

ephesians



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SOURCES & ABBREVIATIONS

Barclay	William Barclay, <u>Ephesians</u> , Westminster, 1956
Barth	Markus Barth, <u>Ephesians</u> , 2 volumes, Doubleday, 1974
ESV	English Standard Version
Foulkes	Francis Foulkes, <u>The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians</u> , Tyndale, 1963
Hendrickson	William Hendrickson, <u>Ephesians</u> , Baker, 1967
Hodge	Charles Hodge, <u>A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians</u> , 1856, Sovereign Grace, 1972
Hughes	R. Kent Hughes, <u>Ephesians</u> , Crossway, 1990
Kittel	Gehard Kittel, <u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u> , Eerdmans, 1964-1974
KJV	King James Bible
Lincoln	Andrew T. Lincoln, <u>Ephesians</u> , Word Books, 1990
MacArthur	John MacArthur, <u>Ephesians</u> , Moody, 1986
Martin	Ralph Martin, <u>Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon</u> , John Knox, 1991
Morris	Leon Morris, <u>Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians</u> , Baker, 1994
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version (1984)
Patzia	Arthur G. Patzia, <u>Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon</u> , Hendrickson, 1984
Simpson	F. F. Bruce and E.K. Simpson, <u>The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians</u> , Eerdmans, 1957
Stott	John Stott, <u>The Message of Ephesians</u> , IVP, 1979
Wood	A. Skevington Wood, <u>Ephesians</u> , Zondervan, 1978

This study guide is a revision of a revision. SBCC first studied Ephesians in 1994 and then again in 2002. Now we come back to it as a church community in 2013. This study was written by Reed Jolley and has been revised substantially since its last incarnation. One significant change is that the base text is now the ESV rather than the 1984 NIV. There is, obviously, much in Paul's letter that God has for us. Thanks to Susi Lamoutte and Steve Jolley for help in this latest revision.

The cover art is a visual representation of all six chapters of Ephesians. The words' size are based on their frequency in the book. Thus *Christ*, which occurs most often, is largest. Common English words like *the*, *as*, and *if* are omitted. Graphic images within the studies are modified photographs from the following sources: www.creationswap.com/, churchmediadesign.tv/lightstock-giveaway-day-5/, and wikipedia.org. Layout design created by Carolee Peterson. Winter/Spring 2013.

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INTRODUCTION

What we call *Ephesians* was originally a letter composed by the apostle Paul to one of the most successful churches in the New Testament era. The letter is fairly short. It consists of six chapters which contain 155 verses from the pen of the apostle Paul. It takes about thirty minutes to read this letter. These 155 verses can and will give shape to our lives like few other portions of Scripture.

Many readers of the Bible, along with biblical scholars, recognize Ephesians as the high point of the Apostle's inspired writing. The letter is as sublime as it is brief! It tells us most of what we need to know about God and what he has done for us in Christ. In these pages we learn about his church and how we are related to one another as a consequence of what God has done!



Testimony to the letter throughout church history is over the top! John Calvin claimed Ephesians was his favorite of the letters in the New Testament and he preached no fewer than 48 sermons on the book. In more recent times, New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd saw the letter as the crown of all that Paul wrote. More recently still, F. F. Bruce considered these verses the *quintessence* of Paul's writings! The accolades don't stop here.

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge called Ephesians *the divinest composition of man*.
- John Mackay, once president of Princeton Theological Seminary, called the letter the *climax* of Paul's literature. *Never, he said, was the reality of Revelation more obvious and the reflective powers of the Apostle's mind more transfigured than in the great book of Ephesians.*
- E. J. Goodspeed sees the letter as a *rhapsody on the worth of salvation*.
- New testament scholar Ralph Martin says Ephesians is the *most relevant* portion of the New Testament. (Martin, p. 1)
- Pastor Kent Hughes comments, *Ephesians — carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered — will change our lives. It is not so much a question of what we will do with the epistle, but what it will do with us.* (Hughes, p. 16)

How did Paul come to write Ephesians?

Ephesians takes a unique place among the thirteen New Testament letters attributed to the apostle Paul. Ephesians doesn't sound like Paul. It is certainly the least personal of his letters. Absent are the usual references to friends and coworkers in the church who

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are singled out for special greetings (see Romans 16 for example). Paul seems more detached from his readers in this letter than in, say, Colossians where he struggles for the church in prayer (Colossians 2:1ff.), or in his Corinthian correspondence where we find Paul intimately and, at times, angrily involved with his readers (1 Corinthians 1:10ff.). Paul's detachment is all the more surprising when one considers the Apostle's very intimate relationship with the church in Ephesus:

- The seeds for the church in Ephesus were planted by Paul, Priscilla and Aquila at the tail end of Paul's second missionary journey. Because Paul was in a hurry to return to Jerusalem, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to continue, we assume, the work he began in the synagogue (Acts 18:18-21).
- On Paul's third missionary journey he spent three months preaching in the synagogue trying to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 19:8).
- Following a rebellion against his teaching, Paul rented a lecture hall and for two years taught daily both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10).
- We read of Paul's farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20:13-38. The story is one of the most touching in all the New Testament. Here we find Paul fully engaged with the leadership of the church. *They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.* (Acts 20:37).

After Paul leaves Ephesus, he journeys to Jerusalem, is arrested and imprisoned in Caesarea for at least two years (Acts 24:27). Then he goes to Rome and is a prisoner there under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:30).

It is from Rome that Paul writes his prison letters: Colossians, Philippians, Philemon and Ephesians.¹ In Ephesians we catch Paul in a contemplative mood. He writes a rhapsody about God and his church.

What is the letter about?

We could call Ephesians Paul's eulogy to God! In 1:3 he says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...*² The word *blessed* in Greek is *eulogetos*. It means *to bless*, or *to praise*. From this word we get the English word eulogy which, according to the dictionary, refers to *a laudatory speech or written tribute...* Ephesians is Paul's exuberant gushing about the greatness of God.

¹ This is open to interpretation. Paul nowhere claims to have written these letters from Rome. Some commentators think Paul wrote Ephesians from his prison cell in Caesarea in Israel. Still others posit an Ephesian imprisonment and place the letter there (based on 1 Corinthians 15:32).

² These words introduce one of several extremely long sentences in the Greek text (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-9; 3:1-7).

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Paul is not urgently correcting a problem in Ephesus.¹ Apparently the Apostle has no theological ax to grind, as in Colossians.² Furthermore, he is not preparing for a visit (as in Romans), trying to settle a dispute (as in Corinthians), or giving thanks for financial support (Philippians).

In Ephesians Paul is thinking about God. He ponders what God has done in Christ. His enthusiasm is evident to anyone who reads the letter. For example, five times he refers to the *riches* of God, 12 times to the *grace* of God. The *glory* of God is mentioned eight times, and the words *in Christ* are used 15 times. As we read the book several themes emerge:

1. The sovereignty of God. God is the highest authority and power in the universe. He is the object of all praise and adoration (cf. 1:3, 9, 11-12; 2:4-7).
2. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:1-4, 30; 5:18; 6:18).
3. The doctrine of the church. Ephesians is unique in its insistence that the church is the incarnate representative of Christ on earth during the present era. Ralph Martin writes:

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul had insisted on the indivisibility of the body, which is made up of many members (cf. Romans 12:4-5), but in Ephesians (notably in 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:29-30) the head and the body are inextricably united and interdependent. (Martin, p. 7)

John MacArthur goes so far as to say, *Christ's church is His present reincarnated Body on earth!*

4. The doctrine of reconciliation. The great theme of Ephesians is the reconciliation Christ provided on the Cross. First, sinful men and women were reconciled to God (2:1-10). The implication of this vertical reconciliation is a horizontal reconciliation between ethnic and racial divisions (2:11-22). Paul is stunned by what he calls the *mystery* of the gospel. And what is that mystery?

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. (Ephesians 3:6)

1 There is some debate as to whom the letter was addressed. The oldest Greek manuscripts omit the words *in Ephesus* in 1:1. Ephesians may have been a *circular* letter intended for both the Ephesian church and the various churches in the region. Ephesus was surrounded by over 200 independent communities in the Roman province of Asia. If this is the case, we have an explanation for the lack of personal greetings in the letter. Paul has a wider audience in mind.

2 The similarities between Colossians and Ephesians are quite clear. In 1823, Wilhelm Martin Le-Brecht de Wette, one of the most influential 19th century biblical scholars, claimed that Ephesians was but a *verbose* expansion of Colossians. He was having a bad day. However, the letters do share over 50 phrases verbatim (cf. Hendrickson, pp. 6-26, for a parallel of the two books).

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The salvation which was once thought to be the private possession of Israel is now available to Jews and Gentiles alike. As a Jew who had been trained to see Gentiles as outsiders, Paul is shocked when he considers what God has done in Christ. This melding together of Jews and Gentiles into one *body* was planned by God from eternity past (1:11-13; 3:9-11). The proclamation of this mystery is what landed Paul in prison. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Paul asking for boldness in his future proclamation of this mystery.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (Ephesians 6:19-20 NIV)

Ralph Martin writes,

[Paul] is gripped by what is virtually a single theme that runs like a thread through his treatise. He marvels...at the grace of God which has brought into being a united church. In this Christian society, Jews and Gentiles find their true place (2:1-11). The unity of this universal society which is nothing less than Christ's body (1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 5:30) is his great concern... The coming into existence of this one family where all barriers of race, culture, and social status are broken down is the wonder that fills his vision. (Martin, p. 6)

Along these lines William Barclay writes,

The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. Christ is the centre in whom all things unite, and the bond who unites all things. In nature as it is without Christ there is nothing but disunity and disharmony... The world, as we see it without Christ, is a divided, disunited, fragmented world... this disunity can only become a unity, and this disharmony can only become a harmony, when all things and all men and all powers in heaven and earth are united in Christ. (Barclay, p. 77)

As we read, study, ponder and argue over this wonderful letter during the coming weeks, let us catch a vision of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. In a world broken by racism, emphasizing at times a new tribalism, let us celebrate the reconciliation Christ provided on the Cross. Let us live out this marvelous mystery in the church. When we live in this way, members of the body of Christ will bask in the loving concern of the God whom we worship, the ministry of the church will be enhanced, and Christ will be glorified.

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STUDY ONE

a litany of delight

EPHESIANS 1:1-6

At first we marvel at the wealth of his language: but soon we discover by the very repetition of the phrases which have arrested us, the poverty of all language when it comes to dealing with such topics as he has chosen. He seems to be swept along by his theme, hardly knowing whither it is taking him.



So says Armitage Robinson about the opening sentence of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church.¹

After a brief and somewhat typical greeting (1:1-2), Paul begins one of the loftiest sentences of the New Testament. In the Greek text, verses 3-14 are a single, glorious, run-on sentence. One commentator says Paul is writing in a *state of controlled ecstasy*. Even a casual reading of a re-punctuated English Bible gives the reader the unmistakable sense that Paul is grasping for words to express his sheer delight in what God has done for the believer in Christ.

These verses contain much to ponder. They are loaded with significance and will shape our understanding of both God and the salvation he provided in Christ. Even though we will focus primarily on verses 1-6, take a few minutes to read Ephesians 1:3-14 and pray over this passage before going on. Catch a glimpse of the whole. Marvel at what God has done for you! If possible read from several translations.

Make a list of the things God has done for you from these verses.

List the references Paul makes to our being *in Christ, in him*, etc.

¹ Cited in Hughes, p. 270

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STUDY ONE

Try to outline these verses. Attempt a sentence diagram of verses 3-14.

Verse 1:3 begins Paul's lofty eulogy to God. Verse 3 contains three uses of the word *bless*.


Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...

Blessed be God was a typical introduction to Jewish praise in the synagogue. But notice what Paul does with this familiar introduction to worship. The Apostle ties the blessing of God with the lordship of Jesus the Messiah and then goes on to point out the blessings we have received from him.

Pastor John MacArthur writes of these verses,

Paul takes us to the very throne room of the Godhead to show the greatness and the vastness of the blessings and treasures that belong to those who are in Jesus Christ. (MacArthur, pp. 5-6)

As we go into the throne room of God, keep the following outline in mind:

Bless God!  Because God chose us for salvation (vv. 4-6)
Because God redeemed us in Christ (vv. 7-10)
Because God guarantees our future inheritance (vv. 11-14)

Stop here for a moment during your homegroup discussion, celebrate these blessings in prayer. Pray specifically through these three sections of Paul's sentence.

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STUDY ONE

Verses 4-5 contain two words saturated with significance and controversy. The words are *chose* and *predestined*. Theologians have written volumes on these words and developed theologies to match their findings.¹ Before we look more closely at each of these important words, notice Paul's train of thought. We are to bless God (v. 3) because he *chose* us and *predestined* us to salvation. Regardless of where our study and discussion takes us, let us return to this central idea of our passage. Worship is Paul's intention.

What do you think Paul means when he says God *chose us* in Christ?

The Greek word Paul uses is *eklego* which means, simply, to pick or to choose. Paul is speaking here of what is called the doctrine, or teaching of *election*. God, in his infinite, sovereign wisdom and grace decided to choose for himself some to be *holy and blameless*.

What do you make of this doctrine of election? How does it feel to know that God chose you to be *holy and blameless before him*. Furthermore, he chose us before the foundation of the world.²

Compare the following Scriptures:

John 6:44

John 15:16

1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

2 Thessalonians 2:13

1 Peter 1:2

1 Rest assured, all the controversies of the past two thousand years will be settled in the next two pages of the study guide.

2 Charles Spurgeon writes, *There is no doubt in my mind God chose me before I was born. He didn't have any reason to choose me after I was born...*

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STUDY ONE

Ours is an era which stresses the freedom of the individual. Accordingly, some are often offended at the doctrine of election. Some of us grimace at the thought that we are saved because of God's sovereign choice. We want to make our own choices! What does this doctrine of election or predestination teach us about God? What does it teach us about ourselves?

About God

About Ourselves

Respond to the following quotation by John Murray.

If we say or suppose that... predestination... is determined by some sovereign decision on the part of men themselves, then we contradict what the apostle by eloquent reiteration was jealous to affirm. If he meant to say anything in these expressions in Ephesians 1:5, 9, and 11, it is that God's predestination, and his will to salvation, proceeds from the pure sovereignty and absolute determination of his counsel. It is the unconditioned and unconditional election of God's grace.¹

We need to be careful in our thinking here. While the New Testament writers affirm the necessity of God's sovereign choice in our salvation, they also affirm the reality of each man and woman's free will. Consider the following Scriptures:

Matthew 23:37

John 7:17

Romans 7:18

Revelation 22:17

¹ *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2, p. 127. Emphasis added.

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STUDY ONE

What are we to make of these verses when compared to the verses listed above? Consider and evaluate the following attempt at reconciling the doctrines of election and free will:

Apart from God, man's will is captive to sin. But he is nevertheless able to choose God because God has made that choice possible. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16) and that "everyone who believes in Me shall never die (11:26)." The frequent commands to the unsaved to respond to the Lord...clearly indicate the responsibility of man to exercise his own will.

Yet the Bible is just as clear that no person receives Jesus Christ as Savior who has not been chosen by God (cf. Romans 8:29; 9:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:2). Jesus gives both truths in one verse in the gospel of John: *All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.* (John 6:37). We should let the antinomy remain, believing both truths completely and leaving the harmonizing of them to God. (MacArthur, p. 11)¹

In verse 5 we read,

... he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...

The Greek word Paul uses for predestination is *proorizo*. It means *to decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine*. The KJV translates this word *predestinated*, while the NEB uses the English word *destined*. Some translators use the word *foreordained* to translate *proorizo*. This is the glorious truth Paul celebrates: God chose us!

But again, we need to ask, *What are we to do with this teaching?* What does Paul's exultation do to us?

Go back and review verses 4-6. What are the stated purposes of the doctrine of election? List these purposes.

¹ J. I. Packer grapples with the reconciliation of these two biblical teachings. What do you think of the following? *All Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that they reject it. What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most cases of error in the Church—the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the supposed demands of human logic. People see the Bible teaches man's responsibility for his actions; they do not see (man, indeed, cannot see) how this is consistent with the sovereign Lordship of God over those actions. They are not content to let the two truths live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it. The desire to oversimplify the Bible by cutting out the mysteries is natural to our perverse minds, and it is not surprising that even godly men should fall victim to it.* (J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 1961, pp. 16-17).

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STUDY ONE

What does the notion of *adoption* (v. 6) bring to mind? How does this teaching shape your understanding of your relationship to God? Do you know anyone who has adopted a son or a daughter? How do these parents *feel* about their adopted children? Are these children loved as if they were their own flesh and blood?

Again, observe where Paul is going with this! All of this is *to the praise of the glory of his grace!* Worship is the outcome of these powerful doctrines.

J. I. Packer sees the connection between our doctrine and our spiritual vitality.

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.¹

As you conclude your study of this passage, ask God for a deeper understanding of his sovereignty and your relation to him in his sovereignty. Bless God for who he is and what he has done.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 1973, p. 182

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STUDY ONE

praying the passage: ephesians 1:1-6

- Praise God for the many truths contained in verse 1! Acknowledge his sovereignty in choosing Paul and in choosing us. Thank him that he calls his people *saints*, and calls the Ephesians (and us) *the faithful in Christ Jesus*.
- Pray grace and peace into the lives of each of your homegroup members by name, into whatever calling he has given each one. Consider repeating verse 2 as a litany in response to these prayers of blessing.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Praise God for all he has given us in verses 3-6! Consider the privilege of being called sons of God (v. 5), or the fact that he has freely given us all these things (v. 6).
- Confess the ways in which you have failed to meditate on or embrace these truths. Confess ways in which you may not feel holy or blameless, or may be focused on earthly security rather than on the security of being chosen in him before the creation of the world.
- Pray for each other that these truths would change the way you feel on Monday morning, or your attitude in the face of trials. Pray for the persecuted church and the suffering church, to know that they are adopted by their Father in heaven. Consider Christians in the Muslim world, or those locally who are without family.

sermon notes

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STUDY ONE

blood deliverance

EPHESIANS 1:7-10

William Shakespeare's tragedy of *Macbeth*, written early in the seventeenth century, contains the bitter proclamation: *Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing...*

Is life but a tale told by an idiot? Philosopher Andre Maurois thought so and he mourned the absence of meaning in life:

The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea. (Barclay, p. 98)



G. N. Clark became president of Cambridge University. In his inaugural lecture he said,

There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of all the irrationalities of preceding ages. If it could not explain them, still less could it justify them. (Hughes, p. 35)

Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is the Apostle's grand statement against these cries of despair. Life, for Paul, is full of wonder, purpose and mystery because of what God has done for his people through Christ.

Once again, read and meditate upon Ephesians 1:3-14. Allow these verses to help you ponder the greatness of God. Notice how these verses point to a view of life which is full of meaning. Ponder with Paul for a few minutes. What has God done for you? How do these verses give significance to your life?

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STUDY TWO

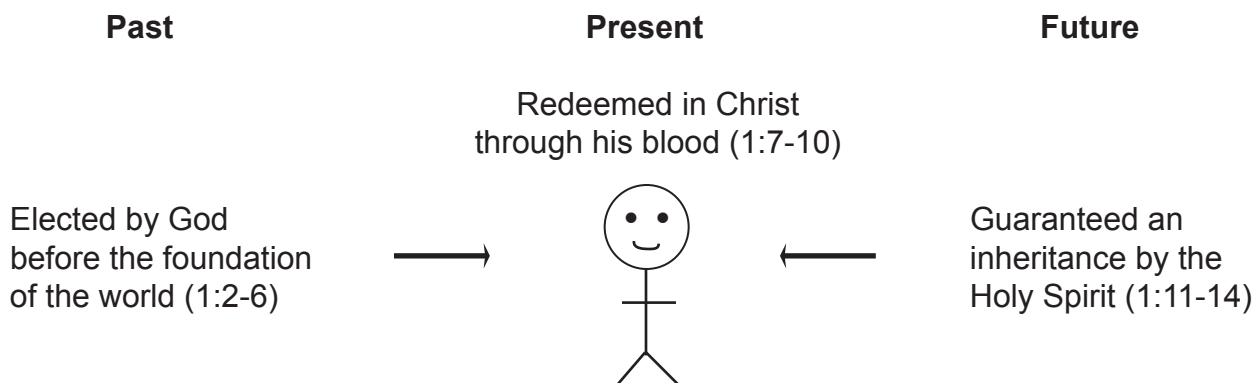
Paul is gushing in these verses. He cannot seem to find enough words to express his awe over what God has done for us in Christ. Make a list of the key words in verses 7-10. Try to find a synonym for each word.

Key Words

Synonym

Of these words, which stand out and have more meaning for you? Why?

The outline of these verses could be understood in a temporal sense:



When Paul says we were *redeemed* in Christ he employs a word picture. In the ancient world the victor in battle would take the conquered soldiers from the opposing army and make them into slaves. Sometimes these slaves would be sold back to their original king. The payment price was called a *ransom*. When the transaction was completed the slaves were *redeemed*. Morris writes,

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STUDY TWO

...the thought in “redemption” is always that the person has been in a captivity from which he or she cannot break free, yet is set free on the payment of a price.¹ (Morris, p. 20)

Compare the following passages with verse 7. How do they fill in the picture of the payment Christ made for our sin?

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13)

... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15)

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

Think of these verses in light of biblical history. For roughly 1000, years Jews had been offering sacrifices in the temple and, before that, in the tabernacle. While these sacrifices symbolized redemption from sin, they didn't really work. *It is impossible*, we learn in Hebrews, *for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* (Hebrews 10:4) The sacrifices were merely *shadows* (Colossians 2:17) which looked forward to reality of the cross.²

1 Sometimes an individual slave was able to collect enough money to purchase his or her own freedom. The same term was applied. The slave purchased *redemption*.

2 Christ *bought us back* while on the cross. But how? What was it about the cross that justified us? How did the death of Christ procure our salvation? Romans 3:25 gives the best explanation. *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.* Here Paul uses the Greek word *hilasterion*. The word is usually translated *propitiation*, which means to appease someone's wrath. In the Greek Old Testament the word occurs twenty times to denote the golden cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat. This is the place where the high priest met with God annually. Here the high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to assuage the wrath of God. Through the shedding of blood this was the place where Israel was reconciled to her God.

