Introduction to Ephesians
Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-2
Code: 1901

INTRODUCTION

Hetty Green was known as America's greatest miser. She managed an inherited fortune so shrewdly that she was also considered the greatest woman financier in the world. In 1916 she died leaving an estate that was worth nearly 100 million dollars. Yet she would eat cold oatmeal because she didn't want to spend the money to heat the water. Her son eventually lost his leg from a relatively minor injury because she took him to a number of free medical clinics instead of calling for a doctor. (Her life is recounted in Hetty Green: A Woman Who Loved Money by Boyden Sparkes [N.Y.: Doubleday, 1930].) She had tremendous resources but didn't make use of them.

A. A Book About Riches

1. The understanding of our riches

The book of Ephesians is about the riches, fullness, and inheritance that a believer has in Christ. Because of that, some have called Ephesians the treasure house of the Bible. During the Great Depression some banks restricted the amount of money their clients could withdraw from their own account. However, God doesn't work that way. His resources are boundless and always available to His children. The book of Ephesians will teach you who you are, how rich you are, and how you should use those riches for Christ's glory.

2. The magnitude of our riches

In this epistle the apostle Paul speaks of "the riches of his [God's] grace" (1:7), "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8), and "the riches of his glory (3:16). We will see how God showers His riches on His children.

Paul also used several terms in this book to describe our abundant resources. He referred to "riches" five times; "grace" twelve times; "glory" eight times; "inheritance" four times; "fullness," "filled up," or "fills" six times; and the key phrase "in Christ" fifteen times.

3. The fullness of our riches

In Christ we have the fullness of "the riches of the glory of his inheritance" (1:18). Paul prayed that we "might be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19). He also desired that all believers know "the unsearchable riches of Christ,... who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (3:8, 20). God has the resources to cover all our past debts, present liabilities, and future needs. In fact, God has made available to us the fullness of Himself (3:19), Christ (4:13), and the Holy Spirit (5:18).

4. The guarantee of our riches

The guarantee of our riches is founded upon the fact that they are "in Christ," a phrase repeated fifteen times throughout Ephesians. Our riches are secure because Christ is secure in the plan and love of the Father. Our resources are secure because God has made them available to Christ. What God has given to His Son is also ours because we have become "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Referring to all believers Hebrews 2:11 says, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." First Corinthians 6:17 says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." His possessions are ours. All His riches are at our disposal. The apostle Peter called it "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

5. The basis of our riches

We did not earn the riches we have in Christ. Rather, they are ours because of God's mercy, which is emphasized throughout Ephesians. We are rich because of God's will (1:5, 9, 11), grace (1:6-7), glory (1:12, 14), power (1:19), love (2:4), good pleasure (1:9), purpose (1:11; 3:11), calling (1:18), inheritance (1:18), and workmanship (2:10).

B. A Book About the Church

Because believers are in Christ, they are in His body, the church. Ephesians focuses on the basic doctrine of the church--what it is and how believers function within it.

1. The mystery of the church

In Ephesians 3:3 Paul expresses a key thought relative to the church, "By revelation he [God] made known to me the mystery." That mystery "in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (v. 5). Verse 6 identifies the mystery: "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." A mystery in the biblical sense is something that had been hidden in the past but is now revealed in the New Testament. The book of Ephesians presents the mystery of the church. The hidden secret of the past (v. 5), revealed to Paul in the present (v. 3), was that Jew

and Gentile alike would be one in Christ's Body--the church.

God's Pattern of Revelation

1. God has secrets He will never reveal

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." God chooses to reveal some things to man but others remain a mystery.

2. God has secrets He reveals only to believers

Psalm 25:14 says, "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant." God reveals His secrets to believers. Proverbs 3:32 says that God's "secret is with the righteous." Amos 3:7 says, "He revealeth his secret unto his servants." God has revealed some things to all men. Romans 1:20 says everyone knows something about God's "eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." But there are certain things God reserves only for His children to know. For example, the disciples understood things no one else understood because the Father had "hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and ... revealed them to babes" (Matt. 11:25).

3. God has secrets He revealed only in the New Testament

The New Testament is new truth for a new age--sacred secrets revealed by God. The Old Testament saints searched their own writings in an attempt to discover their meaning (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Even the angels long to understand the truths we know, including the meaning of salvation (Eph. 3:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:12). The man given the responsibility of revealing most of the mysteries was the apostle Paul.

