



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament Ephesians

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4

Back in the early '70s Clifford Irving was convicted of writing a fake autobiography of billionaire recluse Howard Hughes. The public was outraged that this author had faked an autobiography. As a society, we are intensely interested in "truth" and "authenticity." However, the Roman society of the first and second centuries was more focused on the content of writings. A practice arose wherein a disciple of a famous person would publish a document saying the things the writer believed the famous person would say if still alive. The vast majority of scholars acknowledge that not all the letters identified as being written by Paul were written by Paul. That is the case of the letter to the Ephesians.

How do the scholars make this judgment? After all, Clifford Irving was exposed when Howard Hughes conducted a televised phone interview with journalists who had known him for years. But Paul is not available to point to the letters he wrote and those he did not write. The answer is more straight forward than you might think. Consider the people you know and how they write and speak. What types of phrases do they use? Do they use complex literary allusions or are they more "down home." Do they speak in short succinct sentences or are they prone to write long, complex sentences? What are their word choices when talking about different subjects? That is the type of analysis, among others, that is undertaken by those who engage in textual criticism. Comparing Ephesians to those letters that are undisputed letters of Paul, e.g. Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians and others, they conclude that the writing styles, word choices and theology of Ephesians are not those of Paul.

If we don't believe that Paul wrote the letter, should it be excluded from the bible? No. The canon of the New Testament was determined over a period of several hundred years. The criteria for inclusion in the canon was primarily one question: "Do we hear the Gospel in these words?" Over the centuries the Church, in all its scattered congregations, heard the Gospel in the letter to the Ephesians. When it came time to put the canon of the bible together Ephesians was included without dispute. The writer may not have known Paul but he or she was at least a faithful student of Paul's teaching.

Although the letter is styled as one written to the church at Ephesus, it does not directly address any internal problems that the Church is having. It instead focuses on two ideas: In Christ, God has made the Jews and Gentiles one body and, as a people joined together in Christ, Christians should live righteous lives. As the church moved through the first century there was a tendency in the Church to disclaim Judaism and Jesus' Jewish origins. This may

have been the result of on-going friction with the Jewish community and the disparity between the numbers of Jews and Gentiles in the Churches. For the most part, as the Church grew, it had fewer Jewish converts. The writer of Ephesians makes a point of emphasizing that Christ united Jews and Gentiles into one body:

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.
Ephesians 2:11-16

Pay special attention to 2:15-16 above. The joining of these two groups in Christ is meant to bring peace and “put to death” the hostility between the groups.

There is also reason to believe that the writer of Ephesians is concerned about the Gnostics, a group that would have been growing in influence in the last part of the first century onward. The Gnostics were “duelists;” that is, they divided the universe into two spheres. One was the material, the “flesh,” and the other was spiritual. For the Gnostics only the spiritual was important. The Gnostics claimed to have the secret knowledge, *gnosis*, that would reveal the mystery, *mysterion*, of God’s spiritual creation. Mystery, as used in this context, describes secret knowledge available only to the initiates of the religion. Roman culture had many mystery cults with closely guarded “secrets.” The Gnostics believed that those who obtained the knowledge of the mystery were freed from the burdens of the flesh. Such persons might follow lives of asceticism or debauchery. They considered themselves able to ignore the flesh or indulge the flesh. They saw no harm in debauchery because they were now spiritual beings and their spiritual being could not be harmed by anything they did in the flesh.

Ephesians rejects this reasoning. God created the heaven and the earth and declared it all good. Moreover, Christians are not freed from the code of morality contained in the Law of Moses. If you were baptized, you are called to live a new life in Christ:

19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ! 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:19-24.

The writer of Ephesians also attacks the idea that the Gospel is secret, something only for the few. He does this by using the language of the Gnostics. The word “mystery” is used seven times in Ephesians although Paul used it only twice in his letter to the Romans, the most complete account of Paul’s theology. However, the writer of Ephesians gives the word a new emphasis. The “mystery” of the Gospel, rather than being held in secret by only a few, has been revealed to **all** the church.

9 he has made known to us the **mystery** of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:9-10

3 and how the **mystery** was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4 a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the **mystery** of Christ. 5 In former generations this **mystery** was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6 that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Ephesians 3:3-6

9 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the **mystery** hidden for ages in God who created all things; Ephesians 3:9

19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the **mystery** of the gospel... Ephesians 6:19

The writer of Ephesians uses the words of the Gnostics to emphasize that the Gospel, the “mystery” of Christ, is meant to be shared by everyone instead of being revealed to only a few select initiates.

Ephesians also emphasizes the importance of the family. Husband and wives should have love and respect for one another. Children should respect their parents and parents should not “provoke [their] children to anger.” 5:21-6:4. Those who have been baptized are called to live righteous lives in this world. They are to put on the armor of God, truth, righteousness, faith and the knowledge of salvation to do battle with the evil forces of this world. Ephesians 6:10-17. The Christian is not called to battle against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of the world. One of the most profound passages in Ephesians for my life is this:

26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27.

If we are paying attention to the world around us we should be angry sometimes. Injustice, hatred, bigotry, cruelty, indifference and more should make us angry. But anger is not an excuse to sin. Don't let your anger fester or lead you to hurt those around you. Use your anger to spur your ministry by trying to make the world a better place.

