

New Testament Survey

Class 15: Ephesians

Date and authorship:

The apostle Paul, c.62 AD (assuming the imprisonment referred to in 3:1; 4:1; and 6:20 is his Roman imprisonment)

Questions and answers about Paul's authorship:

"Pauline authorship of Ephesians was universally accepted until modern times."¹ However, two objections are often raised today:

1. "the style and thought [aren't] characteristically Pauline"
2. "the author... does not seem to be familiar with the letter's recipients (see 1:15; 3:2; 4:21)"

Regarding the first objection:

1. "Analyses of an author's style are often subjectively based on incomplete evidence." In other words, it begs the question to first decide what Paul's style can and cannot include, and then rule out evidence that doesn't fit the preconceived conclusion.
2. "The role of secretaries in the composition of ancient letters should be given greater consideration." (e.g., Rom 16:22 + 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; Philem 1:19)

Regarding the second objection:

1. It had been more than 5 years since Paul left Ephesus (55 AD).
2. "Ephesus controlled a large network of outlying villages and rural areas up to 30 miles from the city."
3. "Paul's preaching during his stay at Ephesus had radiated out to 'all the residents of Asia' " (see Acts 19:10).
4. Thus, it is not surprising that Paul was not personally acquainted with all of the believers at Ephesus. Additionally, any personal greetings from Paul could be transmitted by Tychicus (6:21-22).

NOTE: No class for the next two Sundays (12/24 and 12/31)

17-Dec-23	Ephesians
24-Dec-23	----- NO CLASS -----
31-Dec-23	----- NO CLASS -----
7-Jan-24	Philippians
14-Jan-24	Colossians
21-Jan-24	1 Thessalonians
28-Jan-24	2 Thessalonians
4-Feb-24	Intro to the Pastoral Epistles
11-Feb-24	1 Timothy
18-Feb-24	2 Timothy
25-Feb-24	Titus

¹ All quotations in this handout are from the *ESV Study Bible*, "Introduction to Ephesians."

Further considerations increasingly erode objections to Pauline authorship:

1. “the letter explicitly claims to be Paul’s (1:1; 3:1)”
2. “The early church—which rejected other spurious letters—unanimously accepted this letter to Ephesus as being written by Paul, and this was a city with a reputation for discernment regarding false apostolic claims (Rev. 2:2).”
3. “letters in antiquity were usually transmitted through a person known by both author and recipient,” in this case, Tychicus (6:21-22), “who would have guaranteed the original copy’s genuineness.”
4. “Finally, it would be extraordinarily odd for someone to write so forcefully that his readers should ‘speak the truth’ and ‘put away falsehood’ (4:15, 25) in a letter he was deceptively forging!”

Occasion of the Letter

- No apparent crisis, but multiple emphases: Praise to God (1:3, etc.), exhortation to unity (2:11ff; 4:1-6, etc.), encouragement to the church (3:13), instructions about living like Christians (4:1, 17, etc.)

Outline:

Praise to God for his gracious redemption through Christ (1:3-2:10)

- Praise: “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3)
- Predestination: “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (1:4-6 mirrors 1:11-12)
- Plan of redemption (2:1-10)

The cross of Christ creates a church whose unity runs deeper than ethnic divisions (2:11-3:21)

- From alienation and estrangement to peace and intimacy (2:12-13)
- Images:
 - Dividing wall of hostility removed (2:14)
 - Two opposed men becoming one whole person (2:15)
 - Reconciliation to God (2:16)
 - Fellow citizens and members of same house (2:19)
 - A temple where God dwells (2:20-22)
- The unified Jewish and Gentile church is the display of God’s wisdom to spiritual powers (3:10)

Explanation of the nature of the church (4:1-6:20)

- Call to unity (4:1-6)
- A new perspective on the organization of the church (4:7-16, cf. Mark 10:43-44)
- The life of God in us: renewal in thought and action (4:17-5:21)
- Specific guidelines based on personal vocation (5:22-6:9)
 - A “household code”?
- A concern with the spiritual realm (6:10-20, cf. Acts 19:11-20)