In Romans 3:25, Paul uses this familiar imagery and gives it new significance. When Christ was on the cross God provided *propitiation to himself*. *The death of Christ, then, is the means by which God does away with His people's sin - not symbolically, as in the ritual of Leviticus 16 in which the material mercy-seat figured, but really. And really in a twofold sense; the sin has been removed not only from the believer's conscience, on which it lay as an intolerable burden, but from the presence of God.* (F. F. Bruce, Romans p. 106)

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STUDY TWO

How does Paul describe our redemption in verse 7? Diagram this part of his sentence:

Each of us has sins in our background which haunt and trouble us. We have proverbial *skeletons in the closet* we hope no one finds. The word in verse 7 for *forgiveness* should set us free from our past regrets. The word means, *to send away*. In the death of Christ our sins are *sent away*. *All* of them!

Examine the following verses with this in mind. Personalize these verses as you read them. When you read the word *sin*, or, *sins*, think about those things in your past which haunt you.

Psalm 103:12

Isaiah 44:22

Jeremiah 31:34b

Micah 7:18-19

Matthew 26:28

1 John 1:9

If these verses are true, why do we sometimes retain feelings of guilt concerning our past sins?

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STUDY TWO

How do these verses address your feelings of guilt?

Acknowledging there are sometimes life-long residual consequences from sin, what can we do to encourage one another to move beyond inappropriate feelings of guilt?

Notice that the forgiveness we receive is *in accordance with the riches of God's grace*.... *Riches* is one of Paul's favored words. Fifteen of the twenty-two times the word occurs in the New Testament are from the pen of Paul (five times in Ephesians alone). *Riches* refers to literal wealth, but it is used figuratively to refer to the abundance of blessings in Christ.

... having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints... (Ephesians 1:18)

... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus... (Ephesians 2:7)

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ... (Ephesians 3:8)

[I pray] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being... (Ephesians 3:16)

Paul follows this word saying God *lavished* his grace upon us. *Strictly speaking the word refers to things that are over and above the required number ...* (Morris, p. 21)

What is Paul saying about our forgiveness?

... in the unspeakable Gift high heaven comes to our aid and allocates to our bankrupt funds its own illimitable wealth, "infinite riches in a little room". And the Lord's forgiveness is as complete as its procurement was costly. His is no grudging, but a cordial, an *abundant*, an exhaustive pardon. (Simpson, p. 31)

ephesians

STUDY TWO

When Paul says God made *known to us the mystery of his will* ... he does not have in mind something cryptic or spooky. In the New Testament the word *mystery* generally refers to the revelation of something which was previously hidden. God's grace is manifest in his revelation of the *mystery of his will*.

Read verse 9 in context. What is the *mystery of his will*?

Verse 10 is laced with significance. Here Paul proclaims the meaning of the universe. The Greek text is difficult to translate. Paul uses a Greek word (*anakephalaiosasthai*) which means *to sum up*. Literally it means *to gather under a single head*. It refers to the conclusion of an argument. Martin writes,

Here it probably means that in Christ the entire universe will one day find its full explanation and rationale, its "principle of cohesion." If so, this bold claim marks the completion of New Testament thought which has Christ as the source (Colossians 1:16; John 1:3-4; Hebrews 1:2-3) and the sustainer (Colossians 1:17) of creation. He is now hailed as the destined Lord of all life as the goal toward which the whole creation is moving... (Martin, p. 17)

Through Christ God has redeemed us. What should our response be to such knowledge both emotionally and behaviorally? How should these verses shape our worship? Our lifestyle? Our friendships?

If you have given your life to Christ in response to God's merciful redemption, lift praises to God for the richness of his grace! If you have not, carefully ponder what is being offered to you, an offer of both forgiveness and inclusion in God's plan to bring all things into a rich unity through the death of Christ.

ephesians

STUDY TWO

praying the passage: ephesians 1:7-10

- Thank God for *redemption through his blood*. Consider that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sins (Hebrews 9:22). Thank God for the cross, and Jesus for what he endured on our behalf.
- Confess, silently and/or out loud, those sins that still plague us. Thank him for, and rest in, the redemption through his blood that covers every one of those sins.
- Pray for Christ to return and bring all things together under his headship (v. 10)! Name parts of the world in which Christ is not worshipped, and ask Jesus to rule and reign in those places.

sermon notes

ephesians

STUDY TWO

inheritance

EPHESIANS 1:11-14



Our text in this study concludes Paul's marvelous run-on sentence which began in verse 3. Paul's words are pregnant with meaning. The Apostle's inspired words strain to express his exuberance in what God has done for us in Christ! Before going on in this study re-read 1:3-14 a few times. Try reading from an unfamiliar translation. Ponder and meditate upon this grand sentence.

Let us turn our focus to the end of this sentence (verses 11-14). Here Paul reiterates the great themes of verses 3-10, but adds a hint of what is to come in chapter 2. Notice the *we-you* language in these verses. Paul is introducing the major theme of his letter, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14)

One of the problems besetting the early church was that of Jewish exclusiveness. Spiritual pride on the part of the Jews caused divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish believers almost from the inception of the church. Ephesians, at one level, is Paul's statement of Christian unity. As one commentary title states, Ephesians is about *God's New Society*.¹

In these verses Paul begins to show that in Christ, Jew and Gentile come together as one new people. The *we* (Jews) and the *you* (Gentiles) are both marked by the Holy Spirit and have become together the people of God! Paul will develop this theme in chapters 2 and 3.

In verse 11, Paul returns to the theme of the believer's election to salvation. He puts this in terms of receiving an inheritance in Christ.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...

¹ This was the original title of John Stott's commentary published in 1979.

ephesians

STUDY THREE

The Greek verb Paul uses is found only here in the New Testament (eklerothemen). Eklerothemen comes from kleroô which means, literally, “to cast lots,” “to choose by lot,” or “to receive by lot.” The noun kleros means “the lot,” “portion,” or “inheritance.” Paul probably has in mind the Old Testament concept of Israel as God’s “lot” or “chosen people” (Deuteronomy 4:20; 9:29; 32:9; I Kings 8:51...). Now, however, believers are chosen “in Christ.” Our future is so certain in Christ that Paul writes in the past tense “we have already obtained our inheritance in Him...” (Patzia, pp. 156-157)

Imagine you are the recipient of a large inheritance. Imagine further that the legal documents surrounding this inheritance declared that you will receive the estate (with interest, tax free) ten years from today. What changes would this make in your lifestyle? What changes would take place in your attitude toward money?

Now apply this delightful (?) fantasy to the big picture of your life! Paul declares you have received a massively generous inheritance which will last for eternity! God is in control. You are his possession, chosen, elected, loved and saved by him. Think about your future inheritance from the vantage point of the following verses:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Does this wonderful news affect the day-to-day struggles of your life? Explain.

ephesians

STUDY THREE

How might you encourage a Christian friend who is overwhelmed with suffering in light of God's gracious gift to us?

Paul links our *inheritance* in Christ with our *predestination* in Christ. Remember study one? The Greek word Paul uses is *proorizo*. It means to *decide beforehand, to preordain, to determine, or to predestine*. Our salvation is according to God's wonderful plan.

Hendrickson summarizes this teaching from the entire section:

Neither fate nor human merit determines our destiny. The benevolent purpose — that we should be holy and faultless (verse 4), sons of God (verse 5), destined to glorify him forever (verse 6, cf. verses 12 and 14)—is fixed, being part of a larger, universe-embracing plan. Not only did God *make* this plan that includes absolutely all things that ever take place in heaven, on earth, and in hell; past, present, *and even the future*, pertaining to both believers and unbelievers, to angels and devils, to physical as well as spiritual energies and units of existence both large and small; he also *wholly carries it out*. His providence in time is as comprehensive as his decree from eternity. (Hendrickson, p. 88, emphasis is Hendrickson's)

In one way or another we have looked at this doctrine for the past three weeks. Has this look been difficult to digest? Has it produced humility, confidence, joy and godly activity? Give at least one example to your group.

Re-read verse 13. Paul tells his readers when they believed they were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit.

In the partially literate society of Paul's time, a seal was used to bear the imprint of its owner. A wax seal marked an object, a letter or a legal document and said to all who saw it, *I belong to my owner*.

ephesians

STUDY THREE

Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit within the believer is God's seal on that person.... It is the sign that God has accepted him or her. It is the guarantee that all God's promises will be fulfilled in the believer. (Morris, p. 26)

The Holy Spirit, living within us, is God's mark on us. The Spirit is given to everyone who trusts in Christ (Romans 8:9). Each believer's body is called the *temple* of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Here in verse 13 the Holy Spirit guarantees we are God's children.

What does this seal of the Holy Spirit promise? See verse 14. What does this mean to you?

The word Paul uses for *guarantee* is loaded with significance. The Holy Spirit is, in Greek, the *arrabon* who assures our future salvation. The word means, *the first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge that pays part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.* (Bauer, p. 109)

The word is used, outside of the New Testament, of a woman who received 1,000 drachmas as *arrobona* for a cow she was selling. In modern Greek the word is used to refer to an engagement ring.

The Holy Spirit, then, is God's deposit in us, who guarantees our future redemption as his possession. Notice that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is real, but that presence is merely a taste of what is to come.

Share with your group how you experience the Holy Spirit in your Christian life. Is it a good idea to understand this experience as a guarantee of your future inheritance in Christ? Do you think Paul has a believer's experience in mind in these verses? Is there a danger in this notion? Could we become *experience junkies* who always crave the latest manifestation of the Spirit?

ephesians

STUDY THREE

Paul concludes this magnificent sentence with the words *to the praise of his glory*. In other words, all that God has done for us and in us is to the end of his own praise. What does the phrase mean to you? How do you appropriate this phrase in your day-to-day life?

Spend time in prayer responding to Paul's declaration of God's grace. Give God the praise which is his due.

praying the passage: ephesians 1:11-14

- Thank God once again for his choosing us and predestining us. Praise him that we have a guaranteed inheritance (v. 14). Name some things about that inheritance we have in heaven that we may set our hope on.
- Confess the many ways the church has distorted or resisted the doctrine of election. Pray that this doctrine would be rightly understood in the church, inspiring in us humility (because God did it all) rather than pride (because of our privileged position).
- Pray for each other to have assurance of salvation because of this passage. Thank God for his Holy Spirit, who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). Pray for the Spirit to deepen our sense of identity as God's children, and to give us greater focus on our heavenly inheritance rather than on our earthly possessions.

sermon notes...

ephesians

STUDY THREE

the greatness of his power

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

A chief object of all prayer is to bring us to God.
P. T. Forsyth¹

When we begin verse 15, Paul's 205-word sentence has come to a close. He now moves on to inform his readers that he is praying for them, and to tell them something of the content of his prayer.² These nine verses contain many difficulties, problems of interpretation, grammar, etc. But the overall thrust of the text is fairly clear. Paul desires that the Ephesian church may know and experience the greatness of God's power.



Read Ephesians 1:15-23 a few times. Compare translations. Notice how different the NIV is from the more literal ESV.

What are the key words in the text?

What are Paul's main concerns?

What questions arise in your thinking as you read these verses?

How would you summarize Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?

¹ *The Soul of Prayer*, Regent College Publishing, 1997, p. 16.

² Interestingly, Paul mentions his prayer for each church he writes to except for the Corinthian church (which seemed to have more problems than all the other churches combined).

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STUDY FOUR

For this reason... (1:15). Paul's prayer however does not arise out of a vacuum, it flows from his over-the-top praise of verses 3-14. At the outset of this study, think about how God's spiritual blessings can and should inform your own prayer life. How are your prayers different when you ponder God's spiritual blessings? Share this with your homegroup.

Paul prays in 1:17 that the Ephesians will receive the Spirit of *wisdom and revelation*. Most commentators see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit (see the NIV and ESV as opposed to the NASB).

Wisdom refers to seeing and living life from God's vantage point (consider wisdom in the book of Proverbs). This is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Think about wisdom and the Christian life. How does a wise person behave? Who is someone you know who is wise? Why do you consider this person to be wise? How is this wisdom a result of the Holy Spirit's work in that person's life? (Who is the wisest person in your homegroup???)

But what about *revelation*? Leon Morris clarifies the meaning of the word *revelation*.

With [the spirit of wisdom] goes "a spirit of ... revelation." Just as it is true that the believer should aim for the highest mental excellence that the Spirit of God can give, so it is true that the believer is never in the position of being able to work out the Christian way by means of the best wisdom he or she can acquire. Christianity is a religion of revelation. It is only because God has revealed the Christian teachings that we can know them. Specifically, there is nothing about a Galilean carpenter nailed to a Roman cross that can obviously bring salvation to sinners in the modern world. But God has revealed something of the significance of that death on the cross, and it is in light of the revelation that we come to put our trust in the crucified one. And we live out our lives in light of the revelation, for it includes not only an understanding of the way sinners come to be saved, but also of the way saved sinners are to live out the implications of their faith. (Morris, p. 31)

ephesians

STUDY FOUR

At the end of verse 17 we are told that this impartation of *wisdom and revelation* is *in the knowledge of him*, that is, in the knowledge of God. Literally, the text reads *in a full knowledge of him*. The word Paul uses for knowledge is a compound word. We find not the simple word for knowledge (*gnosis*), but the richer word for deep knowledge (*epignosis*).

Epignosis is the fullness of knowledge acquired through personal acquaintance.
(Wood, p. 30)

What then is Paul saying? His prayer for the Ephesians centers on their gaining intimacy in their knowledge of God!

How is your relationship with God? Do you know him better than you did a year ago? Do you work toward intimacy with Christ?

As a homegroup, compile a list of how your members endeavor to know God better. Select one practice you would like to try. Plan to check in with each other in a few weeks to see how this is going.

What role does prayer play in your spiritual progress? Recall the quotation by P. T. Forsyth at the beginning of this study, *A chief object of all prayer is to bring us to God*.

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STUDY FOUR

So often we saturate our prayers with *requests* for temporal needs (health, jobs, relationships, etc.). While these requests are certainly to be a part of our prayers, we often neglect the more important needs of our lives.

Notice how Paul prays for believers in the churches to which he writes. How should this shape our prayers for others?

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

...and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. (Philemon 6)

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10)

How can we, as a church, develop the habit of praying for one another after the manner of Paul's prayers? More specifically, what can your homegroup do to make a priority of these kinds of prayers for one another?

Notice verse 18. Paul's prayer is based on the fact that the Ephesian believers have been born again. The eyes of their hearts have been enlightened. Paul uses what is called a perfect passive participle which denotes a completed action with continuing results.

The Ephesians are *in Christ*. Their hearts have already been enlightened. This is what it means to be a believer. *Illumination... comes through the reception of the gospel.* (Patzia, p. 166)

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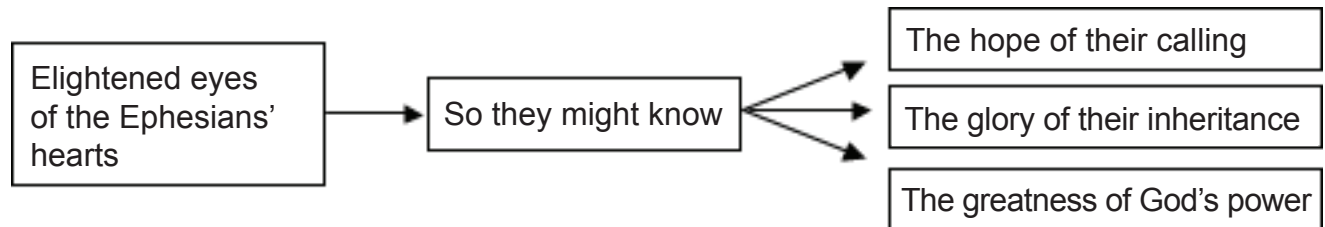
STUDY FOUR

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

In other words, the believer need not pray for enlightenment (as in Buddhism). He or she already has it in Christ.

What does Christian *enlightenment* look like? Give examples out of your own life or examples you have firsthand in the lives of other Christians.

What does Paul want these enlightened believers to know and experience? Re-read verses 18-19. Notice the threefold prayer of Paul.



The Hope of Our Calling

How are believers to understand the notion of *calling*? Paul will use this word later in his letter (Ephesians 4:1, 4). Compare three other passages which speak of the believer's calling.

Romans 1:6-7

1 Corinthians 1:2

1 Corinthians 1:9

Talk with your homegroup about how you understand your calling in Christ. What are the marks of the *hope to which he has called you*?

ephesians

STUDY FOUR

The Riches of His Inheritance

When Paul speaks of the *riches of his glorious inheritance* he may have one of two ideas in mind. He could be speaking of the church as God's inheritance. In the Old Testament, Israel was often spoken of as God's inheritance, that is, as his treasured possession.¹ But more than likely Paul has in mind the inheritance which the church receives. A similar verse in Colossians makes this clear. There we learn that the work of Christ has qualified us *to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light* (Colossians 1:12).

What do you think of when you consider your inheritance in Christ? Compare Revelation 22:1-4.

The Greatness of His Power

In 1:19, Paul prays that the Ephesians will know *the immeasurable greatness of his power*.

The adjective, *immeasurable* (*hyperballon*) is used only by Paul in the New Testament. Paul is again grasping for words. His desire is that the Ephesians grasp the power of God.

Once again he expresses this in the strongest terms that language can find, both by speaking of its surpassing magnitude, and by using all the synonyms possible. (Foulkes, p. 62)

Three words Paul uses are:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Power | From this Greek word we get our word dynamite. |
| Working | From this word we get our word energy. |
| Might | The word refers to an attribute of God. It is sometimes translated <i>dominion</i> , or <i>power</i> . (See, I Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 2:14) |

Carefully re-read this prayer. What do we find? God's power is here! It is at work within us (consider Ephesians 3:20). If we find we are not experiencing the power of God in our lives the problem is ours. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians reveals a storehouse of power.

¹ Consider, for example, Isaiah 19:25; Jeremiah 12:7-9; Joel 3:2.

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STUDY FOUR

In 1:20-21, Paul points out that God exercised this great power through *Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places*. It is important to note that Christ is seated at God's right hand above the rulers and authorities and powers which we later learn we must stand against in 6:10ff. As we live in Christ, God provides, in Christ, the power for us to stand strong.

Praise God for the provision of his power in your life, and ask him to enable you to live in accordance with that power!

praying the passage: ephesians 1:15-23

- Imitate Paul's prayer life exhibited in verses 15-16, by giving thanks for the saints sitting around you. Expand your prayers to thank God for others outside of your homegroup who have exhibited faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints!
- Pray for one another by name to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you navigate life in this complex modern world. Pray for the eyes of each other's hearts to be enlightened to understand our hope, our riches, and our power (vv. 18-19)! Pray this may inform the specific challenges each of you face in your lives.
- Pray for this same understanding of hope, riches, and power for the church around the world. Pray for the missionaries we support and the people they serve. Pray for the persecuted and impoverished church in places like the Muslim world, China, India, and Africa.

sermon notes

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STUDY FOUR

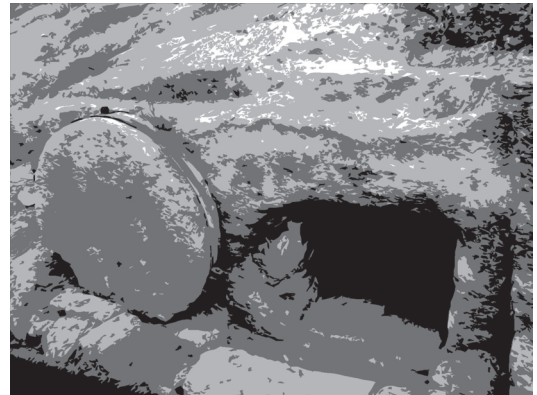
once dead—now alive

EPHESIANS 2:1-6

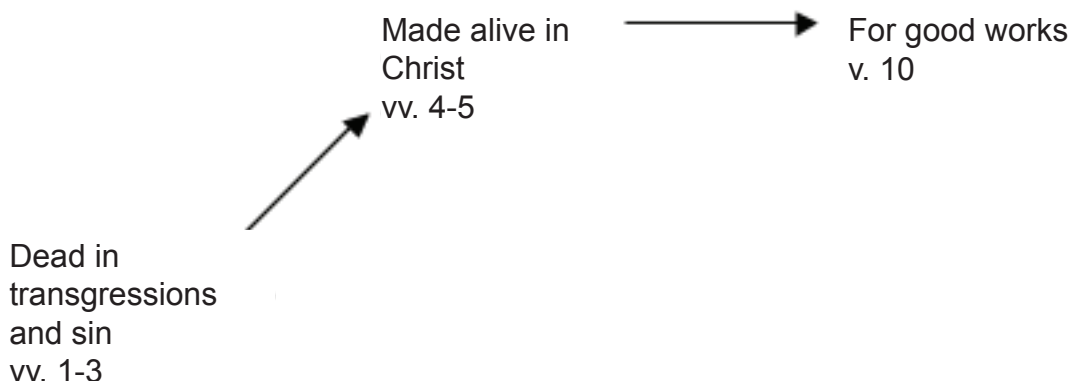
When we think of the human condition there is much to be depressed about. Global warming, we are told, threatens life itself while *wars and rumors of wars*¹ are the order of the day. Underemployment, poverty, violence, sexual perversion, psychological turmoil, and racism characterize our era.

Our text for this week stands as a beacon of hope in a hopeless situation. Paul points out the sinfulness of sin in the hearts of all people, but then goes on to describe the wonder of God's reconciliation through Christ.

Max Zerwick called Ephesians 2:1-10 *the shorter epistle to the Romans* because it succinctly states the gospel of grace. In just ten verses the reader is taken from sin to salvation, from bondage under Satan to dwelling with Christ in the heavenly realms, from spiritual death to life with Christ forever. If you are looking for a short section of Scripture to memorize you could do no better than Ephesians 2:1-10!



How do these verses fit with the flow of Ephesians? Consider what Paul has done thus far in his letter. Chapter 1 moves from praise (vv. 3-14) to prayer (vv. 15-23). In these verses Paul summarizes the Gospel message doctrine of redemption. We will devote this study and the next to this passage. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 in as many translations as you have available. Memorize this wonderful passage and shout it out your window. Keep the following outline in mind as you read:



¹ Matthew 24:6.

