

13.1 The Letter to the Ephesians

Introduction

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1.1-2).

With this greeting, Paul moves immediately into the profound discussion of union with Christ (1.3), election (1.4), and predestination (1.4b-5, 11).

Interestingly, commentators have difficulty agreeing on the purpose of this letter and, in turn, on a theme statement. The reason for the difficulty is that there is no indication of the occasion for the letter; there is no refutation of heresy (as in Colossians), no reports of divisions, and no questions from the church receiving answers (as in 1 & 2 Corinthians).

We cannot work within a specific situation to find our way in the reading of Ephesians. Therefore, we must try to arrive at a formulation of purpose (and theme) by reference to two things: 1) we must focus on Paul's purpose in general as an apostle to the churches. Attention here is on the purpose of the NT canon in its gift to the church through apostolic testimony. Additional to what Jesus promised in the Gospels in this regard (cf. Peter: you are foundation rock), in Ephesians, Paul speaks to the work of apostles in two important texts:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. ¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles- ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power (2.19-3.7).

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4.11-13).

2) We must focus on the major units of thought within the book in relation to the broad apostolic purpose. Then we can formulate a purpose statement for the book. The large units of the book are:

The plan of redemption: union with Christ, election, and predestination (1.3-5, 11)

Prayer for enlightenment (1.15-3.21)

Regarding the hope, glory, and power of the gospel (1.15-23)

That you remember your past as you better understand your present (2.1-22)

In relation to your former state in sin and alienation

That contrasts with your present state in grace and reconciliation

That you understand the mystery of the Gentiles & have strength (3.1-21)

Exhortation to walk worthy pursuing unity with diversity in love (4.1-16)

Exhortation to put off the old life and put on the new life (4.17-6.9)

Exhortation to be strong in the Lord and armed for spiritual battle (6.10-20)

What then is the purpose of the book? How can we put these focus points together to come up with a purpose statement? Hint: we can also incorporate Paul's goals in prayer, and his exhortations.

What is important *for us* about the fact that the book is a non-occasional writing?

What good (manifold) *purpose* for us today in the post-apostolic church does the non-occasional writing serve?