

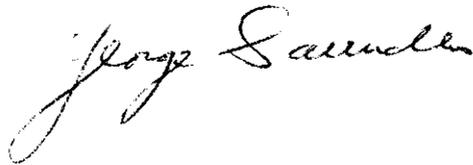
Ministry Packet

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Saunders". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the printed name of the thesis advisor.

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Abstract

The Bible itself tells its readers to communicate its message to others. Although this task is done by lay people, it is the primary task of a person going into ministry. A minister will have to be prepared to deliver sermons and conduct Bible Studies. Sermons are the traditional way for a minister to teach a congregation a truth from a Biblical text. Bible Studies have become increasingly popular as a way for a smaller, more intimate group of people to gather together and learn a Biblical truth for themselves.

In this paper, I focus on two passages from the New Testament book of Ephesians and give a sermon and a Bible study for each passage. I also analyze the organization and theology of both Sermons and Bible Studies. In addition, there has been given a brief background of the city of Ephesus and to the study of scripture.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. George Saunders for assisting me and guiding me with this thesis project.

Artist's Statement

The profession of ministry is one that combines serious academic study with artistic and creative thought. The study of scripture is a discipline that takes many years to learn in order to gain a deep understanding of the theology and the meaning of the texts. But the study of scripture is only one aspect of the ministry field.

Ministry also requires a person to use his or her education in order to make life-changing applications to those that he or she ministers to. It is here that the minister takes on a creative role in developing and designing new ways to teach an idea with the use of stories, testimonies, dramas and songs. The minister's job is to take truth that he or she has learned in the scriptures, and have his or her listeners apply the truths to their own lives.

A minister's effectiveness lies in these two areas. Without the academic study and education, no truth can be revealed. Without creativeness and application, life-change in the listeners can not be accomplished.

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Introduction to Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

The letter to the church in Ephesus has been called the crown of Paul's writing, but has often been overshadowed by Paul's larger letters. Within six short chapters, Ephesians contains a message of God's complete plan and love for his church. Ephesians has been called "the quintessence of Paulinism," "the divinest composition of man" and even "the Waterloo of commentators" (Guzik, 1996). According to Marcus Barth, the letter is "written in an often painfully ponderous style... [it] conveys weighty doctrines, warm exhortations and, above all, an urgent invitation to praise God" (Barth, 1974, p.3). Anyone who wants to be informed about the Christian faith needs to be familiar with the themes of this "Queen of Epistles."

Authorship: Paul or not Paul

Paul's authorship of Ephesians has been questioned. While there are numerous authors that argue against Pauline authorship, this author follows the traditional view that the letter of Ephesians is written by Paul. For more information on these issues, refer to Barth's *Anchor Bible Commentaries* (Barth, 1974) as well as the commentaries of Caird (p.11-29) and Foulkes (p.19-49).

When Written

Ephesians was written sometime during Paul's imprisonment around 61-62 A.D. as indicated in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 1. According to the *New Bible Commentary*, Paul used the opportunity of returning a run-away slave, Onesimus, to his slave owner Philemon to send letters to the Asia Minor province. Paul sent Tychicus to Philemon with his letter and a letter to the church in Colosse and Ephesus since Tychicus would have passed through these regions (Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7-9).

Audience

The audience to whom Paul wrote this letter is in debate. The earliest manuscripts of this letter leave out the “saints in Ephesus” in verse 1. It may have been added later by editors. It also lacks the personal greetings that accompany Paul’s other writings. It has been assumed, therefore, that this was a letter that was not written specifically for the church in Ephesus, but was rather meant to be shared with the whole providence of Asia Minor. This is also seen by Paul’s lack of addressing specific problems in the church as he does in other letters.

The specific church in Ephesus, however, is believed by most scholars to be one of the intended receivers of this letter¹, so it would be useful to take a look at the church specifically. The church in Ephesus was relatively new at the time. The church came out of a chaotic time for Ephesus. The creation of this church caused a great divide that everyone felt in the city as can be seen in Acts 19. Like most of the churches in the Asia Minor providence, it was composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. This was the cause of one of the major themes in the letter, that of racial reconciliation through Christ.

This idea of Jews and Gentiles worshipping together was entirely alien to the people of the first century. The Jews considered themselves the chosen people of God. Similarly, the Gentiles felt that the Jews looked down upon by them. However, Christianity included Jews and Gentiles within the same church. The table below lists some of the basic differences between Jews and Gentiles.