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STUDY FIVE

Did you have some fun with the outline? Go ahead, be brave, add your own arrows to the sentence diagram. From the passage itself, what does it mean to be dead in transgressions and sins? What are the consequences of this *deadness* in sin?

Why did God make us alive in Christ? What is the stated purpose of this gracious act of God?

This is a fertile section of Scripture. What thoughts stand out as you read? What is Paul's main point? What remains unclear? What surprises did you find in these verses?

Notice 2:1-3. One of Paul's main concerns in Ephesians is that Jews and Gentiles understand their unity in Christ. Here the Apostle levels the playing field before God. We are equal failures with regard to achieving our own salvation.

Notice the familiar Jew-Gentile language in verses 1-3. *As for you* refers to Gentile believers. But Gentiles are not alone. Speaking as a Jew Paul adds, *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh...* Jewish believers come to God from the same impoverished background as Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles are on equal ground.

When Paul begins in verse 1 by saying we were dead in our *transgressions and sins*, what does he have in mind? The difference between the two words should not be pressed. The root meaning of transgressions is *to fall beside*, or *to fall away*. The meaning of sin is *to miss the mark*. Paul wants to show the reader that he or she is thoroughly sinful.

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STUDY FIVE

What kind of death is Paul talking about? Is this a figure of speech?

If we were dead in our sin (dead people don't respond to external stimulus), how is it that we were able to *receive Christ*? See verse 5 and think through all that we have learned in Ephesians 1.

Perhaps 2:3 is a bit surprising. Here Paul, the devout Jew claims that he, along with his fellow Jews were living lives devoted to their own lusts and desires. Andrew Lincoln translates this phrase,

... in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the wishes of the flesh and the thoughts.
(Lincoln, p. 97)

The Greek words Paul uses are *epithumia* (lusts) and *thelema* (desires). The first word refers to strong or inordinate desires, sexual or otherwise. The second word refers to the strong will of a person who is unredeemed by God.

Paul was a devout Jew, devoted to keeping God's law. In what sense can Paul, the devout rabbi, claim to have been living in his lusts before he surrendered to the lordship of Jesus? See also Philippians 3:2-5.

Some Christians have a *sensational* testimony. God rescued them from alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, a life of crime, and drug addiction and wanton materialism. Others have a less spectacular story of conversion. What do Paul's words in verse 3 mean for those without a sordid past to look back on? In what sense were they *gratifying the cravings* of the sinful nature and *following its desires and thoughts*?

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STUDY FIVE

What was your conversion like? Share with your homegroup a one minute story of your coming to the faith. Mention some words (not paragraphs) referring to what God rescued you from. Take a moment and write this out. Come prepared to read your brief testimony to your group. In doing this you give testimony to the immeasurable greatness of God's power seen in 1:19-20.

Read verse 3 in the NIV and the ESV and notice the differences. The NIV reads *we were by nature objects of wrath*. Compare this translation with the ESV and you will find *we were by nature children of wrath*. Why the difference? The Greek text indeed reads, *children of wrath*. The NIV translation is probably an attempt to avoid the embarrassment of having little children pictured as creatures who are under the wrath of God! Commentators point out the phrase *children of wrath* is a Hebrew idiom which refers to people of all ages much like *sons of disobedience* in verse 2. The NEB reads, *we lay under the dreadful judgment of God*.

What is this wrath? William Hendrickson writes,

... it is *settled indignation*, the attitude of God toward men viewed as fallen in Adam (Romans 5:12, 17-19) and refusing to accept the gospel of grace and salvation in Christ. (Hendrickson, p. 115)

John Stott adds,

It is God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, his settled refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve instead to condemn it. (Stott, p. 76)

To go a bit further, the Greek text reads, *we were children by nature objects of wrath...* What does Paul mean? Is he saying we are guilty before God by virtue of our being born?

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STUDY FIVE

Probably the best commentary is his own as it is found in Romans 1-3, so the expression 'by nature children of wrath' is a summary of Romans 5:12-14.¹ His argument there is that 'death spread to all men because all men sinned' is not that all inherited a sinful nature which led them to sin and so to die, but that 'all men sinned' in and with Adam. The Old Testament has a strong sense of the solidarity of the human race. It speaks of the next generation as being already 'in the loins' of the present generation, a truth which modern genetics may be said to underline. Paul is saying, then, that we were ourselves in Adam. It may truly be said that we sinned in Adam, and that in and with him we incurred guilt and died. (Stott, p. 78)

Verses 1-7 are one long sentence in the Greek New Testament. Paul, again, is caught up in his own writing. Grammar takes a back seat to the wonder of what God has done for us in Christ. The main point of the sentence doesn't come until verse 4 (*God*) and the verb waits until verse 5 to be revealed (*made us alive*).

With all of the above in mind (vv. 1-3) how do you react to the word *But* in verse 4? How would your life have turned out differently if God had not stepped in and changed the course of events through his grace?

Notice the corporate description of our salvation in 2:5-6. We are saved with Christ in the context of the Christian community. *God made us alive together...* When Jesus was raised from the dead, so were we.²

In these verses, Paul uses three verbs which begin with the prefix *syn* (*with* in Greek). We were *made alive with*, *raised with*, and *seated with* Christ.

It is not easy to bring out the force of this feature of the epistle, for we do not go in for such compounds in English. But we must not miss the emphasis Paul is placing on the truths that Christians belong together and that they belong with Christ. (Morris, p. 49)

-
- 1 Romans 5:12-14 reads, *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*
 - 2 Andrew Lincoln writes, *Both Christ and believers have been raised from the dead (1:19; 2:5,6), both Christ and believers have been seated in the heavenly realms (1:20, 2:6)... The death from which Christ was raised was according to 1:20 a physical death, while that from which believers have been raised is the death of an existence characterized by their sinful action.* (Lincoln, pp. 85-86)

ephesians

STUDY FIVE

In what ways do you understand your salvation as a corporate event? How does this inform your view of the church and your place in the church?

Re-read verses 1-6. Reflect on Paul's explanation of the merciful process of God taking sinful, broken people from a state of spiritual death to being spiritually alive. If you have been born again in Christ, describe what you are thinking and feeling as you ponder this.

Rejoice! Praise God for his mercy in bringing you from death to being alive in Christ, seated safely with him in the heavenly realms.

praying the passage: ephesians 2:1-5

- Consider taking moment in silence to remember where you came from. Consider quietly the ways in which you were dead before you met Christ.
- Confess out loud the ways in which you used to live—specific patterns and ways of life from which you have been delivered. Tell God what your life would be like if you had not met him.
- Thank him for taking the initiative in your salvation!
- Pray that God would raise others around you from the dead. Pray that he would extend to your friends and family the same grace he has extended to you. Expand your prayers to include people groups and nations.

grace and art

EPHESIANS 2:6-10

Think about a favorite piece of art in the Western world. Michelangelo Buonarotti's *David* stands proudly in Florence, Italy. The Renaissance marble carving stands over 12 feet



tall and has been admired since it was completed in 1504. *David* is Michelangelo's workmanship. Admirers travel from all over the world to see this magnificent statue. What do they say when they see this beautiful sculpture? *David* draws attention to the artist who made him. *David* is a grand testimony to the artist's ability to work wonders with stone. The visitor says, in one way or another, *What a grand artist Michelangelo was!*

As we continue in our study of what has been called *the shorter epistle to the Romans*, that is, Ephesians 2:1-10, we catch a glimpse of the grand purpose of our salvation.

Jonathan Edwards, the renowned scholar and preacher of the Great Awakening, wrote,

The ultimate end of the work of redemption is the glory of God.¹

Edwards then amasses dozens of Scriptures to show this is the case. God sent Jesus to the cross out of his kindness to us. We are the recipients and beneficiaries of his grace. But God himself is the one who gets the glory. Our salvation somehow enhances and magnifies the splendor of God! At the outset, notice this staggering truth in verses 6-7.

Raised up
with Christ

Seated with
Christ in the
heavenly
realms

→ In order that →

In the coming ages he might
show the incomparable riches
of his grace

¹ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1759), *The End For Which God Created the World.*, Part seven, section three.

ephesians

STUDY SIX

Before we study verses 6-10, re-read Ephesians 2:1-10. Again, compare translations. What new thoughts come to mind?

Ponder verse 7. What is God's purpose for your salvation? What motivation did God have in providing for our salvation? Does this seem selfish? Does it surprise you?

Wood writes, *This was God's publicity program for the whole of history—and beyond.* (Wood, p. 35)

Notice the teaching of this great truth in other portions of Scripture. Read and explain these passages to one another in your homegroup.

1 Samuel 12:22

2 Samuel 7:23

Psalms 23:3

Isaiah 63:12

John 12:27-28

Ephesians 3:10

Philippians 2:6-11

ephesians

STUDY SIX

Read verses 8-9 in light of the whole paragraph (vv. 1-10). God has done everything! We were dead. We were made alive.

Salvation is God's gift, *lest any man should boast*. Christians are always uncomfortable with pride, for they sense its incongruity. We shall not be able to strut round heaven like peacocks. Heaven will be filled with the exploits of Christ and the praises of God. There will indeed be display in heaven. Not self-display, but rather a display of the incomparable wealth of God's grace, mercy and kindness through Jesus Christ. (Stott, pp. 83-84)

For many believers Ephesians 2:8 is their favorite verse of the Bible. Describe what this verse means to you personally.

Respond to the following statement. Does it accurately summarize Paul's teaching in these verses? If so, what should this mean for the way the church conducts her business, sets her goals, makes her plans?

The purpose of God for His Church, as Paul came to understand it, reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation, the enlightenment and the re-creation of individuals, beyond its unity and fellowship, beyond even its witness to the world. The Church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ. (Foulkes, p. 74)

Have you found that your understanding of the church has been shaped by these truths?

How should it affect our evangelism?

ephesians

STUDY SIX

Re-read verse 10. Paul points out our role in responding to God's work. He has brought us from spiritual death to life with Christ *in the heavenly realms*. Consequently *we are God's workmanship*. The Greek word is *poiema* from which we derive the English word poem. The Jerusalem Bible translates this verse *we are God's work of art*.

We have been meeting in our groups for seven weeks. Take a few moments and affirm those in your group. In what ways do you see those in your homegroup as God's *works of art*.

Here in Ephesians we learn we are God's *workmanship*, God's carving. What is our function? Why did God make us? Notice the change God has produced in us.



In Ephesians Paul loves to use the verb *to walk*. The verb characterizes the pattern of life for both the believer and the unbeliever.¹

Share with your homegroup how your daily *walk* has changed since coming to know Christ. What *good works* are you pursuing in your life at this time?

¹ The Greek word is *paripatein*. The NIV will often translate this verb *to live*. The ESV consistently renders the verb literally, *to walk*. Paul uses this verb with increasing regularity as the letter progresses (see 4:1; 4:17; 5:2; 5:8; 5:15).

ephesians

STUDY SIX

In these past two studies we have focused on the grand purposes of God. How can SBCC fit into this grand plan of the God of the universe? What changes can we make (corporately and individually) to exhibit the wisdom and grace of God more clearly? What is your role in these changes?

How does it feel to know you are God's workmanship? How does this affect your view of yourself?

Do you live your life to the glory of the creator? In what ways?

Spend some time in prayer committing each and every area of your life to God, all to be lived for his glory.

praying the passage: ephesians 2:6-10

- Thank God for the specific ways in which you have already seen his kindness (v. 6). Thank him for *the incomparable riches of his grace* that we will see in the coming age.
- Confess in your own words how you have been saved by grace and not by yourself. Name your gifts and accomplishments, and tell God they could never save you!
- Pray for each other by name, that you walk in those good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do. Pray that he would accomplish his purposes in your homegroup members. Consider fledgling churches around the world, and pray that God would complete his work in them.

ephesians

STUDY SIX

sermon notes

no longer strangers

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

One of the *buzz words* of our time is *multiculturalism*. There is a multicultural movement in our leading academic institutions, in our government, in the music we listen to, the food we eat and the clothes we wear. But what is it? What is multiculturalism?

On the positive side, multiculturalism is the attempt to respect and embrace the good in all cultures and people groups. Multiculturalists rightly insist that, in the past, we have been insensitive to ethnic and religious minorities and we should rectify our hurtful attitudes and actions. Certainly the American church has much to learn in this area.

But there is a darker side to multiculturalism. Because of the hardness of the human heart we are witnessing a new *tribalism* both locally and internationally. Consider, for example, former Yugoslavia. After the end of the *cold war* the reasons for the unity of this country ceased to exist.¹ In the summer of 1991 Serbian forces seceded from Yugoslavia and attacked people with whom they had been living peacefully for decades. Yugoslavia was one country in the spring of 1990. It became six countries within a few weeks. As the fighting (ethnic cleansing) continued, the United Nations proposed a peace plan which would divide Bosnia, a disputed territory, into 12 separate parts. So one sixth of a country was to become, evidently, 12 more countries. The plan was rejected and the fighting continued.



We need not look too much further to find similar instances of bitter tribalism. Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Israel, Ireland, Korea, Nigeria, Liberia are all names of places where war, fueled by racial and religious hatred, has left its devastating effects on the land and the people. The list could go on and on.

The first century was characterized by a bitter racial/religious animosity between Jews and Gentiles. William Barclay writes,

The Gentiles were called the *uncircumcision* by those who laid claim to that circumcision which is a physical and man-made thing... The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be

¹ Yugoslavia was *created* in 1918 after WWI at the Treaty of Versailles. The country was held together by Marshal Tito due to his opposition to Soviet aggression.

ephesians

STUDY SEVEN

fuel for the fires of Hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that He had made. The best of the serpents crush, they said, the best of the Gentiles kill. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world... . The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death. (Barclay, p. 125)

Even the architecture of the temple reflected the racial hatred the Jews harbored for the Gentiles. In 2:14 Paul speaks of *the dividing wall of hostility*. Certainly he refers to the floor plan of the temple in Jerusalem, which was still in operation when Ephesians was written. The temple was elevated and looked up to by all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. It was surrounded by courts of worship. First was the court of the priests. On the east side was the court of Israel and before that the court of women. These courts were at the same elevation as the temple and were for priests, Jewish men and, finally Jewish women. *From this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on to the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the outer court or Court of Gentiles.* (Stott, p. 91) This was a spacious court running around the temple where Jews and Gentiles were free to mingle. Along the *dividing wall*,— a four foot high stone wall — stood signs which read in both Greek and Latin, *Trespassers will be executed*.¹

With these things in mind read Ephesians 2:11-22. Read this in context, keeping in mind our text from last week. In verses 1-10 Paul concentrated on the believer's unity (reconciliation) with God. Here he plays out the drama. Not only are we at peace with God, we have become a new people in Christ. We are at peace with one another! Keep the following outline in mind as you read:

The Problem: Racism (2:11-12)

The Provision: Christ (2:13-18)

The Product: One People (2:19-22)

What thoughts do you have as you read?

¹ Josephus writes that the temple was *encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in 'under pain of death'*. *Antiquities*, XV. 11.5 An 1871 archaeological dig produced a stone with the inscription, *NO MAN OF ANOTHER NATION TO ENTER WITHIN THE FENCE AND ENCLOSURE ROUND THE TEMPLE. AND WHOEVER IS CAUGHT WILL HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME THAT HIS DEATH ENSUES.* See Acts 21:27ff. for a New Testament example of the seriousness of this matter in the mind of the Jews.

ephesians

STUDY SEVEN

List the images Paul uses to describe the work of Christ in creating unity? How many can you find? Does he mix his metaphors?

What does this text mean to you personally?

Have you ever experienced hostility or animosity directed toward you because of your race? Describe this. How did this make you feel?

When you think of your own attitudes, what sorts of racial prejudice do you find? Where were these attitudes formed?

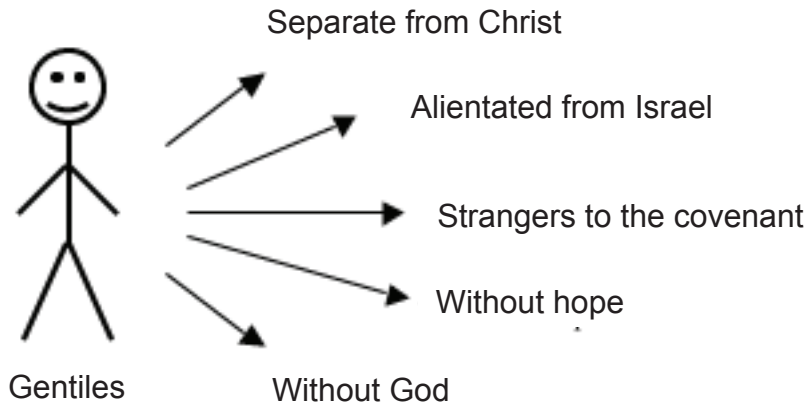
Therefore, (v. 11) remember is emphatic in the Greek text. Paul wants the Gentile believers in Ephesus to be aware of where they came from before meeting Christ. He does this again in verse 13: But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Why would Paul go to such lengths to remind the Gentiles of their former separation from God? Doesn't it seem he should be chastising the Jews for their feelings of superiority?

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STUDY SEVEN

Notice the depth of the predicament of Gentiles without Christ in verse 12.



Is it any wonder that Hendrickson claims the Gentiles were *Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless?* (Hendrickson, pp. 129-130)

In verses 12-13 to be *separate from Christ* is the opposite of Paul's common phrase *in Christ*. It is not too much to say that Paul sees the Christian life as a life lived *in Christ*.

The believer is...

- chosen *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:4)
- foreordained *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:7)
- redeemed and sanctified *in Christ* (Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 1:2)
- reconciled to God *in Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:19)
- justified *in Christ* (Galatians 2:17)
- given access to God *in Christ* (Ephesians 2:12)
- saved *in Christ* (2 Timothy 2:10)
- buried *in Christ* (Romans 6:4)
- even dead *in Christ* (1 Thessalonians 4:17)¹

¹ The list could go on. Of the 89 references to being *in Christ* in the New Testament all but five are from the pen of Paul. Eugene Peterson writes, '*In*' is the preposition of intimacy and one of the most important words in the gospel. (Eugene Peterson, *Praying With Jesus*, November 12, John 14:20-21)

ephesians

STUDY SEVEN

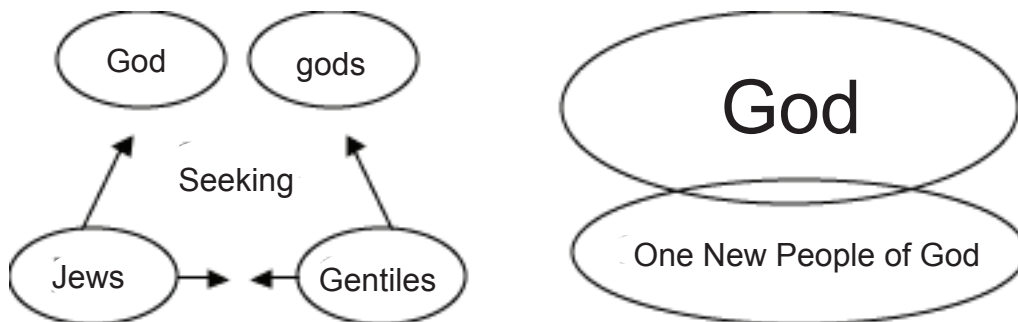
Define in your own words what it means to be *in Christ*.

What does it mean to be *separate from Christ*?

How did your life change when you went from being *separate* to *in Christ*? Did you realize that difference then, or is this something you understand in retrospect?

In verse 12, the words *without God* are the translation of the Greek word *atheoi* from which we get our word atheist. The Gentiles were, however, anything but atheists. They worshipped a pantheon of gods who had grown tired in the minds of first century Greeks.¹ In Paul's mind, to worship a false god was to worship no god at all. See Acts 19:26 and 1 Corinthians 8:5.

The real concern of 2:14-18 is to show the unity produced in Christ. Jesus *himself is our peace*...



¹ J. A. Robinson notes, *The Jew had a hope: the Gentile had none. The golden age of the Gentile was in the past: his poets told him of it, and how it was gone. The Jew's golden age was in the future; his prophets told him to look forward to its coming.* (J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1909, p. 57, cited in Patzia, p. 191)

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STUDY SEVEN

Note verses 15-16. How did Jesus make peace between Jew and Gentile?

Verses 19-22 are stunning! Notice the three images Paul uses to describe the church:

We are **fellow-citizens**: This brings to mind the kingdom of God teaching in the New Testament. The *Kingdom of God* refers to the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of his people. Accordingly, we are now *citizens* of his kingdom. See Philippians 3:20; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12 etc.¹

We are **the household of God**: This takes the association to the personal realm. To be citizens unites us politically and nationally. To be family members unites us in a far more intimate manner. We share a common father and therefore we are *brothers and sisters* in Christ.

We are **God's temple**: In Old Testament times the temple was the place where God *lived*. This was never understood to be literally true. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said, *But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!* (1 Kings 8:27) But the temple was the place where the glory of God would be manifest.

The new temple, however, is neither a material building, nor a national shrine, nor has it a localized site. It is a spiritual building (God's household) and an international community (embracing Gentiles as well as Jews), and it has a worldwide spread (wherever God's people are to be found). This is where God dwells. He is not tied to holy buildings but to holy people, to his own new society. To them he has pledged himself by a solemn covenant. He lives in them, individually and as a community. (Stott, p. 109)

The American church probably does not have a Jew-Gentile problem. Jewish followers of Christ do not seem to *look down* on Gentile disciples. But could this need for unity be necessary in other areas? Does a predominantly white middle-class church feel a bit superior to an inner-city store-front church? Does an educated church *look down* on those believers who are less educated? If so, what can such a church do to repent of this spiritual pride?

¹ The New Testament also promises a future, earthly kingdom. What the believer experiences in his heart he will one day experience externally, that is, the rule and reign of Christ! See 2 Peter 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9 etc.

ephesians

STUDY SEVEN

The style of a church's ministry and life will vary greatly due to the composition of its membership. Maasai believers in Kenya will have a different church life than, say, *white collar* workers in the suburbs of Chicago. Is this bad? When Paul says that Christ created a new society of people who are *fellow citizens* does this mean that each church in a given town should look and act the same?

