

Overview of Ephesians:

1. Geography

- a. Located on the mouth of the Cayster River in present day Turkey. Originally described in 1000 BC as on the south side of the harbor, by 300 BC the coast had moved westward and Ephesus lied on the southeast side of the harbor because of the silt carried out by the Cayster River. Over the years the Cayster deposited so much silt that the city is now 4 miles inland from the Aegean Sea. During Paul's time, the governor of Asia tried to clear a deeper passage from the city to the sea, which shows that large ships couldn't dock there any longer. Perhaps that is why Paul chose to meet the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, some miles away, when he visited them later.
- b. Was an important city with many great buildings and structures. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world stood at Ephesus: the Temple of Artemis. There were also many other temples to various gods and later of emperors as well (Isis, Domitian, Dea Roma, Divius Julius), a large theater, capable of seating 25,000 people, a large library was built soon after Ephesians was written, a gymnasium, many baths, indoor plumbing and heating through clay pipes inside the walls of the wealthier homes, and public marketplaces (agoras).
- c. In Paul's day its population was around 250,000
- d. Ephesus was a very cosmopolitan city, with varying influences of Greek, Roman, Persian, and early Ionian cultures.
- e. It was a place of trade for all known nations, so peoples from differing ethnic groups and social status were present, lending much of what the church had to deal with in Paul's letter (racial and socio-economic relationships).
- f. Think of Ephesus as a lot like New York City 150 years ago. It was a place of booming economic growth, cultural change, a melting pot of nationalities, great wealth, great construction, and in Paul's time political power.

2. Religion

- a. Proud to be the protector of the Cult of Artemis, although other religions were present as well, including emperor worship.
- b. Greek gods were not exclusive of other gods. They coexisted and were even dependent upon one another. Ephesus, however, took great pride in being the headquarters of Artemis.
- c. The Cult of Artemis
 - i. Artemis was a goddess who is represented as the nourisher, a huntress, lover of the wild, keeper of the crossroads, and wife of Ephesus. Viewed as the keeper of crossroads, she was venerated as a supreme power over fate and supernatural powers, hence the need for magic.
 - ii. Two known religious festivals to Artemis, including religious processions, athletic and theatrical competitions.
 - iii. A rock had fallen from the sky and become venerated as magical (Acts 19:35).
 - iv. Ephesus was known as a center for magic. Luke reports that many Christians burned their magic books in Ephesus (Acts 19:19). The value of which was 50,000 pieces of silver, or in today's value: 3.25 million dollars!! Obviously, there was a large presence and acceptance of magic and sorcery in Ephesus.

3. Politics

- a. Provincial capital of Asia Minor (senatorial province) governed by a proconsul who was very powerful and presided in Ephesus (Acts 19:38). Luke also records the presence of a clerk (*γραμματεως*), an important official who copied, registered, preserved, and published official documents. It was the clerk in Ephesus that quieted the crowd and reprimanded them before dismissing them in Acts 19:35-41. Verse 32 gives us a glimpse of the way politics worked because the clerk told the riotous crowd that if they wished changes to be made they must utilize the proconsul, the courts, or at last the regular assembly. The meeting of the

- silversmiths was not a regular assembly and so was not valid. It also showed the power of the clerk in political affairs.
- b. There was a system of powers in control and they must be appealed to in proper order.
4. Commerce
 - a. Largest trading center in Asia Minor west of the Taurus, which is on the east edge of Asia Minor.
 - b. Had a harbor and connected shipping routes of the north with Syria and Egypt on the east and Italy, through Corinth on the west.
 - c. At the end of the “Royal Road,” a 1,700 mile road running from Susa and built by the Persians. In Paul’s time it was still the major path from East to West
 - d. Roman milestones have been found in Ephesus which portray the distance to other major Roman cities. This shows that Ephesus was quite important on the trade routes.
 - e. Estimated population of 250,000, its importance fell behind only Athens and Rome herself.
 5. Biblical References
 - a. Ephesus was where Aquila and Prisca served. Their ministry was effective, so that when Paul came back to Ephesus (Acts 19:1) he found followers of Jesus already there.
 - b. Apollos came to Ephesus and was instructed by A & P. He was a native of Alexandria (another cosmopolitan center).
 - c. Timothy was an elder in Ephesus.
 - i. False teaching and strange doctrines were a problem
 - ii. In line with the syncretic culture of the Ephesians
 - d. Onesiphorus served in Ephesus and persistently search for Paul when he was imprisoned so that he could encourage him in Rome.
 - e. Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews (Acts 18) and in the hall of Tyrannus as well when the Jews rejected the gospel.
 - f. Ephesus is where Demetrius the idol-maker formed a mob and dragged Paul’s companions into the agora (Acts 19).
 - g. Ephesus was one of the churches written to in Revelation as “having lost its first love.”

