

GOD ABOVE ALL

A STUDY IN EPHESIANS

above all, love

Acts 20

Revelation 2

between good and great

- In doing what was good, the Ephesians failed in doing what is great.



Philippi

Turkey

Athens
Corinth

Ephesus

Antioch

Mediterranean Sea

Caesarea
Jerusalem

paul's goodbye

- He does not want to stop in Ephesus, so he calls the elders of the Ephesian church to come and meet with him at Miletus.
- He is giving them a final admonition to them as people that he loves and for a church he cares deeply for.
- Paul even goes prophetic in his speech.

acts 20: 17—38

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

acts 20: 17—38

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

acts 20: 17—38

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

acts 20: 17—38

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

acts 20: 17—38

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

paul's teaching

- He taught repentance (v. 21).
- He taught grace (v. 24).
- He taught the Kingdom (v. 25).
- He declared the whole counsel of God (v. 26).

paul's prophetic warning

- This is a sorrowful meeting for everyone who is involved.
 - Paul loves these men he worked alongside.
 - These men love and respect Paul for what he has done in these men's lives.
- They will not see Paul again, so God has given him a warning for the near future of the church.

wolves

Acts 20:28–31: Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

wolves

- Paul know all about these wolves. At least two letters he wrote before he wrote Ephesians are directed to churches specifically dealing with false teachers or people resisting teaching.
 - Galatians, 1 Thessalonians
- However, Paul does not identify these wolves in Ephesus as false teachers, he says they are members who will rise up to draw people away.

wolves

- When wolves hunt, wolves go after the weak, sick, or the maimed.
 - They are not going after the big healthy caribou.
- Wolves are not “ambush” hunters. They are “endurance” predators.
 - They will work long and hard to find the vulnerable and the weak and pounce when the time is right.

they are successful

- In the book of Ephesians, Paul does not write against any specific teachers or heresy like he does in many other books.
- Ephesians is all about recognizing who Jesus is, who they are because of Jesus, and the power of God above everything else.
- It is mostly a book of the reminder of authority and power rather than a book of correction.

they are too successful

Revelation 2:2–3: *“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.*”

- Good for you Ephesians, you have rooted out the wolves!

they are too successful

- Revelation 2:4–5: *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*
- In doing what was good, they failed in doing what was great.

there were some signs

- Chapters 3 and 4 in the book of Ephesians center on love and God's love for us is a major theme in the first half of the book.
- The Apostle John lived in Ephesus and was part of the church there.
- He probably wrote 1 John while in Ephesus.
- 1 John is a handbook on love.

they are too successful

Revelation 2:5–6: Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- There is grave danger when you operate in something other than love.
 - Pride, shame, fear, hopelessness, disunity

they are too successful

1 Corinthians 13:1–3: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

the tragedy of ephesus

- They did not heed the warning and turn back to their first love.
- It seems they became known for who they were against rather than who they were for.
- Today, Turkey is less than 1% Christian.
 - The lampstand is gone.
- We cannot fail in doing what is great while doing what is good.

there is real reward in love

- Revelation 2:7: *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'*
- Love is not our default. It is our choice.
- Love is not passive. It is active.

reflection

- There is freedom in repentance and grace. Do you need to experience that freedom?
- Have you been pursuing what is good instead of doing what is great?
- Who will you choose to love this week?