To bring this question closer to home, in Santa Barbara we have many *ethnic* churches. We have a Chinese church, a Japanese church, several African-American churches, and many Hispanic churches. And, obviously we have many churches which are predominantly *white*. What are we striving for? Can the body of Christ be *one* and still have room for different ethnic expressions of the church? Or, should the goal be to meld all ethnic (and linguistic?) groups into one church? Explain your answer.

Respond to the following quotation from John Stott:

The church must ... exhibit its multiracial, multinational, and multicultural nature... . Only a true theology, the biblical revelation of God, can deliver us from racial pride and prejudice. Because he is God of creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. Because he is the God of history, we affirm the diversity of ethnic cultures. Because he is the God of revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. And because he is the God of redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church. Whatever (national) policies for racial integration may be developed, we should try to ensure that they will reflect these doctrines. Because of the unity of mankind we demand equal rights and equal respect for racial minorities. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups we renounce cultural imperialism and seek to preserve all those riches of interracial culture which are compatible with Christ's lordship. Because of the finality of Christ, we affirm that religious freedom includes the right to propagate the gospel. Because of the glory of the church, we must seek to rid ourselves of any lingering racism and strive to make it a model of¹ harmony between races, in which the multiracial dream comes true.

Evaluate Santa Barbara Community Church in these areas. What can we do to make Ephesians 2:11-22 a reality in our church body?

¹ John Stott, *Involvement*, 2, 1984, pp. 94-95.

ephesians

STUDY SEVEN

praying the passage: ephesians 2:11-22

- Take a moment in silence to remember, once again, that once you were *separate from Christ*. If you have known Christ all your life, consider how at one point your ancestors had never met Christ.
- Praise God for the blood of Christ that has brought you, who once were far, near to God (v. 13). Again, if you were raised in a Christian home, thank him for your spiritual lineage, and what he did in your ancestors.
- Pray about the *dividing wall of hostility* that separates Jew from Gentile and people group from people group. Pray that Christ would be an agent of reconciliation in your community as many people groups come to him. Pray for unity among churches.

sermon notes

a mystery revealed

EPHESIANS 3:1-6

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

The context of the above quotation is found in one of the *Servant Songs* of the book of Isaiah. The speaker is none other than Yahweh, speaking to the Messiah. God says, *I am not sending you to bless a tiny nation called Israel. You are going to take my grace to every nation on earth!*

We could call this the *hidden truth* of the Old Testament. God called Abraham (Genesis 12) and told him, essentially, *I will bless you and make you a blessing to every nation on earth.*



The Jewish people never really grasped the second half of God's promise. They reveled in being God's chosen people, but were quite content to leave it at that.¹ The shock of the new covenant in Christ is the full inclusion of the Gentiles (the nations) into the people of God.

Peter points out that the biblical writers themselves, speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, didn't fully understand the salvation of which they wrote:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

As we have seen in Ephesians 2 Paul introduced the *mystery* of the gospel, that is, that God made one new society, one new people through his death on the cross. In chapter 3 he tries to move on to a prayer (v. 1), but, in his characteristic style, he digresses back to ponder again the mystery of the gospel.²

1 See the book of Jonah. The whole story is an indictment of Jewish exclusiveness. At the end of the story Jonah is upset that God has spared the Ninevites his wrath. He is more concerned about his comfort in the shade than he is about the salvation of 120,000 inhabitants in Nineveh.
2 Paul ends the whole letter on the subject of the *mystery* of the gospel. See 6:20.

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STUDY EIGHT

As Paul begins this chapter he re-introduces himself to the reader as a *prisoner of Christ*.

By the time Ephesians was written Paul had been in prison for up to five years under Roman governors Felix, Festus and King Agrippa (see Acts 23-26). The original charge brought against Paul was unfounded, but interesting in light of the *mystery* of the gospel. Paul's accusers claimed that he brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple area reserved for the Jews. Now he is a prisoner in Rome under the authority of Nero. He is, however, a *prisoner of Christ*. Such was Paul's understanding of the sovereignty of God and of his own discipleship.

This section of Ephesians is ponderous, lofty and will stretch our feeble minds. Before going on in this study guide, read Ephesians 3:1-13. How would you outline these verses? What are Paul's main points? What stands out to you?

Now read the text again with the following outline in mind (does the text fit this outline?):

1. Probing the Mystery (3:2-6)
2. Proclaiming the Mystery (3:7-13)

Probing the Mystery (3:2-6)

In verse 3:5, Paul says that this *mystery* was *not made known* to people in *other generations*. Paul's claim is puzzling insofar as the Old Testament does teach the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. Examine the following verses:

ephesians

STUDY EIGHT

Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 Isaiah 42:6	→	Teach that the <i>nations</i> or the <i>Gentiles</i> will be blessed by God.
Psalms 72	→	Teaches that the Gentiles will bless God.
Isaiah 11:10; 49:6; 54:1-3 60:1-3	→	Teach that Messiah will come for the Gentiles.
Hosea 1:10 Amos 9:11-15 Psalm 2:8	→	Teach that the Gentiles will be saved by the Messiah.
Joel 2:28-29	→	Teach that the Gentiles will receive the Holy Spirit.

With all of this promised in the Old Testament, how can Paul say that the *mystery* was *not revealed*? John Stott explains:

[W]hat neither the Old Testament nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God's plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God's rule) would be terminated, and replaced by a new international community, the church; that church would be 'the body of Christ', organically united to him; and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction. It was this complete union of Jews, Gentiles and Christ which was radically new, and which God revealed to Paul, overcoming his entrenched Jewish prejudice. (Stott, p. 118)

Paul lays claim to a special revelation from God concerning these hidden truths.

Read Galatians 1:11-20. Here we read of Paul's own spiritual autobiography. Where did Paul get his gospel? It was revealed to Paul by God himself. What questions does this section of Galatians bring to mind? Share and discuss these with your homegroup.

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STUDY EIGHT

Note 3:6. Specifically, what is the mystery revealed to Paul? What three things do Jews and Gentiles enjoy *together* in Christ? What do each of these mean to you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Paul, writing as a rabbinic Jew, steeped in Jewish schooling, teaching and culture, was astounded at this mystery. The church, not Israel, had become God's instrument in the world for carrying out his work and his will!

John MacArthur clarifies how shocking this truth must have seemed:

[I]t is difficult for us to realize how incredibly revolutionary [this] truth was to Jews of Paul's day... [T]he idea of including Gentiles in one body with Jews was the spiritual equivalent of saying that lepers were no longer to be isolated, that they were now perfectly free to intermingle and associate with everyone else as normal members of society. In the minds of most Jews, their spiritual separation from Gentiles was so absolute and so right that the thought of total equality before God was inconceivable and little short of blasphemy. (MacArthur, pp. 91-92)

If we were to leave this study in the first century it might be a bit too easy. How does this *mystery* confront you and your relations? If Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in Christ, what does that mean for SBCC corporately? What does this mean for you personally?

Each of us has grown up in a family or community where we have learned to value or respond to various types of people. Reflect on your own ingrained values and prejudices that may need to be shed. What steps can you take to actually do this?

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STUDY EIGHT

William Hendrickson exults in God's plan to create a new people in Christ:

Paul makes it very clear that God's unveiled secret ("mystery") has to do not merely with an *alliance* of Jew and Gentile, or perhaps a friendly *agreement* to live together in peace, or even an outward *combination* or *partnership*, but, on the contrary, complete and permanent *fusion*, a perfect spiritual union of formerly clashing elements into *one* new organism, even a new humanity" (2:15). In God's house there are no borders; all are children. (Hendrickson, p. 155)

Ephesians 3:1-6, while weighty, is a game changer for the Christian who is now described as a part of God's family. Verse six declares we are, *fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*. This speaks to the Christians identity.

How does our passage help you to see yourself as a vital part of God's family? What are the practical implications of these verses for your life?

Let us praise God for the revelation of this beautiful mystery. And let us pray for ourselves and our church to put into practice the reality created by the death and resurrection of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

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STUDY EIGHT

praying the passage: ephesians 3:1-6

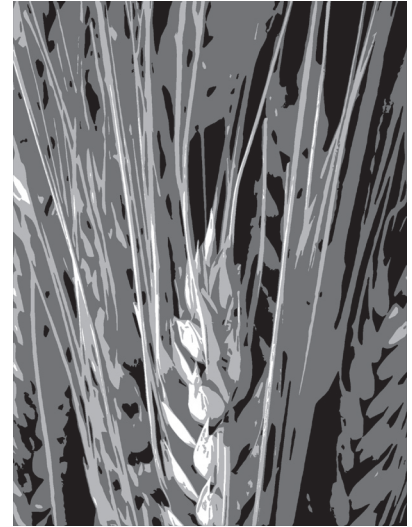
- Praise God for his apostles and prophets like Paul, who endured imprisonment (v. 1) and other hardships (Ephesians 3:13, Acts 20:23) that we Gentiles might hear the gospel! Praise God for messengers of his word that have spoken to us at great cost to themselves.
- Praise God that we are included with Israel in the gospel (v. 6)! Praise him that we are privy to revelations that earlier generations never knew (v. 5). Recognize the privileged position we enjoy and privileged age in which we live.
- Pray for Israel to recognize Christ as the Messiah. Pray for those Gentile peoples that still have not heard that they too are included in this lavish promise. Name individuals and people groups, and pray for them.

sermon notes

through the church!

EPHESIANS 3:7-13

The first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church reaches its crescendo in 3:7-13. From the opening of the letter the Apostle has probed, pondered and proclaimed the grace of God which was planned before the creation of the world. God chose us and called us to himself before we were born (chapter 1). He made us spiritually alive *in Him*, even when we were dead in our sins (chapter 2). He then reconciled us into a *new humanity* through Christ (chapter 2). The dividing wall of hostility has been broken down in Christ. Reconciled relationships testify to the completed work of Christ.



In chapter 3, Paul delights in the fact that God has chosen him to preach this *mystery of Christ*.

Take a moment and review last week's study. Survey the main points.

Read Ephesians 3:1-13. What do you think are the three most important words in these verses? Try comparing translations. What questions or observations do you have of verses 7-13? What is unclear? What lessons stand out?

ephesians

STUDY NINE

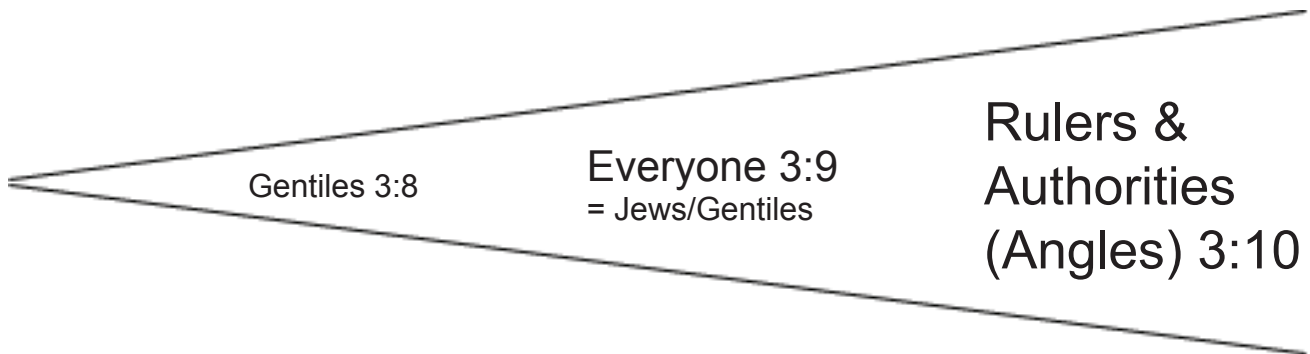
Paul's self-deprecation is both endearing and instructive. After he met the risen Lord, the proud Rabbi (Philippians 3:6) becomes a humble servant, or slave of Christ.

In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul calls himself the *foremost* of sinners.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 he refers to himself as the *least* of the apostles *because I persecuted the church of God*.

Here in verse 8 Paul goes so far as to coin a term for himself. The NIV says *I am less than the least of all God's people*. Actually Paul takes a superlative, *elachistos*, smallest or least, and turns it into a comparative, *elachistorteros*, *leaster*. These verses explain the responsibility of this *leaster* apostle to proclaim the gospel.

Notice the broadening scope of Paul's proclamation.¹



Look at verse 8. What is the content of Paul's message? What comes to mind when you read the phrase *the unsearchable riches of Christ*?

¹ There is some debate as to what is in mind when Paul refers to *rulers and authorities*. Markus Barth and others claim *rulers and authorities* refer to *Political and social, cultural and religious forces* which are contrary to the will of God. (See Barth, 1 p. 365...) But these terms normally refer to angelic beings both good and evil. Here, however, Paul seems to have only good angels in mind. Why? First there is no reference to any conflict between believers and these beings (unlike Ephesians 6:12). Second, Paul's vision seems heavenward. Calvin writes, *There can be no doubt about the fact that the apostle labors to place in the strongest light the mercy of God toward the Gentiles, and the high value of the gospel ... Paul's meaning is, the church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, is a mirror, in which the angels behold the astonishing wisdom of God displayed in a manner unknown to them before. They see a work which is new to them, and the reason whereof was hid in God.* (See Hendrickson, p. 159)

ephesians

STUDY NINE

The Greek word translated *unsearchable* (ESV, NIV) is pregnant with significance. John Stott notes ten different English translations which try to capture the nuance of this word.

unsearchable	inexplorable	untraceable	unfathomable	inexhaustible
illimitable	inscrutable	infinite	incalculable	not to be traced out

Stott concludes,

... what is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it. (Stott, p. 120)

Linclon says the word,

... suggests the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it. No limit can, therefore, be put to its resources. (Lincoln, p. 183)

It is this message of the riches of Christ which is central to Paul's preaching. How should this message transform your understanding of what Christ has done for you? Do you see the *riches of Christ* as an infinitely deep reservoir? Or are his riches more like a shallow pond? What could help change your perception of the spiritual riches you possess in Christ?

In 3:9 we see a second stage in Paul's preaching.

In verse 8 he *preaches* (euangelizô) *to the Gentiles*.

In verse 9 he brings *to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God*.

The verb in verse 9 is *phôtizo* which means *to enlighten*. Those without Christ are *darkened in their understanding* (4:18). Paul's commission, from the beginning, was a call to enlighten the Gentiles. Jesus said to Paul,

I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:17-18, NIV)

ephesians

STUDY NINE

Stott comments,

We ourselves must always remember in our evangelism that ‘the prince of darkness’ holds men and women in darkness, and that only by a divine enlightenment will their eyes be open to see. Our responsibility is to be faithful in spreading the gospel, since this is the means which God has ordained by which to bring light to those in darkness. (Stott, pp. 121-122)

Can you identify what was holding you in darkness before you became a believer? By what means did the Lord bring light into that darkness? Was it someone bringing the gospel message to you? What was that like?

In what ways are you enlightening your non-believing friends? If you find yourself struggling with this, what hinders you? How can your homegroup encourage you and challenge you? Share with your group the name of one person with whom you would like to share the light of the gospel in the next two weeks.

How are we doing this as a church? Be specific.

Again, notice the differences between verses 8 and 9. In verse 8 the emphasis is on Christ and his *unsearchable riches*. What is the emphasis in verse 9? More specifically, what is *the plan of this mystery...* (see the next few verses)?

ephesians

STUDY NINE

Read 3:10-11. What is the purpose of Paul's responsibility? Look closely at verses 10-11.

The word *manifold* means *many colored, or very varied*. (Wood, p. 48)

The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society. (Stott, p. 123)

Again, examine verse 10. The church is being watched. As one 19th century commentator put it,

The Church becomes a mirror through which the bright ones of heaven see the glory of God. And in order to show them this glory, God committed the gospel to Paul.¹

Respond to the following statement:

The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His **wisdom** before the angels, who can then offer greater praise to God. The purpose of the universe is to give glory to God, and that will be its ultimate reality after all evil is conquered and destroyed. Even now, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). The church is not an end in itself but a means to an end, the end of glorifying God. (MacArthur, p. 96)

What does this tell us about choosing a church?

What does it tell us about the priorities of a local church?

¹ A. J. Beet, *Ephesians*, 1890, p. 319. John A. Mackay writes, [T]he history of the Christian church becomes a graduate school for angels...

ephesians

STUDY NINE

According to this verse how important is the role of the local church?

What privileges and responsibilities do verses 1-13 give to the church of Jesus Christ?

Think about verse 10 in light of what we studied last week. How important is *unity* in the body of Christ?

What *should* this text say to the unchurched Christian?

Summarize what you have learned from this study of Ephesians 3:7-13.

Michael Griffiths writes,

There is no future for the Christian individual in isolation from the church. The general and proper pattern of the normal Christian life is to be lived in warm and joyous fellowship with other believers in God's family. (*God's Forgetful Pilgrims*)

When we do this, the angels will notice and God will be glorified.

ephesians

STUDY NINE

praying the passage: ephesians 3:7-13

- Praise the God who chose Paul as his servant, and who continues to choose weak and undeserving men and women to accomplish his purposes.
- Thank God for the Church, and for your church! Consider and name the ways in which you have seen the *manifold wisdom of God* displayed in the church.
- Approach God with the *freedom and confidence* that come in and through faith in Christ! Lay before him the needs and burdens of your homegroup. Pray for your church and other churches, that the *manifold wisdom of God* would be more and more evident in them.

sermon notes

ephesians

STUDY NINE

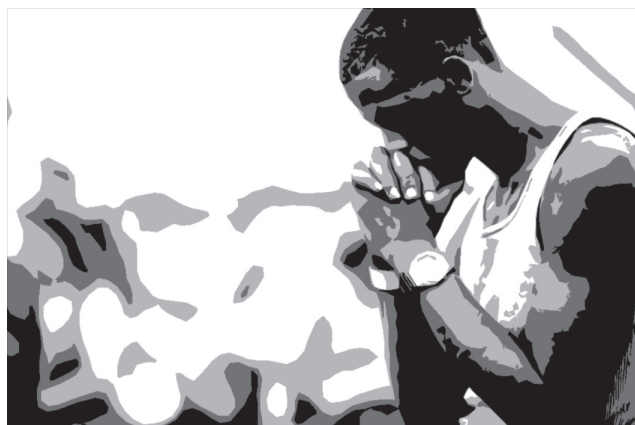
deep prayer

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts about God. For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he may at a given time say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.

A. W. Tozer

If you want to know someone look at his or her checkbook. Then take a peek at that person's calendar. The way we spend our time and money tells a great deal about those things we deem important. A third area to investigate would be the content of a person's prayers, and how we understand God shapes everything about our prayers.



In these verses we catch another glimpse of the concerns of Paul for the Ephesians. The glimpse should boggle our minds. As Bishop Handley Moule asked, *Who has not read and re-read the closing verses of the third chapter of the Ephesians with the feeling of one permitted to look through parted curtains into the Holiest Place of the Christian life?*

Paul has taken us to the *heavenly realms* in these first three chapters of Ephesians. Soon he will turn his attention to the practical implications of this lofty exposition on God and his grace (4:1). But first he must complete the prayer he began, but did not develop, in 3:1.

For this reason in verse 14 surely has all that has preceded in mind. The theology of Ephesians builds as the letter progresses.

Paul's posture in prayer, kneeling, is unusual.¹ It is only in this letter that Paul refers to himself kneeling in prayer. Jews generally prayed in a standing position. Markus Barth holds that kneeling was a Gentile posture of prayer. How interesting, therefore, to find Paul kneeling in prayer at the point in his literature of the New Testament where he is propounding the unity of Jew and Gentile. He has adapted his prayer posture to their position (Galatians 4:12).²

1 Barth calls this *an extraordinary attitude of prayer*. (Barth, I, p. 367)

2 Many postures for prayer are referred to in Scripture. *Posture in prayer is never a matter of indifference. The slouching position of the body while one is supposed to be praying is an abomination to the Lord.* (Hendrickson, p. 166)

ephesians

STUDY TEN

Carefully read Paul's prayer with the following outline in mind:

Introduction: 3:14-15

Paul's three desires for the Ephesians: 3:16-19

Conclusion: 3:20-21

Why does this prayer take you into the *Holiest Place of the Christian life* (see above)?

What does this prayer teach about God? Find, among other things, the doctrine of the Trinity in this prayer.

In study four we looked at Paul's prayers and encouraged one another to begin praying prayers like this for each other. Have you been in the habit of doing this as you pray together in your homegroup? What characterizes your prayers?

Read verses 16-19. In what ways has Paul's prayer for the Ephesians been answered in your life?

Before discussing this text as a group spend some time praying this prayer for one another. Use verses 14-21 as a prayer book. Paraphrase this prayer on behalf of the members of your group.

ephesians

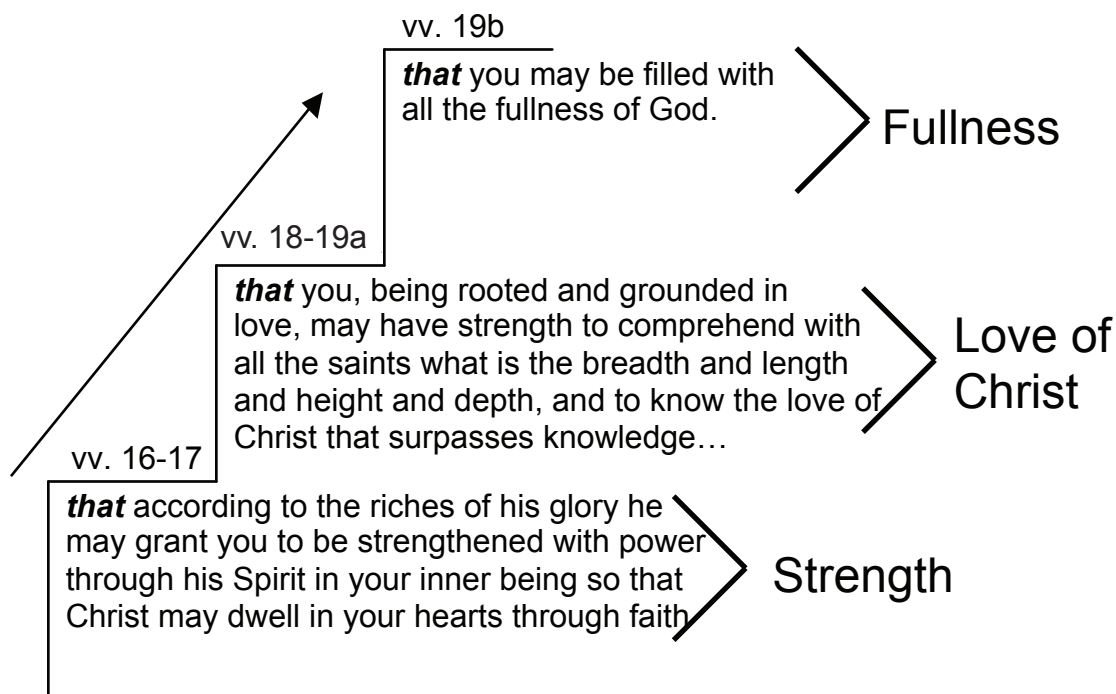
STUDY TEN

Introduction: 3:14-15

In verse 15, the phrase *every family* is difficult to translate from the Greek text. The word for father is *patria*. It means, *lineage, descent, from a common father, or clan*.¹ Some translations render *pasa* (all) *patria* as *every family*, as in the ESV while the NIV renders this *his whole family*. Either way, Paul is drawing attention to the unity of all believers.

