

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Ephesus was under Roman control in 129 B.C. A City of wealth and luxury between 1-4 AD and a center of travel and commerce, it was one of the greatest seaports of the ancient time. Temple of Artemis/Diana 425' x 220' x 60' high was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Paul was there around 52 – 54 AD. The Epistle to the Ephesians was written while Paul was in prison in Rome (around 62 AD). Luke recorded Paul's work in Ephesus in Acts 19. John the apostle referred to the Church in Ephesus in Revelation 2. According to Acts 19, this was the sequence of events:

- Paul came to Ephesus and found disciples and baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon the 12 men. They only had John the Baptist's baptism of repentance (Acts 19:1-7).
- Paul preached in the synagogue for 3 months, and then he went to the school of Tyrannus where he taught his 12 disciples for 2 years (Acts 19:8-11). God was authenticating Paul with extraordinary miracles, with healing of the sick and exorcism.
- When some Jewish exorcists tried to emulate Paul, they were overpowered by the evil spirits. Fear fell upon the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. The word of God was growing mightily and prevailing. By the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, lives changed, people were finding themselves capable of loving God and pleasing him instead of loving the world. There was a cultural upheaval as they turned from worshipping idols to worshipping God. (Acts 19:13-20).
- Idolatry in Ephesus was affected by the word of God. The trade in the temple of Diana (aka Artemis) was affected. The worship of the goddess was regarded as worthless by Paul's teaching of the Word. The converts to Christianity realized, confessed and disclosed their practices of magic and renounced and burned their books of magic. (Acts 19:23ff.) The tradesmen of the idols of the goddess caused a riot and were subsequently dismissed by the town clerk. Paul then departed from Ephesus.

WHAT HAPPENED IN EPHESUS?

- The Fullness of Time – Fulfillment of prophecy – The Incarnation – The New Covenant:

²⁴ "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you

a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ *"And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.* ²⁸ *"And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:24-28 About 622 BC.)*

"Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in my anger, in my wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. ³⁸ *"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God; ³⁹ and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them.* ⁴⁰ *"And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.* ⁴¹ *"And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul (Jeremiah 32:37-41 about 626 BC)*

⁵ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* ⁶ *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* ⁷ *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'* ⁸ *"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)*

¹⁷ *Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

The Christians in Ephesus:

- Were regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit
- Became a new creation enabled by the Holy Spirit to love and obey God.
- Were redeemed by the work of Christ
- Have a heavenly father who has taken their guilt away and given them righteousness through the active and passive obedience of Christ.
- Have an everlasting covenant with Christ
- Were blessed with every spiritual blessing
- Had been predestined to glorify God.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH ON PROVIDENCE

I. God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence,

according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

II. Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

III. God, in His ordinary providence, makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.

IV. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

V. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God does oftentimes leave, for a season, His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

VI. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, does blind and harden, from them He not only withholds His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God uses for the softening of others.

VII. As the providence of God does, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it takes care of His Church, and disposes all things to the good thereof.¹

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter V:1-7

BELIEF IN MAGIC AND IDOLATRY

“God is not at our service. To claim to penetrate His secrets, know his signs, and have his power at our beck and call is not faith, but magic.”²

- Eve was deceived by Satan and tempted by the promise of magic. (Genesis 3)
- The covenant between God and the nation Israel stipulated against idolatry and magic and occult activities (Deuteronomy 5:7-10, 18:9-15)
- The Canaanites’ magical practices are detestable to God and the Israelites were forbidden by God to imitate them. (Deuteronomy 18:9ff.)
- Gideon destroyed his father’s idols as commanded by God (Judges 6:25ff.)
- King Saul’s error of seeking magical victory through the medium at En-dor (1 Samuel 28).
- Warning to Solomon against idolatry and disobedience against covenantal stipulations which included magic and occult activities (1 Kings 9:2-9).
- Israel and Judah were exiled due to idolatry (The prophetic books).
- The Ephesians indulging in magic were taught by Paul and they repented, renounced and burned with fire the occult books (Acts 19)

God’s way of faith is in his omnipotent power of regeneration and his providence and not in magical spells and idolatry.

INDICATIVES AND IMPERATIVES IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

*⁷ In Him we have **redemption** through His blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him ¹¹ **also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** ¹² **to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:7-12)*

² Tournier, Paul, transl. by Edwin Hudson, *A Doctor’s Casebook in the Light of the Bible*. [London: SCM Press Ltd. 1969]. P. 87

DISCUSSION: HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.²⁸ Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:23-5:1)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;² and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

THE NEW CREATION

The time of the world has come to a conclusion with Christ's advent. Paul writes of the great change that has entered with the death and resurrection of Christ as follows:

¹⁷ Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2Co 5:17 NAS)

The "new creation" is not meant merely in an individual sense, but of the new world of the re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ, and in which everyone who is in Christ is included. The "old things" stand for the unredeemed world in its distress and sin, the "new things" for the time of salvation and the re-creation that have dawn with Christ's resurrection. He who is in Christ is a new creation, he participates in, belongs to, this new world of God.³ ". . . not merely individual, subjective conditions have been changed, but . . . there has been created a totally new environment, or, more accurately speaking: a totally new world, in which the person spoken of is an inhabitant and participator."⁴

³ Ridderbos, Herman, (Trans. John Richard De Witt), *Paul An Outline of His Theology*, [MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987], pp. 44-46

⁴ Vos, Geerhardus, *The Pauline Eschatology*, [NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1986], pp.46, 47.

