

The Epistle to the Ephesians

~ To Him be Glory in the Church ~

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Part 1 An Overview

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, is one of the most glorious writings in the Bible. It is addressed to the saints which are at Ephesus, AND to faithful In Christ Jesus.

Many consider this letter to be not just specific to the Ephesian Church, but maybe a circular letter, and intended for all of the Churches in Asia and very much to us today.

This letter is called one of the “Prison Epistles” along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. As we will see, he wrote this a few years after his visit to Ephesus in Acts 20, from a Roman Prison. His love and passion for the church is so much more evident because of this. Knowing his time was short and his outpouring of joy – (Philippians – remember “rejoice evermore – pray without ceasing ----) showed us just how caught up he was in the Lord He loved.

May we be gripped with the same vision and passion that the Apostle Paul had when he penned these words. That we would see God's eternal purpose in Christ and the relationship we have in Him as the Church as Paul saw and wrote in Chapter 3

*Eph 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 **And to make all men see** what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

Why is this Epistle so special and glorious?

In every other letter, Paul is writing to correct errors that were rising in the churches.

- The Galatians were becoming legalistic,
- the Corinthians were becoming hedonistic,
- the Romans needed to be warned of the course of the world around them and to be called to a life of faith.
- The Thessalonians were fearful and confused about the apocalyptic course of history around them.

But Ephesians is pure doctrine, and so much so, it has been called the **Constitutional Document of the Church.**

Why should we study it today?

For us – at St Columba, there is now no more pressing urgency to refocus, to redefine and to revive what it means to be the Body of Christ, the Temple of the God, the Bride of Christ, the Army of the

Lord, the Church of Jesus Christ..... All of these metaphors are used to describe what Paul calls a glorious church – without spot or wrinkle or any such thing....

Ephesians is split in two.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 tell us **how we do** church, but chapters 1, 2 and 3 tell us who we are, who God is, what His calling and purpose is.

If we jump to a practical talk about gifts, about ministries about loving one another – about marriage, about spiritual warfare – we will never be what He wants us to be with out Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in which our hearts and our minds are captured by the glory of God, by the eternal purpose of His kingdom, and of our place in Him as seated together with Christ in heavenly places.

Remember when Jesus asked His disciples “who do men say I am?” and Peter responded with that great confession “Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God” - what did Jesus say? “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you – but my Father which is in heaven and on THIS ROCK (the revelation of this glory) I will build my church – and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

The first three chapters of Ephesians expound this eternal purpose and identity of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – out of that – and ONLY out of that can we expect for Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to work.

This message is the story of how the Church at Ephesus was birthed.

And this is the story of Acts Chapter 19



Paul left Corinth to go to Asia

12 Disciples who knew the baptism of John.

Paul finds “Disciples” and only about 12 men. I guess they had families, but to form a congregation and set up a synagogue they needed 10 men.

Now he called them disciples – so they were evidently separated from the rest of the Ephesian population by their religion.

The centre of religion of Ephesus was the temple or sanctuary of Artemis

“Artemis of Ephesus is represented as a woman with many breasts, These breasts symbolize the vitality and the nourishing capacity of the earth. She was the goddess of nature, of productivity, of chastity, and the protector of wild animals and sailors. Her cult spread to the Mediterranean shores as even as far as Marseilles and Spain. “

So here is our first challenge: Paul found a people who were obviously not of the world, but what was wrong?

His first question was “have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed”?

Why would he ask that?

So they say: "we didn't know that there was a Holy Ghost"

So next question: "Tell me about your baptism"

And right here we see how essential and how pivotal Baptism is to the Christian Church. It is a subject we will further pursue, but sufficient to say at this point, that the identity with Jesus Christ by sharing in His death, burial, and resurrection is absolutely vital.

They said: “We have received John's Baptism”

Ah! says Paul, John indeed ministered well, and taught a Baptism of Repentance – but he also taught that we should believe on Him who was to come – that is Jesus.

