

Leaders' Notes

The radiance of

GOD'S

GRACE

Ephesians

The background of the page is a collage of three distinct images. The top right portion features a lighthouse on a rocky island, with bright beams of light radiating from its lantern room across a dark, stormy sea. The bottom left portion shows a dark, turbulent sea with white-capped waves under a dark sky. The bottom right portion depicts a calm sea at sunset or sunrise, with a golden glow on the horizon and gentle waves.

A note about these notes

The aim of these notes is to help energise and equip you to lead your Growth Group each week. Leading a Growth Group is a significant responsibility and a precious privilege. We pray it would be a rich source of joy as well.

These notes contain:

- An overview of the book as a whole; and
- Week-by-week notes to help your weekly prep.

By no means is it compulsory that you use these notes but we hope they provide a leg up in your preparation, and are also of personal encouragement to you. This is why each week starts with a 'first!' Section. If you are only able to do one thing, the best preparation is letting God's word speak to you by reading and reflecting on the passage yourself. If you can do a second thing, run through the questions in the study itself with these notes beside you.

If these notes raise questions for you, that's great! I'd love to hear from you and we can wrestle through the scriptures together (by no means do these notes have all the answers, really, they are just a start).

Thank you for your service and partnership in the gospel. Ephesians is an incredible book. Let's mine it's riches!

God bless

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On behalf of the Crossroads Pastoral Staff

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Ephesians Overview

Why did God give this book?

To them:

To show the churches in/around Ephesus how in Christ, God had made them (with the universal church) his loved and redeemed handwork, so they were to walk in love and unity.

For us:

To impress upon us that Christ is the glorious showing of his sovereign grace. He has shown that grace to us (ch1-3), and now he shows that grace through us to the world and the heavenly realms as we walk in love and unity as his church (ch4-6). The gospel brings us big, cosmic, unity in Christ now which we get to live out in wisdom and love.

What is our big prayer for this series?

That as a church we would be in awe of the sovereign grace God has shown us in Christ. And that we would be equipped and energised to show God's grace to others (and indeed the heavenly realms!) by living in unity and love.

What's the genre?

Written as a circular letter - likely to several churches in the region of Ephesus. This may explain why there are not clear and specific reasons for writing within the letter (contrast to Corinthians for example).

What's the overall structure of the book?

Part 1: Who we are as God's church (1:1-3:21)	Part 2: How we walk as God's church (4:1-6:24)
Hello (1:1-2) Praise God for his planned spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-14)	Walk in Unity (4:1-16) Walk in Holiness (4:17-32)
Prayer for the Ephesians to know God more (1:15-23)	Walk in love (5:1-6) Walk in light (5:7-14)
Each of us, made alive by God, (2:1-10)	Walk in Wisdom (5:15-6:9)
All of us together, brought near by Christ's blood (2:11-22)	Stand firm in warfare (6:10-20) Conclusion (6:21-24)
Included in God's mysterious plan of grace, through Paul his apostle (3:1-13) Praying for God's strengthening (3:14-21)	

Where does it fit in the big story of the Bible?

Written after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, but before his return. So it's written in the same theological period as us.

FYI Other references to Ephesus/the Ephesian church in the New Testament:

- Planting/farewelling Ephesian church - Acts 18 - 20
- 1 Cor 15:32
- Re Paul's Travel plans: 1 Cor 16:8, 1 Tim 1:3, 2 Tim 4:12 • Work of Onesiphorus - 2 Tim 1:16
- Letter to the church in Ephesus - Rev 2.

What big ideas does it teach?

1. The role of the church is bigger than you think!

In Ephesians, when Paul says 'church' he usually the universal body of Christ. We see that the church has a central role in God's plans. It even witnesses to God's wisdom and grace to the heavenly powers. In particular, our church should be characterised by love, wisdom, unity and holiness. We will stand out as different compared to the world.

2. Our God is wonderfully triune.

Again and again in Ephesians we see how the three persons of our triune God (Father, Son and Spirit) are working together to achieve his plans. See for example 1:4-14, 17; 2:18-22; 3:4-5, 14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20.

3. We are saved by God's glorious grace

Ephesians emphasises that we are saved by grace to God's glory. This salvation gives us a new identity both individually and corporately as the church.

4. We are united with Christ and each other

Ephesians focuses on Jesus as the ascended, reigning king. We are 'in him', and so have been united with him in his death and resurrection and are seated with him in the heavenly realms. This union with Christ gives us unity with each other as his body.

Helpful (free) resources:

1. Peter O'Brien's commentary on Ephesians

Online through Moore College:

https://moorecollege.access.preservica.com/IO_80673216-5ba3-4493-a98e-73595592a40e/

[please note that this commentary has been discredited due to a lack of citations, if not for that it is regarded as one of the best commentaries around. The upside is it is now available for free.)

2. Series of verse-by-verse devotions on Ephesians by Lionel Windsor. The series is called 'Lift your eyes', found at his blog: 'Forget the Channel. Online at: <https://www.lionelwindsor.net/publications/lift-your-eyes/>

Study # 1 - Eph 1:1-14

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 1:1-14

Think for yourself: Paul lists a whole lot of blessings. Which one is most precious to you and why?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That God would lift our hearts to praise him, and lift our eyes to his plans and purposes. Paul takes us sight-seeing. Like flying over a mountain range, he points out the peaks of God's glorious goodness to us. - 'look, see how he redeemed us!' 'There's how he adopted us!' Etc. Let's take in the sights of God's generosity to us in Jesus.

