

The Letter to the Saints at Ephesus—Part 1

Southside church of Christ, Huntsville

Reading Assignment—Ephesians; Ephesians 1

Introduction

The author of the letter to the Ephesians is Paul. Like Philemon and Colossians, this letter was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Some have argued that this is the letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Colossians. This is likely not the case since Ephesians is thought to have been written after Colossians; whereas Paul seems to allude that the letter to the Laodiceans was written before the letter to the Colossians. Secondly, Ephesians bears much resemblance to Colossians and therefore likely would not need to be read in both places. Regardless, speculation will always abound as there are no manuscripts addressed to the Laodiceans. Regardless, the Ephesians needed to hear many of the same things as the Colossians

Paul spent much time with the Ephesian brethren (Ac. 20:31). Other notable characters who were from Ephesus were Apollos (Ac. 18:24-26) and Aquila and Priscilla (Ac. 18:26). The church at Ephesus meant so much to Paul that he summoned the elders to meet him in Miletus (Ac. 20:18-35). The letter therefore, is clearly intended for an audience of Christians. According to Acts 19:8-10 the church likely consisted of Jews who were persuaded by Paul's reasoning in the synagogue. Additionally, there were likely many former idolaters as Ephesus was the home of the temple of Diana. The temple of Diana is considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians likely took pride in the beauty of the temple. In the letter Paul compares all Christians to the materials that make up a holy temple to God (Ep. 2:20-22).

The letter bears much resemblance to the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians. In fact, many of the topics are very similar. The letter to the Ephesians is larger, and thought to have been written after Colossians, leading many to believe that Ephesians is an expansion of Colossians. While there are many striking similarities, there are some subtle differences. For example, in Colossians Paul develops the idea of Christ as the head of the body. With Christ as the head of the body, it is natural for Paul to then make the argument for Christ's authority in Colossians chapter 2. In Ephesians the focus is on Christ's body—the church.

In chapter 1 Paul addresses the book to the “saints which are at Ephesus” and to the faithful. Paul may have intended for the letter to be read by other brethren beyond Ephesus. In Ephesians 6:24 he closes the letter with a reference to “all them that love” Christ. After the greeting, he talks about the Christians as being ‘chosen’ by God. Many confuse this to mean that God already decided, before the world was even formed, the exact persons who would be saved. In James 2:5, James also uses the word chosen. In that passage James is referring to the physically poor as being chosen to be rich in faith. If the saved have no choice because God has already chosen for them, then do the poor have no choice either? If we have no choice of salvation or lifestyle, then why does God even allow our existence? Instead, the choice that God

has made is to pre-define the type of person that will be saved—not the exact person himself. The fact that God predestined Christians according to his will demonstrates his steadfastness. We can trust that he will give us an inheritance because it has been his plan all along. The “greatness of his power” as demonstrated by raising Christ from the dead is further proof to us that he will keep his promise. We have the hope of resurrection because we are the body of Christ who is already raised.

One theme that will stand out in the first half of the book is unity, or all Christians being members of one body. All members of the human body answer to the head; all members must either work together for the same purposes or the body will not function. In order for the body of Christ to function, all the members must remember that they are “dead to trespasses and sins.” Only then can the members put away the cares of the world and focus on the work of the body. Just like our bodies are very carefully formed, or each stone is masterfully cut for a specific location in a remarkable edifice, Christians must be of a mind to participate as the body of Christ (chapter 2). Christians must learn how to live as the body of Christ. Paul was made a minister so that he could reveal this mystery to us. We can accomplish living as the body of Christ with Christ’s help and love (chapter 3).

Just like Colossians, Paul spends the last half of the book giving practical advice for how to live as Christ. Paul admonishes the readers to “walk worthy” of the calling; he then describes how to treat each other. Paul acknowledges that everyone has a role to play as they are members of the body (chapter 4). He goes on to give instructions on how to live as a family in the home (chapter 5). Instructions for the home are followed by the employer and employee relationship. He wraps up the book with a reminder to be strong and fight against Satan (chapter 6).

Instructions

While reading the book, especially chapter 1, be sure to identify the major and minor themes as well as the major arguments used to support the themes.

Ephesians

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

Chapter 1

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

Questions

1. Why did Paul write the letter to the Ephesians?
2. How many times does the word 'walk' (in all forms) appear in the book?
3. Name a few characters from the book of Acts who likely worshiped at Ephesus.
4. Define 'chosen' and 'predestinated.' Are they the same thing?
5. Name at least 3 things the saved are predestinated to do or be.
6. What prompted Paul to give thanks for the Ephesians?
7. Why did Paul become an apostle? (Ep. 1:1)

8. God chose that we should be holy and without blame, but these are incomplete without what? (Ep. 1:4)

True or False—Be sure to provide scripture for your answer.

T or F—The Spirit of God is the earnest of our inheritance.

T or F—God worked his mighty power by raising Christ from the dead.

T or F—God did not care to make known his calling.

T or F—God exalted Christ after being raised from the dead.

T or F—Predestinated saints have no choice in the matter.

Thought Questions

1. Explain in your own words what predestinated means. Exactly who or what was predestinated? (Ep. 1:5, 11; I Pe. 1:2, 20).

2. What does it mean to “gather together in one all things in Christ?” (Ep. 1:10)

3. How does Paul set up the idea of unity by writing Ephesians 1:23?