¹For more information, see C. E. Arnold’s article in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Arnold, 2000, p.245-246)

Jews	Gentiles
Monotheists	Polytheists or Secularists
A long history defined by Yahweh	No shared heritage
Kosher laws	No food regulations
Sabbath as inviolable	No sacred day
Weekly synagogue tradition	Occasional religious feast days
Strict sexual ethics	Few sexual taboos
Strong corporate identity	Part of the Roman empire
Mainly traders and merchants	Slaves, some wealthy civic leaders
Prohibition on the occult	Avid practitioners of Magic

Main Themes

While Paul does not address any particular problem in the church, he does write a theologically filled letter. This letter is wrapped around the central theme of reconciliation under Christ. Paul first addresses reconciliation and gives no doubt that through Christ all reconciliation is possible in order to bring all peoples together in worship. Paul then addresses and challenges the people to live out this reconciliation and to fulfill the idea of the church being unified under Christ's leadership. Paul also encourages the Ephesians to Christian lives and to abandon their old sinful ways.

Outline of Ephesians

1:1 - 2 Address and Salutation

1:3 - 3:21 Paul Giving thanks and Praying

1:3 - 14 Thanks and Praise to God for his eternal purpose

1:15 - 23 Paul's Life of Prayer

2:1 - 10 Christ's Great Grace

2:11 - 22 Gentiles and Jews become One

3:1 - 21 Paul a Prisoner and Preacher

4:1 - 6:20 Living out reconciliation and unity in Christ

4:1 - 16 Unity of Believers found in Christ

4:17 - 5:20 Christ bringing about a Changed Life

5:21 - 6:9 Call to Submission out of reverence for Christ

6:10 - 20 Fighting the Spiritual Battle

6:21 - 24 Final Greetings

Hermeneutics & Interpretation

Introduction

The traditional definition of hermeneutics is “the science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author’s meaning” (Osborne, 1991, p.5). However many argue today for a broader definition of hermeneutics to include the author’s original intent and the significance that it places on our lives. This later definition appeals to the author since people of faith read the text for more than increasing their knowledge of what is written in the Bible. They are to also read the Bible and interpret the message that it holds for them today. By allowing scripture, and therefore ultimately God through the scriptures, to change who we are, is to allow the reader to gain a closer relationship with God. This is the challenge of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, as defined by the *New Bible Dictionary*, is “the study and statement of the principles on which a text is to be understood” and “the interpretation of the text in such a way that its message comes home to the reader or hearer” (Bruce, 1999, p.467).

3 Levels of Hermeneutics

Grant Osborne, a professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, describes three levels to Hermeneutics: What the text meant (exegesis), what the text means to me (devotional), and what the text means to a contemporary congregation (sermonic) (Osborne, 1991, p.5). It is the goal of the minister to practice hermeneutics on all three levels.

Exegetical Interpretation - What the Scripture Meant

The first level of hermeneutics is exegetical interpretation. Gordon Fee, a professor of New Testament at Regent College, defines exegesis as “the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning” (Fee and Stuart, 1981, p.19). Without the understanding of the text at the time that it was written, one runs the risk of missing the intended meaning and application for us today.

This process can be quite difficult due to the time that has passed and cultural differences that separate us from the original authors of the text. Therefore, finding the historical context (the time and cultural in which it was written) and the literary context (putting each sentence into the context of the whole Bible) proves to be a very difficult task. Many Biblical scholars over the years have made this process their life’s work. We are able to reap the benefits of their findings in references such as Bible commentaries and dictionaries.

Devotional Interpretation - What it Means for Me

The second level of hermeneutics is devotional interpretation. Devotional reading of the Bible helps the scripture to become life-changing for the reader. Devotional interpretation applies the truths in the Bible to our daily lives. Through devotional interpretation, we understand the scriptures in order to have a deeper relationship with God.

Devotional interpretation of the Bible applies the truths discovered through exegesis to oneself. As you can see, if one misses the original meaning through bad exegesis, then the application of the truth is impossible.

Careful exegesis is essential to devotional interpretation. Without exegesis, it is easy to skew the interpretation of the text and make it say what you want it to instead of what the author intended it to mean.

Sermonic Interpretation - How to Share

The third level of hermeneutics is sermonic interpretation. The Bible gives explicit instructions to us to communicate its message to others (Matt 28:19-20). Scripture can change the lives of those who hear it preached (Rom. 10:14-15). This is the ultimate goal for a person in ministry: to speak God's truth so that it changes others.

This paper includes two practical ways in which a minister is able to perform this task of hermeneutics through sermons and Bible studies.

Sermons

Introduction to Sermons

What is a Sermon

The academic definition of a sermon is a “religious discourse delivered in public usually by a clergyman as a part of a worship service” (Meriam-Webster, 2004). In this sense, preaching, or the act of giving a sermon, is nothing more than giving a speech during a religious ceremony. As people of faith, however, we are not satisfied with such a simple definition.

