

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. Today we introduce the letter to the EPHESIANS. We will learn about the characteristics of the letter, the writer and the recipients of the letter, the date and place of writing, the occasion and purpose of writing, and the division and the main messages of the letter.

POINT 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EPHESIANS

First. Similarities to Colossians.

About two-thirds of the 95 verses of Colossians are in part or in whole paralleled in Ephesians. And about half of the 155 verses of Ephesians are in part or in whole paralleled in Colossians. Both deal with God's plan of salvation that involves the whole universe (1:10; Col 1:16). Both speak about the supremacy of Christ in the universe and in the Church (1:21-23; Col 1:16-18), both contain thanksgiving and prayers for the recipients and their life in Christ (1:15-19; 3:14-19; Col 1:3-12). Both speak of their former lost condition and their new position in Christ (2:1-22; Col 1: 21-22). Both speak of the abolishment of the ceremonial law of the Old Testament (2:15; Col 2:14). Both speak of the mystery of Christ which was once hidden but now revealed (3:2-12; Col 1:25-27). Both speak of Paul's ministry especially to the Gentiles (3:8; 1:27). Both speak of putting off the old self and putting on the new self (4:22-24; Col 3:5-14). And both speak of the rules for special Christian groups (5:22-6:9; Col 3:18- 4:1). These similarities do not mean that a later forger used Colossians to write Ephesians. The similarities rather prove that the same author wrote both letters, but that he had a different purpose for each letter. As we shall see, Paul wrote both letters at about the same time and to similar situations.

Second. Differences with Colossians.

Ephesians is not simply a duplication of Colossians, but a unique letter with its own purpose and destination. While Colossians deals with a *particular* situation, Ephesians deals with the more *general* situation. The character of Colossians is *polemical* - it defends the truth over against heresy and the character of Ephesians is more *doxological* - it is a song of praise about the glorious blessings of Christians and the Christian Church. Ephesians contains teachings that are not found in Colossians. For example, the teachings concerning the Trinity (1:3,10,13-14,17), the Church in the whole world (1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:6,10,21; 4:4,12,16; 5:23,25,27,29,32), the sovereign character of God's grace and its relation to faith and works (2:8-10). The teachings concerning the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles (2:11-22), the unity amidst diversity and the growth of the Church (4:1-16). The teaching concerning the relationship between the Christian husband and Christian wife is rooted in and patterned after the relationship between Christ and his Church (5:22-33). Finally the teaching concerning the Christian's effective spiritual armour (6:10-18).

POINT 2. THE WRITER OF EPHESIANS

The letter says that the writer is Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. Also the universal testimony of the early Christian Church was that Paul was the author of the letter to the Ephesians. The parallels found in Colossians and Ephesians can also be found in Paul's other letters and even in comparisons with the writings of Peter, John and Luke. The traditional theory is that the apostle Paul at about the same time wrote Colossians and Ephesians to people living in the same Roman province of Asia. He elaborated on certain themes, which although related, are essentially different. This theory fits all the data.

POINT 3. THE RECIPIENTS OF EPHESIANS

First. The city of Ephesus.

The city was founded more than 1000 B.C. by Hittite tribes from the east. Later, Greek tribes from the west also settled there. In the third century B.C. the Romans conquered that part of the world and Ephesus became the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus became famous for her worship of the goddess called Artemis or Diana and her temple (Acts 19:27). Ephesus became the greatest commercial city in Asia Minor. Her ships sailed to the north, south and west and her road transport led to the north, south and east. There was also a Jewish community in Ephesus (Acts 18:19), who had received from Caesar Augustus of Rome the right to freely exercise their religious practices in the Roman Empire.

Second. Paul in Ephesus.

During his second missionary journey between A.D. 50-52, Paul was in Ephesus for a short while. He preached the gospel in the synagogue and then left Priscilla and Aquila there to minister to the Ephesians. Later Apollos came from Alexandria in Egypt to Ephesus, was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila and ministered in Ephesus and Corinth. During his third missionary journey, Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years between A.D. 53-56 (Acts 20:31), for the first three months in the synagogue and thereafter in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). God did extraordinary miracles through Paul: the sick were healed, the demon-possessed were set free and many people were converted. Many openly confessed their evil deeds. Those who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. The message of Jesus Christ spread far and wide so that the whole province of Asia heard the gospel (Acts 19:10-20). It was probably from Ephesus that Paul's fellow workers like Epaphras, spread the gospel to the cities of Colosse, Laodicea, Hierapolis and the other cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 (Col 1:2; 4:13). Because both Jews and Jewish proselytes were being converted to Christ, Paul experienced great opposition from the Jews in Ephesus, (Acts 19:9,33; 20:19). He also experienced great opposition from the Gentiles in Ephesus, especially from the silversmiths. Through the conversion of many Gentiles to Christ, these silversmiths were losing much of their income from making temple artefacts (Acts 19:23 f.). In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul mentioned that "after the manner of men, he had fought against wild beasts in Ephesus" (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 1:8-11). He was referring to his Jewish and Gentile opponents, who fought like wild beasts against him and often brought his life in danger. He especially referred to his persecution by the silversmiths and the great disturbance they caused in the city.

