

The Letter to the Saints at Ephesus—Part 2

Southside church of Christ, Huntsville

Reading Assignment—Ephesians 2-3

Introduction

After opening the book with a greeting, Paul makes the case for the headship of Christ. The argument is similar to Colossians chapter 1. Paul demonstrates the absolute power of Christ in order to make the case for Christ's absolute authority. Christ has authority over all things, including the church. The church is his body and is in subjection to him as the head, just like our members are subject to our mind.

In chapter 2, like Colossians chapter 3, Paul makes the point that Christians are raised with Christ. Because we are his body we are alive with him, but dead to sin. Being dead to sin, Christians live because of God's mercy. Even though all of us are worthy of terrible punishment, Christ offers us a way to leave that behind and start anew.

Many misinterpretations have been made of Paul's statement in 2:8-9. A common misinterpretation revolves around the idea that man has no part to play in salvation. Given that bias, 2:8 seems to be saying that salvation is exclusive of works—otherwise known as obedience. However, this misinterpretation almost equates grace and faith. In truth, grace and faith are very different with respect to who is responsible for each. By sending his son to teach us how to live, God supplied grace. We bring our faith; together they add up to salvation. Think of this as an equation where 'grace + faith = salvation.' If either grace or faith are missing, then salvation cannot be accomplished. We know that faith is not something we simply say, but something we in fact do (Ro. 4:19-25; Ja. 2:20-24). Works are always present with faith because true faith will always provoke obedience.

The statements "not of yourselves" and "not of works," therefore, cannot mean that works are not needed. The misunderstanding comes from what is the gift of God. The gift of God refers to salvation, not faith or grace. Because it is a gift, no man can compel God to give him salvation; nor can a man demand that God surrender salvation. Salvation is the free and willing gift of God. Furthermore, faith is the basis of salvation, not works. This means that it would not be possible for a man to somehow live a both perfect and sinless life (void of faith) and then demand eternal life from God. In that case salvation would be through works alone; that man would be able to boast that he had earned salvation through works.

By stating that salvation is not through works Paul is setting the stage for later in the chapter. He calls the old law enmity. The old law did nothing to reconcile sinful men to God. In fact, the old law was nothing more than a set of ordinances—or works. In other words, Paul is saying that you cannot take the equation 'grace + faith = salvation' and on the left side insert the Law of Moses. If you do, then you no longer get salvation. We should thank God that we no longer are under the law of ordinances, but anyone can be a member of the household of God.

In chapter 3 he expands on the idea of Gentile salvation. The plan of salvation has been revealed; all men now have access to God. In fact, we can be so bold as to expect that he will save us, but only if we have “the faith of him” (3:12). In fact, his love will cause him to do far more than we could even think to ask (3:20).

Instructions

While reading the chapters 2-3, be sure to identify the major and minor themes as well as the major arguments used to support the themes.

Chapter 2

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

Chapter 3

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

Questions

1. What did Jesus abolish in his flesh?
2. Why did God not make salvation a result of works?
3. Why has God now revealed the mystery to the apostles and prophets?

4. How do the principalities and powers learn the wisdom of God?

5. List the blessings enjoyed by the Gentiles with the revealing of the mystery.

6. Find the passages in chapters 2 and 3 that continue the theme of predestination.

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

T or F—The love of Christ goes beyond knowledge.

T or F—The Ephesians had hope of someday no longer being strangers to God.

T or F—We will someday sit together with Christ in heavenly places.

T or F—The mystery of Christ is still hard to comprehend.

T or F—We should imitate Paul because he was the most important apostle.

Thought Questions

1. Why does Paul refer to trespasses AND sins? What is the difference? (Ep. 2:1)

2. Look up the word 'wrath.' Why does Paul call persons of the world 'children of wrath?' (Ep. 2:3)

3. Why does Paul use four measurements to describe the love of Christ? (Ep. 3:18)

4. How can you comprehend the love of Christ if it exceeds knowledge? (Ep. 3:18-19)