Next week: Philippians

Please be in Prayer for the Families of Rev. Paula Hoos and Pegine Hill

We were saddened and shocked to receive the following news on January 23rd from Rick Hoos, husband of Rev. Paula Hoos who served Trinity UMC as pastor for five years.

Sad unbelievable news. Paula has died of an overwhelming pneumonia here in New Zealand. We've both been sick off and on this whole tour. Yesterday she got dramatically worse, and died this evening in the Christchurch Hospital ICU despite getting prompt extended excellent care. I am functioning in shock.

We have not received any additional news from Rick. I assume that it will take time to make arrangements for the return from New Zealand and the funeral.

Paula was both a colleague and a friend. We started Vanderbilt Divinity School together in 1997. At that time she was already a Professor of Anatomy in the Medical School. Like me she was answering a call to ministry late in life. Many of you have spoken to me about the impact her ministry had on your lives.

As soon as I know anything further I will share it. Please be in prayer for Rick and the rest of Paula's family.

On Tuesday afternoon I received a call informing me that Pegine Hill, a long-time member of Trinity UMC and treasured friend of several of our members, had also passed away unexpectedly. There are no arrangements to announce at this time. Please be in prayer for the family of Pegine and for those who loved her.

What Is the Significance of the Colors?

United Methodists, along with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians and most Presbyterians and Lutherans follow the Christian Year. As the seasons of the year progress the colors displayed in the sanctuary change as well. The Christian year begins in late November or early December with Advent. There are four Sundays in Advent. The traditional colors for the Advent season are dark blue, light blue and purple. Pink or rose is sometimes used on the third Sunday in Advent as we remember the Annunciation; the declaration of the Angel to Mary that her child would be the Son of God. Blue and purple are traditionally colors of royalty.

Beginning Christmas Eve, and continuing through Epiphany, the Colors change to white and gold. White and gold are symbols of life and purity.

After Epiphany, and right up to the beginning of Lent, the traditional color is green, except for Transfiguration Sunday when the preferred color is again white.

The Lenten colors are purple, gray and black. The purple reminds us of the sacrifice of Christ, and the gray and black are symbols of mourning, sorrow, repentance and death.

The Easter Colors are again white and gold as we celebrate the new life in Christ through the resurrection.

Red and gold are the colors for Pentecost, representing the fire of the Holy Spirit. The strict practice is to change to green following Pentecost Sunday but I prefer to keep using red during the first month following Pentecost. Then we will change to Green until Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the liturgical year, when we change to White.

Do we have to honor the liturgical year? No. But it is a way of reminding ourselves of the Gospel Story. Each year we celebrate the Grace that God brought into the world through Jesus Christ.

Preacher, What Does the Bible Say about ...?

From the time I came to Trinity I have stated on numerous occasions that I am willing to consider a sermon, or sermon series, on any subject that is of concern. If there is a subject upon which you would like me to preach I will consider it. If I do not think it appropriate for a sermon I will explain why. It might also be appropriate to address some issues as part of a Newsletter article or series or as part of the Sunday School curriculum. But, if at all possible, I will seek to speak to these issues that are of interest on Sunday morning. One purpose of worship is to contemplate our relationship with God and if something is bothering you it is likely bothering others as well.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

The Thursday Morning Bible Study Group meets weekly on Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. We received two new members of the Group when we started up again after the Christmas holidays but there is room for more. We are currently studying Genesis. **Due to a District Ministers' Meeting the study will not meet on January 26th.**

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Leslie Eastwood	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

January 29. Sermon: These Are blessings? You be the judge. My texts are Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 5:1-12.

February 5. Sermon: God and Evolution, Faith and Science. Some people have begun to treat observable scientific facts as threatening to Christian Faith. However, the truth can never threaten our faith. My texts are John 1:1-5 and Gen 1:1-2:4a.

Worship Leaders Schedule

January 29

Hal Newman, **Liturgist**

Gina and Brandon Stewart, **Greeters**

Maurice and Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

February 5

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Tommy and Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Marty and Dana Bauguess, **Ushers**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GraceWorks has a shortage on many items in our food pantry, and we need your help restocking it! Here is a list of some very critical items needed in our food pantry: **Critical Needs:** Canned green vegetables (not green beans), Canned beans, Canned meat (not tuna), Cereal, Hamburger Helper type boxed meals, Soup. Please support this important ministry with your regular donations. The box is located beside the side door.

A joint meeting of the **Finance Committee and the Trustees** will meet following worship this Sunday. If you are a member of these groups, please plan to attend.

Hosts and Hostesses for First Sunday Lunch: Please see the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Please add your name to host this occasion for the coming months.

The Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School Class is both learning and enjoying a new discussion-based study. We are reading a book, "Ask." This book explores "faith questions in a skeptical age." We enjoy discussion about what we are reading and the application of the lessons to our lives. We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in January

**Renee Fetting, Dawn Stevens, Dennis Meaker, Judy Richardson, Linda McGill, Jessica Moore,
Laura Otto**

Happy Birthday to each of you!