On his return journey from Corinth to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at the harbour Miletus and said farewell to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38). Although Paul thought that he would never return to Ephesus, it seems that he visited Ephesus again between A.D. 62-64, where he left his fellow worker Timothy to continue his ministry (1 Tim 1:3).

Third. The destination of Ephesians.

Although the words "in Ephesus" is not found in the best and most ancient existing Greek manuscripts, they are found in many important Greek manuscripts. It is virtually impossible for Paul to write to Ephesus without including the surrounding cities in Asia Minor, because while Paul had ministered in Ephesus, the gospel had spread to the whole of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). The best explanation is to regard this letter as a *circular letter* intended for the churches in Ephesus and all its surrounding area. The original letter left a blank space so that when this letter was read in a particular church, the name of that church was filled in orally. After it had been read by all the churches in the surrounding cities, it was returned to Ephesus. However, by previous direction from Paul, the words "in Ephesus" were inserted in the blank space so that believers everywhere would understand that *this letter was intended for the churches in "greater Ephesus", that is, for Ephesus and all its surrounding area*. From Ephesus, copies were made when needed and spread to other places, exactly as reflected in nearly all the later manuscripts of this letter. According to Ephesians 3:2 and 4:21-22, Paul was not personally acquainted with everybody, but that was because the letter was addressed to a very large group of people. Ephesians 1:1 addresses the letter to "the faithful in Christ" and therefore ultimately, this letter is addressed to all Christians in all times everywhere in the world.

POINT 4. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING EPHESIANS

According to Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1, Paul said that he was "a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the Gentiles". According to Colossians 4:3,7-9 and Ephesians 6:20-22, Paul wrote the letters of Colossians and Ephesians while he was "in chains", that is, chained to a soldier who guarded him in a private house (Acts 28:16). He sent his fellow worker, Tychicus to let the Christians know how he was doing in prison. Paul thus wrote Ephesians during his first imprisonment in Rome between A.D. 60-61.

POINT 5. THE OCCASION AND PURPOSE OF WRITING EPHESIANS

First. The purpose of Ephesians was to personally communicate with the churches.

He sent Tychicus to let the Christians in the churches know, that although he was in chains for Christ's sake, he was doing well (6:20-22). He also wanted to express his satisfaction with the faith and love of these Christians (1:15-16). It was thus a letter of encouragement (6:22).

Second. The purpose of Ephesians was to proclaim God's glorious plan of salvation.

According to Ephesians chapters 1-3, from all eternity, God has *planned* to save people through the completed work of redemption of Christ. In the appropriate time in history, God has *executed* his eternal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator between God and man (2:18; 3:12) and the Head of the whole universe in the interest of the Church (1:22). And throughout all the centuries, God *applies and guarantees* his eternal plan of salvation in the lives of regenerated Christians through the Holy Spirit. All the spiritual blessings belong to Christians because they have a position in Christ. According to Ephesians chapters 4-6, God's plan of salvation includes not only saving people when

they believe in Christ, but also continuing that saving process throughout their lives on earth. Christians grow in unity, in maturity and in effectiveness (4:1-16). God's eternal plan of salvation includes the human responsibility to accept God's grace, to respond in faith to Jesus Christ and to do the good works that God wants them to do (2:8-10). God's plan of salvation also includes the whole creation. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the whole creation will have been brought together under one Head, Jesus Christ (1:10).

Third. The purpose of Ephesians was to draw a contrast between the Roman empire and the Christian Church.

In contrast to the glamour of the Roman Empire, Paul sets forth the glory of Christ's Church. The stern dictator of Rome ruled over a vast yet limited domain, but Jesus Christ sovereignly rules over the whole universe. The Roman Empire tried to create political consolidation through military power and was characterised by many wars, but the Christian Church has an organic unity created by the Holy Spirit and is characterised by peace. The Roman soldiers wore physical armour, but Christians put on the spiritual armour of God. The Roman Empire was temporary and subjected to change and decay, but the Christian Church will endure forever.

POINT 6. THE DIVISION OF EPHESIANS

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians may be given the title: "**Ephesians - the glory of the Church of Jesus Christ**" or "**Ephesians - God's goals for the Christian Church**". The letter portrays Jesus Christ, the eternal foundation of the world-wide Church. The theme of Ephesians is written in Ephesians 2:21-22, "In Jesus Christ the whole Church in the world is joined in unity together and all Christians are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." The letter to the Ephesians may be divided into three parts:

Part one. The position of the Christian.

