



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 all the letters identified as being written by Paul were not all 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 they 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 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 do hurt those around you. Use your anger to spur your ministry by trying to make the world a better place.

Next week: Philippians

Christians and Halloween

Christians in recent years have tended to become embroiled in issues without substance. Rather than focusing on the spreading of the Gospel and living as the body of Christ in a troubled and often uncaring world we turn to irrelevancies. Examples would be the posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, the

teaching of evolution and geology, prayer in school and the so-called “War on Christmas.” Another example would be the fear that allowing our children to participate in Halloween activities undermines Christianity.

According to Britannica Online, Halloween has its origins in the Celtic festival of *Samhain*. This festival took place on November 1st, marking the end of summer. Herds were brought down from summer pastures. It was also believed that the dead would visit their old homes on this day. Masks were worn to disguise the living from the visiting ghosts. The church ultimately selected November 1st as All Saints Day, probably in an effort to supplant the pagan customs. The evening before All Saints Day was considered holy, or hallowed. Eventually it came to be known as Halloween.

The fact that a holiday we celebrate has its origins in a pagan celebration is not a basis for declaring the day “unholy” or the practice of observing Halloween “un-Christian.” The question that we should ask is, “What does the holiday mean to us?” The answer is simple. Over the last two centuries the holiday has come to be known as a day of make believe and fun. Our children, of all ages, are invited to use their imaginations to dress up and party together. It is a day when too much candy is likely to be eaten, but that can be a good thing too. Ask any kid. People laugh, enjoy one another’s company and generally a good time is had by all. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus enjoyed a good party and I suspect that he would have enjoyed the celebration of Halloween. In our world today, an excuse to have a good time sharing one another’s company is not a bad thing. It’s actually quite Christian. Have a blessed Halloween.

GraceWorks Ministries

The following information is from a letter I received from GraceWorks ministries which focuses on serving the needs of Williamson County:

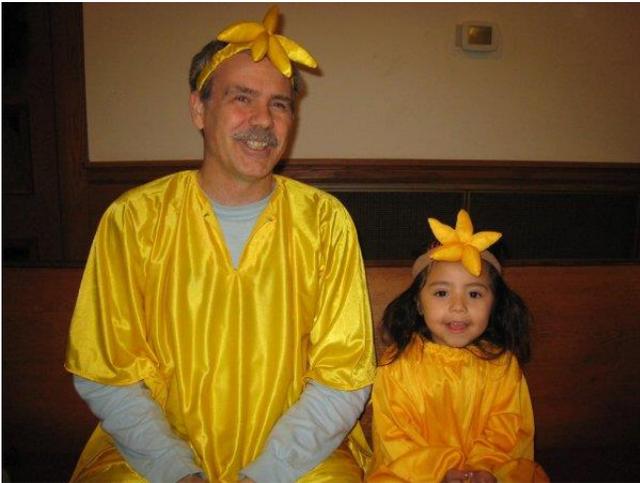
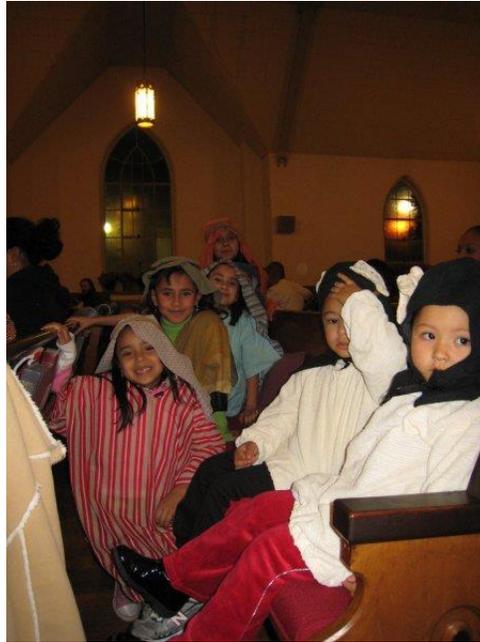
- Forty percent (40%) of Franklin school children participate in the free or reduced lunch program.
- Over the last five years requests for help with rent and utilities has doubled. Requests for food have increased 275%. Food requests are expected to go up as recent reductions in the SNAP (Foodstamp) program go into effect.
- GraceWorks provides around 2000 meals a month to hungry children in Williamson County. They estimate that the need is for 20,000 meals.
- GraceWorks provided over \$2 million dollars in assistance to the poor in Williamson County in 2012.

The need is on-going even in this wealthiest of Tennessee Counties. In the coming months I will ask you to explore with me how we can assist the work of GraceWorks through our prayers, our presence, our witness, our gifts and our service.

What Is An Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

If you have not heard of it yet, we are planning an Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant for Sunday, December 8th. But what is an unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

The typical Church Christmas Pageant is a telling of the Christmas story by our children by means of a play. Usually there are about three weeks' worth of chaotic rehearsals which require young children to memorize lines and where they are supposed to be during the play. The result is often quite jumbled with children showing up in the wrong places at the wrong times and forgetting their lines. None of that usually matters much to the parents and families because they simply came to see their own child anyway.





