

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Ephesians

Book 49

Basic Questions behind the book:

What difference does it make in life to be a Christian? What has changed?

Summary of book:

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one of encouragement and of spelling out of some of the most precious truths of our faith. The language of the book is interesting. In **Chapter 1**, once we've gotten past the opening greetings, the rest of the chapter consists of two long sentences in the original Greek. In English the sections have been further broken down into multiple sentences but that means you lose the sense of Paul's words spilling out with passion and without reserve. So, **vv. 3-14** should be read as sentence 1; while **vv.15-23** should be read as the second sentence. I particularly love the second sentence – it is one of my favourite pieces of scripture, while the former sentence has caused all kinds of theological controversy over the years, speaking as it does about predestination. **Chapter 2** speaks about the changes that Christ makes in our relationships with God (**vv.1-10**) and with one another (**vv.11-22**). We were by nature objects of God's wrath, but now, because of Christ, we are objects of God's grace. We were alienated from each other – Jew and Gentile – but again, because of Christ, the two have been made one and have access to the Father through him. **Chapter 3** contains a reflection on the mystery of the Gospel. We should note that the word mystery in Greek thinking was something that was hidden but then revealed. So, we could not know anything about God, but, because of the Gospel, God has been made known in all His fullness. The latter part of the chapter contains a beautiful prayer from Paul for his Church with some powerful metaphors. **Chapters 4 & 5** speak about the outworking of the Gospel in the unity of the Church and the way we treat one another. Again, some controversial words are to be found about husbands and wives, and about slavery. These words have often been distorted. The key point is about being imitators of Christ, behaving in our relationships the way God would want us to. **Chapter 6** then finishes up with a call to us to recognise that as we seek to live within this relationship with God through Christ, and live it out in daily life, we face all sorts of obstacles, some of them are spiritual, and must be addressed with spiritual resources, which he beautifully depicts as the armour of God. The letter finishes with some personal greetings and blessings.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To strengthen the believers in Ephesus and surrounding areas in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the Church, the body of Christ.

Author: The Apostle Paul. Because the book exhibits signs of much deeper / later reflection and ideas, many scholars consider Ephesians to be a later composition based on earlier material from Paul. I believe that this is speculative and that we are safe to assume Ephesians was authored by Paul.

Recipients: To the Church at Ephesus with which Paul had many links throughout his ministry according to the book of Acts.

Dating: Probably somewhere around AD 60 when Paul was under house arrest in Rome.

Setting: The letter was not written to address any particular problem or pastoral issue in the Church at Ephesus (as in Galatians or Colossians for example). It was sent with the purpose of strengthening the church there (thus probably more akin to Romans or Hebrews). Paul may have spent three years ministering there previously, and in Acts 20:17-38 you see a very moving farewell between him and the Ephesians before he returns to Jerusalem. Because the words 'at Ephesus' (1:1) are missing in a number of early manuscripts it is sometimes thought that this letter was intended to be a circular letter.

Other Reflections:

When it comes to picking a key verse from Ephesians you really are spoilt for choice. You could take any of a number of texts. I have chosen to take one that is extremely important in Church history, being at the heart of the Reformation which led to the start of Protestantism of which our Methodist Church is a part.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast...” (2:8,9)