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A one-year journey with the early church



Introduction to Dr. Tom Constable and His Bible Study (Expository) Notes

Dr. Constable is one of the most respected and beloved teachers of God's Word at Dallas Theological Seminary, and he has served as a Bible teacher and elder at Plano Bible Chapel for many years. Learn more about him at: www.soniclight.com/constable/index.htm. You can explore the rest of the Sonic Light website by left-clicking in the top lighthouse graphic to return to Sonic Light's homepage, or click on one of the tabs to see other pages:

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NOTES ON

EPHESIANS

2008 EDITION

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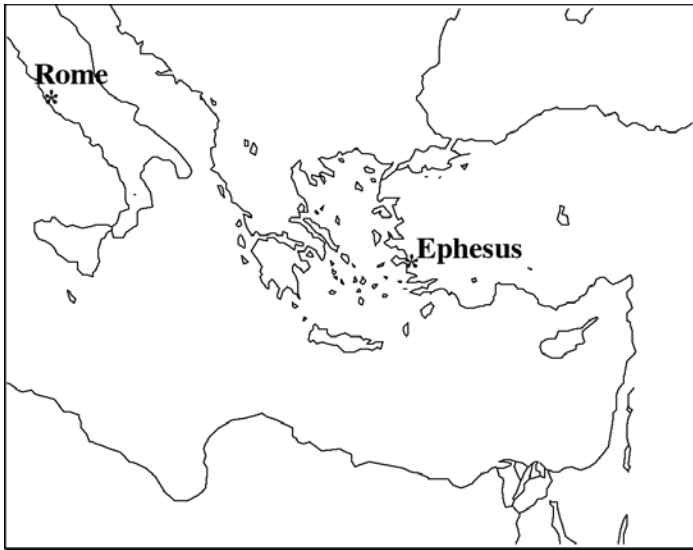
INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Almost all Christians believed in the Pauline authorship of Ephesians until the nineteenth century when destructive biblical criticism gained much influence (cf. 1:1; 3:1).¹ The critics built a case against Pauline authorship from linguistic and stylistic features, literary comparisons chiefly with Colossians, historical evidence, and doctrinal peculiarities.

“When all the objections are carefully considered it will be seen that the weight of evidence is inadequate to overthrow the overwhelming external attestation to Pauline authorship, and the Epistle's own claims.”²

Most conservative New Testament scholars hold to the tradition that Paul wrote Ephesians along with Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians, the other “Prison Epistles,” during his first Roman imprisonment, 60-62 A.D. (3:1; 4:1; 6:20; cf. Acts 28:16-31). During this time Paul was under house arrest. He lived in his own rented quarters under guard by Roman soldiers. He could have visitors and could minister without hindrance as far as his confinement



permitted (Acts 28:16, 30-31). He was not chained in a prison cell at this time as he was during his second Roman imprisonment when he wrote 2 Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16). For some interpreters, the reference to Paul having recently sent Tychicus to Ephesus in 2 Timothy 4:12 seems to put the composition of Ephesians in the second imprisonment (cf. Eph. 6:21-22). However the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians have led most scholars to conclude that Paul wrote these two letters at the same time.³ The evidence for his having written Colossians and Philemon during the first imprisonment is strong.

“Ephesians bears much the same relation to Colossians that Romans does to Galatians, a fuller treatment of the same general theme in a more detached and impersonal manner.”⁴

Paul knew Ephesus and the church in that city well. He had ministered in Asia Minor, the Roman province of which Ephesus was the capitol, with Ephesus as his headquarters for about three years, 53-56 A.D. (Acts 19:1—20:1). It appears that he sent this epistle to the Ephesian church so the Christians there would subsequently circulate it among the other churches.⁵ Three other New Testament books went first to Ephesus: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:1). Tychicus evidently delivered this epistle to the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:21-22).

PURPOSE

Paul’s frequent references to the church as a mystery, previously unknown but now revealed, identify the apostle’s main purpose in writing as having been the exposition of the mystery of the church (1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19). His emphasis on the church as Christ’s body in which both Jewish and Gentile believers are one suggests that Paul wrote to promote unity in the Ephesian church and in the universal church. The emphasis on the importance of love is also strong.⁶ More than one-sixth of Paul’s references to love in his 13 epistles occur in Ephesians. This also shows that he wanted to promote Christian unity in the church.

“Possibly realizing that the Ephesians were starting to forsake their first love, Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to love both God and their fellow saints more deeply.”⁷

“The letter focuses on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and does through his Spirit today, in order to build his new society in the midst of the old.”⁸

OUTLINE

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. The Christian’s calling 1:3—3:21
 - A. Individual calling 1:3—2:10
 - 1. The purpose: glory 1:3-14
 - 2. The means: knowledge 1:15-23
 - 3. The motive: grace 2:1-10
 - B. Corporate calling 2:11-3:19
 - 1. Present unity 2:11-22
 - 2. Past ignorance 3:1-13
 - 3. Future comprehension 3:14-19
 - C. Doxology 3:20-21
- III. The Christian’s conduct 4:1—6:20
 - A. Spiritual walk 4:1—6:9
 - 1. Walking in unity 4:1-16
 - 2. Walking in holiness 4:17-32
 - 3. Walking in love 5:1-6
 - 4. Walking in light 5:7-14
 - 5. Walking in wisdom 5:15—6:9
 - B. Spiritual warfare 6:10-20
- IV. Conclusion 6:21-24

FOOTNOTES

- 1 See the charts of which scholars held Pauline authorship and which did not in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 9-20.
- 2 Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 2:127.
- 3 See the chart of comparisons of Ephesians and Colossians in Hoehner, p. 34.
- 4 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:514. He believed Paul wrote Colossians before Ephesians.
- 5 See my comments on 1:1.
- 6 See Hoehner, pp. 104-6.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 8 John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 24.