Paul chose strategic cities where ideas were considered and discussed for his missionary headquarters. These places, steeped in idolatry and cross-cultural and syncretistic religions, provided the opportunity for the Gospel to flourish and take precedence through sound reasoning and bold preaching. Paul brought the truth of the Gospel to the areas where idolatry was the strongest so that the Gospel would be seen as THE true way. He did not, by the grace of God, hoard the Gospel closely to his own heart or take it merely to those who were weak in the eyes of the world. He hit the world and its systems head on, striving daily to present Jesus Christ as the hope of reconciliation. Ephesus became a thriving mission for the church, with Apollos, Timothy, Aquila and Prisca, and John teaching there.

The book of Ephesians has been called, “full of Paul’s sublime thoughts and doctrines” (Chrysostom), “the crown of St. Paul’s writing” (J. Armitage Robinson), and “one of the most significant documents ever written” (Peter T. O’Brien). It was Jean Calvin’s favorite book, which his wife read to him daily before his death. It is considered the epitome of Paul’s message and of his heart.

It is not a normal book, where there is a singular main problem that Paul is defending against or taking issue with. Ephesians is more of a letter written in the grip of worship, a multi-faceted reflection on the grandeur and glory of God in the face of Christ. In this book Paul deals with the glorious gospel of grace, the supremacy of Jesus above everything, the formation, purpose, and relationships of the Church as the body of Christ. Love is a major theme, both God’s love for man and man’s love for each other. Unity is a part of coming under the supremacy of Jesus. There are many sub-themes in this wondrous letter. But, if anything can be said to be the main theme of Ephesians, it is this: Jesus is glorious above all.

Main theme: “The Glory of God in the Supremacy of Jesus”

Sub themes: God’s Grace, The Church: Unity, Love, Spiritual Blessings

TEXT:

Apostle of Christ Jesus

What is the significance of apostleship?

Paul is an ambassador, with all the authority of His Master, who carries forth the mission and the purpose of His master.

This mission is not Paul's. His chains are not his own. He does not struggle for his own name, for his own salvation, for his own safety, or for his own satisfaction. He seeks to fulfill his calling as an apostle, to complete the mission that His master has given him.

This is not a letter from merely a far-off friend, or correspondence from our boy on the front lines. Paul writes as an apostle. His words are God's Words. The Holy Spirit is using Paul to reveal the heart of Jesus Christ to His church.

What is the significance of Jesus Christ?

THIS IS THE MAIN THING FOR PAUL!!

KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

Christianity, what Paul was purposed in building, is not a philosophy...it is not a culture...it is not principles to live by...it is a person to be known, loved, honored, trusted, and obeyed: Jesus of Nazareth.

The most practical discipline of the Christian life is doing Theology: Asking the question for every turning point in our lives, "Who is Jesus?" The Main Thing of life is to keep the main thing of life the Main Thing. The Main Thing of life is Jesus.

