

"EPHESIANS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Ephesians 1:1-6; 2:1-10

Introduction.

Ephesians is the first of what are called Paul's Prison Epistles. During his four years of imprisonment, two years in Caesarea and two years in Rome, at the end of his life, Paul wrote at least three letters to churches, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and two to individuals, Philemon; and Timothy, II Timothy.

History has given us some of the greatest literature from prisons.

John Bunyon's Pilgrims Progress.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's writings.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail.

What kind of letter would you write from prison?

Paul calls himself a prisoner for the Lord and an ambassador in chains, willing to suffer anything for the Gospel.

Paul made a brief visit to Ephesus on his second missionary journey and then stayed three years during his third missionary journey.

Ephesus was the wealthy, prosperous commercial center and crossroads of Asia Minor. It was the largest city in the Roman province of Asia, a thriving metropolis of between three and six hundred thousand people.

It was most famous for her temple to the great Greek goddess Artemis (Diana). It was the largest building in the Greek world, four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. She was the national deity of the city, the mother goddess even of all of Asia.

The citizens of Ephesus were fanatical about their worship of this goddess. In Acts 19 we read about Paul's first visit there and his encounter with the

magic arts practiced there and about the riot that started because Paul interfered with this cultic worship.

This was a city as pagan as any large city in the world today. It was filled with cult worship, temple prostitution, sensuality, secularism, idolatry, unholy alliances and unholy tolerances, sorcery, magic. It was a dark place.

On his third missionary journey Paul ministered with tears day and night for three years, the longest he spent at one church.

The church Paul established there was strong and was the mother church in Asia Minor. The first Christians there were very strong, they had to be in the face of such strong opposition. They followed Jesus at great personal sacrifice (Acts 19:19).

Book

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a miniature Romans, a CliffsNotes or Spark notes to Romans, an abridged summary.

Scholars who proclaim Romans as one of the most important documents ever written are quick to put Ephesians a close second, as having the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality.

The same kind of praise that is heaped on Romans is given to Ephesians as well.

“The queen of the Epistles.” Barclay

“The crown of Paul's writings.” A. Robinson

“The crown and climax of Paul's writings.” John Mackay

“The divinest composition of man.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“The epitome of the whole Christian doctrine.” Zanchy, quoted by Matthew Henry.

John Calvin called it his favorite book.

For its size (six chapters and 155 verses), Ephesians has had a profound impact on the life and theology of the church.

It sums up the leading themes of all Paul's writings, and the focus of his ministry to the Gentiles.

Here is one of the clearest understandings of the mess of the human predicament and God's gracious and comprehensive salvation. It is a glorious summary of the history of our salvation and redemption in Christ.

Purpose, theme

The outline of Ephesians follows classic Pauline style. The first three chapters are nothing but gospel explanations, pure doctrine and theology, all indicative statements. The second three chapters are entirely gospel application. Soaring indicatives followed by grace-filled imperatives. Remember Romans was eleven chapters of indicative followed by four chapters of imperative.

Three chapters of the blessings of the Gospel followed by three chapters of implications and responses. Theology and practice, truth and action, the tree and the fruit. With Paul theology is always practical, lived out. What God has united, let no man put asunder.

Ephesians deals with topics at the very core of what it means to be a Christian—both in faith and in practice.

Ephesians 1-3

This is our calling. This is who God declares us to be, by means of what He has accomplished for us. This is about how we are a Christian and a Christian community, we are made in Christ by God's grace.

The Blessings, 1:3-14.

Paul turns things upside down in Ephesians. Rather than end with doxology like in Romans, he starts with doxology.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is one sentence, 220 words pouring out all the spiritual blessings of God that are ours in Christ Jesus. This is one long praise-blessing to God for all the blessings He has showered down on His people.

Ephesians 1:3-14 (NIV1224) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every

spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 [even as] he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 [having] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 *to the praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In [whom] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 [making] known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

11 In [whom] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. 13 [in whom] you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, [and] were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—*to the praise of his glory*.

What is Paul trying to do in this passage? I'll tell you what he is trying to do. This is the work of an arsonist. Paul is trying to start a fire. Every phrase is another log, another gallon of gas, until he has piled up and soaked enough timber to get a huge blazing inferno raging. There's a fire burning in this man and, driven by the wind of the Holy Spirit, he wants to stir up something really big in Ephesus (and Lynden). He is igniting a fuse and fanning the flames.

