

Section 1 - Eph 1:1-2

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a revelation of God's plan in and for the Church, highlighting the Church's relationship to God and its significance in the Bible.

Scripture: Acts 20:17, 1 Corinthians 10:32, Galatians 1:11, Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 2:11, Ephesians 3:1, Ephesians 4:4

Topics: "Church Age", "Saving Grace"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the profound revelations received by the Apostle Paul regarding the gospel of saving grace through Christ and the divine age of the Church, emphasizing the mystery of forming a new heavenly company from both Jews and Gentiles. The Ephesian letter unveils God's plan for the Church, written by Paul in A.D. 64 while in prison at Rome, closely associated with letters to the Philippians and Colossians. The Epistle addresses the saints in Ephesus and all faithful in Christ Jesus, revealing the unique position and privileges of the Church as the New Creation, distinct from the Adamic and Abrahamic stocks.

Transcript

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unquestionably the greatest religious crisis in human history was experienced when, immediately following the death of Christ, the divine purpose was changed from the limitations of Judaism to the world-wide proclamation to Jew and Gentile alike of the infinite grace of God in and through Christ Jesus. The demand then was for a man who, under God, could receive the new divine revelation, formulate its doctrines, and contend for its claims. Saul of Tarsus was God's chosen instrument and to him were given two distinct revelations. The first was of the gospel of the saving grace of God through Christ, and is stated thus:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12).

The second was of the divine age in the out-calling of the Church which, so far from being a continuation of any previous plan for Jew or Gentile, is said to be a mystery or sacred secret which was hid in past

ages. This new purpose was not merely that a blessing was determined for Israel or for the Gentiles -- each of which has a large place in unfulfilled prophecy -- but rather that out from both Jews and Gentiles a new heavenly company was to be formed. The Scripture states,

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward; how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; ... which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:1-6).

The Ephesian letter is a revelation of God's plan in and for the Church and is thus a development of the second revelation given to the Apostle Paul.

Date of the Epistle

By an abundance of evidence, we are assured that this Epistle was written A.D. 64 to the church at Ephesus by the Apostle Paul while in prison at Rome, and that it was closely associated with the letter to the Philippians and the letter to the Colossians. Probably all three letters were carried from Rome by Tychicus and noticeable, indeed, are the thirty-three similarities in the messages of the Ephesian and Colossian Epistles. The fact that the words "at Ephesus" (verse 1) in some early manuscripts are omitted is of little significance in view of the general character of the letter itself. Possibly this Epistle may be the letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16) -- that is, the letter may have been written as a circular, or encyclical, going to various churches which each, in turn, was charged to pass on to another, with Ephesus as a final destination.

Though now but an insignificant village, in Paul's day Ephesus was the capital of Proconsular Asia, located on the Sacred Port and the river Cayster, and noted for its theater and its temple -- the temple of Artemis (Diana) -- both of which are mentioned in the Scriptures (Act 19:27-29).

In addition to the text of the letter itself, much New Testament Scripture bears directly, or indirectly, on this city and the believers therein. It will be remembered that in his first missionary journey about A.D. 51, the Apostle was "forbidden to preach the word in Asia" (Act 16:6), but returning from that journey, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila of Rome, he stopped at Ephesus (Act 18:18-21); and, upon resuming his journey, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. This, Paul's first visit to Ephesus, was exceedingly brief yet vitally effective and apparently without opposition from the Jews in whose synagogue he "reasoned." Act 20:31 records Paul's second visit, about A.D. 54, and indicates an unbroken ministry of three years (Act 20:31); first for a period of three months in the synagogue, and later for a period of two years in the "school of one Tyrannus" (Act 19:8-10). The beginning of this second ministry in Ephesus was characterized by his discovery of twelve men, disciples of John the Baptist, whom he led into the knowledge of Christ and who were rebaptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus." So far-reaching were the effects of the second visit that "all which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." This ministry accompanied by miracles so penetrated the thought of the heathen city that we are told

"many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men, and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Act 19:19-20).