This part is recorded in chapter 1 to 3 and consists of three sections:

Chapter 1 speaks about the eternal foundation of the Church. The foundation of the Church is eternal, because it is rooted in God's election and predestination, in Christ's completed work of redemption and in the Holy Spirit's certain application and guarantee of this salvation. This fact means that every spiritual blessing in heaven belongs to Christians so that it may result in praise for God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (1:3-14). This fact also leads to thanksgiving and prayer, that Christians may know Christ better and that their eyes may be opened to see God's power, which was revealed in Christ's resurrection and enthronement (1:15-23).

Chapter 2 speaks about the universal scope of the Church. The universal scope of the Church is secured by the redemptive blessings in Christ, which are given by grace and received by faith (2:1-10). It is shown in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles through the cross of Christ (2:11-18). And it is shown in the fact that the Church in the world is growing into one group of people who are indwelt by God (2:19-22).

Chapter 3 speaks about the lofty goal of the Church. The goal of Christians is to make God's wisdom known, that is, to proclaim that Gentile believers are fellow-members with Jewish believers of God's holy people (3:1-13). And their goal is to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that they may be filled to all the fullness of God (3:14-19) and that this all may result in glory to God (3:20-21).

Part two. The walk of the Christian.

This part is recorded in chapter 4:1 to 6:9 and consists of three sections:

Chapter 4:1-16 speaks about the growth of the Church. The Church grows in unity only within diversity of spiritual gifts, calling and tasks. The goal of all churches should be to grow in unity based on the truth of the Christian faith and a personal relationship with Christ, to grow in maturity based on the character of Christ and to grow in effectiveness based on equipping every Christian to serve in the Church and in the world.

Chapter 4:17-5:21 speaks about the glorious renewal of Christians in the Church. All Christians put off the old sinful nature and put on the new Christ-like nature (4:17-32). They no longer live as unbelieving Gentiles, but rather live a life of love, live as children of the light and live as wise people (5:1-21).

Chapter 5:21-6:9 speaks about the glorious renewal of special groups in the Church. Wives are subject to their husbands and husbands love their wives. Children obey and honour their parents and fathers rear their children according to God's word. Slaves obey their masters and masters do not threaten their employees.

Part three. The warfare of the Christian.

This part is recorded in chapter 6:10-24 and consists of one section:

Chapter 6:10-24 speaks about the effective armour of the Church. The Christian Church does not depend on its own strength. All Christians put on God's armour in their warfare against Satan and every kind of wickedness.

POINT 7. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF EPHESIANS

First. The great redemptive blessings in Christ.

Redemption (1:7) is the most glorious work of God. It is far greater than his work of creation. While God spoke a word and the universe was created, it cost him the life of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world. *To redeem* means to pay the only price that could atone the righteous anger of God against every kind of sin and wickedness. Every person who believes in Jesus Christ is redeemed from the slavery to sin (Jn 8:34), from captivity to Satan (Col 1:13; 2 Tim 2:26) and from the curse of the law (Gal 2:13; Eph 2:15).

In the past, every Christian was dead because he lived according to his sinful nature, the sinful world and the enemy, Satan.

In the present, every Christian has been *crucified with Christ, resurrected with Christ and seated with Christ in heaven*.

Both as to his legal state as to his actual moral condition, together with Christ he has been tried, condemned, crucified and buried (Rom 6:4-8; Col 2:12; 2 Tim 2:11), but also made alive, resurrected and given a place in heaven (Rom 6:5; Col 2:13; 2 Tim 2:12). There is a time factor and Christians do not receive this glory in its fullest measure all at once. The right to receive it has been secured and the new life has already begun.

Already now the life of every Christian is hidden with Christ in God and the fullness of glory will be manifested in the future at Christ's Second Coming (Col 3:3-4). Already now the interests of Christians are promoted in heaven.

Christians are being ruled from heaven. They are governed by heavenly standards and motivated by heavenly impulses. And they receive grace and love and power from heaven that enables them to live the life worthy of their calling (4:1). That is why the thoughts, prayers and actions of Christians are directed towards heaven and they aspire to live to the glory of him who dwells in heaven (1:6).

Second. The mystery has been revealed and is proclaimed.

Mystery means a truth that was hidden until the appropriate time has come for God to reveal it. The mystery of the Church is that the believers from the Gentiles are to have an equal position with the believers from the Jews as God's chosen people (2:19; 3:6,12; Rom 10:12-13; 15:9-10; Gal 3:8-9). Through the cross, Jesus Christ reconciles Jews and Gentiles from the different nations with God and with one another (1 Pet 2:9-10; Rev 5:9-10).

Third. The sit, walk and stand of every Christian.

Chapter 1-3 speaks of how every Christian *sits* in his position in the eyes of God (2:6). Chapters 4-5 speaks of how every Christian ought to continually *walk* or conduct himself (4:1,17; 5:2,8,15). And chapter 6 speaks of how every Christian ought to *stand* in his spiritual warfare against Satan (6:11,13,14).

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Philippians 1-4. Next week we will introduce the letter to the Philippians.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".