



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 33 – Two More Letters from the Prisoner Paul (Ephesians, Philippians)

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians at the same time that he wrote his letter to Philemon and his letter to the Colossians. This was probably in the early months of his two-year stay in Rome (59-61 AD), while he was awaiting his trial before the Emperor Nero. This letter was delivered along with the other two letters by Tychicus, who was probably from Ephesus, and by Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, who was from Colosse.

Since this letter contains no personal greetings from Paul to any of the Ephesian Christians, it is probable that this letter was addressed not only to the Christians in Ephesus, but to all the Christian congregations in the province of Asia – such as those in Ephesus, Colosse, Hierapolis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Thus, this letter could very well be the letter referred to in Colossians 4:16.

The letter to the Ephesians is very similar to the letter to the Colossians. The emphasis is slightly different, however. In his letter to the Colossians Paul emphasizes Christ, the Head of the Church. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul emphasizes **the Church as the Body of Christ**.

Another difference between the two letters is that in his letter to the Colossians, Paul was dealing with a specific false teaching, whereas his letter to the Ephesians is more general in nature.

The letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two parts: **the doctrinal portion** (chapters 1-3), which teaches what the Church of Christ is, and then **the application of the doctrine** (chapters 4-6), showing what being a member of Christ's Church means as far as our daily lives are concerned.

Read Paul's letter to the Ephesians. If you have questions, do not hesitate to ask them.

Ephesians 1-3 – What the Church Is – the doctrinal portion of the letter

Ephesians 1:1-2: Greetings – the usual pattern: author, to whom written, the word of greeting.

Ephesians 1:3-14: Paul praises God for all His blessings

"He (God) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world" (v. 4).

"In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (v. 7).

“In Him (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel” (v. 13).

“Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (v. 13).

Note: In this section Paul teaches **the doctrine of election** by grace, also called **predestination**: namely, that those who believe in Christ **now** have the assurance that God chose them **from eternity** to be His children and promises to take them finally to heaven.

Ephesians 1:15-23: Paul thanks God and prays that the Ephesians will understand how good God is

“He (God) raised Him (Christ) from the dead and seated Him at His right hand” (v. 20).

He “gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body” (vv. 22-23).

Paul prays that God **“may give to you the spirit of wisdom ... in the knowledge of Him” (v. 17).**

Ephesians 2:1-10: Paul reminds them that God has saved them by His grace

“You He (God) made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (v. 1).

“By grace you have been saved through faith ...; it is the gift of God, not of works” (vv. 8-9).

Note: In this section Paul teaches **the doctrine of conversion**: namely, that we are helpless to bring ourselves to faith in Jesus, and that God has brought us to faith by grace, by His working without our cooperation. Faith in Christ is a gift from God in undeserved love.

Ephesians 2:11-22: Paul shows how God has joined together Jews and Gentiles into one Church

“You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13).

He **“has broken down the middle wall of separation, ... thus making peace” (vv. 14-15).**

“You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (v. 19).

Ephesians 3:1-21: Paul prays again that the Gentiles might realize the great love of God

Paul understands **“that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body” (v. 6).**

He prays **“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (v. 17).**

Note: The word “church” in this letter refers the “invisible” Church, that is, all the believers in Jesus throughout the whole world.

Ephesians 4-6 – The Application of the Doctrine: What Membership in the Church Involves

Ephesians 4:1-16: Strive for unity and use the gifts God has given to the Church for the good of all

"I ... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (v. 1).

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3).

"one body and one Spirit, ... one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God" (v. 4-6).

"To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (v. 7).

"apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers" (v. 11).

These gifts are given so that we, **"speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things" (v. 15).**

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:20: Put on the new man, and put off the old man

"You ... have been taught by Him ... that you put off ... the old man" (vv. 4:20-22).

Also, **"that you put on the new man which was created according to God" (v. 4:24).**

Old man: lying, stealing, bad words, bitterness, malice, fornication, drunkenness, etc.

New man: truth, honest labor, good words, kindness, forgiving, love, giving thanks, etc.

"Forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (v. 4:32).

"Christ has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God" (v. 5:2).

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (v. 5:11).

"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns, ... giving thanks always for all things" (v. 5:19-20).

Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9: Be Christian in your specific station in life

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (v. 5:22).

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church" (v. 5:25).

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (v. 6:1).

"Fathers, ... bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (v. 6:4).

"Bondservants, be obedient. ... Masters, do the same, ... giving up threatening" (v. 5:9).

Ephesians 6:10-18: Fight against Satan and all the powers of evil

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand" (v. 11).

belt, breastplate, sandals, shield, helmet, sword – weapons of defense and offense

"Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17).