F B Meyer:

“Meanwhile Paul had a ministry to fulfill in Ephesus. The twelve men mentioned had known only so much of the truth as had been revealed to the Baptist. They had felt the need of repentance and had heard of Christ as the Lamb of God; but of His resurrection and ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit they were ignorant. Paul at once fixed on this lack as the source of their impotence. He seemed to say, “If you men had received the baptism of the Spirit, you would move this city.”

They had a form of godliness, but were denying or more likely ignorant of) the power of it. They had to come from the shadow to the light. From the Law to faith in Christ.

So: He baptized them in the Name of Jesus and laid hands on them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Why was John's Baptism not enough?

John was the last prophet of the Law

Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

Remember Hebrews 6:

Heb 6:1 ***Therefore leaving the principles*** of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, 2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this will we do, if God permit. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once ***enlightened***, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made ***partakers of the Holy Ghost***, 5 And have ***tasted the good word of God***, and the powers of the world to come,

If we think the “First Principles” equate to the Christian life, we are short changed and mistaken. The “First Principles” that Hebrews refers to here were the pointers – the LAW which pointed to Christ. John the Baptist ministered under these pointers.

The way we become Christian is we are:

1) **“enlightened”** – that is “the light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ – shines into our hearts” see 2 Cor 4:4 *“In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”*

2) **Taste the heavenly gift** IE “are made partakers of the Holy Ghost”

3) **Have tasted the Word of God**

see 1 **Pe 1:23** *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”*

In short: Being “Born Again” is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit – nothing we can do to achieve it. It is the Work of God.

Also to the Galatians:

Gal 3:23-27 *“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*

Acts 19:20 “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

His love for the church there was very evident.

Of all of Paul's missionary work, I imagine that the Church in Ephesus was closest to his heart.

Acts 19: 1-20 Paul ministered there for over two years. He established the church, fought with many who opposed the Gospel, so much so that he used Ephesus as an example of the struggle of ministry and the worth of the Gospel.

1Corinthians 15:32 If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

Ephesus, it would seem, became the chief of the churches in Asia and is addressed first by Jesus in Revelation chapter 2 vs 1

In conclusion, and before we think that such a revival as Paul saw and ministered to for those two and a half years was easy sailing we need to take note of Paul's return to Ephesus in Acts 20. He was on his way to Jerusalem and not sure of the welcome he would receive there. He knew though, that he would see these folks no more and with tears he warned them: He said “I've preached to you

the whole counsel of God. I've held nothing back. Be ware: After I depart, men will creep in and bring heresy. Denying the Lord that purchased you with His own blood. Take heed: Feed the flock of God. Preach the Word: make the Gospel known in clarity and truth..."

What became of that church?

Revelation Chapter 2

When was this written? Some say Revelation was a late writing. I don't think so: For instance the church at Laodicea has no mention of a massive earthquake which destroyed the city in 62 AD, and the Temple mentioned in Chapter 11 was destroyed in AD 70. In fact none of Revelation makes any sense if it's removed from its first century context.

So in spite of so few years, Jesus writes a stern letter

*Rev 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;
 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:
 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.
 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, ***because thou hast left thy first love.***
 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.
 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

He commended them for their WORK for their labour, and for their PATIENCE, as well as their endurance.

They hated the things that God hated, but also, they left their "first love" which always must be that for Jesus himself.

It's possible to hate the things which God hates, and yet need to repent that our hatred exceeds our love.

Paul was imprisoned briefly while in Ephesus, and from there he wrote to the Corinthians. However, the Letter to the Ephesians which we are starting to look at, was written a few years later, maybe AD62, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

So: what have we learned?

- 1) The church is powerless without the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ
- 2) Baptism identifies us with Christ
- 3) It is possible to be very religious and to hate the things that God hates, yet lose our first love – our passion for Jesus himself.

To be continued