Paul's three desires for the Ephesians: 3:16-19

What is the content of Paul's request for the Ephesian church? His prayer, in Greek, has three purpose clauses which seem to build upon one another.²



In 3:16, Paul is praying for the continued filling of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. This verse *suggests the depth of the Spirit's penetration*. (Wood, p. 51) Paul sees a contrast between the *outward man* which is dying slowly (see 2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:9-10), and the spirit and soul of a man which is being renewed in the image of Christ.

We live in a *youth culture*. Everyone, it seems, wants to *look* like they are 26 years old. Cosmetic surgeons make a good deal of money in Southern California helping people

1 See Barth, I, p. 368.

2 The translation here relies on Leon Morris, p. 100.

ephesians

STUDY TEN

prolong the inevitable signs of age. Botulinum toxin, usually called Botox, promises to take away the wrinkles in our face. Health clubs and physical fitness instructors do a brisk business providing outlets for those seeking to keep their bodies *in shape*.

How do we, as members of this culture, balance the truly important (pursuing God, holiness, preparing for the next life) with the relatively unimportant (keeping our muscle tone, staying slim, low fat eating, working on our heart rate, etc.)? Describe what the nurture of these two areas of your life—bodily health and spiritual health—look like. How does your life reflect a proper balance or an imbalance in these endeavors? What does a proper balance look like? What changes would you like to make in your life?

Note 3:17. The word Paul uses for *to dwell*, means *to settle down*. The word refers to a *permanent residence*. The Christian faith is for keeps. Paul prays to this end. What does the permanent residence of Christ look like in your heart, in your life?

In 3:18, Paul prays the Ephesians will grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ. He wants them to enjoy everything God offers his children! Simpson points out how different this was from the prevailing Gnostic teaching during the time of the Ephesians.

The ancient mystagogues [Gnostic teachers] restricted their choicest teaching to an esoteric circle, industriously sifted from the vulgar herd of auditors, admission to which was counted in itself no small privilege. But, Paul reckons every convert a candidate for honours, or he would not have offered such an exalted prayer on their behalf. (Simpson, p. 80)

The verb *to grasp* means *to seize to lay hold of*.

When one 'grasps' a truth one is not hesitantly wondering; the verb points to sure knowledge. Such sure knowledge, of course, does not spring from human ability, which is why Paul makes it the object of prayer. (Morris, p. 105)

ephesians

STUDY TEN

With the above in mind, evaluate your progress in the Christian faith. Do you grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ? What is the evidence of your grasp? Is this rooted in your mind, or your emotions, or both?

How do you find yourself continuing to more firmly grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ? Give a recent example.

Look at 3:19. The phrase *filled with all the fullness of God* is difficult to interpret.

The word *fullness* comes from the Greek work *pleroma*. As a verb it has two meanings, *to fill*, or *to complete*.¹

Fullness means to make full, or fill to the full, and is used many times in the New Testament. It speaks of total dominance. A person filled with rage is totally dominated by hatred. A person filled with happiness is totally dominated by joy. To **be filled up to all the fullness of God** therefore means to be totally dominated by Him with nothing left of self or any part of the old man. By definition, then, to be filled with God is to emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self.² (MacArthur, pp. 111-112)

Of course, no one has ever had *all of God and none of self* on this side of the grave. How then should this prayer in Ephesians 3 inform the way in which we pray this prayer for one another?

1 In the New Testament the word is sometimes a technical term referring to the deity of Christ (see Colossians 1:18; 2:9). Chrysostom said, *The fullness of God is that excellence of which God himself is full.*
2 Later in Ephesians Paul will talk of the fullness of the Spirit (5:18).

ephesians

STUDY TEN

Conclusion: 3:20-21

John Calvin wrote of this text,

He who has Christ has every thing that is required to our perfection in God, for this is what is meant by the *fullness of God*. (Hodge, p. 67)

The conclusion of Paul's prayer (vv. 20-21) is praise and doxology. Spend time giving glory to the God who is willing and *able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think*. A good prayer culminates in praise.

Praying the Passage: Ephesians 3:14-21

- Consider kneeling while you pray, just as Paul did (v. 14). Thank God that you may call him Father, and that your name and very identity come from him. Thank him for other parts of his worldwide family, who share the same name as you!
- Pray the classic prayer in verses 16-19 for your homegroup members (careful... this could go on all night!). Pray for each other to be *strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*, and to be *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*. Take this prayer outside your circle, praying for the leadership of your church and for people groups around the world, particularly in the suffering or persecuted church.
- Conclude your prayer by saying verse 20 out loud in unison:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

sermon notes



a worthy walk

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

In Ephesians 1-3 we have learned of God's work of reconciliation. First, according to his divine plan, he reconciled sinful women and men to himself. This reconciliation created a new society devoid of religious, class, race and even sexual enmity. God created a new people, a new family in Christ.

After three chapters of lofty doctrine, Paul begins to spell out the practical implications of all which has preceded. Paul turns a sharp corner in chapter 4. He wants the church to practice what they have learned. *God has made you one people, now act like it!!!*

The abrupt turn comes in verse 1. This verse introduces the second half of the letter. Paul writes,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...

Don't just talk about it, do it!

The word *worthy* in Greek is *axios*. It means *bringing up the other end of the scales*. *Axios* is a word picture. It refers to balanced scales. In the context of Ephesians, Paul is saying, *These things (chapters 1-3) are true... now live your lives in balance with the great blessings you have received*.

We could outline Ephesians chapters 4-6 as follows:

1. The unity of the church 4:1-16
2. The purity of the church 4:17-6:24

Throughout Paul's letters we find a passion for ministry.¹ His intensity for the Lord's work is found at every corner of his rugged life (see 2 Corinthians 11:24ff.). When Paul met the risen Lord (Acts 9) everything changed. Now life was lived from the perspective of Christ.

¹ In 4:12 the word translated *ministry* is *diakonias* in Greek. From this word we get the words ministry, service, minister and deacon.

ephesians

STUDY ELEVEN

Saul the puffed up rabbi became Paul the slave, servant of Christ. His desire was for each believer to see himself or herself in the same way, as a servant or minister of Christ! But how does it work? What is God's plan for ministry? Who are the ministers? What are their qualifications?

Read Ephesians 4:1-12 with the following outline in mind:

1. The foundation of ministry: UNITY (4:1-6)
2. The provision for ministry: GIFTS (4:7-11)
3. The performers of ministry: PEOPLE (4:12)

Make a few notes as you read. What is Paul up to here? Have some fun and try diagramming his thought.

The foundation for the ministry of the church is the unity of the church. Jesus' prayer for his church was that it would be a unified church (see John 17:11-22).

In 4:2-3 we see a recipe of Christian character. We are to be people of humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance. The basis of this character is love.

The first of these words, humility, would have shocked the Ephesians. Paul uses the word *tapeinophrosyne*. It refers to the *crouching submissiveness of a slave* and was regarded as a *despicable trait* in Greek culture.¹ (Simpson, p. 88) The KJV translates the word *lowliness* which may capture the meaning better than the ESV. It is the same word used of Christ in Philippians 2:8! Our calling is to emulate Christ in his humility for the sake of the unity of the church.

¹ Aristotle, for example, praised the virtue of intolerance. He said one should strike back at every insult.

ephesians

STUDY ELEVEN

How do we differentiate lowliness or humility from wimpiness? Give examples.

In verse 3 we are instructed to *maintain the unity of the Spirit*. Unity in the church is not something created, it is something maintained. Paul is not speaking of an institutional unity. He is speaking of the every day inter-connectedness of all believers.

How should this understanding of unity in the church affect the way we conduct ourselves in the church? Try to think of some very practical illustrations of how this might work out in our church context as a whole?

How do the four character qualities of verse 2 help maintain the unity of the church?

Humility

Gentleness

Patience

Bearing with one another

What would *lowliness* or *humility* look like in our church? How have you seen this demonstrated in SBCC?

Kent Hughes draws out the implications of verse 2:

The truth which radiates from verse 2 is that Christian unity doesn't begin with an external structure, but rather in the attitudes of the heart—*humility* and *mildness* and *patience* and *loving tolerance* of one another. “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3) takes people who are *so* different and makes them live in soul-satisfying unity. What diversity there is in the average church! Think of all the body types: tall, short, round, thin, muscular, unathletic. Then imagine all the mental types: nervous, calm, mathematical, unmathematical, artistic, musical, other-than-musical, etc., etc. There are huge differences among us! But when the spiritual fruits of humility and patience reign, there is unity. Christian unity in profound diversity brings great glory to God! (Hughes, p. 124)

ephesians

STUDY ELEVEN

Think practically here. What has your experience in the church been? Have you ever been through a church fight? If so, were these character qualities evident or absent from the church boxing ring?

How would it be possible to have severe disagreement in the church and still practice these character qualities? How would it be possible to have a church fight and still be practicing the *unity of the Spirit*? In other words, could a church *fight fair*?

Respond to the following:

... humility is essential to unity. Pride lurks behind all discord, while the greatest single secret of concord is humility. It is not difficult to prove this in experience. The people we immediately, instinctively like, and find it easy to get on with, are the people who give us the respect we consider we deserve, while the people we immediately, instinctively dislike are those who treat us like dirt. In other words, personal vanity is a key factor in all our relationships. If, however, instead of maneuvering for the respect of others (which is pride) we give them our respect by recognizing their intrinsic God-given worth (which is humility), we shall be promoting harmony in God's new society. (Stott, pp. 148-149)

ephesians

STUDY ELEVEN

Look at 4:3. The maintenance of unity is hard work. Paul begins with a Greek word which could be translated, *being eager* or, *make haste*. The preservation of our God-given unity will take a lot of work, at times, in the body of Christ. In what ways have you shown an eagerness to preserve the *unity of the Spirit* in our church?

The word *gentleness* is the balance to humility. Aristotle defined this virtue as the mean between the excesses of anger and passive resignation. The person who has this quality is not beyond anger, but is angry at the right time. Paul, in employing this term for believers, is saying we are not called to be proverbial *wet noodles* who allow anyone and everyone to trample us for any reason.

How would you rate yourself in the areas of gentleness and humility (It is hard to think about this, let alone talk about it...)? What has helped you, or could help you grow in these areas?

Read 4:4-6. Paul presents the theological basis of the church's unity. We are all members of the same family! There is, Paul points out, only *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God*.

Can you find the Trinity in this list? The word *trinity* refers to the tri-unity of God. God is one (unity) and yet three persons. Notice how Paul grounds our unity in the unity of God himself. As God is one, the church is one.

ephesians

STUDY ELEVEN

Unity is an indispensable feature of any healthy church. Without unity the body of Christ, the church goes into pathetic spasms and convulsions. The watching world will want nothing to do with such an organism.

Compare these verses:

Romans 12:18

Romans 14:19

Make a habit of praying for SBCC in this regard. Let the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi become your own.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hate, may I bring love;
Where offense, may I bring pardon;
May I bring union in place of discord.

praying the passage: ephesians 4:1-6

- Remember again the wonderful calling you have received (v. 1), that Paul has outlined for us chapters 1-3. Thank God again for our identity and blessings in Christ, using some of the rich language of chapters 1-3 as you pray.
- Pray for humility, gentleness, patience, and love among the people of God. Pray for the marriages in your homegroup, and for family relationships. Pray for reconciled relationships within the church.
- Lift up the names of churches in your community and around the world. Pray for unity among all of us. As you name different churches, consider repeating these words from verse 5 as a litany.

...one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism

every-member ministry

EPHESIANS 4:7-12

Growing big churches is an industry. Books are written, seminars are offered, CDs are sold, podcasts are uploaded. Church growth experts are looking for the right formula with which a successful church may be built.



The books and conferences may have much to offer, but Ephesians remains the seminal book of church life. Here Paul insists that the church God wants to build is Spirit-driven. Christ, by virtue of his work on the cross, gives Spirit-endowed gifts to his children, to prepare them for the work of the ministry and service. When the members of the body appropriate these grace-gifts, the body of Christ is built up and becomes a *grown-up* organism (4:14-16).

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. Compare translations if possible. This section of the letter should be familiar. What new insights come to mind as you ponder Paul's inspired thoughts?

Notice in 4:7 that Paul sees every member of the body of Christ receiving gifts of grace from the Lord. In verse 7 we learn that our gifts are sovereignly given by a sovereign Lord.

By definition, gifts are something we receive, and we receive spiritual gifts through the working of God's grace. Believers' gifts are not determined by their preferences, inclinations, natural abilities, merit, or any other personal consideration, but solely by God's sovereign and gracious will. We are gifted according to His plan, His purpose, and His **measure**. We have no more to do with determining our gift than we did with determining what color of skin, hair, or eyes we would be born with. God is the source of electing grace, equipping grace, and enabling grace. (MacArthur, p. 136)

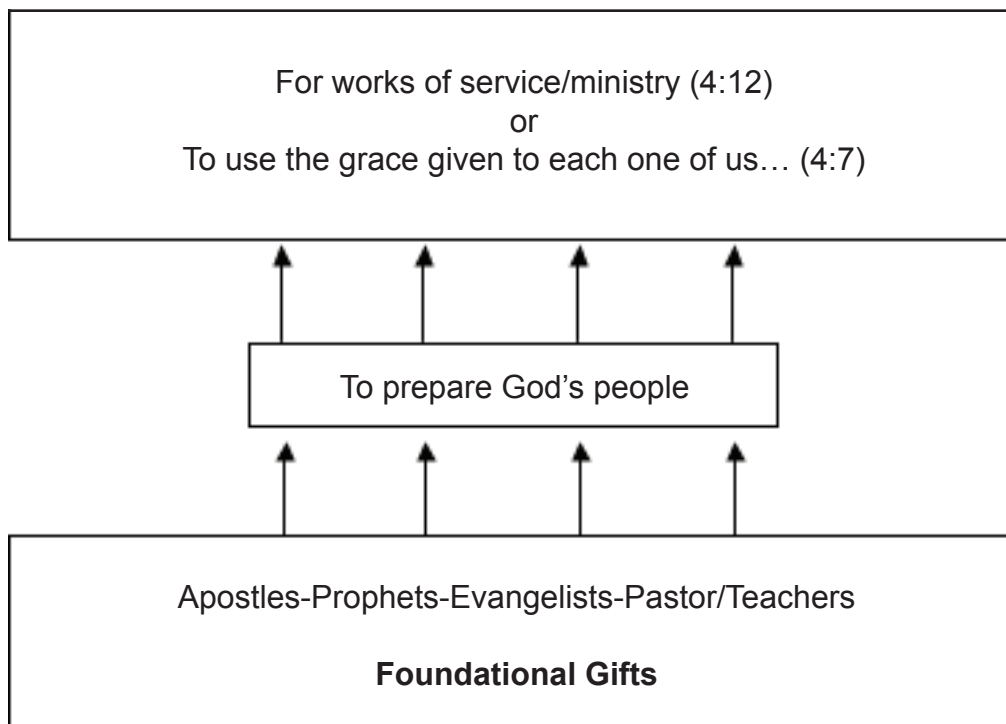
ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

In the New Testament there are several lists of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit.¹ Collectively, some 20 different gifts are mentioned, but no two lists are the same. Most students of the New Testament see these lists as less than exhaustive.

In verse 11 Paul gives a list of gifts given to benefit the whole church. It would not be an overstatement to say that Paul lists the gifts which enable the members of the body to use their gifts.

We could diagram the entire section in the following way:



Verses 4:7-10 are possibly the most confusing verses in Ephesians. When all is said and done, Paul is probably talking about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). How does he do this?

Paul moves from the unity of the body (vv. 4-6) to the individual. *But grace was given to each one of us...* He backs up verse 7 with a quotation from Psalm 68 and then another comment of his own.

Psalm 68 calls on God to come to the rescue of his people as he had done during the time of Moses.

¹ Romans 12:6ff., 1 Corinthians 12:1ff., 1 Peter 4:10-11.

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

Initially, the Psalm celebrated an earthly triumph of the Israelites over their enemies and the return of the defeated foes with the spoils of war to the capital city. This serves also as a picture of God's victory over all his enemies during the exodus and his enthronement in the holy city. (Patzia, p. 236)

When connected to verse 10 we see that Paul is applying this Psalm to the ascension (the victory) of Christ into heaven (Acts 2).

Paul uses Psalm 68 because he understands Jesus' ascension to the Father as fulfilled prophecy.

As Moses was given the law for the people of Israel, Christ, as a second but greater Moses, gave the Spirit to the church, which, in turn, included the gifts mentioned in 4:11 (**he ... gave gifts to men**). (Patzia, p. 236)¹

In 4:9, Paul speaks of the humility of the second person of the triune God *descending* to earth. The ESV Study Bible explains:

In the incarnation, Christ descended from the highest heavens to the lowest regions (i.e., to the earth), where he suffered, died, and was buried, but where he also defeated death and rose again. He then **ascended** (Acts 1:9) 40 days later to be seated in the highest heavens at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33).

What is interesting about what Paul writes in verse 10, that Jesus *ascended above all the heavens...*, is that the Jews had a view of the universe which depicted seven heavens. Jesus is exalted higher than all of these to *the highest honor and glory possible*. (Foulkes, p. 116)

1 There is a technical problem in Paul's rendering of the Psalm:

Psalm 68:18
*When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious.*

Ephesians 4:8
*When He ascended on high
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men.*

The main distinction is in the line regarding the gifts. In Psalm 68 the gifts were *received from men*, while in Ephesians the gifts are *given to men*. Paul may have been quoting from the Syriac Old Testament (Morris) or he may have paraphrased for his own purposes. Interestingly, the sense of the Psalm is preserved either way. The victor in a battle would *receive* the spoils of war from his captives. But, *...conquerors in antiquity characteristically distributed some of the spoils of war to their loyal supporters*. (Morris, p. 123)

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

In 4:11 we learn Christ gave *apostles, prophets, evangelists* and *pastor-teachers* to the church.

The word **apostle** means *to send*. On the one hand, all believers are *sent ones*. We are all to fulfill the great commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:18). But in a narrower sense the word refers to the original twelve disciples of Jesus.¹ This seems to be the way in which the word is used here. God gave the apostles for the foundation of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

Prophets spoke, or revealed the word of God to men and women. The emphasis in Scripture is on the prophet receiving and then revealing the word of God.

In other words, a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation. (Stott, p. 161 emphasis added)

There are no more prophets in this sense today. Otherwise we would have to add to the text of Scripture as these men and women spoke the word of God.

Evangelists were those who took the gospel to areas where there was no witness to Christ. Epaphras, for example, took the message to Colosse and began a church there.

Pastor-teacher most likely refers to a single gift or office in the church. Those with this gift guide and instruct the church.

The word for *pastor* in Greek is *poimên*. *Poimên* is the normal Greek word for a *shepherd*. The pastors of the church feed and care for the flock as a shepherd does with his sheep. But, notice, it is the sheep who go about the business of being sheep. It is the ewes and rams that produce more sheep and grow wool. So also in the church. Consider verse 12.

After all of the above, verse 12 is very simple and easy. The role and function of pastor-teachers, evangelists, prophets, and apostles is that of preparation. The word translated *prepare* or *equip* means to *make fit, or complete*. (Morris, p. 127) The word was used for the repair of fishing nets.

What are the people of God to be prepared for? For works of *service* or *ministry*. This word was used for those who waited tables originally and was employed by the church for the office of deacon.

¹ There was, of course, a deletion (Judas took his own life after betraying Jesus) and an addition (Matthias in Acts 1). Paul claimed to be given this primary *apostolic* authority along with the twelve (*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?* I Corinthians 9:1)

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

Markus Barth's commentary on this section of Ephesians is called *The church without laymen and priests*. He writes,

Indeed, the traditional distinction between clergy and laity does not belong in the church. Rather, the whole church, the community of all the saints together, is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world. This way two widespread opinions are refuted: the assumption that the bulk of the church members are reduced to the rank of mere consumers of spiritual gifts, and the notion that the church as a whole must strive primarily for a "build-up" which benefits only herself. (Barth, 2, p. 479)

If the job of pastor-teacher is to equip the people of the church for works of ministry, what does this say about the church as a whole?

What model of the church, then should we keep in our minds? The traditional model is that of the pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It is a totally unbiblical image, because the New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock but both a plural oversight (pastors) and an every-member ministry. (Stott, p. 167)

The church, then, is not a pyramid but a body. With Christ as her true head. The role of pastors is guidance, direction and equipping.

Santa Barbara Community Church has a plan for equipping each of us for works of ministry. This plan includes, but is not limited to,

1. our large-group gatherings for worship, prayer, communion, and teaching on Sundays;
2. participation in our homegroups for Bible study, fellowship, prayer and worship; and
3. building relationships within the body of believers which will *spur [us] on toward love and good deeds*. (Hebrews 10:24 NIV)

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

Consider, and discuss the following questions:

How long have you been a part of SBCC?

To what extent have you availed yourself of our church's equipping plan?

Is the plan working in your life? Where are your areas of ministry in the church? In the surrounding community?

Examine the following quotations. Do they sound like something Paul might say? How does SBCC measure up? How do you measure up? Are the people of SBCC being equipped and prepared for ministry? What improvements can we make to our equipping plan? Use the space following the quotes to respond.