A Companion Text

Outside this Epistle to the Ephesians, perhaps the most important scripture bearing on the ministry of Paul in Ephesus will be found in Act 20:17-38, which context records the farewell words of Paul to the elders of the Church at Ephesus. The Apostle, being restricted in time, stopping but briefly at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, called for the elders to journey the thirty miles that he might be with them all the available time. This portion of Scripture (Act 20:17-21, Act 20:25-38) should be read with care and compared with the message of the Ephesian letter. It is as follows:

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ... And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."

From Ephesus Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written, and the influence of the scenes which surrounded him is discernible (1Co 4:9; 1Co 9:24-25; 1Co 15:32). Later on, in A.D. 63, the Apostle's care for the Ephesian church is seen again in the various references to Ephesus in the Pastoral Epistles (1Ti 1:3; 2Ti 1:18; 2Ti 4:12).

Events in Ephesus

We are also assured that, following the death of the Apostle Paul, both Peter and John carried on the apostolic testimony in the region of Ephesus. There John's Gospel and his Epistles were written. So, also, the Revelation was written from Patmos --removed from Ephesus but sixty miles. At Ephesus, likewise, the great Christian council which dealt with the Nestorian heresy was held in A.D. 431. But, finally, the Ephesian church is distinguished as the first of the seven churches to which the ascended and glorified Christ spoke through John. No accusation is made against her other than that she had lost her first love; on the other hand, she is commended by these priceless words:

"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Rev 2:2-6 Rev 2:2-6).

Here some intimation is given of the wealth of the spiritual life and experience that obtained in the Ephesian church before her departure from her first love.

The church was jealous both for apostolic authority and for the brotherhood of the saints; which brotherhood has been so sadly divided and so despoiled by Nicolaitanism, i.e., the division between laity and clergy and the subverting of the laity by the clergy. The Epistle to the Ephesians reflects nothing of Nicolaitanism, though the ministry gifts are recorded (Eph 4:11). It is in this Epistle that we read,

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:4-6).

Similarly, as an introduction to the Epistle to the Ephesians this, the first letter to the churches in Asia, should be read with care, remembering that it is written by the Apostle John a full thirty years after the death of the Apostle Paul.

To Whom Addressed?

That the Epistle to the Ephesians is not addressed to unregenerate persons is clear. The full identification of the distinct and limited class to whom this message is addressed will be disclosed as the study of the Epistle proceeds. However, a brief identification of this particular company is called for at this point before the Epistle itself is approached. That this company may be seen in all its relationships and separate characteristics, a brief panorama of human history, past, present, and future, is here given.

Generally speaking, the period from Adam to Abraham, though occupying but the first eleven chapters of the Bible and including at least two thousand years, represents one-third of all human history as that history has progressed from Adam to the present time. The second period of two thousand years, or from Abraham to Christ, occupies by far the major portion of the text of the Bible; while the third period of nearly two thousand years, or from Christ to the present time, occupies a portion, but not all, of the New Testament. Prophecy plainly anticipates a yet future period of one thousand years, after which there will be the setting up of the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

It is obvious that in the first period of two thousand years, though there were distinct nations, the earth was inhabited by one stock or kind of humanity; and in the second period of two thousand years, there were two distinct kinds of people -- the original Gentile looking backward to federal headship in Adam, and the Jew looking backward to federal headship in Abraham (Heb 7:9-10). The seed of Abraham was to be different in kind, preservation, and destiny.

