

The Book of Ephesians – Part One

Today we are going to begin a series of messages in which we will be doing something slightly different. We will be reading through the Book of Ephesians over the course of the next few months, spending time understanding the letter as a whole as well as the individual parts within it. Today we are going to be setting the historical context in which this letter to the Church at Ephesus was written.

1). But some foundation first. Let's begin at the end, if you will, to see some final words written to the Church at Ephesus—

Revelation 2:1-7

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent. 6 "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'"

- Revelation Chapter 2 begins with the Lord's judgment upon the church of Ephesus, which is the first of the seven churches 'which are in Asia.' This also forms the beginning of the judgment of all born again believers from this dispensation at Christ's Judgment Seat following the resurrection/rapture. The description of this event is seen in the first chapter of Revelation—

Revelation 1:12-16

12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

- The events at the Judgment Seat occur with a view to decisions and determinations being made with regards to Christians attaining positions of rulership with Christ as part of His Bride, being adopted as a firstborn son, receiving the salvation of the soul.
- And what is particularly fascinating about what is recorded in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 is that the Apostle John is transported through both time and space to the end of this dispensation into the Lord's Day in heaven. John is an eye witness of *future* events...events that will take place with regards to all Christians.
- However, having said that, we need to realize that what John records is not *something like* what will take place-- it is the very event itself. What we read is exactly the experience in which we will all one day participate –

Revelation 1:1-2

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

- John is not dreaming, nor is he witnessing a vision. He is literally present at an event in future time at which both you and I were present and will be present.

2). Not only does the Lord, in these two Chapters of Revelation, present to us the very details of our appearance at His Judgment Seat, He also, through the use of the 7 churches (seven being a number of completion, remember) presents to us the history of the church throughout the 2000 years (the 2 days) of this dispensation.

- He begins with the Church at the beginning of the dispensation – represented by the church in Ephesus, the first of the seven churches addressed – and concludes with the Church at the very end of the dispensation – represented by the church in Laodicea, the seventh of the seven church addressed.
- And what we see in these two churches are born again believers who left their 'first love' at the beginning of the dispensation, resulting in the born again believers alive at the end of the dispensation being almost totally nauseating to the Lord's sight because of their complete indifference to that 'first love.' Yet sadly, they are in complete ignorance of their deplorable situation –

Revelation 3:16-17

"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...

- Given the close proximity of the Lord's return for His Church, we would have to conclude that the Lord's words recorded here will be addressed to the greater majority of Christians alive on the earth at this present time. Even people that we may know and love – and God forbid, even us. We would do well to remember that what we read here in Revelation is not something we

shall witness as a detached observer, but as an active participant. We will hear the very voice of Christ speak these very words that John has recorded.

- We may thank God though that in every generation there is a remnant of believers who have remained faithful to their high calling –

Revelation 3:21-22

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""

3). And here in this final overcomers' promise – the seventh of seven in these two chapters – is another truly remarkable facet of what God has placed in these 2 Chapters of Revelation.

- Not only does the Lord give us the exact detail of what will take place at His Judgment Seat, and not only does He lay out for us the complete history of the Church during this dispensation, but He also makes absolutely plain what action needs to be taken by each individual Christian at any point within the dispensation to avoid the negative consequences spelt out in the judgment given.
- And this admonition for each individual Christian was then given to the Church through the pen of John at the very beginning of this dispensation for anyone with ears to hear.
 - In consequence, we can realize that we are completely without excuse to appear before the Lord as anything other than an overcomer.
- And yet the very recording of the literal judgment itself, detailed through John's pen, shows unequivocally that few from our generation (and most preceding generations) have taken any notice of what the Lord has said.
- Because of our lack of excuse, this must lay the blame for this squarely on our own shoulders and we can have nothing to say about the righteousness of the Judgment handed down –

Matthew 22:12

"So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless."

4). Now we could allow ourselves to wallow in doom and gloom here, but this would not be sensible. The scriptures have been given to us, the mysteries of the Kingdom have been opened to us and the admonition of the Lord has been made available to us, *not to provide a stick to beat us with at the Judgment Seat*, but to provide everything that is necessary for us to be victorious in the race of faith –

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39

nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

5). And so with all this in mind, we can realize that the Lord has left nothing missing from His revelation to us. He has done everything that it is necessary to do to provide the way for us to enter His Kingdom as a joint heir with Him.

- And so we are going to spend some weeks in the Book of Ephesians to see what we may learn from it to help prepare us for that coming day.

2 Peter 1:10-12

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 12 ¶ For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.

6). Let's begin to lay some background and foundation, against which we can read the Book of Ephesians within a fuller context.

- To go back to Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 for a moment, we will see that of the seven churches mentioned 'which are in Asia,' only Ephesus has a book of Scripture bearing its name. Although Paul's letters generally would be read amongst the churches within a specific area, the Lord has seen fit to draw our attention to Ephesus.
- And because this church is singled out to represent the experience of believers at the start of this dispensation, we might also see in it a parallel with any group of believers who begin the race of faith with a view to winning the prize.
- So then, what happened to the Ephesians can provide us with a poignant warning with regards to our own experience and what God has seen fit to say to us through the letter addressed to them. This Book of Ephesians, then, can provide the insight into what *we must do in order to overcome that which overcame them*. But of course, only if we will have ears to hear and the good sense to put into practice that which the word says –

James 1:21-24

21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24

for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

7). The city of Ephesus was a port city on the Mediterranean Sea in an area known as Asia Minor, located in modern day Turkey. This whole region of Asia Minor had received thorough teaching and was the recipient of not only Paul's letter to the Ephesians, but also the letters of 1 and 2 Peter –

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...

