practical and moral issues in life of the church may have been treated which may intended to summarize Paul's teaching to the churches he had founded in Asia Minor.

The authenticity of Ephesians was doubted in the early church. Because of its succinctness and its elegant summaries of some of the core Pauline doctrines, it has been influential, especially on ecclesiological matters. For the reasons, it is particularly popular among lay people and children

¹²“Ephesians”, New World Encyclopedia .org, retrieved from www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ephesians (accessed July 02, 2020)

¹³ Ibid.

alike. Its vision of the church as the eternal body of Christ together with a number of other memorable passages, make it among the most quoted of the New Testament books.¹⁴

¹⁴“Ephesians”, New World Encyclopedia .org, retrieved from www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ephesians (accessed July 02, 2020)

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGY AND ETHICS IN EPHESIANS

One of the reasons for the influence of Ephesians is its rather remarkable balancing of theology and ethics. In this epistle, as is true of several of Paul's other epistles, there is a fairly well defined doctrinal or theological portion of the epistle followed by a practical or applied section. Paul usually makes the transition from the more theological to the more practical by the use of the word "therefore".¹⁵

The word "therefore" serves as a bridge that links together the doctrinal section of the epistle and the practical or the applied. The first chapters of the book introduced as to the secrets and resources of the Christian life, and the last to its exercise in the church and in the world at large.

Although the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ remain a theme in Ephesians they receive less prominence than Christ's exaltation and enthronement. As in some of the recognized Pauline epistles, salvation is brought about through baptism into the church, which is Christ's body. However, the centrality of the church in God's providence is particularly emphasized. The church is the "fullness" of Christ and was God's purpose from the beginning of creation. It is in the church that Christ reigns and where the spirit dwells, and it is there as well mystery of God's will is revealed to the prophets and apostles.¹⁶

It should never be forgotten, however, that in Paul, in the biblical revelation in general, and in Christian experience there is no divorcement of theology and ethics. These are merely two sides of one coin or the "two sides of one picture", and the two sides represent "the total Christian approach to life". Christian faith and Christian moral are inseparable, "and" the most wonderful mysteries of the Christian revelation have a direct relation to conduct".¹⁷

Theology and ethics, as Carver suggests, "cannot be put asunder without serious results for genuine religion". He adds "if doctrine is not practical and practiced, it is unreal, delusive, and

¹⁵T.B Maston "Theology and Ethics in Ephesians" South Western Journal of Theology vol.16, Fall 1963, retrieved from www.preachingsource.com/journal/theology-and-ethics-in-ephesians (accessed July 01, 2020)

¹⁶"Ephesians", New World Encyclopedia .org, retrieved from www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ephesians (accessed July 02, 2020)

¹⁷T.B Maston "Theology and Ethics in Ephesians" South Western Journal of Theology vol.16, Fall 1963, retrieved from www.preachingsource.com/journal/theology-and-ethics-in-ephesians (accessed July 01, 2020)

useless. If experience and conduct are not integral with truth, they are lacking in meaning and reality”.¹⁸

Therefore, theology and ethics can only be separated only for emphasis and study. We should not forget the Paul’s basic ethic, in contrast to his applied ethic, is found in most of the theological section of the major epistles including Ephesians. His emphasis on “Faith and works” and unity in Christ” are two cardinal divisions of his teachings on theology and ethics.

Paul was always concerned with the ethical and was never more so “than where he was most profoundly metaphysical”. For Paul, “an effective religion must be thoroughly and passionately ethical, and it can be so only if it is based on sound and secure convictions as to God-theology; and on a realistic understanding of man-anthropology”.¹⁹

Paul focus also on various life applications of redemption to the church and to personal and domestic life (4:1-16:24). He taught unity in the spirit, while celebrating the diversity of individual gifts of the spirit for the building up of the believers into unity and maturity.²⁰

We might find it intriguing that Paul, writing to believers in a heavily individualizing culture (which all pluralistic cultures invariably are).Speaks both of unity and solidarity among believers.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹T.B Maston”Theology and Ethics in Ephesians” South Western Journal of Theology vol.16, Fall 1963, retrieved from www.preachingsource.com/journal/theology-and-ethics-in-ephesians (accessed July 01, 2020)

²⁰“Ephesians; Introduction and Background”08/23/2012) retrieved from <https://cutpaste.typepad.com/understanding/2012/08/ephesians-introduction-background.html>(accessed July 02, 2020)

²¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

In chapters 1-3, Paul begins with the joyful truth that every believer has been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us into adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself according to the intention of His will”(1:4-5). Paul then teaches about the unity of believers. These are the truths and blessings that believers have in common. He writes that all Christians are “adopted as sons through Jesus Christ” (1:5). All believers are, “redeemed through His blood” (1:7), and “sealed by the Holy Spirit” (1:13).²²

In chapter 4-5, Paul encourages believers to “walk in a manner worthy of calling “. Every believer has a responsibility to live as servants of Jesus Christ. In these chapters, Paul teaches that it takes hard work to be in unity with others, and that we are to be “imitators of God” (5:1). He mentions imperative truths and advice for well functioning families, including husbands and wives who upon the oath of marriage become as “one flesh” (5:31). Paul explains the concept of a biblical marriage. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (body of believers) and the way that Jesus Christ loved the church is the way that the husband must love his treasured wife.²³

In chapter 6, Paul instructs believers how to prepare for spiritual battle by dressing in the “full armor of God” (6:110). Prayer is the key weapon of the Christian soldier. He emphasizes his principle with the repeated statement “stand firm”.²⁴

The letter to the Ephesians closes with a reference to a certain Tychicus, mentioned in several other epistles as one of Paul’s companions and messengers, who will tell everyone, and followed, by a closing benediction.

²²J. Smith, “Ephesians Summary” retrieved from [https:// biblehub.com/summary/Ephesians/html](https://biblehub.com/summary/Ephesians/html) (accessed July 02, 2020)

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

The epistle to the Ephesians remains one of the most compelling among New Testament books. Taking its root from ancient Ephesus known for its great historical antecedents, is an important trading center within the Mediterranean region. Ephesus is located near the western shores of modern day Turkey, where the Aegean Sea meets the former estuary of the river Kaystros about 80 kilometers of south of Izmir, Turkey.

Ephesians is mentioned multiple times in the New Testament, and the biblical book of Ephesians, written around 60-62 AD is thought to be a letter from Paul to Ephesians Christians, although some scholars question the source.

The book does not seem to have originated in any special circumstances related to a particular church but sprung from the authors' concern for the Christian church in general. Some theories and scholars agree that the book is a circular letter to number of churches of which Ephesus is one. Paul has been identified by the traditional school of thought as the author of the book of Ephesians probably written from Rome during his imprisonment. It is noteworthy to mention that in Paul's account, there is no divorce between theology and ethics. The two were seen as inseparable and were properly incorporated in Paul's letter to Ephesians. In Ephesians the church is described with a metaphor relating the relationship of God with the church similar to that which exists between a husband and a wife. The book closes with a reference to a certain Tychicus mentioned in several other epistles as one of Paul's companions and messengers who will relate to everyone all about the book and Paul, with a closing benediction.

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