

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Introductory Message

Intro: There is always the possibility that the study of any book of the Bible, will bring revival to the hearts of individuals who read it or hear it taught, especially when the Holy Spirit is the One to Whom the people of God are looking for their understanding of the truth. Many have found this to be true in the past. Sometimes whole churches have been profoundly blessed by the teaching of the Word of God. Many have been praying for revival in our day. Churches need it, and that means that we as individual believers who make up the body of Christ, need to be revived. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to understand the Word of God. And when He blesses any believer or any church in such a way, there will always be a revival of interest in holy living. There are indications here and there today among the Lord's people, that many are giving special attention to what the Lord wants us to be, what we need to be, and how we need to live, if we are to be pleasing to our God. We have been very blessed by the Lord to have had Jerry Bridges with us recently for our Family Camp. He is one whom the Lord is using in a special way to awaken believers today to the absolute necessity of pleasing the Lord by obedience to His Word which is what leads to holiness of life.

So let us be praying for special blessing as we go through this amazing epistle which God has given us through the Apostle Paul. Hardly any of the commentators I am consulting in my fresh study of this epistle, can find words to express how glorious, how majestic, how awe-inspiring this epistle is. It is just what I need; it is what we all need. I hope you will read it as often as you can while we are going through it together. The more we read it looking to the Holy Spirit to give us understanding, the more we will love it, and the more we love it, the more we will believe it, and the more we will obey it, and this all leads to our transformation into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. Remember what Jerry emphasized with us that in seeking to be holy, God, of course, does the work, but we have responsibilities as far as reading and hearing and obeying and praying that we will be enabled to do what the Word tells us to do, or not to do.

I have in my library a book of sermons on Paul's epistle to the Ephesians which were preached by the well known historical servant of the Lord, John Calvin. As some of you know, some of the early manuscripts of this epistle do not have the words "in Ephesus" in them. This does not change

Ephesians #1 (2)

anything regarding the divine inspiration of the epistle, but it has given rise to the idea that even the Apostle Paul, while he wrote it especially for the believers at Ephesus, intended for it to have a much wider circulation even among the early churches. Perhaps this letter originally was sent to the church at Ephesus, but then it was to be circulated among the same churches that the Apostle John intended for his book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to go as we see in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. With that in mind I want to read to you from John Calvin's first sermon on this letter to the Ephesians. This is what he said:

When we read the epistles which St. Paul wrote to a variety of places, we must always consider that God meant they should serve not only for one time alone, or for certain people only, but for ever, and in general for the whole church. And truly if a man considers well the doctrine that is contained in them, it will be easy to discern that God's intention was to be heard in the things that are spoken there, even to the world's end; and also that he has such a care for us that he has not passed over or forgotten anything that might further our salvation. The sum of this Epistle which I have now taken in hand to expound is that St. Paul confirms such as had been already instructed in the Gospel, in order that they might know that that is what they must rest upon, as upon the true and perfect wisdom, and that it is not lawful to add anything to it (*John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, p. 7).

Some people are always wondering if we have everything in our Bible that God intended for us to have. Calvin has said here, and there have been countless numbers of teachers of the Word who have said the same thing, that God has given us everything in the Word that is necessary for our salvation. It does not need to be revised, or have anything added to it, and He has preserved it for us so that we have what the early Christians had, to help them live lives that please God and are designed by the Holy Spirit, the Author of Scripture, to make us like our Lord.

So we need to know that this epistle was written just as much for us as it was for those early churches, and we need to receive it, believe it, obey it, and thank God for it, just like they did in Ephesus and every other place where copies of this letter went in the first century. It is still be circulated among the Lord's people in more different languages than ever before, and it will be used by God in our lives and in the lives of all of His people until the Lord takes us to heaven. God's Word will never pass away. We have that on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. See Matthew

24:35; Luke 21:33.

Now let me guide you today through this epistle to make you more familiar with it as we go through it in the coming days.

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus was written while he was a prisoner in Rome the first time. At the time he wrote this epistle, he also wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Philemon lived in Colosse and was a member of the Colossian church. Paul wrote these epistles in the early 60's, or about thirty years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord.

It has been suggested by some that Ephesians and Colossians have something of the same relationship that Paul's letters to the church at Rome and to the churches of Galatia. Both Ephesians and Colossians deal with the church, the body of Christ. In Ephesians the emphasis is upon that, the church, the body of Christ; in Colossians it is upon Christ as the head of the body. Of course both deal with Christ, and both deal with the church. By reading these two epistles (which we all should do), it is apparent that they were written at the same time. Many passages are similar in the two letters.

The teaching about the church in the New Testament was new to the people of God in the days following the ascension of Christ. The Apostle Paul was the main spokesman about the church, both of the local churches, like Trinity Bible Church – its leaders, its mission in the world, its ordinances, its doctrine, and concerning the lives of its members. The body of Christ is the larger group, made up of all believers in this age. We will learn more about The Church and churches as we go through Ephesians.

The Message of the Epistle

Now the epistle to the Ephesians, while it is one of the deepest and richest of all of the books of the Bible, concentrates on two things:

- 1) What Christians believe in the first three chapters.
- 2) How Christians are to live, in the last three chapters.