1. Why do I need to make Jesus the Main Thing?
 - a. We all desire fulfillment, joy – to know and to be known
 - b. We expect that other things will fill this desire in us
 - i. First fall in love or finally get married
 - ii. Get the promotion or recognized as successful at work
 - iii. Finally get that house
 1. When we finally get these things we discover that the anticipation and the promise of joy never fully blossoms.
 2. We eventually, through much pain and loss, discover that this longing is something that no lover or career or achievement, even the best possible ones, can ever satisfy. As one pastor put it: "The satisfaction fades even as we close our fingers around our goal."
 3. We end up like Marie Antoinette: "Nothing tastes."
 - c. We can respond to this realization in several ways, including:
 - i. Blame the things themselves
 1. by finding fault in your lover, career, your boss
 2. blame everything around you for your dissatisfaction: "if only I had a better spouse, a better career, a better boss, a better pastor..."
 3. Some of the most successful people in the world are running around discontented, bored, changing lovers and projects and surroundings like they change their socks.
 - ii. Blame yourself
 1. by trying harder to live up to certain standards
 2. Many people believe that it is because of poor choices or failure to meet standards that is the reason for their dissatisfaction and joy: "If only I could reach my goals, then this emptiness would be gone." It is not so
 - iii. Blame the universe itself
 1. stop seeking any fulfillment at all
 2. Cynical, repressed, hopeless: "Yes, when I was young I was idealistic and brimming with optimism, but now that I'm older I've quit being so naïve."

3. You've become harder, losing your compassion, joy, hope, and you feel less human.
 - iv. Blame and Recognize Your Separation from God
 1. seeing that it is your sin and consequent separation from God that has led to this emptiness.
 2. This leads to a reconciliation, by establishing Him in your heart as Supreme Savior and Lord.
2. How Do I Establish Him as the Main Thing?
- a. Who We Are
 - i. God's Creation
 1. God created us for a relationship with Him (He walked in the garden with the man and woman).
 2. We belong to Him: every breath is His, every step, every success, every moment should be taken with gratitude to our Creator.
 3. We were built for worship – if not God, then we will worship something else, trying to give our lives meaning through our devotion to it.
 - ii. Sinners
 1. We have all chosen (and re-affirm daily) to reject God and to make our own will our highest priority. We do not want to bow to God as our Master or to worship Him, yet we were made to worship, so we turn to idols, centering our lives on things that make empty promises of meaning and significance: success, relationships, influence, love, comfort, physical desire, etc.
 2. "Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God. No one sins out of duty. We sin because it holds out some promise of happiness. That promise enslaves us until we believe that God is more to be desired than life itself (Psalm 63:3) Which means that the power of sin's promise is broken by the power of God's." - John Piper
 - 3.
 - iii. In Spiritual Bondage
 1. This idolatry leads to slavery. Whatever you worship, it is that that governs your life. It will spin out whole systems of rules and regulations from which you derive worth and satisfaction.
 2. The trouble is that they cannot deliver because they are not God. They will fail you and you will fail their demands and they will not forgive you, nor give you freedom. When a fish leaves the water, which he was built for, he is not free...he is dead.
 3. So, we are driven to work too hard for something that we cannot gain and then we are terrorized by our failures because they jeopardize our meaning.
 - b. Who God Is
 - i. Justice and Love – Judge with the guilty son
 1. Because God is good and loving he cannot tolerate evil.
 2. The opposite of love is not anger, it is indifference
 3. "The more you love your son, the more you hate in him the liar, the drunkard, the traitor." ~E. Gifford
 - ii. Jesus Christ
 1. Jesus is God come to earth. He lived his life in complete surrender and obedience to God. He loved God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and all his strength. He lived what was required of us and of which we utterly failed – a perfect record.

