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Pause Ponder Profit

The Church At Ephesus

by James A. Brown

Eph. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

The book of Ephesians is addressed to the saints and faithful in Christ who are at Ephesus, i.e., the church at Ephesus. Paul identifies himself as the author of this book at least twice by name (1:1; 3:1) and several times by the personal pronouns I, me and my (cf. 3:1-4). He also includes himself several times along with those to whom he was writing by using the plural pronouns our, us, and we (cf. 1:1-7). Paul was given authority to pen this epistle for he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (1:1). He wrote this epistle in the spring of 63 AD and during his first Roman imprisonment (3:1; 4:1). He wrote to set forth God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, i.e., God's plan for human redemption. He makes this known in chapters one through three. In chapters four through six he exhorts the saints in Ephesus to live a life worthy of God's purpose. In order to learn about the church at Ephesus one will have to look at other sources of information other than the book of Ephesians.

The church at Ephesus had its beginning near the end of Paul's second evangelistic journey. When Paul left Corinth he came to Ephesus and entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews (Acts 18:18-19). Intent on being at Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost he did not stay in Ephesus long but promised to return (Acts 18:20-21). When he left Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla who had traveled with him from Corinth remained in Ephesus (Acts 18:19). Later on while at Ephesus Aquila and Priscilla would convert Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Then, when Apollos desired to travel to Corinth, "the brethren" wrote exhorting the disciples in Corinth to receive him (Acts 18:27-28). "The brethren" of Acts 18:27 are evidently those who made up the church in Ephesus. These "brethren" could have been converts of Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, or even someone who had been in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9).

Later on, Paul returned to Ephesus during his third evangelistic journey and converted twelve men who had been disciples of John the baptizer (Acts 19:1-7). Afterwards, he entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months persuading the Jews of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). Some obeyed the gospel but some were hardened and did not believe. When the unbelievers began to revile and denounce Christianity, Paul departed from them and withdrew the disciples reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). "And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Later Paul told the Ephesian elders that for three years he did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears (Acts 20:31).

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During Paul's stay in Ephesus, God worked unusual miracles by him. Handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from Paul's body to the sick and the diseases left them and evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:11-12). These miracles along with a case of demon possession which Luke mentions in Acts 19:13-17 had great impact upon the people. Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds because they had previously practiced witchcraft. In demonstration of repentance they brought their books of magic and burned them in the sight of all (Acts 19:18-19). The people of Ephesus were also immersed in idolatry (Acts 19:23-41). Of course they lived in a magnificent and wealthy city, which was a meeting place of oriental religions and Greek culture. This city was famous for the temple of Diana. The temple was said to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Diana was the female Greek deity "Artemis", whom all Asia and the world worshipped (Acts 19:27). It has been said that her rituals included sacrifices and ceremonial prostitution. Paul preached against idolatry and the licentiousness associated with it (cf. Eph. 4:19) not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, persuading people and turning them away from it, saying they are not gods which are made with hands (Acts 19:26). Paul's preaching included: things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8), the word of the Lord (Acts 19:20), the way (Acts 19:9, 23), repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21), the gospel of the grace of God and the kingdom of God (Acts 20:24-25), and yes even baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). As a matter of fact, Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had proclaimed the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27). Those who made up the church at Ephesus had heard, trusted and believed the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation (Eph. 1:13). As a consequence, they were saved by the grace of God through their obedient faith, having been baptized in the name of Christ (Eph. 2:8,9; Acts 10:4,5).

After Paul left Ephesus and continued his third journey he went into Macedonia and then into Greece and then returned through Macedonia headed toward Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-3). On his way to Jerusalem he stopped at the city of Miletus and sent to Ephesus calling for the elders of the church (Acts 20:16-17). As he requested, they came. Luke records Paul's discourse with the elders in Acts 20:18-35. Paul's speech was filled with much emotion. Consequently it is difficult to analyze. However, the two major thoughts seem to be: First, Paul's example as he served among them with humility and sincerity, preaching and teaching both publicly and privately repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:18-21). Second, Paul's exhortation to the elders to accept the responsibilities of the oversight of the congregation, to be aware of the dangers headed their direction, to depend upon the word of God, and to follow his example in supporting the weak. (Acts 20:28-35). When Paul finished his remarks they all got down on their knees and Paul prayed with them. The elders wept aloud, embraced Paul and kissed him again and again. They grieved mainly over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see him again (Acts 20:36-38).

When Paul left the Ephesian elders, he went to Jerusalem where he was arrested and eventually taken prisoner to Rome (Acts 21-28). As mentioned earlier, Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians in the spring of 63 AD and during this imprisonment at Rome (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). Sometime later, after Paul was released from prison, he evidently came to Ephesus and as he left from there to go into Macedonia he urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul apparently traveled through Macedonia and into Achaia where he had planned to winter at Nicapolis (Tit. 3:12). It is possible that he wrote the first epistle to Timothy from Nicapolis, late in 64, or very early 65 A.D. Then in the late summer or early

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these verses we see that the church in Ephesus had worked hard, patiently endured trials, hated evil, and even tried and convicted false apostles. But the Lord also said, *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent"* (Rev. 2:4-5). This church had been faithful in many ways as verses two and three indicated. But verses four and five indicates that they had also been very careless. In view of all the good they had accomplished this seems to be a small criticism. But it is no minor condemnation at all, for it is a very serious charge. The Lord commands them to repent. If there was any spiritual profit in all the good they had done, there was now a shortfall. The Lord charges them with no longer loving Him like they did at the first. Once love is gone every sacrifice we make for the cause of Christ, every deed performed in the name of the Lord, every defense of the faith, all worship, and etc., is worthless. Where there is no love, there is no profit (1 Cor. 13: 1-3). Not only does the Lord call upon them to repent but he also commands the doing of the first works. He is not demanding more works but works like the first type. He wants works that are prompted by and expressive of real love. For without that, no church can shine in this world filled with darkness.

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