

Ephesians

INTRODUCTION: We learn from the book of Acts, Paul went from Corinth to Jerusalem. He went to Caesarea, where he was held a prisoner for two years. Here he exercised his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. That brought him to Rome, where for two years he was a prisoner under a Roman guard in his own house. Luke tells us that Paul spent this time preaching the Gospel. While Paul was here as a prisoner, he wrote four of his epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

During his residence of over two years in Ephesus, Paul had made many friends; in fact, his time in Ephesus was one of his dearest and closest relationships with people. When one reads the book of Acts, he finds that when Paul left Ephesus, the people fell upon his shoulders and wept and tried to keep him from leaving. However, it is quite unusual that this epistle of Ephesians contains no salutations or personal references, as do his other letters. He does not refer to any personal experiences in Ephesus, and there is nothing here to indicate that the letter is to a specific church. Because of this, it is believed that this epistle was not written exclusively for the one church at Ephesus, but rather, for the churches in Asia Minor and that it was to be taken from church to church and read in each place.

This letter does not deal with prevailing errors of the churches, such as the letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, etc. Therefore, it does seem that this was a letter written to many churches rather than to one church. There are people that think the letter ought to be called "The Letter to the Church of Laodicea," but as one reads Revelation 2 and 3, he finds several churches in Asia Minor to whom John wrote. John lived in Ephesus during his latter years, and it is not unusual that he would, while on the Isle of Patmos, write letters to the churches in Asia Minor which were near Ephesus. It is also interesting that his first letter in Revelation 2 and 3 is to the church at Ephesus.

Now let us notice things about the Ephesian letter.

I. THE THEME OF THE EPHESIAN LETTER IS "UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE CHURCHES."

The Apostle is pleading for unity. In Ephesians 1-3, he deals with the unity of the local church. In Ephesians 4-6, he deals with the unity of all churches and the unity of all believers.

1. Unity of the local church. (Teacher, stress how important it is for each member of the class and each member of the church to promote unity in the church. Stress the importance of loving each other, caring for the needs of each other, being nice to each other, not criticizing one another, etc. Have the class discuss for a few minutes what we can do to promote unity in our own local church. Take an old book to class and ask the pupils to pick a page and tear it up. Then ask them to take the whole book together and try to tear the whole book in two. Show them how much more difficult it is to tear something up when it is combined with hundreds of others of its kind. An old telephone book could be used to prove this. It is much harder for Satan to get any one of us when we are united with the rest of us. Show the importance of coming to church, being a part of the church. and promoting the unity of the local church.)

2. Unity of the churches. (Teach the pupils the importance of being "for" other Bible-preaching churches. This is not union! This is not a forced denomination-like council of churches where we organize together. It is a fellowship of independent-minded churches, each church caring for its own business, but being concerned about other churches of like faith. Teach the pupils not to criticize other Bible-preaching churches. Teach them to pray for other Bible-preaching churches. Teach them not to criticize other Bible preachers regardless of their attitude toward us.)

3. Unity of Christians. (Teacher, using the body as an example, show that we are all members of the same body. Teach the pupils that we should not criticize other Christians nor hurt other Christians because we are in the same body. Show how ridiculous it would be for the hand to take a knife and cut the throat or for a foot to kick the other leg or for the hand to scratch the eyeball. One member of the body should not want to hurt another member of the body, for in so doing he hurts the entire body. Show the pupils that when one

member of the physical body suffers, the entire body suffers. When a person stubs his toe, his eyes may fill with tears, his mouth may grimace, his tongue may say, "Ouch!" and his hand may reach down and grab the toe. This is the way Christians ought to be one toward the other.)

II. THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS WAS A BIG, INFLUENTIAL CHURCH.

It influenced other churches, and it was large. (Teacher, show the assets of a large church. Tell the pupils of the future programs of our church. Tell the pupils about all the things they can do—choirs, youth activities, Sunday school, soul winning, Christian day school, sports teams, camps etc. Show them how they can build their lives around a church like ours.)

III. THE CITY OF EPHESUS WAS A FAMOUS CITY OF LYDIA IN ASIA MINOR.

It was the capital of Proconsular Asia. It was a free city, having its own assemblies and magistrates, much like our Washington, D.C. It operated itself, had its own government, etc. In other words, it was a city that could be used to reach people around the world. Because of this, Ephesus became one of the chief fortresses of Christianity, but it was also a great stronghold of idolatry. At the head of the harbor was the great temple of Diana, the outstanding divinity of the city. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the world. The inhabitants of Asia contributed to the building of this temple, and its magnificence was a proverb throughout the civilized world. It was 60 feet high and was supported by 126 columns.

A large manufacturing of portable shrines grew out of this worship of Diana. These shrines were purchased by strangers who carried them on journeys or set them up in their homes, much like our Catholic friends do with statues of their St. Christopher, etc.

While Paul was there, the increasing number of conversions greatly depressed the business of the craftsmen engaged in the manufacture of these shrines or silver images of Diana. Because of this, insurrection rose against Paul. Paul and Timothy were protected by the town clerk. Later, however, it grew necessary for them to leave the city.

CONCLUSION: The church at Ephesus was—large, influential, and located in a metropolitan, human melting pot. Yet, from it, preachers went out to start churches all over Asia Minor. This, no doubt, is why this book is called "Ephesians," because of the fact that Ephesus was the major church. Therefore, it was necessary for the church at Ephesus to stay strong. One who belonged to that church was more accountable because the church affected the entire nation. Folks often wonder why we work towards having a larger church. The greater the work the more of an influence it can have in the area, the nation and even the world, the blessings of belonging to a church like this are many, but the responsibilities are inevitably greater because of its influence on the entire world.

Memory Verse: Eph 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:"