Preaching involves much more than simply preparing a speech. It involves careful study of scripture, interpretation of the text through hermeneutics and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and “the living Word touching the living situation” (Fant, 1975, p.107).

Role of the Holy Spirit as Illuminator

One of the components of scriptural interpretation is the illumination of the Holy Spirit. John MacArthur, president of the Master's Seminary and Pastor-Teacher at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, defines illumination as “the work of the Holy Spirit that opens one's spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God” (MacArthur, 1992, p.103). MacArthur states firmly that the proper understanding and interpreting Scripture, and therefore correct preaching, is

impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit (MacArthur, 1992, p.102).

Style of the Sermon

A sermon's content depends on the type of sermon employed. According to Richard Mayhue, the Executive Vice President of the Master's College and Seminary in the Los Angeles, California area, there are three types of sermons: topical, textual and expository. Mayhue criticizes topical and textual sermons: "Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as a gateway into whatever subject the preacher chooses to address. Neither the topical nor the textual method represents a serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God's truth in the context of the Scripture(s) used" (Mayhue, 1992, p.9).

A good way to avoid the possibility of misinterpreting scripture is to practice the art of hermeneutics, as described above, utilizing the expository sermon style. For this reason, this author has decided to use exposition as the form of the sermons in this paper.

Sermonic Process

The process of creating an expository sermon should follow the same procedures as stated above in relation to hermeneutics. Grant Osbourne states that the sermonic process "is a continual bridging enterprise in which the preacher helps the audience to relive the drama and spiritual power of the text for its original audience and then to understand how that original message relates to similar situations in their own lives" (Osborne, 1991, p.339).

It can not be over stated the importance of the basis of the sermon coming from a good hermeneutical practice and humble reliance on the Holy Spirit to interpret the meaning of the text. Only then can the preacher hope that he or she is truly proclaiming the written word of God with accuracy and with life-changing power.

Sermon 1: Destroying the Walls

Pretend that you are in a church where someone that you hate just walked in. This is not just a petty dislike for someone like “I don’t like those people because they live on the other side of town.” No, this is true hatred. You were taught to despise this kind of person since you were a little child. In fact, your whole identity is founded on you and your family loathing these people for generations. But now, they have come into your church.

This situation is the same situation that the church in Ephesus faced a couple thousand years ago shortly after Christ’s ascension into heaven.

We have come to a section in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians where Paul writes about a specific and difficult topic. Today we will be reading Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11 through 22 where Paul tackles the issue of a church divided by racism.

Today we will look at two things that Paul has to say about a church that is divided by racism. We will see that Christ destroyed the racism barrier and established a new body of followers.

The history of mankind is one that is riddled with divisions. Men have always found a way to divide themselves from other men because of differences. Mankind’s nature is to feel more comfortable with those who are like them, either in thought, race or behavior. At the same time, people automatically tend to think that because someone

is different from them, they are inferior. In the United States this predominately takes the form of racial division.

The history of racial division is not a new topic. What it means to be a person of a different race has plagued mankind for thousands of years. Man has struggled with the ideas of racial equality and racial supremacy. This passage in Ephesians speaks to this issue and what Christ did to bring all men together under one ruler, Christ.

Paul writes about how the once foreign Gentiles are to have equal rights and equal inheritance of the kingdom of God with the Jewish Christians. Lets read what he has to say from the New International Version of the Bible:

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) - ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

I know what you are saying “What does that mean?” “Who are those people?” “How does that affect me?”

I think that in order to understand what Paul is saying, a history lesson is needed on the background of these two people groups.

Thousands of years ago, God pulled Abram aside and made a covenant with him that promised to make a nation out of his descendants. These descendants of Abram would become known as the nation of Israel. The people of Israel also came to be known as the Jews after Jacob’s son Judah. God called the nation of Israel to be his

people who would bless all nations. As a sign of this covenant, the men of Israel were required to go through circumcision as a sign of who they belonged to. The people of Israel alone had the right to a relationship with God. Even in worship, foreigners could not enter the temple and were not able to worship with the Israelite people.

All other people who were not a part of the nation of Israel were called Gentiles by the Jews. Because the Gentiles did not belong to the Israelite nation, they did not practice circumcision and so were called “the uncircumcised.” They were looked down upon by the Jews and were thought to be inferior. As the scripture states, they were not part of God’s chosen people and were not a part of the covenants and promises that God had made. Without access to these covenants and to the true God, they were, as Paul put it in verse 12, “without hope” in the world.

This was the attitude of the Jewish people at the time of this letter. As you can imagine there was a hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews viewed themselves as the chosen people and the Gentiles were seen as inferior.

Something should also be mentioned about the type of town Ephesus was.