- Remember that the two letters from Peter deal exclusively with the salvation of the soul and the influence of false teachers.
- From this alone we would realize that we are dealing with a group of Christians who were well grounded in the word of the Kingdom, who had every opportunity to go on to maturity.
- And we might also note that God was not tardy in trying to get their attention and provide them with encouragement and warnings.

8). Paul also had a personal involvement with the Church in Ephesus, and we see it recorded in Acts Chapters 18 and 19. In Acts 18 we see that having come to Ephesus, Paul then leaves Priscilla and Aquila there to minister –

Acts 18:18-21

18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

- And it is while in Ephesus that Priscilla and Aquila meet Apollos, a powerful teacher of the Scriptures whom they took aside to teach 'the way of God more accurately.'
- Paul himself returned to Asia, and having his center in Ephesus, he spent some three years teaching the mysteries that had been entrusted to him –

Acts 19:8-10

8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this

continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

- Notice from verse 8 the subject of Paul's teaching, **'the kingdom of God.'**
- And note from verse 9 that 'all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks'.

9). In Acts 20 we find Paul again passing through Asia, and although he did not stop in Ephesus, he called the elders of the church to him while he was in Miletus to deliver what would be his last face to face admonition to them –

Acts 20:17-37

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 "serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 "except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. 26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. 28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. 32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" 36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

10). And just as the Holy Spirit had testified, Paul found himself in Jerusalem, in captivity because of the actions of a group of Jews coming from Asia. This eventually resulted in his imprisonment in

Rome from 60-62 AD. And during this confinement he writes the letter to the Church at Ephesus, what we know as the Book of Ephesians.

- Having been released from prison about 62 AD, Paul then began to travel once again, and it is while in Macedonia that he writes his first letter to Timothy –

1 Timothy 1:1-4

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, 2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. 3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

- And where do we find Timothy? In Ephesus. And where does Paul want him to stay? In Ephesus.
- And the reason Paul wants Timothy there is ‘to charge some that they teach no other doctrine’, nor be sidetracked by ‘fables and endless genealogies’.
- This would refer to any doctrine contrary to that which Paul had taught – a doctrine clearly defined by the scriptures themselves –

Romans 16:25-26

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—

2Thessalonians 2:13-14

13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:25-29

25 ... of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may

present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

- Paul's admonition to Timothy then, with respect to the Ephesians, is that he keep them focused on the 'mystery', the word of the Kingdom which he had taught. This would bring about the Godly edification which is in faith. And clearly the fact that 'some' had to be charged not to do something different means that a different gospel had already started to emerge.
- And this of course would be in complete accord with what the Lord had foretold in the sequence of parable in the Gospel of Matthew –

Matthew 13:33

Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

- And it is written about in one of Peter's letters-

2 Peter 2:1

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

- And it is talked about in the Book of Jude-

Jude 1:3

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

11). So what impact did the savage wolves not sparing the flock (those speaking perverse things, the false teachers) have against the background of Paul's ministry and Timothy's ministry and Peter's letters? Sadly, Scripture leaves no doubt –

2 Timothy 1:13-15

13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. 15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

- First is the admonition to Timothy, 'hold fast the pattern of sound words you have heard from me in faith...' (verse 13).
- And then in verse 15 the shocking statement – 'all those in Asia have turned away from me'.
- All those he warned night and day with tears for three years *left him*.
- And in the words recorded by Paul we can hear the heart of the Lord – an echo of an earlier rejection –

1Samuel 8:7

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

- There would of course be a remnant within Asia who had not succumbed to this. But so widespread was the rejection that it could be classified as 'all'.
- In what appears to be a relatively short space of time, those who had been taught and grounded in the faith had turned their back on their inheritance.
- How could this be, given what they knew? The answer can be found in the first warning in the Book of Hebrews –

Hebrews 2:1

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

- This was not instantaneous, but a drift over a number of years. It's the old story of boiling the frog.
- And please note – who is responsible for giving the more earnest heed? You are.
- And what we see here in 2 Timothy is in perfect keeping with the final warning in Hebrews, which has to do with complete disdain for the birthright (the rights of the firstborn) –

Hebrews 12:16-17

16... lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

- This is exactly the same thing we see in the final letter to the 'churches which are in Asia' in Revelation Chapter 3, where the church of Laodicea has become rich and wealthy and in need of nothing with regards to the things of this age. But in actuality, they are seen by the Lord Himself as wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked with respect to their birthright in the age to come. As Esau, the church at large has disregarded the birthright in favor of a present gratification.

- In the church of Ephesus we can see in microcosm the experience of Christianity at large, and the warning of the possible scenario for every group of Kingdom seeking Christians.
- Let us by no means think that we are exempt from this possibility. Only through the diligent practice of what scripture teaches, **by each one of us individually**, can we be assured of the final victory. It is within our grasp.

Numbers 13:30

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."