2. Yet, he turned down his reward, eternal life, and offered it up in death on the cross for our sins, rebellion, and defiance. He took the punishment of anger from God that we deserved.
 3. When we put our trust in Him alone our sins are paid for by His death and His perfect life record is transferred to our account. So God accepts us and regards us as if we have done all that Christ has done.
- c. What You Must Do
- i. Repent
 1. Turn from your own power to save yourself through your good works, great knowledge, or your own sacrifices and gifts to God. Say, “I can’t do anything to make myself OK to You.”
 - ii. Believe
 1. Transfer your trust to turn your life around and save yourself from your own efforts to the efforts of Christ.
 2. This is a humble task, admitting that you cannot do it, and only in mercy and by his own goodness, which you do not deserve, can Jesus save you.
 3. You were relying on other things to give you worth and satisfaction, making you acceptable to yourself and to God, but now you consciously begin to rely on what Jesus did as your acceptance before God. All you need is nothing. If you think, “God owes me something for all my efforts and suffering,” than your Main Thing is still your efforts and sacrifices.
 - iii. Pray like this:
 1. “I see that I am more deeply flawed and sinful than I ever dared believe, but that in Jesus I am even more loved and accepted than I ever dared to hope. I turn from my old life of living for myself. I have nothing in me or on my record to merit your approval, but I now rest in what Jesus did and ask to be accepted into God’s family for his sake.”
 2. When you pray *like* this two things happen:
 - a. Your accounts are cleared, your sins wiped out *permanently*, your are legally adopted into God’s family
 - b. The Holy Spirit enters your heart and begins to change your character to be like the character of Jesus.
3. The Glory of God in the Supremacy of Jesus Christ: Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing
 “Jesus Christ is your life, and as such He must be your strength, your wisdom, your ultimate resource from which you are to draw continuously, and upon whom you must continuously depend”. ~Charles Price
- a. He is supreme above everything that has ever been created, for He created all that is.
 - b. He is glorious because of His grace.
 - c. He is worthy because of His power and His love.
 - i. God is in the business of summing up all things under Jesus Christ (1:10). It is about Him, the glory of the One True God. Consider Jesus Christ today. Come before Him humbly and ask Him to take Mastery of your life. He’s earned it and I’m glad He did.

Jesus says to us all: “Come to Me all you who are tired and burdened down and I will give you rest.” It is not in the halls of philosophical musings or in the emotive meanderings of new age nothingness. It is in the presence of the living Jesus, the Master of the Universe, the giver of grace and the One who has beckoned us to come near. He is our goal. He is our purpose. He is our vision. It is in Him that all things exist and through Him that all things have their meaning. He is the lover of your soul, the blamed in your place, and the redeemer of your life. His message is one of good news:

It is the truth that I am more deeply sinful than I even now know, and I am more deeply loved than I ever dared hope that will push me to serve others before myself, to give up my reputation for the power and glory of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is calling you today to let your glory go. Let yourself be seen as weak, broken, sinful, and perverse, and then let the grace of Jesus Christ become your power, your healing, your forgiveness, your freedom! It is His salvation: He saves you, not because you are good enough, or know it all, or have it all right, but because He is merciful. He desires to renew your broken heart and spirit, to wash your sin-stained past and future, and save you from yourself through His awesome Holy Spirit. He offers to you now a life of hope and joy eternally in His inheritance, for you can be fully forgiven and fully free by placing your dependence for your freedom on Jesus Christ alone! Let Him be your only savior! He is only one who can! Let your own futile works go, let His effective work save you, mould you, free you, grow you. Behold His glorious face and be transformed into His image. The Main Thing in the Christian life is to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing! Jesus is my Main Thing.

QUESTIONS:

1. When somebody asks you, "Who are you?" how would you respond? What are the things that you use to define "who" you are?
2. How are these things temptations to become your "main thing?" In what ways do you depend upon them to give you worth and satisfaction?
3. Explain the difference between seeing Jesus as the Main Thing and seeing Him as the only thing? How does our worship of Jesus actually increase our ability to honor and revere our other relationships?
4. Look at the first chapter of Ephesians and list all the things that make Jesus worthy of being the Main Thing. In vss. 3-14 do you see the repeated phrase that gives us the reason why God would do such wondrous things in Christ?
5. How does our understanding of this reason place us in our proper place under the supreme authority of Jesus (1:10)?
6. Paul states in 1:10 that everything will be summed up under Jesus. How does this look on earth right now? Where are things looking like they are placed under Jesus and where do they look like they're not? Can we explain why things are different (think of the Church, the Holy Spirit)?