

Ephesians

Introduction

Comments concerning Ephesians:

- “One of the most significant documents ever written” – Peter T. O’Brien
- “the divinest composition of man” – Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- “the crown of St. Paul’s writings.” – J. Armitage Robinson
- “quintessence of Paulinism” – F. F. Bruce

F.F. Bruce also said: “(Ephesians) in large measure sums up the leading themes of the Pauline letters, and sets forth the cosmic implications of Paul’s ministry as apostle to the Gentiles.”

Authorship

Since the earliest times Paul has been considered to be the writer of this letter. Clement of Rome referred to it often (95 AD). Ignatius (d.117) quoted from it and was familiar with the amour of God. Polycarp uses 5:30.

Paul had spent about three years in Ephesus before having written this letter. Bible critics or higher criticism of the 1700’s challenged and rejected Paul as the author. Critics of Paul’s authorship credit the letter to someone very familiar with Paul’s teaching with talent that exceeded even Paul’s ability to communicate who wrote shortly after Paul’s death in the first century. I think, along with the early church and the first 1700 years of church history, that Paul wrote Ephesians. If it was not Paul then how could some one so brilliant from the first century have gone undetected?

A Circular Letter

The phrase “in Ephesus (*en Epheso*) is missing in the oldest and best manuscripts.

The NIV puts a footnote here.

Some think the space was left blank and each church would have added its name.

Ephesians differs from Paul’s other letters in that it is not polemic or not written to address certain church problems or clarify theological error. Ephesians is written to present and communicate Paul’s theology to the churches. This is similar to the purpose of Romans.

The idea that this letter is a general circular letter explains why Paul writes:

1. Without addressing or greeting the church in Ephesus where he had spent 3 years.
2. As though he and his readers do not know each other. (1:13, 15; 3:1; 4:21)
3. Paul wonders whether they had heard of his administration of God’s grace to the Gentiles (3:2)
4. Paul wonders about the instruction they received (4:21)

Cosmology – Ephesians gives the big picture of salvation and draws attention to positions in the heavenlies which include God, Christ, us, principalities and powers.

Ecclesiology – the Church in Ephesians is more universal than it is local. The church itself is seen from the cosmic position.

1. 4:4 – one church
2. 5:26, 27 – holy church
3. 1:22, 23 – catholic church

4. 2:20 - apostolic

Eschatology – the focus of eschatology includes the church’s function in time to teach the principalities and powers (3:10), unite with the Jews (3:6), and influence society with the application of their salvation to homes, relationships, work, etc. The eschatology here shows:

1. Salvation as a present truth
2. Believers already raised with Christ
3. Believers already seated with Christ in the heavenlies 4. 2:4-10 – Four compound verbs in the past tense:
 - a. made us alive (2:5)
 - b. raised us up (2:6)
 - c. seated us (2:6)
 - d. have been saved (2:5, 8) But there is yet the future expectation:
1. 1:10 – when times will have reached their fulfillment
2. 4:30; 1:13 – sealed today waiting for the fullness on the day of redemption
3. 1:14, 18; 5:5 – looking forward to the inheritance which already has a down payment made to believers
4. 5:27 – Christ will someday present the church to himself as holy and pure
5. 5:6 – the day God’s wrath is poured out

Ideas About the Nature and Purpose of the Letter

1. A summary of Paul’s Theology written by someone. Even Onesimus, the slave and bishop of Ephesus, is said to have wrote it as a cover letter for Paul’s letters.
2. UNITY: A call to unity in the church. Unity is a theme of the book.
 - a. The preposition *syn* which is translated “with” or “together with” is used through out the book (2:5, 6; 2:21, 22; 3:6; 5:7, 11; 4:16)
 - b. The use of the concept of “peace” (2:14, 15, 17; 4:3; 6:15)
 - c. *Enotes* or “unity” (4:3, 13)
 - d. Twelve times the word “one” (*hen*) is used:
 - i. “the two one” – 2:14
 - ii. “one new man” – 2:15
 - iii. “one body” – 2:16; 4:4
 - iv. “one Spirit” – 2:18; 4:4
 - v. “one hope” – 4:4
 - vi. “one Lord” – 4:5
 - vii. “one faith” – 4:5
 - viii. “one baptism” – 4:5
 - ix. “one God and Father” – 4:6
 - x. “each one of us” – 4:7
 - xi. “each part” – 4:16
 - xii. “each one of you” – 5:33
3. TRUTH - Truth is compared with vanity of the lack of reality
4. LOVE – The Love of God is foundational and believers are to imitate it.
5. A letter against the growing heresy of Gnosticism since Gnostic terms such as knowledge, fullness mystery, perfection, body, new man, heavenly union, revelation, principalities and powers are used
6. Liturgy or Homily since there are elements of hymns and material for catechism training (4:1-3; 4:17-5:20;. Even chapters 1-3 are a form of the Jewish blessing or *berakah* that could be used for communion. The several references to baptism may have been used at baptisms.
7. A Discourse on the Church

- a. Church (*ekklesia*) is mentioned 9 times 91:22; 3:10, 21; 5:3, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32)
 - b. Methaphors:
 - i. body (1:22, 23, 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30);
 - ii. temple (2:2-22; 4:12, 16);
 - iii. bride (5:21-33)
 - iv. building
 - v. new humanity
 - c. Compare the body and the head of Romans 12:4, 5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 with Ephesians 4:15
 - d. The church is the “one new man” that unite all of mankind (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ (2:14-16 then read 1:10, 22, 23)
8. Ephesians continuously draws a contrast between the believer’s life before Christ and their new life in Christ.

NOTES:

- Jews in Ephesus had good relationship with the city. Josephus writes the Jews had been granted freedom to practice their religion.
- Paul had begun in the synagogue until he was opposed and began to teach daily in a lecture hall. The Western text includes the hours of 11 AM-4 PM daily.
- The church that began with Jews in Ephesus had taken on a growing number of Gentile/Pagans since Paul left Ephesus in 56 AD and stopped by in 57 AD.
- Spiritual Climate:
 - Religiously pluralistic which means many gods (50+) were worshipped and for many reasons including Artemis, Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Apollo, Dionysus, Demeter and Egyptian gods Isis and Sarapis. So, there was religious tolerance and it was not normal for the people to commit totally to one god.
 - Artemis cult controlled the city since she had a covenant relationship with the city.
 - One month of the year was named after her
 - Olympic style games called the Artemisia were held for the honor of Artemis
 - The temple and the cult had a major savings and loan institution for the region
 - Magic and spirit powers – Ephesus had a reputation for magic and the occult arts. They believed in animistic world view which places good and evil spirits in inanimate objects. They used rituals, incantations, ect. See Acts 19:17-20.
- Since Paul left the church had:
 - Grown in Gentile numbers
 - These Gentiles brought with them cultural worldviews in their religion and lifestyle
- There does not appear to be a specific crisis, but more of an overview to introduce the basics of Christianity to converts.