THE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS

*⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast.** (Ephesians 2:4-9)*

Ezekiel chapter 37 recorded the revelation of God concerning this event. God gave a graphic vision of a valley full of bones that were in such great numbers that the prophet had to walk around them in order to view them all. The LORD revealed his almighty power in having Ezekiel command the dry bones to become live human beings with well-formed bodies. Then the Holy Spirit came into these bodies to bring forth a resurrection power. This was a symbolic prophecy of the national re-creation of God's new covenant people. This people mourning in exile will be brought back to their land. It is also the imagery of the resurrection of the spiritual Israel made alive through the death and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God.

God will initiate this coming to life with his mercy and love, just as he fought, delivered and redeemed a people from oppression in Egypt. It was God's plan of salvation realized through his sovereignty and fulfilled in history. The prophets saw this great day coming. Jeremiah wrote of God's everlasting love, his drawing a people (Israelites and Gentiles) to him with cords of covenantal lovingkindness ("*hesed*") (Jeremiah 31:3 ff.). Isaiah also prophesied of this new life. This redeeming love already began before time by virtue of his eternal foreknowledge. He would recreate a people and make them loveable. He gave himself in Christ Jesus, his only begotten Son, who is the reflection of his glory and the express image of his substance to render this salvation possible. He makes a covenant of grace with them to protect them and to provide for them. His death paid the penalty for sins, his righteousness merited their righteousness. His regenerating power enabled their gratitude and provided their godliness.

God paid the penalty and covered Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:20-21). God showed Zechariah the heavenly reality of Joshua's standing with God and how God has saved him from Satan's accusations and power because of his Servant the Branch.

*³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel.
⁴ And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, **I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.**" ⁵ Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with*

garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by. ⁶ *And the angel of the LORD admonished Joshua saying,* ⁷ *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If you will walk in my ways, and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among these who are standing here.* ⁸ *'Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you - indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. (Zechariah 3:3-8)*

3 KINDS OF DEATH

- Temporal – the body is cut off from the source of its life, that is, the soul and it slowly dissolves, there is no longer a living, animating principle that keeps it together; it returns to dust, from which it was taken.
- Spiritual – The soul is cut off from the fountainhead of its life, the living God, and accordingly, it dies, is completely torn from its context loses its unity, perishes.
- Eternal – Total separation of both body and soul, when these will one day be reunited, from the fellowship of God. In the outermost darkness, where no ray of divine light any longer penetrates, this alienation from God reaches its zenith and its most dreadful revelation.

Sin is nothing other than renouncing, abandoning God's fellowship, turning away from him and choosing one's own way. We also find all these characteristics in spiritual death. Here the same thing happens to the soul that we just saw taking place with the body. As soon as God takes away his Holy Spirit and withdraws his fellowship, the soul becomes insensible and hardened, spiritual numbness overpowers it. Where life is present, you will notice how it courses through all the parts of the body: it beats in the heart, throbs in the pulse, hovers in the breath, gleams in the eye, and makes itself known by numberless marks. All this is missing in a dead person. Likewise, in a spiritually dead person one searches in vain for the heart throb of faith, the pulse beat of prayer, the breath of love, the look of sympathy—for any expression of a hidden, inward life. The person dead in transgressions is a person, just as a dead body is a body, and yet, when you yourself possess spiritual life, you will feel the distance between yourself and that person, in the same way as living persons naturally recoil from the dead. You miss the image of God in their features, just as the image of the soul is missing in the face of the deceased. And just as death often leaves its stamp on the pallid countenance in misshapen and distorted lines, so the spiritual death of sin puts its horrible marks upon the destroyed soul.⁵

⁵ A translation of *De Geestelijke Opstanding der Geloovigen. Leerrede Over Ephese II: 4, 5* [Grand Rapids: J.C. Melis, Drukker, n.d.] [K: NWTS 5/1 (May 1990) 3-21]

PAUL'S IMPERATIVES TO THE CHRISTIANS IN EPHESUS

Paul provided the indicatives of the Christian life. The Christian is one who is a new creation living in the new aeon. He is a citizen of heaven (Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) as well as a citizen of earth.

*. . .you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and **put on (ἐνδύω = put on, clothe, dress, enter) the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.²⁸ Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:22-32, cf. Matthew 5 :)⁶*

⁶ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/sermon-on-the-mount/life-in-the-kingdom/>? Or Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, Sermon on the Mount. (Amazon Prime)

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