2. The mysteries of the kingdom

God always has kept secrets that He would reveal only to His people. Paul said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Indeed, Jesus often spoke in a manner that unbelievers could not understand. That led the disciples to ask, "Why speakest thou unto them [unbelievers] in parables?" (Matt. 13:10). Jesus replied, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (v. 11). Verses 34-35 say, "All these things spoke Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spoke he not unto them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." The mysteries of the

kingdom of God were not fully revealed until the New Testament era. So while Old Testament saints had sufficient knowledge of God, their understanding was not as complete as those who live after the coming of Christ.

In Matthew 13:11 Christ mentions the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." I believe it was not the kingdom itself but the form of the kingdom that was a mystery.

a) The promised millennial kingdom

(1) The kingdom anticipated

That God would establish an earthly kingdom was no mystery in the Old Testament. It was frequently prophesied that the Messiah would come and set up His kingdom (Gen. 49:10; Ps. 2:6-9; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:10; Jer. 23:5-6; Dan. 7:13-14, 18).

(2) The kingdom offered

John the Baptist said, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Likewise Christ proclaimed the same thing (Matt. 4:17). Jesus offered the kingdom of God to Israel. He was born a king, acknowledged as a king by the wise men, and confronted with His claim to be a king by Pilate.

(3) The kingdom rejected

So it was not a mystery that a king was coming to set up an earthly reign. What was not realized is that the kingdom would be rejected. The Jewish leaders said about Christ, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14; cf. John 1:10-11).

(4) The kingdom postponed

The earthly kingdom was postponed because Israel rejected their king. However, it will be established at a future time. The book of Revelation tells us about the one-thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth (19:1; 20:6). Jesus must be crowned as king of a literal earthly kingdom to fulfill His right to rule. So God's promise of a kingdom to Israel will be fulfilled, though it is presently postponed because they rejected the king.

b) The present mystery kingdom

(1) Concealed from the Old Testament saints

The Old Testament did not make it clear that the king would have to come twice, and that there would be a lengthy gap between His arrivals. Therefore the present age is called a mystery. A particular

feature of the present age, unknown in the Old Testament, is that Jew and Gentile would be united into one Body. Israel didn't realize that because of their disobedience, God would temporarily set it aside and call a new people by His name. So all the details of the church age were a mystery prior to the New Testament.

(2) Compared to the millennial kingdom

In what sense is Christ reigning today? Although He is in heaven and the physical kingdom is yet to come, Colossians says that at salvation God "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son" (1:13). Yet Ephesians says that Satan is "the prince of the power of the air" (2:2). The apparent contradiction is eliminated when we realize that Christ's future kingdom will be physical. But during the church age Christ's reign is primarily spiritual--Christ reigns in the hearts of His people.

While the millennial kingdom will have an external focus the present kingdom has an internal focus. Just as Christ will be outwardly enthroned in Jerusalem during the Millennium (Ps. 2:6-9), He now is inwardly enthroned in the hearts of His saints (Rom. 10:9-10). As He then will bring external peace to the whole world (Isa. 2:4; 32:17; Mic. 4:3), He now brings internal peace in the lives of believers (John 14:27; 16:33; Phil. 4:7). As in the future kingdom He will dispense grace (Isa. 19:21-25; 52:10; Jer. 23:6), so He does even now to those who trust in Him (Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:10, 13; 2 Thess. 2:13). As He will then bestow joy and happiness externally (Isa. 35:1-2; 6-7), He now internally bestows those blessings on His own people (Rom. 15:13; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 1:3).

The kingdom of which the Old Testament speaks, and which will be fully manifested in the Millennium, now exists in a partial state. As Peter explained in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, the remarkable events that had just occurred in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13) were a preview of what Joel prophesied about the millennial kingdom: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh" (vv. 16-17; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

(3) Contrasted with other mysteries

Within the mystery kingdom are many other revealed mysteries (Matt. 13:11): the indwelling Christ (Col. 1:26-27), the incarnation of the Son of God (Col. 2:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:16), Israel's unbelief and rejection of the Messiah (Rom. 11:25), iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7), Babylon-- the terrible, vile, economic and religious system of the end times (Rev. 17), the unity of believers (Eph. 3:3- 6), the church as Christ's bride (Eph. 5:24-32), and the rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52). The mystery age will be completed when Christ returns in glory (Rev. 10:7).

