

INTRODUCTION

We are saved by grace through faith! We do not earn our salvation — it is the gift of God. This is the shocking good news of Ephesians. Even though we were dead in sin and fully deserved God’s wrath, he saved us and brought us into the body of Christ. It is a glorious privilege to be a part of Christ’s body, and it carries with it a glorious responsibility.

We are saved by grace, for good works. God saved us so that he could live in us and work through us. We are filled with his fullness and re-created in his likeness. We are imitators of God. His power works in us, making possible more than we could ever ask or think. We are strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. The message of Ephesians is a message of salvation: God gives it; man lives it.

THE WRITER

From earliest times the church has acknowledged Paul as the author of Ephesians. But while Ephesians has been called “the quintessence of Paulinism,”¹ it is now widely denied that Paul wrote the book. Despite the current trend in scholarly criticism, there are good and sufficient reasons² for upholding Paul as the author.

Reasons to Support Paul as the Author

1. The letter claims to have been written by Paul (1:1 and 3:1),

¹Bruce, p. 229. Bruce says the phrase was the title of a lecture by A. S. Peake in 1917.

²The reasons for upholding Pauline authorship are drawn primarily from Carson, pp. 305-307. See also Bruce, pp. 229-233.

and has several personal references (1:15-16; 4:1; 6:19-20). Those who deny this claim must assume the burden of proving otherwise.

2. The letter was widely known and accepted in the early church, and no one (not even the heretic Marcion) disputed that Paul was the author.

3. The letter is filled with Pauline features. Is it more likely that an imitator copied Paul's writing style in 90 to 95% of the epistle, or that Paul himself wrote it, diverging from his usual style 5 to 10% of the time?²

4. The letter closely parallels Colossians.

5. The practice of writing letters in the name of someone else was not as widely practiced in the early church as some claim.

6. A comparison with the church literature of the period from which a non-Pauline Ephesians is supposed to come (such as 1 Clement) indicates that the letter is far more akin to Paul than to the supposedly contemporary church literature of the late first century.³

7. The major themes — justification by faith, grace, atonement by Christ, the place of the Jews and the law — agree with Paul's uncontroverted letters.⁴

8. The nature of the letter accords well with what Paul would have written from prison, as a final summation of what the church is.

Challenges to Pauline Authorship

It must be admitted that many scholars have advanced reasons to reject Paul as the author of Ephesians.⁵ Their challenges will be listed and briefly answered:⁶

1. Style and Vocabulary: The sentences are often long and

³Weed, p. 116.

⁴See Bruce (pp. 231-232) for a sampling of the affinities of Ephesians with Paul's other epistles.

⁵Lincoln (pp. lix-lxxiii) is a good example of those commentators who suppose that Paul could not have written Ephesians, and that one of his later admirers wrote under the pseudonym.

⁶The arguments against Pauline authorship have been conveniently listed and refuted by Weed, pp. 109-119. See also Carson, pp. 307-309.

complicated, with heavy use of synonyms and adjectives. Certain words and phrases (“devil,” “heavenly realms”) are not found in other Pauline letters.

However, it must be seriously questioned whether our collection of Paul’s brief letters can establish what his style and vocabulary was. Furthermore, an author must be free to exercise flexibility in his style when he writes to a different audience on a different subject. Finally, “devil” is found in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus (but the critics deny the Pauline authorship of all three of these as well).⁷

2. Literary Dependence: There are so many parallels between Ephesians and other letters, especially Colossians, that Ephesians must have been copied and expanded by an admirer of Paul. Of the 155 verses in Ephesians it is estimated that 73 have verbal parallels in Colossians.

However, the similarities could more easily result because the letters all had the same author. There is good evidence that Ephesians and Colossians were written at the same time, which would account for their frequent parallels. (It should be noted that the “style and vocabulary” argument is that Ephesians is too different, while the “literary dependence” argument is that Ephesians is too much the same.)

3. Historical Considerations: The Jew/Gentile tension has ceased; the “holy apostles” are revered as in retrospect; and the “dividing wall” at the temple in Jerusalem has been torn down. Therefore, the letter must have been written after Paul had already died.

However, the Jew/Gentile tension was not as big a problem in some locations; the apostles were held in reverence from the very beginning (Acts 2:42; 5:12-13); the symbolic “dividing wall” could still stand in the temple when it had already been torn down in the church.