"Praying always ... for all the saints – and for me" (vv. 18-19).

Ephesians 6:19-24: Concluding remarks

Tychicus delivered this letter containing greetings from Paul and friends.

The Doctrines of Election and Conversion

Chapter 1 of Ephesians contains an extended discussion of the doctrine of election (or predestination). We who are Christians today are given the comfort that we are Christians because God chose us from eternity to be His children, and He will therefore sustain our faith in Christ even to the end of our lives. The doctrine of election teaches us that our salvation is entirely a matter of God's grace. But the Bible nowhere teaches that God from eternity chose some persons to be damned. Rather, the Bible teaches that God wants everyone to be saved, that Jesus died for everyone, and that the Holy Spirit desires to bring the Gospel of Christ to all and to convert all.

Chapter 2 of Ephesians contains an extended discussion of the doctrine of conversion. It points out that by nature we are all dead in sins and, therefore, we cannot contribute one single thing to our own conversion. It is altogether a matter of grace, not our merit. Even our faith in Christ is entirely a gift from God; it is not a decision we are able to make on our own.

Most Protestant churches do not teach what God's Word teaches on these two doctrines. Followers of John Calvin tend to follow the teaching that God from eternity chose some to be saved and some to be damned. They therefore deny that God wants all to be saved, that Jesus died for all, and that the Holy Spirit earnestly desires to save all.

Followers of Jacob Arminius, such as John Wesley, tend to deny any thought of predestination or election. They teach that some people hear the Gospel and choose or decide to believe it of their own free will, whereas others hear the Gospel and decide to reject it. In Ephesians God clearly teaches that no one can decide to believe the Gospel.

It is very important that when we preach the Gospel of Christ to others, we are clear on what God teaches in His Word about these two doctrines. Thus, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is worthy of our careful study.

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Paul wrote this letter to the congregation at Philippi towards the end of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (61 AD). Paul had founded this congregation on his second mission journey. This was the congregation of Lydia and the jailer. It was chiefly a Gentile congregation. This congregation was very loyal to Paul and very generous to him. They had helped support him with gifts when he was in Thessalonica and Corinth and they had contributed a large amount to the collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, even though they themselves were poor. This congregation was the only one which Paul allowed to support him financially.

Why did Paul write this letter? A member of the congregation, Epaphroditus, had come to Rome to bring Paul a gift from the congregation and to devote his own life to Paul's service.

He had become sick, however, and had come close to death. But Epaphroditus gradually recovered from his ailment and was now ready to return to Philippi. Paul wrote this letter and sent it to Philippi with Epaphroditus, to thank the Philippians for their gift, to report on his prospects for release from prison, to encourage them to continue in the faith, and to warn them against false teachers.

Philippians 1:1-26: Greetings and good news from Prisoner Paul in Rome

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ... for your fellowship in the gospel" (vv. 3, 5).

"I pray, that your love may abound still more and more" (v. 9).

"Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice" (v. 18).

"To live is Christ, and to die is gain, ... having a desire to depart and be with Christ" (vv. 21, 23).

Philippians 1:27 – 2:18: Paul exhorts them to live in unity and humility, with Christ as model

"Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (v. 1:27).

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (v. 2:5).

"He humbled Himself and became obedient. ... God highly exalted Him" (vv. 2:8-9).

"God ... works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (v. 2:13).

Philippians 2:19 – 3:1: Paul sends Epaphroditus and Timothy, and hopes himself to come also

Philippians 3:2 – 4:1: Paul warns them against the false teachers and rejoices in Christ

"Not having my own righteousness ... but that which is through faith in Christ" (v. 3:9).

Philippians 4:2-9: Paul admonishes them to settle their quarrels, rejoice, and think good thoughts

Philippians 4:10-22: Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift to him

Questions

1. What does the Bible teach about election in chapter one of Ephesians?
2. How does God bring people to faith in Christ?
3. How do we know that we cannot contribute to our own conversion?
4. How does Paul describe Christ's Church in his letter to the Ephesians?
5. How is it possible that Jews and Gentiles can be members of the same church?
6. What gifts has Christ given to His Church that are of benefit to all?
7. What sins do we commit because of the old man within us?
8. What fruits of faith does the Holy Spirit produce in us Christians?
9. Why should we always be willing to forgive one another?
10. What are the various stations in life for which Paul gives instructions?
11. What are the weapons God has given us for our battle against evil?
12. Why was Paul thankful even though he was a prisoner in Rome?
13. How did Paul describe Christ's humiliation and His exaltation?
14. How did the Philippians show their love to Paul in Rome?
15. What had Paul boasted in formerly? What did he boast in now?