3. The metaphor of the church

Ephesians uses the metaphor of the human body to present the church.

a) The definition

A metaphor defines something by using another object with similar characteristics. The church is like a body because both are organisms with interlinking systems. As members of the Body of Christ, the life of God flows through us. We are inextricably united. If one believer in the Body doesn't do what he's supposed to do the body is affected. And when the Body of Christ malfunctions, that gives the world cause to see Christ as a cripple. The Body must be healthy and complete so that we come to "the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The church as Christ's Body must function as well as Christ in His incarnation. In a sense the church is "Body II"--"Body I" being the incarnate Christ.

b) The synonyms

Scripture uses other metaphors to describe the church. All metaphors used in the New Testament are used in the Old Testament, except for the body.

(1) Bride

(a) Used of Israel in Hosea 1:1; 3:5.

(b) Used of the church in Ephesians 5:22-33.

(2) Vine

(a) Used of Israel in Isaiah 5:1-7.

(b) Used of the church in John 15:1-8.

(3) Flock

(a) Used of Israel in Isaiah 40:11.

(b) Used of the church in John 10:1-16.

(4) Kingdom

(a) Used of Israel in Exodus 19:6.

(b) Used of the church in Colossians 1:13.

(5) Family

(a) Used of Israel in Hosea 1:10.

(b) Used of the church in Ephesians 2:19.

(6) Building

(a) Used of Israel in Ezekiel 9:9; 43:10.

(b) Used of the church in Ephesians 2:20-22 and 1 Peter 2:5.

c) The distinction

The metaphors of Israel and the church are synonymous except for the metaphor of the body. The body concept is a unique truth reserved for the church age. We are a Body through which Christ can manifest Himself to the world. That's why it's so important that we are all functioning properly within the Body by using the spiritual gifts He has given us (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-13). Only when we do so does Christ come to full stature in His church (Eph. 4:13).

The key to all the metaphors of the church is unity. We are one wife with one Husband, one flock with one Shepherd, one set of branches with one Vine, one kingdom with one King, one family with one Father, one building with one Foundation, and one body with one Head. But the Body is the most perfect illustration of how the church is to function, for it speaks of both diversity and mutual dependence.

LESSON

I. A DUAL SOURCE OF AUTHORITY (v. 1a)

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

A. Paul's Chronicles

1. Before conversion

Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5) and possibly named after the most prominent member of that tribe, Saul. He became a rabbi and sat at the feet of the great teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In

addition, some believe that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. In any case, he was one of the most devout anti-Christian leaders in Judaism (Acts 22:4-5). He passionately hated Christians and was on his way to arrest some of them in Damascus when the Lord stopped him suddenly, transforming him into a messenger of the gospel (Acts 9:1-15).

2. After conversion

Paul spent three years in Arabia and Damascus (Gal. 1:17-18), and then with Barnabas, Symeon, Lucius, and Manaen ministered in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). It was at Antioch that the Lord said to the leaders of the church: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3). That was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey to the Gentiles.

Was Ephesians Written Only to the Church in Ephesus?

The best manuscripts of this letter do not contain the words "at Ephesus" (1:1). Some manuscripts have a blank space instead. There is also no mention of anything local to Ephesus, such as references to individual people or local congregations. Most scholars believe the letter was meant to be circulated among all the churches of Asia Minor. That being the case, it was meant for each church to insert its own name in the blank. Some also believe that Paul's letter to the Laodicians (Col. 4:16) may have been the book of Ephesians, which would have gone to nearby Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Ephesus (cf. Rev. 2-3). The universal content of the letter suggests that it may have gone first to Ephesus and then to those other churches.

B. Paul's Credentials

1. His apostleship

Paul refers to himself as an apostle with a message from God (1:1). He was one of fourteen men who occupied the office of apostle. In the beginning Christ had twelve. Matthias became the thirteenth when he was added after Judas defected (Acts 1:15-26). Paul was the fourteenth.

The apostles were foundational to the church (2:20). Some of them, including Paul, were used by God to record Scripture (John 14:26; Acts 2:42; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). But once the church was established and the canon of Scripture was closed, there was no longer a need for the office of apostle.