The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant produces much the same result without all the angst associated with rehearsals and trying to get young children to memorize a script. The children dress up as Shepherds, Sheep, Stars, Angels and Wise Persons. There is a narrator to tell the story, supported by congregational singing of Christmas Carols. Everyone enjoys participating in the program (there are opportunities for adults to dress up as well) and then we break for punch and cookies. We will also provide an opportunity for children and adults to make an offering of canned food or money to support the food pantry at GraceWorks.

The pictures here will give you some idea of what is involved in the way of costumes. Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt are coordinating this event but will need help from as many members of the church as are willing to help to get costumes together and otherwise organize the event. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this ministry this Advent.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

⁸ *Then the LORD asked, "What do you think of my servant Job? No one on earth is like him—he is a truly good person, who respects me and refuses to do evil."*

⁹ *"Why shouldn't he respect you?" Satan remarked.* ¹⁰ *"You are like a wall protecting not only him, but his entire family and all his property. You make him successful in whatever he does, and his flocks and herds are everywhere.* ¹¹ *Try taking away everything he owns, and he will curse you to your face."* Job 1:8-11 CEB

Job is one of the most fascinating books in the Old Testament. It struggles to explain the disparity in people's lives. Why is one person rich and another poor? Why is one person healthy and another sick? Why does it seem that one person is repeatedly struck by tragedy? The common wisdom of the day was that God blessed those who were righteous and punished those who sinned. Yet, as pointed out by Job, and many other scriptures, sometimes the unrighteous were blessed and the righteous suffered. Despite the "common wisdom," however, the bible does not contain a theology of helping only the "deserving poor." Those who are blessed are called to share their blessings to help others, leaving the judgment of righteousness to God.

¹⁷ One day some Pharisees and experts in the Law of Moses sat listening to Jesus teach. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

God had given Jesus the power to heal the sick,¹⁸ and some people came carrying a crippled man on a mat. They tried to take him inside the house and put him in front of Jesus.¹⁹ But because of the crowd, they could not get him to Jesus. So they went up on the roof, where they removed some tiles and let the mat down in the middle of the room.

²⁰ When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the crippled man, "My friend, your sins are forgiven."

²¹ The Pharisees and the experts began arguing, "Jesus must think he is God! Only God can forgive sins."

²² Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he said, "Why are you thinking that?²³ Is it easier for me to tell this crippled man that his sins are forgiven or to tell him to get up and walk?"²⁴ But now you will see that the Son of Man has the right to forgive sins here on earth." Jesus then said to the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk home."

²⁵ At once the man stood up in front of everyone. He picked up his mat and went home, giving thanks to God. Luke 5:17-25

Much like Job, Jesus challenges the concept of bad things in your life being associated with sin. When the paralytic man's friends lower him to the ground, Jesus is impressed by the faith of the friends. Their faith was a basis for Jesus to forgive the sins of the paralytic man. When the Pharisees challenge Jesus right to forgive sins, he heals the man as a sign of his divine authority, not because the man's sin was associated with his paralysis.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings from 10:00 to noon. This group has just finished Disciple I. We will begin a new study on October 24th. We will be studying the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study beginning October 24th.

I believe that study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard
Larry Eastwood

Leslie Eastwood
Sarah Jordan

Mac McAfee
Rachel Newman

Kenneth Stevens
Patricia Stevens

Sam Richardson

Judy Richardson

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

October 27th: It's All Up to Me. Some people view the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector as a story about pride. To some extent that is correct. But there are deeper meanings to be explored. My texts are 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18 and Luke 18:9–14.

November 3rd; It's Good to be Poor? One of the most confusing, and disturbing, passages in scripture is Luke's version of the beatitudes. It challenges our assumptions about ourselves and our worldview. My texts are Ephesians 1:11–23 and Luke 6:20–31.

Worship Leaders Schedule

October 27

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Ushers**

November 3

Tom Moore, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Hal & Rachel Newman, **Ushers**

Announcements

You are invited to "**Old School Sunday School**" at **9:45** in the Fellowship Hall. We are singing, praying, studying scripture and caring for one another as we strive to become new people in Christ. Our curriculum is Cokesbury's Adult Bible Studies and our template is Colossians 3:12-17.

"Companions in Christ" gathers at 9:45. We are talking about how to be better companions to our fellow Christians, discover what our spiritual gifts are, and dig deeper into what we believe and why. Please come and enjoy this time with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. We will meet in the Youth Sunday School room. All are welcome!

Ministry with 61st Ave. UMC. The remaining date to serve and worship this year is **November 16.**

A photographer will be coming to the church to take photographs of individuals as well as families to update our directory. A free copy of your photo will be available for download for your personal use from a designated website. **The dates for the photographs are Friday, November 1; Saturday, November 2. The scheduled time for Friday November 1st is 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM. On Saturday pictures will be taken from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. We are also scheduling appointments for Wednesday, November 6 and Thursday, November 7. The scheduled times on these days will be from 6:00 to 9:00 PM.** Photographs will be scheduled at 20 minute intervals. Signup sheets are posted on the bulletin board. You will want to take advantage of this opportunity for your personal photograph as well as for our new Directory.

Choir Rehearsal: Rehearsal is scheduled this week on **October 23rd at 7:00 PM.**

October Birthdays

Elaine Rohrig, Julia Moore

Happy Birthday to both of you!