

Church & Kingdom | Ephesians

Mark Allen | 11.15.26

Small Group Guide

Based on Ephesians 1-6

Overview

This sermon explores what it means to be "in Christ" and how that identity shapes our understanding of the church. Using six figurative descriptions from the book of Ephesians, the message challenges believers to move beyond being consumers of church and to embrace their active role in the body of Christ, recognizing that a real spiritual battle is taking place in heavenly places right now.

Key Takeaways

1. You are in Christ, and Christ is in you. These are not competing truths. Paul's earlier letters emphasize Christ dwelling in the believer, while Ephesians emphasizes the believer dwelling in Christ. Both realities are true simultaneously, meaning we are surrounded by and protected by him even as he lives within us.

2. Heavenly places are not a future destination -- they are a present reality. The phrase "in heavenly places" appears repeatedly in Ephesians and is consistently written in the present tense. Believers are already seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), and a spiritual battle is actively taking place in that realm right now.

3. God has already given you everything you need. Drawing from 2 Peter 1:3, the sermon emphasizes that God has granted believers everything pertaining to life and godliness. The posture is not asking God to provide what is needed, but trusting by faith in what has already been given.

4. The church is not a building or a consumer experience. Ephesians 4:11-12 makes clear that leadership gifts exist to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. Every believer has a role. Passive attendance is not participation in the body.

5. Six figurative descriptions of the church in Ephesians:

- A Body (Ephesians 1:22-23)
- A Temple (Ephesians 2:21-22)
- A Mystery (Ephesians 3:8-10)
- A New Man (Ephesians 4:24)
- A Bride (Ephesians 5:25-32)
- A Soldier (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think about how you typically describe "going to church" in your daily conversations. What does the language you use reveal about how you think about what the church actually is?

Section 1: In Christ and In Heavenly Places

(Ephesians 1:1-3; Ephesians 2:6; Luke 17:20-21)

1. What is the difference between "Christ in you" and "you in Christ"? Why does it matter that both are true at the same time?

2. The sermon describes heavenly places as a present reality rather than a future destination. Does that change how you think about your daily life? In what ways?

3. Pastor Mark mentioned that if we could fully see the spiritual battle happening around us, it might frighten us. How does knowing a battle is taking place -- even if unseen -- change how you approach your week?

Section 2: The Church as a Body and a Temple

(Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 2:21-22)

4. Pastor Mark uses the image of a reflex test at the doctor's office to describe how the church sometimes operates -- reacting instinctively rather than listening to the head. Where in your own life do you find yourself acting on reflex rather than seeking Christ's direction?

5. Ephesians 2:22 says believers are being "built together" into a dwelling place for God. What does it look like practically for a group of people to become a stronger temple together than they would be individually?

Section 3: The Church as a Mystery and a New Man

(Ephesians 3:8-10; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

6. Pastor Mark said, "It is a mystery why God would want to use you." Have you ever felt disqualified from being used by God because of your past or your weaknesses? How does Paul's own testimony in Ephesians 3:8 speak to that feeling?

7. The new man and old man both exist in the believer until glory. How do you personally recognize when the old nature is asserting itself, and what do you do about it?

Section 4: The Church as a Bride and a Soldier

(Ephesians 5:25-32; Ephesians 6:10-13; 1 John 2:14)

8. The bridal imagery in Ephesians 5 points toward a final union with Christ. How does thinking of yourself as part of the bride of Christ affect the way you view holiness and personal sanctification in your daily life?

9. The sermon makes the point that a soldier does not sit at home and cheer others on -- soldiers assemble. What is one area where you have been cheering from the sidelines when you are actually called to be in the battle?

10. Pastor Mark connected being a strong soldier to knowing the Word of God, referencing 1 John 2:14. How consistently are you personally in the Word right now, and what is one honest step you could take to change that?

Closing Question

The sermon closed with a challenge drawn from Ephesians 4:1 -- to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have received. If you graded yourself honestly on how you are currently living out that calling, what grade would you give yourself, and what would it take to move one grade higher?

Practical Applications

Choose one of the following to act on before your group meets again:

- **For the consumer:** Identify one specific way you can move from attending church to actively serving within it. Contact a ministry leader this week and take a step toward involvement.
- **For the discouraged:** Write down 2 Peter 1:3 and place it somewhere you will see it daily. Each morning this week, thank God for one specific provision he has already given you rather than asking for what you feel you lack.
- **For the spiritually passive:** Commit to reading one chapter of Ephesians each day this week. As you read, write down one thing God is saying to you personally and one action you will take in response.
- **For the isolated:** Reach out to one person in your church community this week -- not to consume something from them, but to encourage, serve, or pray for them.
- **For the battle-weary:** Revisit Ephesians 6:10-18 and identify which piece of the armor of God you have been neglecting. Spend time in prayer this week specifically addressing that area.

Closing Prayer Focus

As you close your group time, pray together over these three areas drawn from the sermon:

1. That each group member would grow in the awareness that they are in Christ right now, surrounded and protected, even in the midst of real spiritual warfare.
2. That your group and your church would move away from consumer Christianity and toward active, humble participation in the body.
3. That each person would set their heart on the Lord this week -- as Daniel did -- and trust that God hears and responds when we humble ourselves before him.