Ephesus was a major city located in Asia Minor (an area we know as Turkey today) that Paul visited and stayed for eighteen months. There were both Jews and Gentiles living there. While both groups learned how to co-exist, they were far from reaching equality. When Paul established a church there, it was not only for the Jewish inhabitants. The church quickly filled with Jews and Gentiles alike, for the gospel of Jesus proclaimed that all of mankind could approach God with confidence and not just the Jews anymore. Christ indeed died for more people than just the Jews.

Now imagine a Jewish person in this early church. Paul comes in to the scene. This Jew has become a Christian and learned to follow Christ. But, unlike all Jewish traditions that he grew up with the Gentile people were being allowed to worship

alongside of him.

Paul taught something that went against everything that the Jewish people have ever been taught about the unclean foreigners: Gentiles can inherit eternal life with God just like Jews. Gentiles were not even allowed to have a relationship with God. Now they were allowed to fellowship on equal terms with the Jewish people because of what Christ accomplished in his death! This must have thrilled the Gentiles and upset the Jews at the same time.

Remember the way you felt when I had you imagine that you were in a church with people you hated? Well these people, both the Jews and the Gentiles, actually did face that problem. They have been trained to hate one another.

What exactly did Jesus do for these Gentiles, and for us today?

The first thing that Paul tells us about a church that is divided by racism is that Jesus, through the cross, destroyed the barrier.

Lets read on to see how Paul describes what Christ did for the Gentiles:

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Jesus died on the cross for all nations of the world, not just the select Jews. Jesus not only reconciled our relationship with the perfect God, but also reconciled our relationships with each other. There is no longer a select and chosen group of people who alone get the benefit of God. Christ opened the doors for all to come near him.

Paul uses excellent imagery here to show this idea. Paul states that the Gentiles were “far away” from God. Paul states that Jesus “destroyed the barrier” that separated mankind. Jesus removed the “dividing wall” of hostility.

Do you remember the Berlin wall? The Berlin wall was a giant twelve foot wall that divided the city of Berlin in two. The people in West Berlin were separated from the people of East Berlin by a wall that they had built.

In 1989, after the Cold War era, the Berlin wall came down and once again the people of Berlin were united as one city. For the first time in many years, they were together again and nothing was separating them anymore.

In the very same way, Christ destroyed the racial wall that separates us from each other. Just like the people of Berlin, we are no longer separated from each other. Paul tells us that Jesus’ death destroyed this wall and allowed all of mankind to have equal standing with God. Furthermore, Christ’s love is more powerful than any barrier that can come between us.

Maybe this would help give a picture. Professional baseball in the United States is divided up into several leagues. They range from Minor League to Major League. As a player gets better, he gets moved up higher until he reaches the Major Leagues.

Using this analogy, let me describe the situation in reference to God before Christ’s death. The Jews would be the Major League players. They are the top people. They are the chosen people. Only they were allowed to have the most prestigious rights

and opportunities. All other people, the Gentiles, would make up the Minor League players. They were allowed to know about God, but with very limited access.

Then suddenly Christ came into the picture. In effect, what he did was to abolish the league system and bring the Minor League players to the Major League. He gave to all people equal rights and equal opportunity to come to God the Father.

This is not enough to satisfy Paul, however. Paul goes further than just stating that Jesus put them in the same League, he states that we need each other on the same team. Not only were the Gentiles brought up to the Jews' level, they now had to rely on one another.

The second thing that Paul tells us about a church that is divided by racism is that Jesus, through the cross, established the body.

Look again at what he writes in verse 15:

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross

Through the power of Christ's death on the cross, there was no longer a distinction between Gentiles and Jews, they were just God's people; two people groups becoming one with the power of Christ. Christ established a unified body.

The Jewish and Gentile inhabitants of this town would have been extremely shocked and extremely confused at what to do next. How were they to relate to one another? How were they supposed to chose leadership? It is of no wonder that this is an issue that Paul ends up writing about to this church. This started a long and worthy cause in which the new church had to find out what it meant for them to all worship

together. It is a problem that is seen in the book of Acts and continues all the way to today where we struggle with the same ideas as they did.

Now I know what you are thinking, “wait just a second, our church doesn’t have problems with Jews and Gentiles today!” And you know what, you are right. This scripture may have been written to deal with these particular people groups, but the truths taught here by Paul are applicable to today’s current situation. What situation is that? Racial diversity in the church.

Racial conflict has been seen in the United States ever since the creation of this country. The history of racial conflict is very much a part of what this country has become. But don’t we have all that behind us now? Haven’t we made laws to fix discrimination. Haven’t we abolished slavery? Haven’t we done everything that we were supposed to do? And the answer is definitely a “yes” we have taken huge strides as a nation and as a church to abolish prejudices and to create equality, but as a church, we still have a way to go.

