

## Preaching Pointers from Ephesians

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If one was to pull John Calvin's commentary on Ephesians off the shelf, one would find forty-eight expositional sermons in a seven-hundred-page commentary! Well, we are not John Calvin, right? Most of us lack the depth of such scholarly insight. Furthermore, the twenty-first century listener does not possess that kind of listening stamina. I have been asked by *Preaching Source*, to contribute preaching pointers on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

According to my mentor, Dr. B. Paul Wolfe, Headmaster of *The Cambridge School of Dallas*, "Ephesians is the most striking example of the indicative preceding the imperative." This means that out of Paul's forty-four imperatives within Ephesians, only one occurs before 4:25. So, forty-three of the forty-four imperatives are located from 4:25-6:17. The expositor then must follow the structure of the letter and make it the structure of his sermons. A common way of thinking through Ephesians is to consider chapters 1-3 as rich theological content regarding our salvation, and chapters 4-6 as practical life-application (indicative precedes the imperative).

*Who are the Ephesians?* Acts 19 fills in the missing link of historical context. They were Christians living in Ephesus who had some understanding of the Gospel. They lacked some critical details of who they were in Christ as a result of hearing and believing the Gospel. Most Bible Dictionaries expose the religious climate at Ephesus (Acts 19:18-19), so I encourage the expositor to have one on his desk.

I grew up in the 1960's nearly a decade after the Polio vaccine made its debut. For the most part there were no problems. However, in some places the vaccine was watered down and left people walking with a limp and some even reported facial abnormalities. I fear that many Christians are suffering from a watered Gospel and as a result they have theological abnormalities. Depending upon the maturity of his congregation, the expositor can determine the length of his series. I pastor a rural church, two-hundred in attendance. Most of my listeners have listening stamina and are able to enjoy a twelve-sermon series from Ephesians. Here is how I studied and preached those twelve sermons according to the periscopes of texts, with a helpful main idea under the titles:

**Ephesians 1:1-6 A Family Inheritance**

*God equips His children with every spiritual blessing from heaven; live daily with a spirit of gratitude.*

**Ephesians 1:7-12 An Anthem of Praise**

*God Himself made a way for sinful people to know Him; don't keep the Gospel to yourself.*

**Ephesians 1:11-14 Sealed for Your Protection**

*God seals with His Spirit those who respond to Him; go and give away your inheritance!*

**Ephesians 1:15-23 God, Open Our Eyes!**

*God has shamed the enemies of the Gospel putting them under the feet of Christ; put His authority to work in your life.*

**Ephesians 2:1-10 From the Grave Into Glory**

*Because God is merciful, He rescues believers from His wrath; boast in the grace of God.*

**Ephesians 2:19-22 A People Made for God**

*God summons His citizens from a life of chaos and disorder to peace and purpose; join the family of God!*

**Ephesians 3:14-19 Praying for the Saint's Success**

*Through the Holy Spirit the church has the potential to overcome their fears; get to know the love of God.*

**Ephesians 4:1-16 A High Call to A Low Place**

*God gifts the church with His servants to ensure spiritual stability; walk worthy of your calling.*

**Ephesians 4:25-32 When the Devil Comes to Church**

*Bitterness and blabber-mouthing roll out the red carpet for the enemy; forgive each other and welcome the Holy Spirit.*

**Ephesians 5:8-21 A Glorious Work of God**

*Our old nature has old friends that grieve the Holy Spirit; submit to the Holy Spirit's lead.*

**Ephesians 5: 22-6:4 Expressions of the Spirit-Filled Life**

*God has a divinely intended purpose for husbands and wives; mutually submit to the Spirit and give yourselves to one another.*

**Ephesians 6:10-13 Strategy for Victory Pt. I**

*The devil is crafty and wrestles with the church; withstand him in the armor of God.*

**Ephesians 6:14-20 Strategy for Victory Pt. II**

*The Saints have inherited all they need for spiritual war; forge ahead in the Spirit boldly making known the Gospel.*

## **Paul and New Life in Christ**

When preaching Ephesians, the expositor must keep an eye out for the reoccurring prepositional phrase "*in Christ*." This is one of Paul's favorite expressions. "Natural people are in Adam; renewed people are in Christ" (George Ladd). To be in Christ is to be in the Spirit and enjoying the benefits of salvation. In Christ is the opposite of in the flesh.

### **Life-Application**

Jay Adams makes this observation concerning life-application: "When you give a dingy wall a fresh application of paint, you lay paint onto the wall in such a way that it sticks and thereby affects the looks of the wall" (*Truth Applied*, p15). Draw an imaginary grid of your congregation. Picture them one by one standing in front of your desk in your study asking you, 'So what does this mean to me? How do I apply this to my work life, my home life, my relationship with my wife? Moreover, how does this help my walk with God?' Asking yourself these questions while you prepare sermons from Ephesians can deepen your life-application.

Far too many expositors claim there is no application in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Nothing could be further from the truth. Theology must be applied. The indicative verbs in chapters 1 through 3, trumpet our spiritual position in Christ and herald the good grace of God. By spending more time explaining the foreknowledge of God, the expositor can encourage his congregation to live a life of gratitude in a culture driven by consumerism. Announce to your people the Holy Spirit's seal upon them to create a greater sense of protection and worth. By laying that paint to the wall it will change the looks of your congregation!

### **Conclusion**

Whatever spiritual season your church is in, Ephesians will yield a rich and rewarding study for both the expositor and his people. More than anything, the church should walk away from the letter sensing that salvation is a very present reality meant to be understood and enjoyed in the here and the now.