One thing is supremely important; that *all* minister, and that nowhere is to be perceived a separation, or even merely a distinction, between those who do and those who do not minister, between the active and the passive members of the body, between those who give and those who receive. There exists in the *Ecclesia* (church) a universal duty and right of service, a universal readiness to serve, and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions.

Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding Of The Church*

There is no priestly body within Christianity. It is a one-class society, though you would never guess as much, so grossly has conformity to pagan and Old Testament models distorted this unique facet of Christ's community. Although not all men are called to the function of Christian leadership, the church remains a one-class society. There is no suggestion to be found within the New Testament of what subsequently developed into the disastrous two-class system of clergy and laity.

Michael Green, *Freed To Serve*

... in recent years it seems many churches have drifted to an emphasis on growth, fellowship, and therapy. The local church must meet the felt needs of its members, but it cannot afford to do so at the expense of fulfilling its mission to the world.

Responding to the challenge of [our times] will mean mobilizing large numbers of volunteers to meet the needs of the homeless, hungry, ill and hurting. It will mean teaching welfare families how to work and helping them find opportunities to get off welfare. It will mean blitzing the prisons, working the inner-city streets. It would mean re-orienting our whole view of the church, redirecting our energies so we are reaching outward, not inward.

Charles Colson, *Christianity Today* (3/9/92)

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

As we discover the church as a living organism, the body of Christ, church members have been called out of the audience to become players on the stage. Everyone has a part to play. Every believer is a necessary part of the drama God is producing. The drama of salvation history. We are on the stage together, pastors and people alike. There is no longer a select professional union of actors.

Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*.

Ministry is for all believers. Every believer is ordained for ministry. To be a member of the body of Christ is to be a minister.

Howard Synder, *Liberating the Church*

The more we study the early church the more we realize that it was a society of ministers.

Elton Trueblood, *The Incendiary Fellowship*

praying the passage: ephesians 4:7-12

- Thank God that he has given gifts to *each one of us*. There is not a single Christian who has not received spiritual gifts from God! Name some of the gifts you see operating in your homegroup members. Thank God for these. Thank him for gifts in your larger church body.
- Pray for your homegroup members to use the gifts that God has given them! Pray that those gifts may be *fanned into flame* (2 Timothy 1:6), and that your church would abound in *works of service*.
- Pray for God to raise up more prophets, pastors, preachers, evangelists. There is a leadership crisis in the church! Pray for public Christian figures, that they may remain Godly and be filled with Spirit.

ephesians

STUDY TWELVE

sermon notes

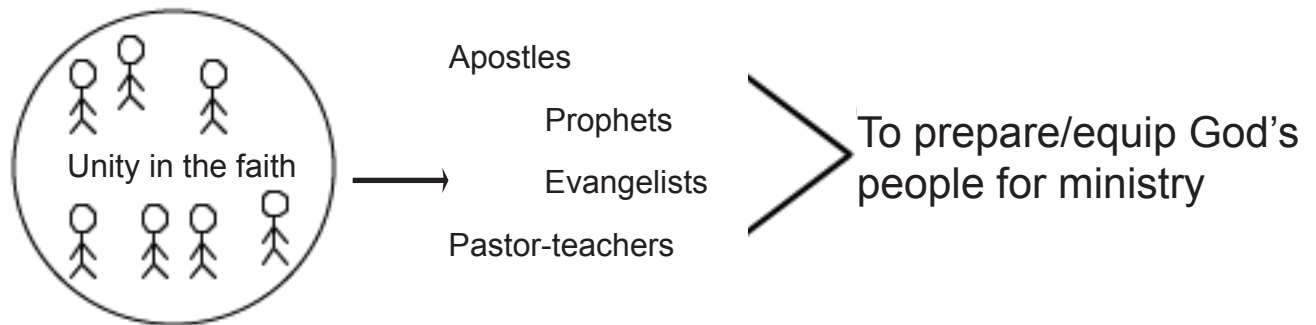
the perfect church

EPHESIANS 4:13-16

What is the church? What is the business of the church? What is the product? Who are the customers? How can we evaluate the success or failure of a given church? Are the numbers of participants, the size of the budget, and the growth of a congregation relevant factors in evaluating the success or failure of a local congregation? Does architecture, landscaping and interior design play a role in the success or failure of a church?



Last week we cut Paul off in mid-thought.¹ The opening 16 verses of Ephesians 4 are a plea for unity in the church before the apostle moves on to a more lengthy discussion of purity in the church. We could summarize last week's study as follows:



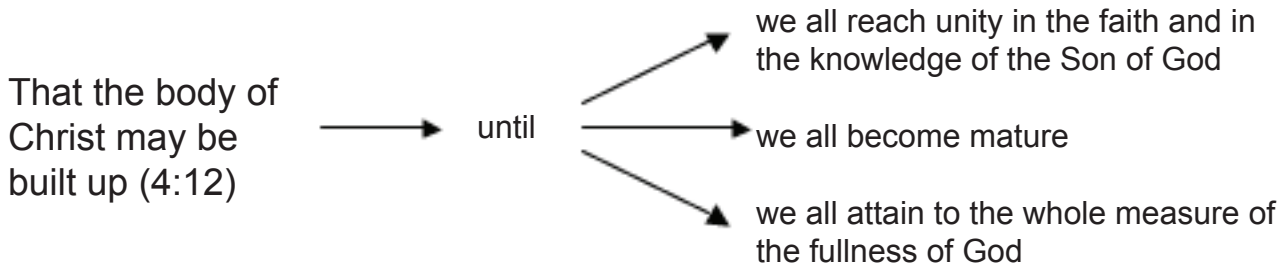
But why are God's people to be equipped for ministry? What is the purpose of such *works of ministry*?

¹ Verses 11-16 are a single sentence in the Greek text.

ephesians

STUDY THIRTEEN

Paul's preliminary answer is in verse 12, *the building up of the body of Christ*. Again, the *Why* question is appropriate. Why should the church be built up? What is the end Paul has in mind?



Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What stands out? Look particularly at verses 13-16. List the various images and metaphors Paul uses and what they lend to his message.

Notice the word *attain* in 4:13. Unity is given to the church but it is also something the church aspires to, something the church attains. We are to live out what we have become in Christ.

How do you see SBCC moving towards a more Christ centered unity? Do you have any thoughts for improvement in this area of church life?

The second phrase Paul uses is *to mature manhood* (*become mature* in the NIV). Literally Paul says, *into a perfect man*. The church is viewed, metaphorically, as a single person who is to be perfect. The Greek word for *perfect* (*telios*) means to reach ones designated end, to be mature, to be complete. A *perfect* acorn grows into an oak tree. A *perfect* cow produces milk. A *perfect* dog fetches the newspaper in the morning. What is a *perfect* church? List several marks of a church which has become mature? Plan to read this list to your homegroup.

ephesians

STUDY THIRTEEN

If Paul is a master at mixing his metaphors, in verse 14 he outdoes himself. G. B. Caird writes, *Christians are warned not to be babies, in an open boat at the mercy of wind and wave, driven off course by the roll of the dice!*¹

Things which are very clear to us as twenty-first century believers were, perhaps, a bit murky to the earliest disciples. The early church was in the process of formulating its doctrine. They wrestled with doctrines we take for granted (such as justification by faith; see Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council). At the time Ephesians was written, the New Testament was incomplete and letters from Paul were probably few and far between. The church at Ephesus was privileged to receive a hearty dose of Paul's teaching. For two years Paul lectured daily in Ephesus (see Acts 19:9-10). Nevertheless, they had far fewer theological resources (Bibles, books, church history, creeds) than we do.

Is the American disciple, the American church susceptible to *being blown here and there by every wind of teaching*? How so? What doctrinal challenges do we face? Where might we be tempted to be *blown here and there by every wind of teaching*? What are some of the contemporary ways that Christians can get blow off course?

David Wells, professor of Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell seminary has written widely on the problem of *modernity* for the church. The modern mind has a certain way of seeing, understanding, valuing and categorizing which, he claims, runs contrary to the Christian mind. Dig into, think through and respond to the following quotation. Are we (you) buying into what Wells calls *modernity*?

What damage has modernity done to the church's appropriation of the doctrine of God? I believe the greatest loss we have suffered is not a matter of any particular aspect of God but rather of his *place* in the church and, beyond that, in society. If modernity is successful in diminishing the reality of God, in emptying him of his significance by pushing him to the periphery of interest, then it will manage to strip the church of the one thing that makes it the church. The church is nothing if it does not belong to God, and it ceases to belong to him when it loses a full-blooded understanding of him, when it ceases to be fully obedient to him, when it no longer worships in awe before him, when it gives up faithful service in his name.²

1 The word *cunning* refers to cheating at dice. *Craftiness* refers to a willingness to do anything necessary to attain one's goals.

2 David Wells, *God in the Wasteland* 1994, p. 120-121.

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STUDY THIRTEEN

Certainly Paul's emphasis in these verses is spiritual maturity. He wants the Ephesian church to grow up in Christ. What is the difference between spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity? What are the marks of a *mature* woman of God? How does a *mature* man think and act?

Infant

Mature

What has helped you attain your present level of maturity?

What conversation should (would?) you have with a Christian whose development is stunted—someone who simply has not matured in his or her faith?

What is your plan for growth in the future? Paul tells Timothy to *train* himself *to be godly*. What is your training plan? What are you doing to draw closer to God? What will contribute to your growth in the next 12 months?

In 4:15. Paul uses a word which is impossible to translate without it sounding strange to our ears. The verse would read, literally, *But truthing in love...* The Greek verb conveys both speaking and acting. Christians speak the truth, but they also *do* the truth (see John 3:21¹). Note, our *truthing*, in word and in deed is surrounded by love.

¹ John 3:21 *But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.* (NASB)

ephesians

STUDY THIRTEEN

Go back and re-read verses 1-16. Notice what a corporate affair the Christian faith is. We tend to see salvation as something which takes place between an individual and God. What do these 16 verses have to say about this?

What role have people in the body of Christ played in your maturation as a Christian? Who were these people and what was your relationship to them?

Notice, especially, the very last phrase of verse 16, *when each part is working properly*. What is essential for the maturation of a church?

Since the parts of the body need to work well together it is essential that we know and love one another. To put it more simply, it is essential that we like one another and become friends. What are you doing to connect yourself in with others at SBCC in a meaningful way? Is this a priority?

When all is said and done the key to a mature life of ministry is maintaining connection with the head. Paul calls immature believers *infants*. When we look at a baby we notice, in some cases, the child's head is too big for its body. But because of the close connection between the big head and small body, the child grows into proper proportion. So it is with the infant believer or the infant church. Our calling is to remain connected with our Lord. It is he who causes the body to grow.

Barth's translation of verse 16 brings out the necessity of our connection with Christ:

He is at work fitting and joining the whole body together. He provides sustenance to it through every contact according to the needs of each single part. He enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love. (Barth, 2, p. 426)

ephesians

STUDY THIRTEEN

praying the passage: ephesians 4:13-16

- Read aloud the great passage about Christ in Colossians 1:15-20. Praise Jesus for who he is, and pray that SBCC may attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- Name some fads and *winds of teaching* that blow the church *here and there*. Confess and repent for the church at large.
- Pray for your teachers and preachers, that they would *speak the truth in love*. Pray that each of you would *speak the truth in love* as you interact with family and friends.
- Pray for SBCC and other churches to become mature, and to grow and build themselves up in love.

sermon notes...

living the new life

EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Thinking in isolation and with pride ends in being an idiot. Every man who will not have softening of the heart must at last have softening of the brain.

G. K. Chesterton¹

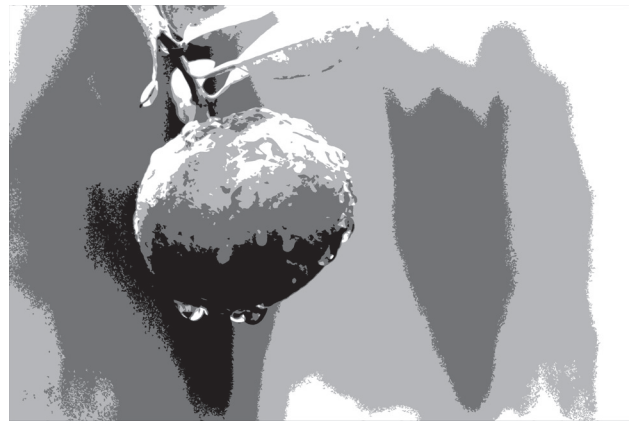
The Scriptures make much of the way a person *thinks*.

Proverbs 23:7 says, For as he thinks within himself, so he is. (NASB)

Jesus said, For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. (Matthew 15:19)

Paul says that original sin affected our thinking. (Romans 1:21) Before being made new in Christ, our mind is set against the things of God. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (Romans 8:6-7)

The anemic Corinthian church was instructed to change their thinking: Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. (1 Corinthians 14:20)



In Ephesians 4 the church is instructed to abandon the way of the *Gentiles* who live in *the futility of their minds*. (v. 17)

Instead of *thinking* in the way of the Gentiles, the Ephesians were to be *made new in the spirit of their minds*. (v. 23)

What if the church does her work? What if she takes this whole idea of equipping and ministering seriously? What will the church become? What will the ministering church look like? At a minimum the church will become a society of people who think differently than they did before they came to know Christ. The church will become a society of people who no longer conform to the pattern of the world, because their minds have been renewed (Romans 12:1-2).

¹ From *Orthodoxy*, Image Books, 1959, p. 42, Originally published 1908.

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

In Ephesians 4 Paul builds his argument. One thing leads to the next. Verses 17-19, though shorter, are remarkably similar to Romans 1:18-32. In both passages we learn of the negative effects of sin on the sinner. In verses 20-23 Paul shows Christ re-making sinful men and women according to God's divine design. Verses 24-32 give five concrete examples of purified behavior in the church, God's new society.

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 in whatever translations you have available. What is the difference between life before and after one meets Christ? Compare these verses with Romans 1:18-32 and James 1:12-15.

Ephesians 4:17-32

Romans 1:18-32

James 1:12-15

How much of your pre-Christian self do you see in Paul's generic description of a *pagan* in verses 17-19?

On balance, do Christians live *better* lives than non-believers? What about the *noble pagan*, the woman who gives of her time, money and resources to the poor, never cheats on her income taxes, is faithful to her husband, never cuts anyone off on the freeway, etc.? Does this so called *noble pagan* live life consistently with her principles? How would Paul respond to such a person?

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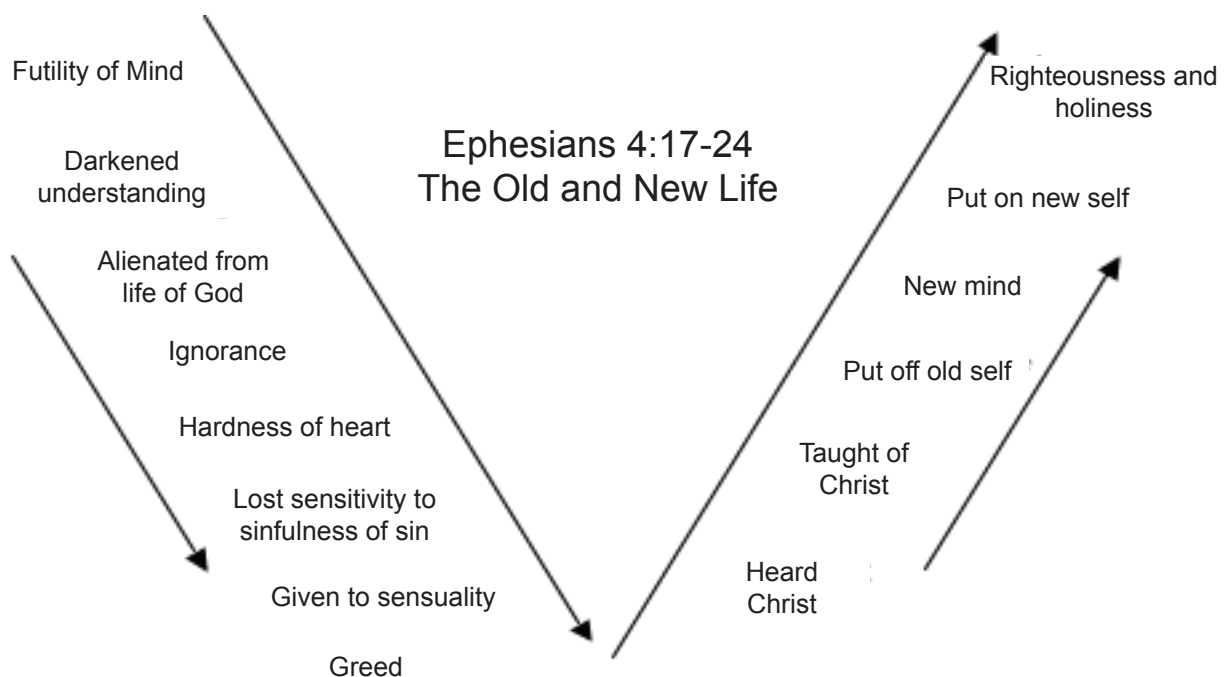
STUDY FOURTEEN

For Paul, and the other writers of the Bible, how a person thinks will determine the course of his action (see above). The *truth* in Scripture is a powerful force able to shape a person (John 8:32). False teaching (pseudo truth) will corrupt those who listen. Ideas have consequences (Matthew 7:15).

Notice the downward spiral a sinful mind produces in verses 17-19 and the renewing effects of knowing Christ in verses 20-24.

J. H. Houlden comments on this passage,

Pagan immorality is seen as willful and culpable ..., the result of their deliberate refusal of the moral light available to them in their own thought and conscience. (From Stott, p. 176)



Read 4:17-19. The word for *futility* expresses both *utter uselessness and vanity*. The NEB translates this word, *the-good-for-nothing notions...*

Notice the contrast between those *darkened in their understanding* (v. 18) and the Ephesian church which is enlightened by Christ. These people are *alienated from the life of God*.

The word for *hardness* in 4:18 referred to both a *stone harder than marble*, and to the formation of a callus on the skin. This leads to Paul's next image. To be hardened is to lose one's ability to be sensitive to sin.

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

When we have *lost all sensitivity* we have lost the ability to respond to moral instruction. This leads to their giving *themselves over*¹ to *sensuality* which leads to indulgence of every kind.

“Sensuality” (*aselgeia*) is license in the sphere of the physical and hence voluptuousness or debauchery... . In the New Testament it often refers to sexual excesses. This fearful self-abandonment leads to all kinds of filthy practices, which are so absorbing as almost to become a total preoccupation (*ergasian*). (Wood, p. 62)

The NEB translation is instructive:

...they are strangers to the life that is in God, because ignorance prevails among them and their minds have grown hard as stone. Dead to all feeling, they have abandoned themselves to vice, and stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desires.

Look at 4:20-24. The change in verse 20 is strong. **BUT YOU** in the Greek text. You Ephesians are different from the pagans! The Christian life involves moral education. Disciples are men and women who *learn* to think godly thoughts and act in a godly manner.

And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)

What follows in verse 21 are three parallel expressions. The Ephesians, literally, *learned Christ*, *heard Christ* and were *taught in him*. In simple terms, the antidote to paganism is Christ.

How does one *learn Christ*? Think of your learning methods in other areas of life (doing the dishes, driving a car, multiplication tables...). Do these methods of learning apply to *learning Christ*?

¹ Interestingly, in Romans 1 it is God who *gives over* the pagan. *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* (Romans 1:24) *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.* (Romans 1:26) *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.* (Romans 1:28)

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

How are you *learning Christ* during this season of your life?

What is the paganism of our time? How does it measure up to the vile paganism described by Paul? Is our society as corrupt as theirs? Are we as bad as they were?

How do you see this paganism affecting the church in the twenty-first century? How do you see paganism affecting Santa Barbara Community Church? Where do you fit in this picture?

Paul speaks of being *made new* (v. 23) and *putting on the new self* (v. 24). Paul is not telling us what to do, rather he is telling us what God has done for us. Nevertheless, the Ephesians are certainly to actively work at making a reality what God has already done in their lives.

In all this teaching the divine and the human are beautifully blended. In the command to exchange our old humanity for a new one, Paul is not implying that we can bring about our own new birth. Nobody has ever given birth to himself. The very concept is ludicrous. No, the new humanity we assume is God's creation, not ours. Nevertheless, when God recreates us in Christ according to his own likeness, we entirely concur with what he has done. We 'put off' our old life, turning away from it in distaste, and we 'put on' the new life he has created, embracing it and welcoming it with joy. In a word, recreation (what God does) and repentance (what we do by his grace) belong together and cannot be separated. (Stott, p. 182)

When the Ephesians came to know and worship Christ he called them to a totally transformed life. They were to have new ethics, values and allegiances. Their former pagan way of life was to be no more.

The eight verses of 4:25-32 contain at least five areas where the Ephesians were to leave their pagan way of life behind and adopt a new way of behaving.

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

Think of each of these from the perspective of church life. How would a body of believers which practiced these virtues be affected? Fill in the boxes on the right with the practical out workings of these new life virtues in the church.

Virtue	Meaning	Effect upon the church
<i>Put away falsehood, speak truthfully...</i>	literally, put off the lie ¹	
<i>Be angry and do not sin...</i>	This quotation from Psalm 4:4 means, <i>Let not your anger be mixed with sin.</i> (Hendrickson, p. 218)	
<i>Steal no longer...</i>	"Manual labor is more than a cure for theft or a method of personal gain. The apostle raises the motive of work to a higher level and indicates that those who labor honestly will be able to fulfill their corporate duty to <i>share with those in need.</i> " (Patzia, p. 253)	
<i>No corrupting talk...</i>	The Greek word can "designate anything that is rotten, putrid, filthy, and therefore, unsound or bad. In the New Testament the term is used to describe bad trees, foul fruit, rotten fish." (Barth, 2, p. 518) ²	
<i>Do not grieve the Holy Spirit...</i>	The word for grieve is "to cause sorrow, pain or distress." "It appears that the author refers to the Holy Spirit because of his connection with a person's speech (see 5:18) ...the misuse of the organ of speech is accordingly a wrong done to, and felt by the Spirit who claims to control it." (Patzia, p. 254) ³	
<i>Get rid of all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander & malice...</i>	<i>Get rid of</i> means "let it be removed," "have nothing to do with it." (See Wood, p. 65)	

- 1 Hughes notes that lying was *endemic to the Greeks as well as Israel's Semitic neighbors, and some who had recently become Christians had brought the practice right into the Church.* (Hughes, p. 149) The parallel passage in Colossians 3:9-10 reads, *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* Verse 9 could be translated, *Stop lying to each other!*
- 2 Barth goes on to point out the New Testament counterpart to *foul speech* is speech seasoned with salt (see Colossians 4:6).
- 3 F. W. Beare (1953) makes an interesting observation. *The sins against the brotherhood are also an offense against the divine Spirit which inhabits the body of believers.* (From Patzia, p. 254)

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

Think through this list from the perspective of the church. How would a church function which did not pay attention to this list?

What would happen to a church (SBCC for example) if it took seriously and applied Paul's admonition to say *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs*?

Share an example of being *built up* by a brother or sister in our church. How did this make you feel? What effect did it have on you?

Reflect on your use of speech. How, specifically, do Paul's words challenge you? Where do you need to improve in your habits of speech? Ask your homegroup to hold you accountable in your efforts to change over the next several weeks and months.

St. Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, had a sign near his dinner table. It said, *He who speaks evil of an absent man or woman is not welcome at this table*. Let's put this motto into practice at SBCC.

ephesians

STUDY FOURTEEN

praying the passage: ephesians 4:17-32

- Remember what God has delivered you from! Consider what life would be like if you did not know him. Thank God for the ways he has delivered you from the *futility of their thinking*, or old thought patterns that are hostile to him.
- Confess the forms of impurity that still exist in the church. How has the church lost its sensitivity to sin and neglected holiness? What sins remain in you? Consider sexual immorality, falsehood, anger, slothfulness, unwholesome talk, and bitterness as just a few examples.
- Pray for a renewed commitment to holiness to pervade the church. Pray for the next generation growing up in our churches, that they would be holy. Pray for a spirit of forgiveness and compassion in churches and families.

sermon notes

imitating god

EPHESIANS 5:1-21

What does a Christian look like? How is he to behave? What special clothes does she wear? What habits are to be formed when one is *in Christ*? How are spending habits to be affected? Can a Christian be a sports fan? Should a believer go to an NBA, NHL, or an NFL game and cheer (praise?) wildly? May a Christian buy a Taylor Swift CD? What guidelines do the Scriptures give for our lifestyle?



Obviously the biblical writers do not directly answer these questions. But in Ephesians 5 Paul states a principle which should guide the life of every believer. We should be men and women who *imitate God*. Clement of Alexandria (155-220), a mystic, said we should practice *being God*. Perhaps Clement went a bit too far, but his shocking statement stems from Ephesians 5.

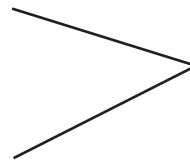
Before getting lost in the shuffle of all that follows in this study, take a moment and ponder the notion of imitating God. What does this mean to you? Certainly there is much about God which is beyond our ability to understand, much less imitate.¹ What do you know about God which you can imitate? Think of God's work in history and in your own life as you formulate your answer.

Principle: Imitate God (vv. 1-2)

Negatively:

Abstain from (vv. 3-4)

1. Sexual immorality
2. Impurity
3. Covetousness
4. Improper speech



Because of these, the judgement of God is coming (5:5-7)

Positively:

Demonstrate that...

1. You are light (vv. 8-14)
2. You are wise (vv. 15-17)
3. You are filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 18-20)

¹ Theologians often distinguish between God's *incommunicable* and *communicable* attributes. The former have no human reference point, no human analogy (the *aseity* of God refers to the fact that God has always existed, for example). *Communicable* attributes have an analogy to human beings. For instance, love is an attribute of God and humans practice loving.

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Read 5:3. In this one verse, Paul covers the full range of sexual sins. He uses two Greek words which are translated *sexual immorality* and *impurity* and together cover all varieties of sexual sin.

The Ephesians were steeped in a society of sexual license. Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis¹ (*Diana* of Ephesus) which was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. This magnificent temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was honored on coins and revered by *all Asia* (Acts 19:27). Diana was the Greek goddess of fertility and sexual orgies were a common, and popular, feature of worship.

Paul instructs the church that she is to be different. A new way of life is prescribed for the new people of God.

Verse 4 addresses the speech of believers.

Foolish talk is from the Greek, *moros*. Moronic talk.

Crude joking can be positive and refer to *wit* or *pleasantry*. (Patzia, p. 257) Here, however it refers to smutty jesting about sexual matters.

As the writer of Proverbs says, *The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly*. (Proverbs 15:2)

Do you see the power of humor in your life? In our society? Consider and respond to the following thoughts on humor from C. S. Lewis' imaginative *Screwtape Letters*.²

The real use of Jokes or Humour is quite ... specially promising among the English, who take their "sense of humour" so seriously that a deficiency in this sense is almost the only deficiency at which they feel shame. Humour is for them the all-consoling and (mark this) the all-excusing, grace of life. Hence it is invaluable as a means of destroying shame... . Mere cowardice is shameful; cowardice boasted of with humorous exaggerations and grotesque gestures can be passed off as funny. Cruelty is shameful — unless the cruel man can represent it as a practical joke. A thousand bawdy, or even blasphemous, jokes do not help towards a man's damnation so much as his discovery that almost anything he wants to do can be done, not only without the disapproval but with the admiration of his fellows, if only it can get itself treated as a Joke.

1 *Artemis was a goddess universally worshipped throughout the Greek world, but may have had pre-Hellenic origin, as for example at Ephesus, in which city her cult was undoubtedly grafted on to that of an Asiatic fertility goddess... . Homer gave her the title, 'Lady of wild things,' the virgin huntress, armed with bow and arrows. (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 2, p. 341)*

2 These fictitious letters are written from a senior demon to an underling and contain advice on how to subvert the faith of a new Christian.

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STUDY FIFTEEN

...flippancy is the best of all. Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour plating against the Enemy¹ that I know... It is a thousand miles away from joy; it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practise it.

Your affectionate uncle,
SCREWTAPE²

How is it with you and your humor? Are you using humor appropriately? Can others in your homegroup hold you accountable in this area?

Consider 5:5-7. These are strong verses. They speak of the wrath of God on those who persist in disobedience.

Compare this text with these:

Galatians 5:19-21

Corinthians 6:9-10

1 John 3:7-10

Revelation 22:14-15

Summarizing these texts, Kent Hughes writes,

... the Scriptures are in concert: No practicing sinner, no unrepentant sensualist, has eternal life.

Do Christians fall into these sins? Of course! But true Christians will not persist in them, for persistence in sensuality is evidence of a graceless state.

We conclude on the authority of God's Word that anyone who is living a lustful life of sensuality and is unwilling to turn from it is lost and has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ. Such a person is an "idolater" because he has put his sensual desire in the central place only God should occupy. (Hughes, pp. 159-160)

1 The *enemy* in these letters is God.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, letter 11, 1961.

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STUDY FIFTEEN

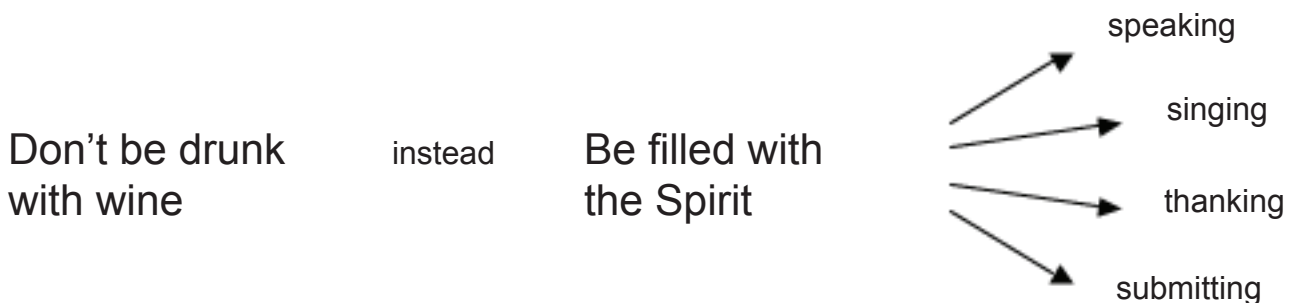
In 5:8-14, Paul states in these verses that the Ephesians are *light*. As such Paul seems to recommend an ignorance of the darkness. *For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.*

How can we apply this to our time and place? Ours is an *open* society. We can hardly watch an hour of television without being exposed to sexual behavior outside of the biblical norm. Pornography is available from any computer equipped with an internet connection. Our schools provide *sex education* where, generally, the students will be exposed to the things Paul says are *shameful even to mention*. Many movies we watch include material which is shameful.

How can the body of Christ recover a sense of the shameful? What are we to do to protect ourselves and our children from such things?

Read 5:15-16. What does Paul mean when he says we should live as *wise* people? What does it mean to *make the most of every opportunity*?

The last part of our text, 5:18-21, concentrates on being *filled with the Spirit*. Paul's thoughts can be diagrammed as follows:



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STUDY FIFTEEN

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a mid-twentieth century medical doctor who became the pastor of Westminster Chapel, London writes,

Drink is not a stimulus, it is a depressant. It depresses first and foremost the highest centers of all the brain. They are the very first to be influenced and affected by drink. They control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest. The better a man's control, the better man he is....But drink is something which immediately gets rid of control; that indeed is the first thing it does.¹

The fullness of the Holy Spirit, we should note, has the opposite effect of alcohol. The *fruit*, so to speak, of alcohol abuse is *debauchery* (the Greek word means *profligacy* or *recklessness*). The *fruit* of the Spirit is described in Galatians 5. Note the contrast:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
(Galatians 5:22-23)

Think how the Holy Spirit is to permeate the life of the believer and the church. The believer is *baptized* in the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13), *sealed* in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and *guaranteed* a future by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:14).

Here the believer is instructed, commanded, to *be filled* with the Spirit. Paul uses a present imperative verb which could be translated *go on being filled*. In other words, the filling of the Spirit is to be an on-going activity for every believer.

But how do we fulfill this command?

Significantly, the present, active verb is in the passive voice. *Let yourselves be filled with the Holy Spirit...* The filling of the Spirit is not something we conjure up by placing ourselves in the right environment. Nor should the filling of the Spirit be associated with religious ecstasy. The Spirit's filling is not a reward for good behavior. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the result of our yielding our Spirit to God day-by-day, moment by moment.

What are the marks of a church *full of the Spirit*? Hint: see verses 19-20.

¹ Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home and Work*, 1975, p. 15.

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STUDY FIFTEEN

Is Santa Barbara Community Church a *Spirit-filled* church? What evidence would you give to support your answer?

We have been meeting in our groups for at least 16 weeks. Spend some time affirming one another. Who have you observed *imitating God* in your homegroup? What has this imitation looked like? How have you imitated the imitation?

Let this study sharpen your life, your behavior, your speech, and how you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ!

praying the passage: ephesians 5:1-20

- Praise God that he has demonstrated to us a life of love (vv. 1-2). Consider the ways that he has loved us and shown us how to love. Thank him for Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering to God.
- Confess once again the sins of sexual immorality in the church. Expose the sin (v. 11) by naming it, rather than letting it fester in darkness.
- Ask God to purify us, and that we would truly live as *God's holy people*. Pray by name for your homegroup members to filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Conclude by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Consider reading specific scriptures as encouragements addressed to specific individuals in your homegroup.

the way of submission

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

The war between the sexes, especially between husband and wife, appears to go all the way back to the sin of Adam and Eve. When this newly married couple decided to forego God's instructions and transgress his will, all of their relationships were altered. Their relationship with God was ruined, their relation with their work was subverted and their relation to each other was strained. The curse placed on Eve is telling.

To the woman [God] said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

What does the second part of this judgment mean? At a minimum the verse states that the original harmony of the sexes, designed by God, was replaced by a degree of alienation and discord.



In the place of equality of the one with the other, and of the complementarity of the one to the other ... there would come the rule of one over the other. Sexual complementarity was intended from the beginning to include masculine 'headship,' as Paul argued, but by reason of the Fall 'headship' degenerated into 'domination.'¹

God's redemptive work through history is his gracious work of *un-doing* the consequences of the Fall. If, as Paul writes in Romans 6:23, *The wages of sin is death...*, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died to give us *life* (John 10:10; Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:12, etc.). When it comes to the war between the sexes we find this same *redemptive un-doing*. As Joan Fredrickson writes, *Prefall conditions are to prevail in the Christian home, and the church is to reflect those conditions.*²

Before reading our text we should consider the historical situation into which Paul wrote.

¹ John Stott, *Involvement*, 2, p. 134. Steven Goldberg wrote *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, 1973, which argues from an academic perspective, In every society that has ever existed one finds patriarchy (males fill the overwhelming percentage of upper hierarchical positions in political and all other hierarchies), male attainment (males attain the high-status roles, whatever these may be in any given society) and male dominance (both males and females feel that dominance in male-female encounters and relationships resides in the male, and social expectations and authority systems reflect this). (Cited in Stott, 2, p. 222)

² From *The Apple of His Eye*, p. 63. Unpublished manuscript by Joan Fredrickson.

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STUDY SIXTEEN

It is well known that women had little advantage in the first century world. On balance, however, we can safely say women had few rights and were held in low esteem during the time of Paul.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33. Compare translations. What stands out in these verses?

Why does Paul compare the relation of husbands and wives to Christ and the church?

Find the five verbs Paul uses to describe Christ's relation to the church. What do these teach us about marriage? What do these verbs teach about the church?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

We should note that *submission* describes what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Re-read verses 18-21. We will find ourselves *speaking, singing, thanking, and submitting*. Submission *to one another*, whatever this means, is a sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We should also note that this is a church wide practice.

What does and should this look like in the context of Santa Barbara Community Church? Give specific examples.

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STUDY SIXTEEN

How are you in submission to others within the church?

What hindrances do you have in this area? How can you grow and mature in the area of submission?

We should note that *submission* describes what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We will find ourselves *speaking, singing, thanking, and submitting*. Submission to *one another*, whatever this means, is a sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We should also note that this is a church wide practice. Much of what follows in Paul's instructions involves marriage and family. But the church, full of the Spirit, is to be in the habit of *submitting to one another*.

The Greek word Paul uses here is *hupotasso*. Originally a military term meaning to *arrange or rank under*, by New Testament times the word meant *the readiness to renounce one's own will for the sake of others...* (Kittel, 8, p. 45) Accordingly the word is translated to *submit, or to be subject to*.

In the Greek text there is no verb in verse 22. A choppy rendering of the Greek would read something like this:

Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives to their husbands as unto the Lord... . Husbands love your wives...

As we read through these verses, *children* and *slaves* are called to submit to those in authority over them.

Stott writes,

Perhaps the most striking feature of the [passage] is that in each pair of relationships reciprocal duties are laid down. It is true that wives are to submit to their husbands, children to their parents and slaves to their masters, and that this requirement of submission presupposes an authority in the husbands, parents and masters... . [Yet] when Paul is describing the duties of husbands, parents and masters, in no case is

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STUDY SIXTEEN

it authority which he tells them to exercise. On the contrary, explicitly or implicitly, he warns them against the improper use of their authority, forbids them to exploit their position, and urges them instead to remember their responsibilities and the other party's rights. Thus, husbands are to love their wives and care for them, parents are not to provoke their children but bring them up sensitively, and masters are not to threaten their slaves, but treat them with justice. (Stott, p. 219)

In other words, in the kingdom of God there is an abiding reciprocity between the citizens of that kingdom.

If therefore, it is the wife's duty as wife to submit to her husband, it is also the husband's duty as a member of God's new society to submit to his wife. Submissiveness is a universal Christian obligation. (Stott, p. 233)

What does Paul mean in verse 23 when he writes, *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church* . . . The notion of headship is difficult to define and articulate. What does Paul have in mind?¹ Some suggest the word *responsibility* is a good synonym for *head*. As Christ was *responsible* for the church, even giving his life for the church, so also, husbands are to *responsibly* care for their wives and give themselves to them. *Headship* is not a matter of crushing authority but of tender responsibility.

Tim Keller is helpful in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*. In a chapter entitled *Embracing the Other* he grapples with headship, submission and love. He points out that how these things play out in various marriages will not always look the same. Consider and respond to the following quotation.

While the principle is clear—that the husband is to be the servant-leader and have ultimate responsibility and authority in the family—the Bible gives almost no details about how that is expressed in concrete behavior....We must find ways to honor and express our gender roles, but the Bible allows for freedom in the particulars, while still upholding the obligatory nature of the principle....The basic roles—of leader and helper—are binding, but every couple must work out how that will be expressed within their marriage.²

¹ See Ephesians 4:15-16.

² *The Meaning of Marriage*, pp. 185-187.

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STUDY SIXTEEN

Take a few moments in your homegroup and ask the husbands and wives in the room how they practice this passage.

What does *headship* look like in your marriage?

How is this call to submission and love played out in your marriage?

In verse 33, notice the last command in this section. Wives are called to *respect* their husbands. What happens to a marriage when a wife does this?

Husbands, what changes can you make in your husbanding to fulfill Paul's strong command? Respond to the following comment by Markus Barth:

Paul not only asks the husband (1) to subordinate himself to his wife as she is to do to him (5:21), (2) to exert his responsibility as the "head" only after the fashion of the Messiah who laid down his life as a servant of those he loved (5:23, 25b), and (3) to heed the full meaning of Genesis 2:24 ("... the two will become one flesh"). Much more the sum and refrain of his special exhortation to the husbands is this: "Love your wives" (v. 25a); "the husbands owe it [to God and man] to love their wives" (v. 28); "each one of you must love his wife" (v. 33). In short, the apostle tells the husbands in three statements to "love" her, love "her," and "love her," and he has nothing to add beyond this. (Barth, 2, p. 701)

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STUDY SIXTEEN

The Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591) said love consists *not in feeling great things, but in suffering for the beloved...* What does it mean for a husband to love his wife? Does this run against the grain of our culture?

Paul's model is, beyond question, ideal. When a couple is in the habit of *submitting* to one another, *loving* one another, etc., marriage becomes a delightful relationship. Who wouldn't want to submit to such a husband? Who wouldn't desire to love such a wife? But rare is the husband who lives up to the call of Ephesians 5. Rare is the wife who is completely *lovable*. Truth be told, both husband and wife are sinful people who will make mistakes on a daily basis (hourly?). What then? How is the principle of submission played out in the real world?

Think through the following quotation as you formulate your answer:

Nowhere does the Bible say that love is the basis for marriage; but it does claim that marriage is the basis for love. Paul's command is "husbands, love your wives," rather than "Men, marry your lovers." Within marriage one is to love—within the covenant set up between not merely individuals, but families, and enforced by the church and the community. Marriage is easily defined in legal terms. It has a beginning that can be dated precisely. It is an institution, while love is not. Ideally, the two should be congruent, but the institution is the starting point in the New Testament. The cup is necessary before the wine can be poured. (Tim Stafford, *The Sexual Christian*, p. 13)

What would you say to a good friend who quoted Ephesians 5:22 in order to get his wife to do what he wanted?

What would you say to a wife who claimed Galatians 3:28 as her final proclamation of emancipation from the constraints of marriage?

praying the passage: ephesians 5:21-33

- Thank God for the gift of marriage, and for how it is a picture of God's relationship with us. Marvel that God speaks of us in such intimate terms, as the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7).
- Pray for the marriages in your homegroup and at SBCC to be a witness to the world of the gospel itself. Pray for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Pray for wives to submit to and respect their husbands. Pray that marriages in the church would be informed by this passage, rather than the culture in which we live.
- Pray that we as a church would be filled with a spirit of submission (v. 21), and would therefore maintain the unity of the spirit (4:3).
- Pray for the day when Christ will return and for that great marriage at the end of history. Pray that whether we are single or married we would be ready, and that the church would indeed be a spotless bride.

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STUDY SIXTEEN

sermon notes

family and employee relations

EPHESIANS 6:1-9



We noticed the terrible effects of the Fall upon husband-wife relations at the beginning of our last study. When we think back to the early chapters of Genesis we see the utter devastation sin produced in the entire family. As soon as we meet the first two brothers of history, Cain and Abel, we find one murdering the other (Genesis 4) and then fleeing the family unit.

If we think through even a biblical history of the family we don't find a harmonious story. Cain kills Abel, Lot and Abram separate, Sarah sends away

Hagar, Jacob deceives Esau, Joseph is sold into slavery by his own brothers... The family was deeply fractured by the Fall, and, as in the case of male-female relations, the work of Christ is meant to undo the consequences of sin.

In Ephesians 6:1-9 we catch Paul in mid-sentence. He is probing the implications of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in earthly relations. Christians are to be people willing to submit one to another. While protecting a *divine order* in human relations (the husband is the *head* of his wife, parents have authority over their children and masters have authority over their slaves), Paul urges the people of the Ephesian church to live lives of humility, graciousness and mutual submission.

Our text falls into two distinct categories:

Parent–Child relations (6:1-4)

Master–Slave relations (6:5-9)

Read Ephesians 6:1-9 in several versions. What words or ideas stand out?

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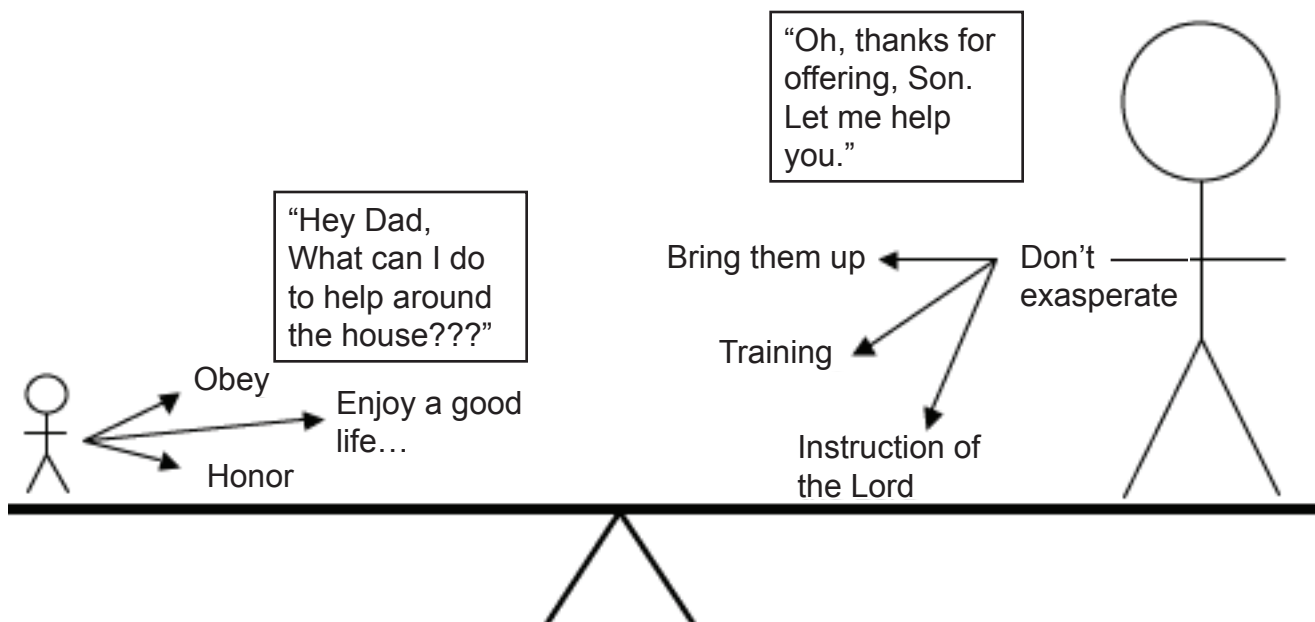
STUDY SEVENTEEN

Parent–Child Relations (6:1-4)

Think of your parents. What was or is your relationship like with them? Consider your obedience and your rebelliousness. What is your experience of honoring your parents?

Would you like to emulate your parent’s style of discipline, training, instruction, etc. in the raising of your own children? Explain.

In verse 1, children are entreated to *obey* their parents, but notice the balance and reciprocity in Paul’s model:



Children in the first century world were the recipients of few rights and privileges. A father had absolute authority over his children. As one student of the times put it, *calloused cruelty* prevailed. Barclay writes:

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STUDY SEVENTEEN

There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father's power. Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in the fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. (Barclay, p. 208)

It is into this setting that Paul wrote. How surprising, therefore, to find the Old Testament command to *obey*. Child—Father obedience was a civil requirement and an unquestioned assumption. Such was the liberating power of the Gospel. Children are given dignity and status among God's people where formerly they had none.¹

Verse 4 has three specific words of advice for parents (fathers) in raising their children. If you have children (or hope to in the future) think through how you can implement each of these in your parenting:

ESV	Meaning	Application
<i>bring them up</i>	The Greek verb means <i>to nourish</i> , or <i>to feed</i> . It is the same verb we find in 5:29 where a man <i>feeds and cares</i> for his body. Calvin translates this, <i>let them be kindly cherished...</i> Hendrickson translates the phrase, <i>rear them tenderly...</i> (Hendrickson, p. 262)	
<i>discipline</i>	This is a strong word which means <i>discipline even by punishment</i> . (Hughes, pp. 200-201) ¹ Read Hebrews 12:10-11. We find the same word employed there for both an earthly father's discipline and God's discipline of his children.	
<i>instruction</i>	Refers to verbal instruction or warning. The word literally means, <i>to place before the mind</i> .	

¹ It is difficult to appreciate the different way children were treated and viewed in the Greco-Roman world. Unwanted babies were *exposed*, that is abandoned to die. The presence of children in a marriage was sometimes regarded *as a partial nuisance because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce*. (Stott, p. 238) Rodney Clapp points out in *Families at the Crossroads*, 1993, that our contemporary affection for and nurture of children in the nuclear family setting is a relatively new phenomenon stemming from the time of the Enlightenment.

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STUDY SEVENTEEN

Notice this last word, *instruction*, is *in the Lord*. Parents are called not to raise citizens, but disciples. How do we do this?

Think back to Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What do these verses tell us about imparting our faith to our children?

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In a sense Paul is sharing his Jewish background with his Greek friends in Ephesians 6. Consider the following proverbs.

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching...
(Proverbs 1:8)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray. (Proverbs 10:17)

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (Proverbs 13:24)

A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.
(Proverbs 15:5)

Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. (Proverbs 15:32)

Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.
(Proverbs 19:18)

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

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Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.
(Proverbs 23:13)

Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.
(Proverbs 29:17)

The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. (Proverbs 30:17)

If a child wanted to consult Scripture in order to be a good child, what would he or she learn from these Proverbs and Ephesians 6:1-4?

What could a parent learn about good parenting from the same passages?

Master–Slave relations (6:5-9)

The Greeks and the Romans accepted slavery without a thought. Four centuries before the time of Paul, Aristotle argued that *a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave. Therefore there can be no friendship with a slave as slave.*¹ The institution and acceptance of slavery in the ancient world was such that it took centuries before slavery was abolished.

Of course the very word *slavery* in the North American mind conjures up a dark and embarrassing chapter of our history. In spite of our history, we do not consider slavery to be an acceptable practice because of the dignity of each individual.

When we read the New Testament we are shocked to find Paul seemingly accept the institution of slavery. Why doesn't Paul call for the immediate overthrow of slavery? There are many reasons for this *omission*.²

1 *Nichomachean Ethics* 8.11. Cited in *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, by, Alvin Schmidt, p. 274.

2 See *Slave and Slavery*, by A. Rupprecht in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. V, p. 457... for an extended treatment of slavery in Bible times.

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First, in the Roman world slavery was completely accepted and widely practiced. Roughly a third of the Roman world consisted of slaves.¹ Stott cites W. L. Westermann, writing for the *American Historical Review*:

The institution of slavery was a fact of Mediterranean economic life so completely accepted as a part of the labour structure of the time that one cannot correctly speak of the slave “problem” in antiquity. This unquestioning acceptance of the slave system explains why Plato in his plan of the good life as depicted in *The Republic* did not need to mention the slave class. It was simply there. (Stott, p. 250)

Second, slavery in the Roman world, while severe, was nothing like it was in the United States. It was not uncommon for someone to sell himself into slavery or to buy back his freedom. Slaves infiltrated every occupation (from laborers to doctors). By the first century, slaves enjoyed the legal rights of free men and women.

While Paul doesn’t call for the abolition of slavery, the radical teaching of equality in texts such as this one laid the foundation for its dissolution.

Paul does not advocate the immediate, outright emancipation of the slaves. He took the social structure as he found it and endeavored by peaceful means to change it into its opposite... . Slavery would be abolished *from within*, and a gloriously transformed society would replace the old. (Hendrickson, p. 263)

With the above in mind is it too much to say that slavery was akin to modern day employment in a major corporation? The *master*, to some degree, functioned as an employer of his slaves. He would see to it that they were fed, housed and that their medical needs were taken care of. The *slave* worked, in a sense, for these provisions.

Apply a parallel between slaves then, and employees now. (*Slavery???* *You bet... if only you knew my boss...*) What does this text say to those of us who are employees? How do these verses inform our *work ethic*?

¹ Barclay and others estimate there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman world.

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STUDY SEVENTEEN

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Apply Paul's commands to your work situation:

obey

fear and trembling

sincere heart

rendering service with good will as to the Lord...

Verse 9 is the shock of this section. *Masters, do the same to them...*

What do these verses say to Christian employers? How should our employees be paid?
How should we set up a biblical *benefits package*?

If you are an employer, what do you need to change to be in line with Paul's teaching?

What are the underlying principles we can distill from these verses regarding relationships in general?

Re-read Ephesians 5:21, which is positioned at the end of what it means to live filled by the Spirit and at the beginning of a long section of teaching on relationships between Christians. How does this verse apply to the material in this study?

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STUDY SEVENTEEN

praying the passage: ephesians 6:1-9

- Thank God for the earthly authorities he has instituted, and the order they bring to our world. Thank him for parents, elders, teachers, and employers. Thank God also that he is our ultimate Master, and that we serve him alone, even as we submit to earthly authorities out of respect for him.
- Pray for children to obey their parents (v. 1), and for God to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children (Luke 1:17). Lift up these family relationships in your homegroup. Pray for absentee fathers and prodigal children to repent and turn to God.
- Pray that we would honor earthly masters and authorities. Pray that Christians would have a reputation as model employees in the workplace. Pray for each other in your places of work, that your service would make Christ attractive to lead others to him.

sermon notes

spiritual warfare

EPHESIANS 6:10-12

Life's A Beach, proclaimed a popular bumper sticker of the 1980s. The declaration expressed in three words that the good life is a life of leisure, sun tan, volleyball, surfing, etc. Throughout church history the Christian's life is anything but a *beach*. Jesus promised his followers suffering, persecution and difficulties between his ascension and his second coming. Church history has fulfilled our Lord's prediction.¹

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. (Luke 21:12)

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering... (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

In 6:10-24 we come to the end of Paul's magnificent epistle. He wants his readers to prepare for battle. Our study has divided the book into two sections: doctrine (chapters 1-3) and practice (chapters 4-6). We could have looked at the letter as three parts. Ruth Paxson divides the book *Wealth* (1-3), *Walk* (4-6:10) and *Warfare* (6:10-24). Watchman Nee's well-known book shares this threefold division, *Sit, Walk, Stand*.

The point of the conclusion of Paul's letter should not be missed.

God has blessed us in the heavenly realms... (1:3)



¹ Antonio Socci, an Italian Journalist, estimates that 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ. His analysis is more shocking when he claims that 45 million of those were killed in the twentieth century alone. (*The New Persecuted: Inquiries Into Anti-Christian Intolerance in the New Century of Martyrs*, 2002)

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STUDY EIGHTEEN

God has created a new humanity, a new, unified society of kingdom citizens. This new society is to bask in God's blessing while returning praise to Him (1:14 etc.).

The church is to live a life worthy of her calling (4:1-6:9) as a united body of believers submitting one to another.

To see this, however, as the end of the matter would be a tragic mistake. God has brought the church together in order to send her out as a military band. The body of Christ is called to do battle against the forces of evil and against the evil one himself. Paul calls his readers to *be strong in the Lord* and to *stand against the devil's schemes*.

Notice that in context, the believer's battle is a defensive battle:

Nearly all the weapons of our warfare described in Ephesians are purely defensive. Even the sword can be used as well for defense as for offense. The difference between defensive and offensive warfare is this, that in the former I have got the ground and only seek to keep it, whereas in the latter I have not got the ground and am fighting in order to get it... . Thus today we do not fight *for* victory; we fight *from* victory. We do not fight in order to win but because in Christ we have already won. Overcomers are those who rest in the victory already given to them by their God.¹

Read Ephesians 6:10-24 from a few different translations. What initial thoughts come to mind? What questions does your reading provoke?

We could make a major study of this section alone. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote two full volumes on these verses. In the middle of the seventeenth century the Puritan pastor William Gurnall wrote, *The Christian in Complete Armour* and presented it as a *little present* to his small church. The *little present* contains 261 chapters and 1,472 pages (think how long their homegroups lasted...).^2

¹ Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand*, 1957, pp. 54-55.

² Seventeenth century literature is known for its elaborate sub-titles. Gurnall wins the prize. This work's sub-title is, *The saints war against the Devil, wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his people, in his policies, power, seat of his empire, wickedness, and chief design he hath against the saints; a magazine opened, from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armour, and taught the use of his weapon; together with the happy issue of the whole war.*

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STUDY EIGHTEEN

Now look over our passage again with the following outline in mind. Jot down any additional thoughts or questions you have:

The Call: *Be strong in the Lord* (6:10-11)

The Conflict: *Rulers, Authorities, Powers* (6:12)

The Strategy: *The full armor of God* (6:13-18)

The Call: *Be strong in the Lord* (6:10-11)

The ESV, in verse 10, reads *finally*. The Greek word could more accurately be translated *henceforward*. Barth translates the word, *For the remaining time*.

Paul has a limited period of time in mind. Its beginning is probably the making of peace between Jews and Gentiles through the cross and the resurrection, and the revelation of God's secret; it will be terminated on the day when the Bridegroom meets the Bride and the Lord holds judgment over all. The strife described in the following verses will be over and God's people will be liberated. (Barth, 2, pp. 759-760)

The battle, therefore, is temporary. The church lives *between the times*, between the first and second advent of her Lord. Christ will come and have the final say against Satan.

Paul says we should be strong *in the Lord*... Read these earlier passages in Ephesians. What do they say about God's power in relation to Christ, and his positioning of Christ and us in heavenly places?

Ephesians 1:19-21

Ephesians 2:4-6

If we are to be *strong in the Lord*, what is ultimately the source of this strength? What is our responsibility in possessing this strength? Are we passive recipients of God's gift? What is the role of discipline and training in such strength? Read the following passages. What do these verses add to verse 10?

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2 Corinthians 10:3-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Philippians 3:12-16

1 Timothy 4:7-8

2 Timothy 3:16-17

What is your personal plan for *training in righteousness* and maintaining your strength? Share your workout plan with your homegroup.

The word in verse 11 which is translated in the ESV as the *schemes of the devil* is *methodeia*. This is the Greek word from which we get our word *methods*. What are the devil's methods in our time to subvert the faith of believers? What are his methods in your life?

Stott points out the subtlety implied in the word *methodeia*. It is the same word we found in 4:14.

[The Devil] is a dangerous wolf, but enters Christ's flock in the disguise of a sheep. Sometimes he roars like a lion, but more often is a subtle as a serpent. We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation to sin are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us into compromise and deceive us into error. (Stott, p. 265)

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STUDY EIGHTEEN

The Conflict: *Rulers, Authorities, Powers* (6:12)

Ultimately the enemies of the believer are the demonic powers and Satan himself. Our struggle, therefore, is supernatural and personal. The word *struggle* indicates a *hand-to-hand fight*. . . . The root idea here is, *swaying back and forth while locked in mortal battle*. (Hughes, p. 214)

Calvin points out that the struggle is so severe that it can only be won if conducted in the power of God.

He [Paul] means that our difficulties are far greater than if we had to fight against men. Where we resist human strength, sword is opposed to sword, man contends with man, force is met by force, and skill by skill; but here the case is very different, for our enemies are such as no human power can withstand. (quoted in Hughes, p. 214)

Respond to the following comment by Dr. Lloyd-Jones. Do you agree? If so, what can you (we) do to undo our ignorance of *this great objective fact*?

I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his “fiery darts”. (*The Christian Warfare*, 1974, p. 292)

Verse 12 shows the comprehensive nature of the battle. We wrestle against *the powers of this dark world*. Paul uses the Greek word *kosmokratores*, which was a term used in ancient astrology of the planets which controlled the destiny of each individual. *Kosmokratores* is a compound word made from *kosmos* (world) and *kratos* (rule). It pictures the global domination of the evil one.

Paul mentions *heavenly places* several times in Ephesians (1:3,20; 2:6, 3:10, 6:12). Both Jew and Gentile believers alike were conscious of this realm where everything from Satan and pagan demonic powers to good angels like Gabriel¹ lived and acted.

¹ See Luke 1:19.

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STUDY EIGHTEEN

Along with verse 12, consider the following verses. What do they add to your understanding of our passage?

2 Corinthians 4:4

1 John 5:19

What is your understanding and awareness of the *heavenly places* where *rulers*, *authorities*, and *powers*, as well as good angels are?

In his preface to *The Screwtape Letters* C. S. Lewis writes,

There are two opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

How can we avoid the errors of both the *materialist* and the *magician* as we prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare?

Ultimately, when all is said and done, the focus must always be on the all powerful God, who sits above all other powers and names in all the heavenly places as sovereign.

ephesians

STUDY EIGHTEEN

praying the passage: ephesians 6:10-12

- Reflect on the power of God displayed in the pages of scripture and in the pages of history. Proclaim his mighty acts (Psalm 145:4) to encourage one another. Consider repeating verse 10 as a litany in response to these praises.
- Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
- Confess and lay before God those areas of life where you feel weak, under attack, and particularly in need of his great power. These may very well be the areas outlined in 4:1—6:9, such as family and marriage, the workplace, or relationships within the body of Christ.
- Pray protection for each other, that you would be covered with all of God's armor. Pray that you would recognize the real enemy in your struggles (v. 12), and would not fight with worldly weapons, but with prayer and full the armor of God. Pray that each of you would be *strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being* (3:16).

sermon notes

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STUDY EIGHTEEN

getting dressed for battle

EPHESIANS 6:13-24

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Such is Paul's eloquent, succinct and poignant statement of the believer's battle in the present age.



The calling of every believer is to employ the *full armor of God*. Paul uses the word *panoplia* which refers to *the full armor of a heavily-armed soldier*. (Bauer, p. 612) Notice the purpose of the armor: *that ...you may be able to stand your ground...* *Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow.* (Stott, p. 275)

In the last study, we looked at verses 10-11. Believers are *to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. Where does that strength come from? How does it get in us? What must we do?

There are two important points to remember before we get dressed for battle.

First, in Ephesians 1:19-21 Paul writes,

...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

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We experience God's *immeasurable power* towards us because in his great might he raised Christ from the dead and seated Christ at his right hand in a position of authority in the *heavenly places*. So Christ already has authority over the *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*.

The second important point is found a few verses later in 2:6. Paul tells us that because of God's mercy and love for us, God *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. So not only has God placed Christ in authority over the forces of evil, he has seated us next to himself in Christ. With Christ there is victory already. We must simply put on the armor and stand firm.

God is the one who delivers the believer from the battle. The disciple's job is to prepare for battle. *The armor is all provided by God: it is for us to take it up and use it. And the victory, when it comes, will always be seen to have been accomplished by God, not by his people.* (Morris, p. 202)¹

Read Ephesians 6:13-24. What catches your attention? What words or themes are repeated? What do you think is most important?

If Jesus sits in authority over all of these *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil*, why must we as believers put on God's armor? (See Ephesians 6:11; Luke 22:31; 1 Peter 5:8)

¹ Interestingly Isaiah 59:16-17 pictures God himself using this same armor in spiritual battle.

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STUDY NINETEEN

Re-read verses 14-17. List the various parts of armor that Paul names and the corresponding function or characteristic that he mentions for each.

Paul was familiar with Roman armor, having been arrested or imprisoned several times. Each piece of Roman armor had a specific function or purpose. Wood lends insight on several pieces.

The belt tied tightly around the waist indicated that the soldier was prepared for action.... The “breastplate” covered the body from the neck to the thighs. Polybius tells us that it was known as a heart-protector... the soldier puts on strong army boots. Josephus described them as “shoes thickly studded with sharp nails so as to ensure a good grip.... [The shield] consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with linen and hide, and bound with iron. Soldiers often fought side by side with a solid wall of shields. But even a single-handed combatant found himself sufficiently protected. (Wood, pp. 87-88)

Consider these elements of strength that are mentioned in the *whole armor of God*.

truth

righteousness¹

gospel of peace

faith

salvation

Word of God

¹ In this context “righteousness” stands for uprightness and integrity of character. But the moral rectitude and reputation for fair dealing results directly from the appropriation of Christ’s righteousness.... The Christian’s protection is not to be sought in any works of his own, but only in what Christ has done for him and in him. (Wood, p. 87)

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STUDY NINETEEN

Are all of these elements different? Similar? How are they inter-related?

What is *the whole armor of God*? What does it do, and how does one put it on? How would you explain this to a new believer?

In what areas of your life, either in your behavior, thoughts or desires, do you find you need to stand firm *against the schemes of the devil*, and against the *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil* (see vv. 11-12)?

Do you wear your armor well? How can you improve in your defense against the attacks and deceptions of the evil one?

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STUDY NINETEEN

To the *whole armor* of God Paul adds still another weapon, prayer.

John Bunyan alluded to this weapon in his seventeenth-century classic allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian reaches a valley on his journey through life:

I saw...there was on the right hand a very deep ditch; that ditch is it into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and have both there miserably perished. Again, behold, on the left hand, there was a very dangerous quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he finds no bottom for his foot to stand on... . About the midst of this valley I perceived the mouth of hell to be, and it stood also hard by the wayside. Now, thought Christian, what shall I do? And ever an anon [immediately] the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises (things that cared not for Christian's sword...), that he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called all-prayer.¹

All-prayer is the final weapon of our spiritual warfare. Paul tells the Ephesians to *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*.

Read verse 18 over a few times, comparing different versions. How are we to pray? What does this verse call you to in your life of prayer?

Stott writes,

Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers and some degree of perseverance, for some of God's people. But to replace 'some' by 'all' in each of these expressions would be to introduce us to a new dimension of prayer. (Stott, pp. 283-284)

What is your prayer-life like? When do you pray? What are your habits of prayer? Share a habit or two of yours with your homegroup in order to provide ideas that may encourage them.

¹ Christian's prayer in the valley is simple, *O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul*.

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STUDY NINETEEN

Think through these verses as a unit. Do you sense the spiritual battle around you?

Paul uses the word *stand* four times. Do you have the sense that you are *standing* in the spiritual battles you face?

What areas do we need to stand firm in as a church, *against the schemes of the devil*, and against the *rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil* (see vv. 11-12)?

Are we standing firm as a church? Recall Wood's comment regarding the shield, that *Soldiers often fought side by side with a solid wall of shields*. Envision this at Santa Barbara Community Church. What does our standing together entail?

As we think of being *strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might* together with the other believers around you, Paul's letter to the Ephesian church comes together. We are chosen, we are brought into God's family and given an inheritance, Paul has instructed us that we are united as believers, even though we are different from one another. And now, in order to stand together, we must have unity, treat each other well in our unity, and submit ourselves one to another. And, finally, we must stand firm in our salvation in Christ.

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STUDY NINETEEN

Spend some time as a group thinking through the past nineteen weeks of this study. What have you gleaned from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus? How has this epistle affected your understanding of God, of the church, of your Christian life? Think back to our first study in this letter. Re-read and re-practice 1:3. Bless God!

praying the passage: ephesians 6:13-24

- Tell God that we are weak but he is strong. Ask him to teach you how to put on his armor. Pray that we may know *his incomparably great power for us who believe* (1:19).
- Consider the various pieces of armor. Pick one, and pray it over at least one homegroup member. For example, you might pray for a specific member to have their *feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*, as they visit their family members over the weekend.
- Pray for each other's needs, praying *all kinds of prayers for all the saints* (v. 18).
- Pray for each of you to be fearless in the proclamation of the gospel (v. 19).
- Consider concluding by saying out loud together verses 23-24.
- Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

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STUDY NINETEEN

sermon notes