In the book *Divided by Faith* there is an alarming claim that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America (Emerson and Smith, 2000). As a church, we are more segregated than ever! But isn’t this okay? Don’t people worship in different styles and we should just let people worship in whatever style they feel the most comfortable? While this kind of thinking may be true, we may be risking missing out on our true identity as God’s children. Paul claims that with and only with all people together, we may find our true identity. But more than that, as we are about to see, we need each other as much as we need God!

Let’s continue in verse 19:

¹⁹Consequently, you [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but

fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul describes the people of God using the imagery of a temple. Look at what he says; he states that the foundation is composed of the apostles and prophets and the teaching that they have provided through the scriptures and Christ as the cornerstone or the piece that supports all the weight. He goes on to state that the building is built together by the Jews and Gentiles both to become a dwelling place in God. The temple would not be complete if it were just one people group. The temple can only be complete with all nations and all peoples as one body.

Imagine trying to build a house without all of the materials. You have laid a great foundation that is firm and strong. But when you start to build the walls, you notice that only half of the needed materials are there. The further you build, the more unstable it becomes. Even with the greatest foundation, the building will not stay together if there are not any walls to support the top!

Paul is saying that the Jews and the Gentiles need each other in order to be a complete church. Without the cooperation and the combination of the two groups, the church would not stand.

So what does this mean to us? I hope you can see the huge ramifications this had on the Jews and Gentiles of the early church and how earth shattering it was. But what about today?

We have seen that, through the cross, Jesus destroyed the barrier of racism and established the body and united the body.

Take a look back through the text and the words that Paul uses. The racism barrier pushes people “far away”; the body of Christ “brings near”. The barrier brings “hostility”; the body brings “peace”. The barrier creates “aliens”; the body creates “fellow citizens”. We are called to no longer be separated but rather to be unified.

Paul talks about how Christ “destroyed the barrier.” As Christians we should not be satisfied as long as there is any type of man-made wall dividing us. Christ already came and destroyed the walls that separated us as people. We should be careful, therefore, that we do not build walls in our own lives, but rather help to destroy the barriers we put in our lives.

So I ask you, are you today building walls, or destroying walls between you and other people though they be of a different race than you? Do you look upon people of other races and realize the value that they bring to the larger body of Christ?

Christ is calling all of us to come together as his his people to worship God. Imagine the effect on the world if we did come together and unite as we are called to do. Only with Christ is this possible, no other system, government, religion or idea has this much power, to bring together all peoples. How are you helping in this effort.

Will you pray with me:

Father in heaven. In your wonderful image you have created all of mankind, and in your glory you have made us different with our own ideas, thoughts, and appearances. We, as a people, have sinned against you by dividing ourselves off from one another. We have shunned people who are different from us and isolated ourselves from becoming who we

are truly meant to be.

Lord we thank you for this scripture and the truth that it contains. We thank you for the model of reconciliation that is described in the early church. And we thank you for leading us and guiding us in our walk with you.

We know that you died not just for people like us, but for all races of man. And we know that you are calling us to be one people. We also know that anything is possible with you. Lord, give us the strength to fight against racism in our lives and in our churches.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sermon 2: It's all about Attitude

Have you ever watched a pilot fly a plane? The pilot has many sophisticated instruments and displays to help him get to where he needs to go safely. One such instrument is the attitude indicator. It shows the planes orientation relative to the horizon.

It is very important that the pilot know the attitude of his plane at all times. The attitude determines where the plane will go. Wherever the attitude points to, the plane will follow.

An aircraft's attitude is not all that different than the attitude of our mind. Our own attitude directs us in our life. Our attitude ultimately determines our actions. It is our attitude that Paul is addressing in the passage we will look at today.

In our study of the book of Ephesians, we now come upon chapter 4 verses 17 through 24 where Paul urges the Christians in Ephesus to have Christlike attitudes in a society that holds a worldly attitude.

Today we will look at the instruction that Paul gives about our attitudes. Paul instructs us to put off the world's attitude and put on a Christlike attitude.

Before we take a look at this, a little background material will clarify a few points.

The book of Ephesians addresses a church in one of the more famous cities of the early Christianity. We are able to find out much information about the city of Ephesus itself from numbers of outside resources and from other portions of the Bible. Both the book of Acts and Revelations give us a picture of Ephesus. We know that Ephesus was a church in the providence of Asia Minor where Paul spent eighteen months teaching and preaching as recorded in the Acts 19. We also know that Ephesus was known for its Pagan roots and was made famous by a stone statue of the goddess Diana that was to believe to have fallen from the heavens and which people worshiped.