Three Classes of People

In this third period of two thousand years there are certainly three classes of people in the earth. The original Adamic stock and the Abrahamic stock are still here; but, added to these, or rather taken from them, not by natural generation, but by regeneration, there is a third group of people who look backward only to the resurrection of the last Adam, Christ, and these in Him and together with Him form the New Creation. Representatives of this third group have been present in the world in each generation during the

period from Pentecost to the present hour. Representatives will also be present in each future generation until their elect number is completed, when they will be received into glory at the coming of Christ to receive His bride. The Apostle Paul clearly recognized the three classes of people of this period when he wrote: "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1Co 10:32). Likewise, in Eph 2:11 the Apostle refers to the Gentiles as the "Uncircumcision," and the Jews as the "Circumcision in the flesh made by hands." But in Col 2:11 he refers to the Church as "the Circumcision made without hands."

The same Apostle gives a most vivid statement of the Gentile's position in the world:

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:11-12).

He gives also the position of the Jew in the world:

"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5).

In like manner, he states the position of the Church:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:3-6).

Every student of the Scriptures will do well to ponder these passages carefully, both for the truth each portion contains as well as for the wide variation in privilege and position which each sets forth.

The Meaning of "Church"

Since it so vitally determines the right understanding of the Ephesian Epistle, the precise Biblical meaning of the word Church should be given careful consideration.

In the original word Church means a called out assembly of people, a meaning not unlike the English word congregation, or gathering of people in one place. Such was Israel in the wilderness (Act 7:38), and such was the mob in the Ephesian theater, which mob is termed an ekklesia, or church (Act 19:32). Of such companies it could never be said that the life of each individual of the company is hid with Christ in God, or that, collectively, they form the very Body of Christ; nor can these holy distinctions be applied to any organized church or congregation. The true Church is composed of all the redeemed who have been, or will be saved through Christ in the period between the day of Pentecost and the removal of the Church, which is yet to be (1Th 4:13-18). That the true Church is not restricted to Jews, Gentiles, a sect, or to one generation is obvious. Each person in this heavenly company is individually called of God, regenerated, forgiven all trespasses, justified, made a member of the household and family of God, united to Christ, and destined to partake of His heavenly glory forever.

That the distinctive character of the Church may be still more clearly observed, the panoramic view of the divinely revealed program for the human family in the earth should be traced to its consummation. It will be seen from the Scriptures that, following the close of this age and the removal of the Church from the earth, there are to be but two classes of people -- the Jew and the Gentile -- in the earth during the coming period of a thousand years. Likewise, following this thousand-year period, and during the eternity of the new earth, the Jew, of necessity, will be on the earth; for their five great earthly covenants, which are everlasting, cannot be broken. These covenants concern their national entity (Isa 66:22; Jer 31:36), the lion of their land (Gen 13:15), their throne (2Sa 7:16), their King (Jer 33:21), and their Kingdom (Dan 7:14); and, in like manner, Rev 21:23-27 seems to indicate the continuation of redeemed nations on the earth in that eternity to come.

Truth for All

The Ephesian letter, though it is addressed to the one local church in Ephesus, contains truth which belongs to the whole company of those who are saved in this dispensation. This fact is disclosed in the two opening verses.

The Epistle opens with this clear identification of its author, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." The name Paul, or Paulus, is a Gentile name, while its Hebrew form is Saul, or Saulus. That he is an Apostle is one of the highest of honors, which honor is claimed here by the Apostle Paul, not at all in self-seeking, but as the ground of authority upon which he is about to write. He is God's messenger according to God's will, and those who, with humbleness of mind, will listen for God's voice, will give heed to the words of an Apostle (1Co 2:1; 2Co 12:12; Gal 1:1).

The Epistle is written to "the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful [full of faith, trustful] in Christ Jesus." Since the words saint and sanctify are from the same root, it follows that all who are saints are sanctified (Heb 10:10 Heb 10:14); that is, they have been set apart unto God -- which is the true meaning of sanctification -- by virtue of their union with Christ through the baptism with the Spirit. It follows, also, that those who are positionally sanctified, or set apart unto God through their union with Christ, which is true of every believer, are saints. After this manner, the message is addressed not only to saints who are in Ephesus, but to all the faithful in Christ Jesus. Thus the letter becomes a personal word to every child of God.

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