This is just another way of saying that the first three chapters are basically *doctrinal*; the last three chapters are *practical*. The doctrine always precedes the practical, laying the foundation for the practical. There are many people today in churches (and I guess there always have been) those

who would prefer to skip the doctrine and go just to the practical. But that doesn't make sense. How would you like to be operated on by a man who did not know anything about the human body, where the various parts are, what their function is, and their relationship to each other, but just had bought a lot of surgical instruments but did not know how to use them? One reason so many crazy ideas get going in churches is because people don't know God as He is revealed in Scripture. In many instances people don't know what salvation is. What is going on in many churches today, would not be going on if even the leaders were guided by the teaching of Scripture. Doctrine is simply teaching. You can't live like the Bible says that we as God's people should live if you don't know what the Bible teaches about yourself, and about God, His purposes, His will, His power, His grace, and about this world in which we live, and the Devil and all of the pitfalls he will place in your way. Churches desperately need teaching today. And we are going to find a lot of wonderful doctrine in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Many expositors speak of Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 as *the wealth* of the Christian. Paul gets into our wealth by what he says in verse 3 of chapter 1. (Quote Eph. 1:3.) Test yourself on how much you know about the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. How many of them can you name?

Remember that word *wealth* for the first three chapters.

I have mentioned to you that the last three chapters tell us how a Christian lives. You see, you ought to be able to tell a Christian by what he believes, and how he, or she, lives. I have met many people throughout my life who never read the Bible, never go to church, who probably could not tell you about the Trinity, and yet they call themselves Christians because they are good people who try to do to others the way they would like others to treat them. The Bible is very clear about what a Christian believes, and how a Christian is to live. And if you aren't a real Christian, you are not going to like what the Bible says about your life and the way you should live it.

The Bible speaks of the life we are to live as Christians as a "walk." This is a little word that includes every part of our lives – not only our lifestyle, but our talk, the way we think, the habits we have, the people we associate with. Everybody has a "walk," a lifestyle. The lifestyle of a Christian is very different from what it was before he became a Christian. Paul wrote about this in chapter 2, verses 1-3. "Conversation" in the KJV in most instances doesn't mean just talk, but it is a synonym for *walk*. Paul

got back to this again in chapter 4, verses 17-21. Notice the word “walk” in 4:17.

In addition to this use of the word “walk,” which is negative, note:

- 1) “Good works . . . that we should walk in them” (2:10).
- 2) “Walk worthy of the vocation . . . (4:1).
- 3) “Walk in love” (5:2)
- 4) “Walk as children of light” (5:8).
- 5) “Walk circumspectly,” or carefully (5:15).

These with 2:2 and 4:17 give us all of the times in this epistle that Paul spoke of the walk of his readers, either what it had been, or what it needed to be now. So this all applies equally to all of us.

So we have these two major sections in Ephesians:

- 1) The Christian’s Wealth (Eph. 1-3).
- 2) The Christian’s Walk (Eph. 4-6).

But I want to break away a part of this second point to make a third point that begins with a “w.” And let me tell you where I first found it.

Many years ago (I think that it was even before I went to seminary) a book came to my attention. I am not sure that Lucille had it first, or I did. It was a commentary written by a lady who did a lot of Bible teaching among women. She may have been a missionary. Some of you may know her name, or even have her book. Her name was Miss Ruth Paxson. And she called her commentary, “The Wealth, Walk, **and Warfare** of a Christian.” I believe that she was right in dealing with verses 10 through 20 in chapter 6 as a separate division in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus. Spiritually we could not be wealthier. As Christians we are to live a life that is different from the world. It is a holy life, a life pleasing to God. But we aren’t saved long before we learn that we are engaged in spiritual warfare with the same Devil who got our first parents to disobey God. And let me tell you now, before we get to chapter 6, that the only reliable information, the only truth about the Devil that you will find in the world, is what is found in the Bible. He got Eve to doubt the goodness of God. And he is always trying to get us to believe that God is not really good, but that God by His commandments in the Word is just trying to keep us from enjoying the best things in life. He tells us not to be afraid to sin because God is just trying to keep us from finding out what fun life can be if we will only forget about God and

His Word.

But let me also tell you this: the Devil hates this passage because it tells us *the only way that we can defeat the Devil*. Every part of Ephesians 6:10-20 has to do either with the Word of God, or with prayer. It is extremely important that we all know and understand that the Christian life is a warfare, and that our hope of victory over Him is in knowing what resources we have in Christ, and that we safeguard ourselves by being obedient to God's Word. Of course, this is only possible through the help that is available to us from the Holy Spirit.

Concl: Now if our time in the Word, in this case, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, is to have a life-transforming effect upon us, we must seek the help of the Spirit of God. Only the Spirit of God can make us understand this epistle, and only the Holy Spirit can enable us to do what He has told us to do, and what not to do.

So I am going to ask you to do three things in addition to reading this letter over and over, and coming to hear what the Lord gives us in our times together. But I ask you to do three things regularly:

- 1) Pray that the Lord will make you receptive to the truth of Ephesians. And I will be doing the same for myself.
- 2) Pray for everybody else in our church family, that we all will be hungry for and receptive to the ministry of the Word.
- 3) Pray for me as I prepare each week. I stand before you more conscious of my need of the Holy Spirit's ministry in my life that I ever have been before. We live in a nation that is under divine judgment because of the way people dare to disobey God continuously. And it is going to get worse, not better, if we as a nation continue on our present course. What the world needs is the testimony of us, the Lord's people, that they can only hear if our lives are pleasing to God. Pray that others in the body of Christ will be convicted that the only way the world will listen to our message is when they can see that we love the Lord and are being transformed daily by the power of God's Word and God's Spirit. So our immediate need is to make sure that our lives, by God's grace, are pleasing to Him.