He explodes with praise for what the gospel is, to make us realize how great is our salvation and how gracious is God, our Saviour. We are left with a view of God and his grace that is infinitely higher than we had before we started reading.

In one sentence Paul piles up all our blessings in the Gospel, all the blessings of being in Christ. fourteen verses about God's electing, predestining, redemption, adoption/inheritance, forgiveness of sins,

perseverance, sealing by the Spirit, regeneration and consummation of all things.

One sentence celebrating God's accomplishments in Christ through whom God blesses us with every spiritual blessing, all the benefits and privileges of our salvation, not just in heaven but here and now. Paul gives us a vast panoramic sweep from eternity past to eternity future, in which God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals the mystery of His will.

This is what Paul prays for us latter in the letter, that we would truly grasp just how wide, long, high and deep is the love of God for us in Christ that our hearts would soar with His.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a description of how in we were dead in our own sin and children of the Devil, and how God miraculously made us alive by grace, and destined us to walk in good deeds.

Ephesians 2:11-22 God has done an altogether new thing in history. God has created a new humanity, the ultimate expression of the power of God and the redeeming work and redeeming love of Christ on the cross. God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself and out of the two they become one, a new humanity, a new people belonging to God.

Ephesians 2:14-15 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

Ephesians 4-6

Therefore.

We are created for good works.

Faith without works is dead. Faith without fruit is fruitless.

I therefore urge/exhort you ...

Nitty-gritty of practical Christian living and behavior. All of the undeserved spiritual blessings are to be used for God's glory and the benefit and blessing of others. This is how we live up to our calling.

Five times Paul explicitly commands Christians to *walk a certain way*: (1) walk worthy of your calling (Eph. 4:1–3), (2) don't walk as the Gentiles walk (Eph. 4:17–22), (3) walk in love (Eph. 5:1–2), (4) walk as children of light (Eph. 5:3–14), and (5) walk carefully as one who is wise (Eph. 5:15–17) (Benjamin L. Merkle).

This section is summed up in

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:15-18 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

This is about how we are to live in Christian community. Being a Christian, being in Christ, leads to transformation, leads to being imitators of Christ, like Christ, reflecting Christ at home, in the church and in the world.

Don't live, act, walk like the world of darkness and evil. Remember how dark and evil the city was where Paul is writing. Do our lives reflect the reality of what we profess and believe?

Is our Christian "walk" (in other words, your daily life) characterized by unity, holiness, love, wisdom, and perseverance in spiritual warfare?

The last three chapters are filled with ethical instruction — children obey, servants honor, wives respect, husbands love, while all Christians put on the full armor of God.

Walk, walk, walk, ends with stand, stand, stand firm against the powers of darkness. The power of Christ's victory is seen in His crushing the "powers." In the light of Christ's victory and in the equipping of the Holy Spirit we are called to stand against the already defeated cosmic powers of evil.

You have the power of the resurrected Jesus through His indwelling Holy Spirit to stand up and stand firm against Satan, sin and evil.

The Tragic Epilogue

Despite such extraordinary privileges, the Ephesian church later drifted. We read in Revelation 2 they had abandoned their first love for Jesus. This is a danger in any church.

This letter may be the closest one to our situation. Churches that uphold sound doctrine are often the ones that grow cold. We can be ambassadors of the truth and forget to love the one who gave us the truth.

We can become like Ephesians if we pit grace and truth against each other. We can become like the Ephesians if we have our doctrine down so well that we stop living it.

We can become like the Ephesians if we stop loving people. We can become like the Ephesians when we see how others should repent, but we don't see our own need to repent. We see others' sins more quickly and more clearly than our own.

We can become like the Ephesians when we forget our spiritual blessings. Rekindle the fire, fan the flames, restore the love and joy. Rekindle the fire of our first love.

Let him who has ears to hear, hear.

Implications and application.

Read Ephesians, hear with fresh ears the staggering truth of God's amazing grace that rescues, redeems, saves, elects, calls, and then unites us to Christ and empowers us with His Spirit, and raises up His Church, and sends us out to transform the world around us.

Ephesians 1:16-19 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable

greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

Ephesians 3:16-19 according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.