Being a church in the Providence of Asia, it was composed of both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. This of course brought about much debate and conflict about how these two distinct groups of people who are thrown into the same church worshipping together which was a completely revolutionary idea. This idea and the conflicts that arose are the exact issues that were dealt with in Ephesians chapter 2.

This church, with the combination of a worshipping group made up of Gentiles and Jews and the sinful conditions of those that occupy the city, would definitely have caused its members to seek guidance and assistance on their attitudes. This is exactly what Paul is addressing in this passage.

Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17 through 24 read as follows:

¹⁷So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

The first thing that Paul instructs us is put off the world's attitude for their thinking is futile.

What does Paul mean by futile thinking of non-Christians?

Paul is not stating that non-Christians are dumb. Mankind has come a long way in the understanding of the natural world. Physics and mathematics have taken gigantic strides in the last hundred years to give us a better understanding of the universe. Non-Christians are certainly able to reason and understand detailed concepts. They are sometimes better at it than Christians are!

So what does Paul mean by a “darkened understanding” and “futile thinking”? The wisdom that Paul is referring to is the reality of the divine and spiritual world in which we live. Simply put, it means that the world does not understand God's ways. Their attitude is one that goes against God's ways. To the world who does not know Christ, the things that Christians do are ridiculous! Without the Holy Spirit guiding and directing their heart, they do not know true right and wrong.

Even the most mundane Christian actions make no sense to the world. Going to church every Sunday...I would rather sleep in or watch TV! Giving ten percent of our income...that is a lot of money that I earned! Spending time in prayer and scripture study...that is just a waste of time!

It is also true that God's truth does not always make since to the world. What God sometimes calls us as Christians to do, the world sometimes does not understand. In 1 Corinthians we find “but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Many times what God asks us to do, may seem ridiculous to our worldly standards. Even the whole idea of salvation by faith is ludicrous to a society that does not believe in anything they can not see with their own eyes. Our Christian attitude is taking us in a different direction than the world's fallen attitude.

Paul gets at the heart of this in these passages. Paul recognizes the attitude of the world as being harmful and destructive. Paul states that of course they would not be able to see right from wrong. They have lost all sensitivity, all morality, all understanding of what is morally right. They have in turn poured their life into impurities that will never satisfy. They have the wrong attitude! Their attitude is directing them away from God.

This thought leads us to Paul's next point in this passage.

The second thing that Paul instructs us is to put on our new Christlike attitude.

We sometimes think that it is hard for us today to have keep the correct attitude in our society. Society tells us to tolerate sins. Society even tells us to delight in some! But imagine how it must have been like for the Ephesians! They lived in a society that had no concept of God. They worshipped all kinds of false idols.

We must not only put off the attitude of the world, but we must also put on the attitude that we have been taught to keep in Christ.

Let's continue Paul's thought here:

²⁰You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Do you get a sense of what Paul is doing here? He shows us our attitudes before

Christ and drastically compares it to how our attitudes are to be with Christ. Only by showing us the ludicrousness of our lives without a Christlike attitude can we see and understand why we are to live the way we ought to. In fact, the whole next chapter in the book of Ephesians is dedicated to showing how we are to live this out in practical ways. Without this foundation of understanding why we live this way, however, the next chapter just becomes a list of do's and don'ts.

Paul is charging us to put off our old self and put on a new self and live a holy life. What does this mean, to "put off our old self and put on a new self"? It simply means that we are to stop separating ourselves from God and running our own lives. This is the attitude of the world: I don't need anyone else but myself to get by. Instead we are to allow ourselves to be the person that God created us to be in Christ's attitude.

Putting off and putting on clothing is an interesting analogy to use here. Isn't it interesting how clothing can define a person. Each person has his or her own individual style of clothing that he or she wears and when he or she strays from that, they look odd. Clothing also has the power to help define who we are. Certain gangs use clothing as a way of establishing membership.

Or think of a conservative school that has a strict dress code that requires a uniform everyday at school. What would happen if one day one of the students wore something different, something more their style? Don't you think everyone would notice the difference?

It is as if Paul is us to wear a different uniform than those around us. We are to not have the same clothing as those around us. We are not to just blend in with the world and perform the same actions and the same behaviors as others. We are to put on a new uniform that is created in the image of God!

Imagine now if a group of students wore a different uniform, one that resembled a

Christlike attitude? What if we were to put on a uniform that resembled a Christlike attitude? What if people looked at us and didn't see their own actions in return, but saw us behaving on a different level, behaving as we were truly meant to be, in the image of God? Wouldn't that draw people's attention towards God? This is possible, but only with the help of God.

I think it is important to note here that change in actions do come from a change in the "attitude of our minds." I think this is a very important step, one that is all too often missed.