Paul's credentials were simply that he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." That alone gave him the authority to command believers' attention.

2. His attitude

It was not vanity that caused Paul to call himself an apostle, for in 1 Corinthians 15:10 he says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." In his first epistle to Timothy he wrote, "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor.... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1:12-13, 15).

3. His authenticity

a) A unique calling--Paul was commissioned by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

b) A unique relationship to Christ--God transformed Paul into a bondslave of Christ. He no longer lived for himself. He said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

c) A unique power--As an apostle, Paul ministered in the power of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:11; 14:3; 19:11-12).

4. His approach

With the exception of Philippians, 1--2 Thessalonians, and Philemon, Paul began his epistles with an acknowledgment of his apostleship. One reason he did that was to defend his authority against those who degraded him because he wasn't one of the twelve original apostles. Yet Paul clearly met the requirements of an apostle, saying, "Am I not an apostle? ... Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1).

C. Paul's Commission

The apostles carried out specific functions.

1. They preached the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17).

2. They taught and prayed (Acts 6:4).

3. They performed miracles (2 Cor. 12:12).

4. They built leaders for the church (Acts 14:23).

5. They recorded God's Word (Eph. 1:1).

II. A DUAL DESIGNATION FOR BELIEVERS (v. 1b)

"To the saints who are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Believers are called "saints" and "the faithful" to emphasize the divine and human aspects of their lives. From the divine side, God made them to be holy. From the human side, man is responsible to exercise faith. Every Christian has been made holy by God, so all Christians are saints. Likewise every Christian's life should be characterized by faithfulness.

III. A DUAL BLESSING FOR BELIEVERS (v. 2a)

"Grace be to you, and peace."

The greeting Paul used was common among first century believers.

The term "grace" (Gk., charis) refers to unmerited favor. It is God's graciousness that leads Him to extend kindness to undeserving people. As a greeting then, charis has rich theological significance in contrast to our use of "hello," which merely communicates exclamation or surprise.

"Peace" (Gk., eirene) is the inevitable result of God's grace. We have peace because God has shown us His grace. Grace is the source of blessing while peace is the continued state of one who has been given grace by God.

IV. A DUAL SOURCE OF BLESSING (v. 2b)

"From God, our father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

The source of our abundant riches is God and Christ. It is Paul's desire that Christians understand God's grace and possess His peace. The book of Ephesians is the product of that desire.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why do people refer to Ephesians as the believers' bank?

2. What are three verses in Ephesians that emphasize God's riches?

3. List the various terms that are used to describe our abundant riches.

4. Explain why we have assurance that our spiritual riches are secure.

5. Explain why the church is referred to as a mystery.

6. What is a mystery in the biblical sense?

7. Describe God's pattern of revelation.

8. Why did Christ speak in parables (Matt. 13:10-11, 34-35)?

9. What does the Old Testament prophesy about the kingdom of God?

10. Whom was the original offer of the kingdom given to (Matt. 4:17)?

11. Why was the Messiah's earthly kingdom postponed?

12.In what sense can we say that Christ is reigning today?

13. How does Christ's present reign differ from His reign during the Millennium?

14. What is the definition of a metaphor?

15. What are the seven primary metaphors used to describe the church?

16. What is the one metaphor used for the church in the New Testament that is not found in the Old Testament?

17. Whom was the book of Ephesians written to? Explain.

18. Why did Paul frequently begin his epistles by stating that he was an apostle?

19. Name five duties carried out by Paul and other apostles.

20. What is the distinctive emphasis of the terms "saint" and "the faithful" (Eph. 1:1)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Look up the definition of malnutrition in a good dictionary. Given that, how would you define spiritual malnutrition? Ask some mature Christian friends how they prevent spiritual malnutrition in their walk with God. Then spend time in prayer asking God to show you areas of weakness in your own life. Once you identify those pockets of malnutrition, establish specific measures to correct them.

2. Why is the metaphor of the body so appropriate to the church? How is your own physical body affected when one of its parts doesn't function? How is the Body of Christ affected when individual believers aren't functioning? Read Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-31. Determine what your spiritual gifts are by examining what you and others think you do best. Are you exercising your gifts to build up the Body of Christ? If not, realize that your lack of participation is affecting the ministry of the Body in the world, and make plans to change that situation immediately.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).