4. Doctrinal Arguments: The “church” is now universal, rather than local; various themes are handled differently in other Pauline

⁷Carson (p. 308) notes that P. N. Harrison has calculated that words found nowhere else in the N.T. occur 4.6 times per page in Ephesians, which is in line with the figures for other letters: 5.6 in 2 Corinthians and 6.2 in Philippians.

letters; the view of marriage differs from 1 Cor 7.

However, these arguments are more apparent than real. From the beginning Jesus saw his church on a universal scale (Matt 16:18) and nothing prevents Paul from using this concept. Certain themes (such as “the mystery,” “in Christ,” the Trinity) may be expressed in different terms in Ephesians, but it is foolish to force a strict uniformity on Paul or to prohibit him from adding any insights to what he has already written.

In conclusion, it must be said that those who dispute what the church has accepted from the beginning have not proved their case. There is more than sufficient reason to accept the epistle as from Paul’s own hand, and to feel his pulse beating in every line.

THE AUDIENCE

The Recipients of the Letter

There are several reasons to question whether Paul addressed this epistle to the Ephesian saints:

1. Several of the earliest manuscripts do not include the words “in Ephesus” in 1:1.⁸
2. Marcion, while a heretic, referred to it as “the epistle to the Laodiceans” at a very early date (about A.D. 140).⁹
3. Though Paul spent three years in Ephesus, longer than any other location on his missionary journeys, the letter is strangely impersonal.¹⁰ He “has heard” about their faith (1:15). Unlike his other epistles, Paul addresses no local problems, and closes without a single personal greeting.
4. The epistle has the mature, universal tone of a letter sent as an encyclical, in this instance to all the churches of Asia Minor.

At the same time, most manuscripts do include “in Ephesus” and

⁸Metzger (p. 601) lists \mathfrak{P}^{46} , \aleph^* , B*, 424c, and 1739 as lacking the phrase.

⁹It should be noted that a circular letter making its way up the Maeander River to the Lycus River valley would first reach Laodicea, then Colosse. It is likely that Paul was referring to Ephesians when he told the Colossians to be sure to read “the epistle out of Laodicea” (Col 4:16).

¹⁰Carson, p. 309.

the church has traditionally called this epistle “to the Ephesians.” If Paul did intend that the letter be sent to churches throughout Asia Minor, it is logical that it would have been sent first to the leading city, and from there copies would be circulated. It is likely, then, that Paul did send this epistle to the Ephesians, but not to them alone.

The Locale

Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia, located on the west coast of what is now Turkey.¹¹ It was a leading commercial center, situated at the intersection of two major trade routes. It was a city where East met West, with the resulting exchange of ideas and philosophies.¹² Ephesus boasted the temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Four times the size of the famed Parthenon in Athens, this temple also served as the bank of Asia Minor, one of the few places where money could be safely deposited. An enormous theatre in the center of the city could seat from 25,000 to 50,000 people.¹³

Within its population of one-third of a million, Ephesus also had a large colony of Jews.¹⁴ After rejection by the local Jewish community, Paul found it possible to teach daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. From this strategic center the gospel message spread “so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10).

Ephesus and the other cities of Asia Minor to which Paul sent this epistle are also mentioned in Rev 1:4-3:22. By that time the church in Ephesus needed to repent and return to its first love. Ephesus continued as a leading center of Christianity for several centuries.

¹¹Green, E. M. B., “Ephesus,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 380.

¹²A magnificent road 70 feet wide and lined with columns ran through the city down to the harbor. The Asian caravan route from the east ended here, and ships carried the precious cargo on to Rome (Green, p. 380).

¹³See Acts 19:29.

¹⁴According to Acts 19:14, there were even members of the high priestly family living in Ephesus.

THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

Proceeding with the conclusion that Paul himself wrote this epistle, it is necessary to identify when and where he did so.¹⁵ We know that Paul wrote from an imprisonment (3:1; 4:1) in which he was confined with chains (6:20). We can safely assume, furthermore, that at this same time Paul also sent letters to the Colossians and to Philemon.¹⁶ But where was Paul imprisoned?