In the United States today, which is still predominately Christian in tradition, we all too often fall into a trap here. As Christians we live a different lifestyle than those around us because of our relationship with God and our knowledge of Him. But, we often forget what caused the transformation of our minds and expect others to behave like us.

What does this result in?

It results in Christians seeing sin in others' lives who do not know Christ and attempting to change their actions to less destructive ones. We might realize the destructive actions of those without Christ but we sometimes forget the reason why they perform destructive actions. They act like they do because in their own knowledge, the knowledge without God, it makes sense for them to do the actions they do. But if we as Christians get them to change their actions, without changing their heart first, we may do them more harm than good by giving them a false sense of security when in actuality, they still do not know God. As Dallas Willard put it "It is the inner life of the soul that we must aim to transform, and then behavior will naturally follow" (Willard, 1998, p.144).

Paul tells us that they are separated from God because of their attitude and that is

what needs to be addressed.

So we understand that the attitude of the world points us in a direction away from God. We also acknowledge that the correct attitude to have comes from Christ.

So what are we to do then?

The answer to this question depends on who you are and where you are with God.

You may be here and have no relationship with God what-so-ever. Maybe you are here just checking this Christian thing out or here because of a friend. Either way, the ideas of Christianity may sound ridiculous to you. And probably, they should! Sometimes I think that it is insane to be devoting so much time in my life to someone I can not see nor hear. But that is where faith plays a huge part in the believer's heart.

If this is you today, then I encourage you to continue searching, and above all, stay open to the idea that this Christianity thing may actually be true. For some of you this may not be an easy step and coming here today may have been a huge step. But if you are at all interested, at least open up to the possibility that it may be true. The next step would be to just ask God for a simple thing, to have God make it known in your heart the truth about him. Ask him to show you where your wisdom has led you astray and to gain knowledge of him. Ask him to change your attitude towards him. This is prayer, it is simply having a conversation with God.

Or maybe you are here and you already call yourself a Christian. Paul is claiming that we need to keep a different attitude than those around us. Paul is telling us not to get wrapped up in the world's wisdom and the world's systems of right and wrong but to follow him instead.

We were once trapped underneath the world's attitude. We were once following what the world tells us to do. Paul is saying "You are not like the world, you know Christ!" We are to take off our old self, which is only leading us to corruption, and put on our new self that was created to be like God! We re to direct ourselves towards God using our Christlike attitude as a guide.

I would like to pray for us right now. Pray with me:

Father in Heaven. We thank you for this scripture that you have given to us. We thank you for this letter and for using Paul to send us a message through time that is true for us today.

God we know that all things are possible through you. We also admit our own inadequacies and our own ignorance before you and your infinite wisdom and power. We pray that you will guide our lives, that you will give us your truth in our hearts, and that we have the strength to go against whatever the world may be telling us and to follow you no matter how stupid it may be to those who do not know you. We ask for your Christlike attitude to completely take over our lives.

God we ask that you use our lives as vessels to reach those around us. May our actions and our words be a witness to those with whom we interact. May our following your ways lead people to you through their curiosity over the difference you have made in our lives.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bible Studies

Introduction to Bible Studies

What is a Bible Study

For the purposes of this paper, a Bible study will be defined as a teaching from the Biblical text that is done by one person acting as a leader (who is not necessarily a licensed clergymen) to a group of less than twenty individuals. While some Bible studies can take on more individuals, such a Bible study tends to be more of a sermon than a Bible study.

Styles of a Bible Study

A Bible study can take on many different forms ranging from a direct teaching of the scriptures to an inductive teaching method. While some prefer to attend a Bible study where the truth is told directly to them, some find it to be more effective to have the listener of the Bible study learn the truths for themselves. This is the common way of teaching done in an inductive Bible study.

The goal of the leader of an inductive Bible study is to have the members of the group to look at a passage of scripture and to make it life-changing through the use of questions. The leader leads the members in such a way as to guide them to an understanding of the scriptures through a hermeneutical series of questions. This method of Bible study, the inductive Bible study has been called the Observation,

Interpretation, Application (OIA) method. It is the form of Bible study that this paper will use.

The following describes the Inductive Bible study method more closely.

How to Develop a Bible Study

Many guides have been developed to aid a person seeking to study the Bible inductively. Many articles have been written as well, including an article put out by the School of Biblical Study International (Poort, 2004).

Observation Questions

Observation is the process of looking over a passage and observing specific traits. Several of the more helpful things to notice are listed here (Poort, 2004):

- Repeated words, phrases, ideas and themes
- Key words
- Main characters, people, people groups, author, audience
- Pronouns
- Events and their order
- Geographical locations
- When
- Verb tenses
- Contrasts
- Comparisons
- Conditional statements
- Connectives
- Progression of passage
- Lists
- Emotions, moods, atmosphere

Develop Interpretation Questions

“The heart of good inductive Bible study should be the forming of good questions about the text, questions which will probe the depths of the text and uncover layers of meaning which may not appear on the surface” (InterVarsity/USA Bible Study Task Force, 1999).

