

# **AN ECCLESIOLOGY FROM EPHESIANS**

## **By Bruce Hopler**

### **INTRO**

It is the most accepted assumption that the book of Ephesians is one of the "general" Epistles and that it was circulated among the house churches in the region of Ephesus. Therefore this letter is unlikely addressing specific problems, or special circumstances, rather broad-spectrum teachings, thus serves as an excellent overall instruction on how to be the church, for both then and now. This has implications for all churches everywhere and serves as a good foundational piece for ecclesiology and even a prescription for church in all ages. It is simply a letter springing from Paul's love for the church.

Several themes emerge that show Paul's understanding of the church. A few of which are unpacked below.

### **GOD'S PURPOSE AND POWER, EVEN IN NEGATIVE TIMES**

It is helpful to understand the context in which this letter was written. Paul was in prison in Rome, not knowing if he was going to be executed or even experience more beatings. Yet he opened the letter full of praise of God. He followed the letter with a prayer that Christians may recognize God's purpose and power, which is superior to what they can accomplish on their own.

This teaches the church many things. Specifically it brings in perspective. It is a common trap to assume that because of the Christian position, entitlement has been earned. In fact, Paul teaches that having a sense of entitlement is destructive. The Christian position is one of humility, as it is an honor to be apart of the family of God. This teaches the church about attitude. The Christian community should always have praise on their lips. Paul models this to the church as he is singing praises from prison. Furthermore, it establishes that their circumstance is only temporary and they are apart of a bigger plan.

### **DIRECT ACCESS TO THE FATHER BECAUSE OF GRACE**

Paul blesses the church in helping them to see that they have direct access to the Heavenly Father. In chapter two the church learns that, because of Jesus Christ dieing on the cross, a payment was paid and we are reconciled to the Father. Though the Holy Spirit, followers of Christ can connect to the Father. The reverse is true as well. The price that Christ paid enables the Spirit to rein in individual believers as well as the community of believers. This teaches the church to go forth in full confidence in the presence of God.

Paul also teaches the church humility in this newfound access. This access does not make them an elite group or have been obtained because of their accomplishments. Paul clearly identifies in chapter 2 that this access is solely due to grace through faith. There is nothing the church has done or can do to earn such a privilege. It is "because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions". Therefore the church should refrain from arrogance, in relationship to the rest of the world. They have no right to boast.

### **RELATIONSHIPS ARE A BIG DEAL**

Paul teaches that the nature of the ministry of the church is diversity in unity, not conformity to the majority. The unity of the church, especially between Jew and Gentile believers, is certainly a significant keynote of the book. This is shown by the recurrence of such words and phrases as "together" (made alive together, 2:5; raised up together, sitting together, 2:6; built together, 2:22), "one" (indicating unity: one new man, 2:15; one body, 2:16; one Spirit, 2:18; one hope, 4:4; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, 4:5-6) "unity" and "whole body" (found in chapter 4).

One of the many things that transpired on the Cross was the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles and uniting them into one household as found in chapter 2. Racism is simply no longer an option.

Paul teaches the supreme importance of living out what Jesus taught, to "love our neighbor as ourselves". There is no room for dissention in the church. In fact the mark of Christ is found in the church's ability to live in reconciliation, peace and forgiveness. Valuing other people is simply non-optional in the church.

### **YOU ARE APART OF A KINGDOM FAMILY**

The Church understands through Paul's letter that they are not only a localized community, but they are apart of the great community of God. In chapter one Paul teaches that followers of Christ has been adopted into His family. God "chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ". Paul challenges us to leave our lowest selves and inspires us to seek our highest potential in Jesus, seated with him at the right hand of the Father. This shows the church that when they serve, they do not serve themselves; they are apart of a great Kingdom cause. Furthermore when they feel alone, they are not, as they are apart of a massive community of Christ followers.

## **LEADERSHIP 101**

In chapter four Paul gives the basic essential of church structure. It appears the doctrine of the church's unity and faith is linked to these basic functions of the church. This prescription for leadership to accomplish the mission of God has five parts. First there is the apostolic function, which likely to be understood as pioneering new missional works and oversees their development. Second is the prophetic function, discerning the spiritual realities in a given situation and communicates them in a timely and appropriate way, furthering the mission of God's people. Thirdly there is the evangelistic function, communicating the gospel in such a way that people connect with God, by responding in faith and discipleship. Fourthly there is the pastoral function, where the Christ-follower shepherds the people of God by leading, nurturing, protecting, and caring for them. Finally there is the teaching function communicating the revealed wisdom of God so that the people of God learn how to obey all that Christ has commanded them.

Paul teaches that God has supplied the body of Christ with different spiritual gifts. If these five spiritual gifts are incorporated as leadership functions, then the movement of God will be better equipped by His people, being in partnership with His power and purpose.

## **LIVE WITH AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY**

Chapters four, five and six lay out the practical expression of the church. What appears to be a long list of "do's and don'ts", is actually practical wisdom for how followers of Christ should live a life of integrity. The church cannot have much of an impact if its followers are acting out in bad behavior. The teachings of Christ cause an authentic transformation and the church should be an authentic expression of that.

## **DON'T GET SUCKED INTO THE EMPIRE**

The most significant difference between Ephesus and North America is that Ephesus admitted they had lots of gods. Consumerism (a major economy center), power kicks (highly political), luxury (had indoor toilets with live music), lust (strong prostitution), education as a idol (third largest library in Asia Minor) and much more existed in Ephesus. Spiritual warfare and temptation was at an all time high. Paul gave the church practical teachings in chapter six on how to avoid being sucked into the evil powers that were all around. Paul taught that all of these "opportunities" were not what they appeared because "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms".