

Studies

In

Ephesians

Lesson 03

Outline

Outline Of The Epistle.

It is of interest to survey the various commentaries on Ephesians and discover how the various writers understood Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Sinclair Ferguson wrote, "The Ephesians were marginalized in a pluralistic culture tolerant of many things but not of the Christian gospel or the church which proclaimed it. They needed to know that they were *secure* – Paul teaches them that they are *anchored in the eternal purposes of God*. They lived under the threat of *dark and sinister powers* – they needed to know that Christ has conquered *all His and their enemies*. They were surrounded by the influence of *the world, the flesh and the devil* – they needed to know that God *had raised them out of that spiritual death*. They were confronted on a daily basis with *Gentile paganism* – they needed to know that Christ had brought them into *the family of God*. They lived under the shadow of *a false temple and a false idol* – they needed to know that they were *the true temple of God*. They lived in an *ungodly society* – they needed to know how *the gospel would transform their lives*. They saw life in marriage, family and business *corrupted* by self-interest – they needed to know how grace could *transform* all relationships. They were under *attack* from the forces of darkness – they needed to know how they could *remain standing* in the battle.

Harry Uprichard said that the key to understanding Paul's letter to the Ephesians lies in the phrase "in the heavenlies" (literal translation). Within the context of Ephesians this phrase means "in the heavenly places" and it is so translated in several translations of the Bible. This phrase occurs five times in Ephesians (1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). **Uprichard** noted that "in the heavenly places" does not speak "of the sky or the afterlife so much as of the realm of reality, the location where the real spiritual forces are at work."

In Ephesians, Christ is the centerpiece of "the heavenlies". He is dominant there and his Lordship evidently supreme in that location. But in Ephesians Christ is the exalted Lord expressly for the benefit of His people, the church.

Uprichard concluded, "The upshot of all this is that Ephesians represents a letter of eulogy, prayer, exhortation and instruction where the enthroned and cosmic Christ is constantly seen as bestowing blessing after blessing on His people, the church."

Uprichard used this theme of "blessing" found in 1:3 to formulate his outline of the Epistle :

- 1). The opening salutation (1:1-2).
- 2). Blessing prepared : salvation (1:3-14).
- 3). Blessing anticipated : Paul's first prayer (1:15-23).
- 4). Blessing initiated : faith (2:1-10).

- 5). Blessing shared : the unity of the church (2:11-22).
- 6). Blessing announced : the gospel (3:1-13).
- 7). Blessing anticipated : Paul's second prayer (3:14-21).
- 8). Blessing shared : the growth of the church (4:1-16).
- 9). Blessing experienced : regeneration (4:17 – 5:21).
- 10). Blessing extended : Christian living (5:22 – 6:20).
- 11). The conclusion (6:21-24).

Richard Belcher holds the view that the problem Paul was facing and dealing with was the inability of men to grasp the one body concept of the church, that is, that Jew and Gentile believers – all saved people are in the same body, are in the one body of the church, are in the one body of Christ. So **Belcher** built his outline around the theme of the body of Christ.

Belcher's Outline.

- I). The Way into the One Body of Christ (1:3-23).
- II). The Equality in the One Body of Christ (2:1-22).
- III). The Mystery of the One Body of Christ (3:1-21).
- IV). The Equipping of the One Body of Christ (4:1-16).
- V). The Walk in the One Body of Christ (4:17 – 6:24).

Peter O'Brien noted that in Ephesians Paul emphasized the exaltation of Christ. **O'Brien** wrote, "the prominence given to Christ's exaltation is central to the writer's

intention of bringing home to his readers the significance of Christ's Lordship over the spirit-powers."

The church is a new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body of Christ. This church is the manifestation of God's richly diverse wisdom. (cf.3:10).

This church, as a new creation (2:11-22) has replaced Israel within God's purposes, and for Paul the significance of Israel lies in the past. Ephesians is addressed specifically to believing Gentiles, drawing a contrast between their pre-Christian past in relation to Israel's privileges and their present status in Christ. Paul wants to help his Gentiles readers appreciate the greatness of their salvation by setting it in the context of Israel's former privileges and their own spiritual deficiencies. They are "no longer strangers and aliens, but ... fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household." They have entered into the heritage of Israel, and have a place in God's saving history. Christ through His death has created a new humanity, *one new humanity*, and they have become members of this new community which transcends the division of Jew and Gentile.

O'Brien's outline is built around this concept of the one new humanity.

I). The New Humanity A Divine Creation. (1:3 – 3:21).

- A). Introductory Eulogy : Praise for God's blessings in Christ (1:3-14).
- B). Thanksgiving, Intercession, and Praise to God for Exalting Christ (1:15-23).
- C). Saved by Grace : Raised & Exalted with Christ (2:1-10).
- D). The Inclusion of Gentiles in One Body (2:11-22).
- E). The Divine Mystery & Paul's Stewardship (3:1-13).
- F). Paul's Intercession for Power, love & Spiritual Maturity (3:14-21).

II). The New Humanity In Earthly Life (4:1 – 6:20).

- A). Unity, Diversity & Maturity within the Body of Christ (4:1-16).
- B). Live according to the New Humanity, not the Old (4:17-24).
- C). Specific Exhortations about the Old Life and the New (4:25 – 5:2).
- D). From Darkness to Light (5:3-14).
- E). Be Careful How You Live (5:15 – 6:9).
- F). Spiritual Warfare (6:10-20).

John Stott subtitled his commentary : **God's New Society.** Stott added, "*The letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does*

through His Spirit today, in order to build His new society in the midst of the old.”

He divided the epistle under four major headings :

- 1). The new life which God has given us in Christ (1:3 – 2:10).
- 2). The new society which God has created through Christ (2:11 – 3:21).
- 3). The new standards which God expects of His new society, especially unity & purity. (4:1 – 5:21).
- 4). The new relationships into which God has brought us – harmony in the home and hostility to the devil (5:22 – 6:24).

There is no questioning the fact that these men have studied the Epistle to the Ephesians very carefully, grappled with the various issues Paul dealt with and came up with their conclusions and outlines. And if you were to follow their outlines in your study of Ephesians, you will come to a proper understanding of the Epistle.

I trust that you have seen the two basic emphases from the various writers :

- 1). The exaltation of Christ.
- 2). The church is God’s new humanity (society, body).

In our text, “**Opening up Ephesians**”, **Peter Jeffery** stated that Ephesians presents us with a worthy and exalted view of God. We have been chosen by God from eternity for salvation (1:4). God saved us (2:4). As Christians, we are God’s workmanship (2:10). God, through the gospel, established peace between man and Himself and broke down the ancient barriers that separate man from man (2:14). Because of what God has done, we are called to live a life worthy of our calling (4:1).

There is one other very important fact I must point out to you concerning Ephesians. The emphasis is that whatever God did on our behalf, He did in Christ or through Christ. In the New Testament Paul used the expression “in Christ” approximately **164** times. The expressions : in Christ, in Him, in Whom, in the Lord, and in the Beloved, appear in Ephesians **37** times. Out of these **37** appearances, **14** of them are to be found in **chap.1**. The expression, through Christ, appears three times.

Philip Hughes wrote, “The expression *in Christ* sums up as briefly and as profoundly as possible the inexhaustible significance of man’s redemption. It speaks of security in Him who has Himself borne in His own body the judgment of God against our sin; it speaks of acceptance in Him with whom alone God is well pleased; it speaks of assurance for the future in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life; it speaks of the inheritance of glory in Him who, as the only