Interpretation questions are ones that simply seek to find out what the text meant to the original audience. This part of the process may be difficult. Some individuals may not be able to interpret the text properly at first. The leader must rely on his or her own firm background and understanding of the passage in order to keep asking questions that will lead the group to correct interpretation.

Develop Application Questions

“Many of the urgent problems of the church today are basically struggles with bridging the hermeneutical gap - with moving from the “then and there” to the “here and now” of our own life settings” (Fee and Stuart, 1981, p.12).

Only after you have interpreted what was “then and there” can you move on to “here and now.” It is important to understand what the passage meant to the people it was written to, before trying to understand what it could mean to us today. Skipping this step has caused many to misinterpret the Bible.

Application then takes the next step and asks “What does this mean to me? What changes in my own life can I make using these truths?” The application should be very specific and challenging for the group. If the group walks away only with a knowledge of the text, the Bible study will have failed. The members need to understand the text and know particular ways in which the text actually applies to them and what

their response should be. The Bible study is complete only after the individuals have found a way in which to apply the truths from the text.

Bible Study 1 - Ephesians 2:11-22 - Two Become One

Introducing the Bible Study

Division within the body of Christ is not a new problem. Church division did not begin with the advent of denominations. Throughout history, the church has been divided for numerous reasons: nationalism, racism and other prejudices. Even in the early church questions about divisions arose. These divisions come about because of differences in race, creed or thought.

The Bible not only talks about the separation of man and God, but also the separation of man with other men. In this study from the Book of Ephesians, Paul is addressing this very same concern about divisions in the church due to differences in people.²

²This Bible study is a combination of the author's original content and questions adapted from the Bible study guides of John Stott (Stott, 1998) and Andrew and Phyllis Le Peau (Le Peau and Le Peau, 2000).

Text

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) - ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Questions

- Who is this passage addressed to?
- What was it like for the Gentiles before Christ?
- How were they treated by the Jews?
- What did the Gentiles have in common with the Jews before Christ?
- What does Paul say it means to be separate from Christ?
- What does it mean to be reconciled?
- Paul states that Christ destroyed the dividing wall “by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (v 15). How did Christ abolish the law?
- What is the significance of Paul stating that Jesus preached to those who were near and to those who were far?
- What images does Paul use to show the unity of Christians in verses 19-22?
- In what ways are Christians still divided today?
- What are some ways of reconciling other Christians today where there might still be some hostility?
- What role do you think you might have in breaking down barriers between yourself and others?

Bible Study 2 - Ephesians 4:17-32 - A Changed Life

Introduction to the Bible Study

Throughout all of church history, Christians have tried to find the balance between doing good works and relying on the grace of God. Some have insisted that we must show our gratitude for our salvation and live strict disciplined lives with many rules and regulations on what we can or can not do. Others, on the other hand, have felt that since we have been saved by grace, we are free from judgement and therefore should be able to do whatever we please. What then is the balance between these two on how we should live our lives?

The Bible speaks to this dilemma and has very clear answers to these questions. This Bible study from the book of Ephesians gets to the heart of these questions through the writing of Paul.³

³This Bible study is a combination of the author's original content and questions adapted from the Bible study guides of John Stott (Stott, 1998) and Andrew and Phyllis Le Peau (Le Peau and Le Peau, 2000).

Text

¹⁷So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. ²⁰You, however, did not come to know Christ that way⁴. ²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

⁴“But that isn’t what you were taught when you learned about Christ.” - NLT

Questions

- What are several characteristics of how the Gentiles live?
- Why are we supposed to not live like that?
- The Gentiles in this passage represent “the world.” How are we to no longer live like the world around us?
- When people look at you, do they see someone who is living differently than the world?
- How was the church of Ephesus taught and why? Where did it come from?
- Paul gives several examples of how we are to treat fellow Christians. What are they? Why are we to treat them like that?
- How did Paul instruct the church of Ephesus to deal with their anger?
- What does it mean to give the devil a foothold with your anger?
- What would it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit of God? (What is the Holy Spirit’s role?)
- Do you ever consider how your actions and words affect God or the Holy Spirit? Do your actions or words grieve the Holy Spirit of God?
- What are ways of getting rid of all “bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” in your life?
- When people look at the Christian group that you belong to, do they see a group that treats each other like this? Do they see Christ’s love?

Really stop and think about the way the world acts, because they do not know Christ, and how we, who do know Christ, are called to act.

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