Rome

The traditional – and most likely correct – view is that Paul wrote from the imprisonment in Rome described in Acts 28:16-30.¹⁷ Paul was allowed to live in a private dwelling, with a soldier to guard him. This continued for two years, and during the latter part of this time Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon – and no doubt Philippians, as well. A date around A.D. 62 is likely.

Caesarea

Paul is also known to have spent two years imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), before his voyage to Rome. It has been suggested that Onesimus would have been more inclined to escape the 500 miles to Caesarea than to attempt the long voyage to Rome.¹⁸ While this location is possible, yielding a date of A.D. 58-60, no real

¹⁵Those who suppose a later admirer wrote the epistle usually fix a date of A.D. 80-95 (Schnackenburg, p. 33; Lincoln, p. lxxii-lxxiii).

¹⁶Tychicus carried both Ephesians (6:21) and Colossians (4:7), and the letters have a remarkable similarity of contents. The letter to Philemon is linked to Colossians (and therefore also to Ephesians) by these facts: the runaway slave Onesimus accompanies both (Phlm 10-17; Col 4:9); Archippus receives a message in both (Phlm 2; Col 4:17); and the same associates with Paul send greetings – Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke – (Phlm 23; Col 4:10-14).

¹⁷This view remained unchallenged for eighteen centuries, from the era of common knowledge in the early church until the coming of the rational critics in the last century (Wood, p. 13).

¹⁸See discussion in Wood, pp. 14-15. While Rome was farther away, however, the huge slave population there would have made it easier for

evidence can be introduced in its support.

Ephesus

Somewhat surprisingly, some critics have attempted to make Ephesus the site of Paul's prison epistles.¹⁹ This would be an even more convenient location for the escape of Onesimus. However, neither the book of Acts nor church history know anything of an imprisonment in Ephesus.²⁰ Paul did refer to fighting "wild beasts" in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32), but since the city did not have a coliseum and Paul was a Roman citizen,²¹ this is probably a metaphor for the fierce men who opposed him. Because this view has no historical support, it has only its novelty to commend it.

Probable Reconstruction of Events

During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul met and converted the runaway slave Onesimus. Not long afterward, he received troubling news about doctrinal problems in Colosse (Col 1:9), the home town of Onesimus (Col 4:9). Paul determined to send the letter of Colossians to correct their errors, and decided to send Onesimus back to Philemon at the same time. Having penned letters to address these two problems, Paul also wrote a letter to the saints in Ephesus, intending that it be circulated among all the churches of Asia Minor. The resulting epistle has been called "the divinest composition of man."²²

Onesimus to avoid detection. See also L. Johnson, "The Pauline Letters from Caesarea," *Expository Times* 68 (1956-1957) 24-26.

¹⁹Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 229.

²⁰Wood, p. 14.

²¹Green, p. 381.

²²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as quoted by Bruce, p. 230.

OUTLINE

I. DOCTRINE: God's Plan for Salvation – 1:1-3:21

A. God's Blessings – 1:1-23

1. Salutation – 1:1-2
2. Present Blessings in Christ – 1:3-14
3. Potential Blessings in Christ – 1:15-23

B. God's Salvation – 2:1-22

1. Saved from Sin – 2:1-10
2. Saved from Separation – 2:11-22

C. God's Participation – 3:1-21

1. God Working in Paul – 3:1-13
2. God Working in All Christians – 3:14-21

II. DUTIES: The Christian's Response to Salvation – 4:1-6:24

A. The Christian in Church Life – 4:1-16

1. Unity in the Body – 4:1-6
2. Diversity in the Body – 4:7-11
3. Maturity in the Body – 4:12-16

B. The Christian in Personal Life – 4:17-5:21

1. The Old Nature vs. the New – 4:17-24
2. Members of One Body – 4:25-32
3. Walking in Love – 5:1-2
4. Walking in Light – 5:3-14
5. Walking in Wisdom – 5:15-21

C. The Christian in Domestic Life – 5:22-6:9

1. Wives and Husbands – 5:22-33
2. Children and Parents – 6:1-4
3. Slaves and Masters – 6:5-9

- D. The Christian in Warfare – 6:10-24**
 - 1. The Nature of the Enemy – 6:10-12
 - 2. The Armor of God – 6:13-18
 - 3. Paul's Own Farewell – 6:19-24