What's the big idea of this passage?

God is worthy of abundant praise for the abundant spiritual blessings he's given us in Christ, making us part of his cosmic plan to bring everything together in Christ.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

This is the start of the letter! You might like to particularly read over Acts 19:1-7 when we hear the story of the first Ephesian Christians first being sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 1 'In Ephesus...' Some early manuscripts have these words, some don't. Either way, its addition (plus the content of the letter) mean it seems clear this letter was written to be passed around churches in Ephesus and the surrounding region.

VS 3 The heavenly realms...the realm where spiritual powers (including dark forces) live (see Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12). Our world is not just material/physical. There is a spiritual realm to it too. To be blessed in the heavenly places isn't to be blessed in some distant, irrelevant way. These are real blessings. They are held safe and secure by God due to the work of his risen, reigning son. The heavenly realms are also "the spatial equivalent of inaugurated eschatology" (Carson), that is, they are the spatial way of explaining the fact that salvation is here but still coming. Not only is it now but not yet, we are also 'there [in the heavenly realms, seated with Christ], but also still here [while we await Christ's return]. Ephesus has an emphasis on the heavenly realms. Reading Acts 18-20 with its mentions of temples, magic, riots, it seems Ephesus was a city which was very aware of (and scared of) the power of spiritual forces

Vs 5,11 Predestined...it can be hard to fathom that God chooses his people before we were born. This teaching is never used in the Scriptures to say 'God hasn't chosen you...'. The message to all is: repent and believe, Jesus's invitation is open to you. We will only fully know who God has chosen on the last day. He preserves us through enabling our perseverance. In one sense, predestination is 'grace' spelt longer. If we are truly saved by grace, based entirely on God's work, not ours, then it must have been his choice before mine. This is a source of comfort and praise (as in Eph1), never pride or

complacency in our walk with God. For those who are doubting, the best thing is not to look in and ask 'am I chosen' But rather to look at Jesus and ask - 'do I trust in him?'
Vs 13 Sealed by the Spirit On contracts, the wax seal was how the parties promised they would carry out their contractual obligations. Similarly, by giving the Holy Spirit God's promise to redeem and save us on the last day.

Extra prep?

One question asks the group to match each blessing with it's description. For this question - cut out the rectangles below (the description on the right is meant to match the word/phrase on the left).

<p>He chose us...</p>	<p>Before the world was built, God chose us to be set apart and blameless before Him. He predestined us for adoption...</p>
<p>He predestined us for adoption...</p>	<p>Through Jesus, he chose us to become part of his family, inheritors of his promises.</p>
<p>We have redemption... forgiveness</p>	<p>Because of Jesus, the penalty for our sins has been paid and wiped away and we have been bought back into freedom.</p>
<p>He's made known to us the mystery of his will...</p>	<p>God has a plan for all things. It used to be hidden, but now he's revealed it to us in Jesus - at the end of time, everything will be brought together under Jesus' rule.</p>
<p>You were sealed with the Holy Spirit...</p>	<p>When you heard and trusted the news about Jesus, you received God's own Spirit, like a wax seal on a legal document, it's the solid proof that you are in God's family and you will have a place with him in the life to come.</p>

Bonus group ideas:

IS there a way you could boost the 'praise' element of this group time? Could you close with a song? Could you bring party food for a praise-party?

Study # 2 - Eph 1:15-23

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Think for yourself: Paul prays that the Ephesians would *know* certain things. Which of these do you find easiest to forget?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That God would enable our group members to *know* God better, in particular - how good our future is in Jesus, how richly God loves us now and how powerfully he is at work bringing all things under Jesus.

What's the big idea of this passage?

Paul asks God to enable his readers to know God better, particularly the hope God is giving, the inheritance God has and the power God is using for his people.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

Paul prays 'for this reason' - that is, because of how God has blessed the Ephesians in Christ. That is, he is praying for people who have every spiritual blessing in Christ, that they would grow deeper in their understanding and experience of those blessings by knowing God better.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

VS 17 Spirit of... Could be a human attitude/spirit of discernment (i.e. fuelled by the work of the Holy Spirit) or the Spirit himself, most likely the latter.

Vs 18 God's inheritance in the saints Through the old Testament, an Israelite's 'inheritance' was their portion of the promised land. Each tribe was given it's special portion, promised by God. In 1:14 we saw the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of our place in the new promised land (see also 1:11). But here we see the flip - for God, his inheritance is...us! it is his people who are his treasured inheritance. He has bought us in order to inherit us. We belong to God, - a belonging which will be fully realised when Christ returns.

Extra prep?

Not for this study.

Bonus group ideas:

Is there a way you could boost the prayer focus of this group time? Perhaps stop after each section and pray about what you've just been learning. Perhaps deliberately model your prayer time on the prayer Paul prays.

Study # 3 - Eph 2:1-10

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Think for yourself: which phrase jumps out to you as most surprising?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That each person would be struck afresh by the goodness of God's grace, by seeing how he has brought us each from death to life through Jesus.

What's the big idea of this passage?

God has made sinners alive, raised them up and seated them with Christ. This has been done by God's grace alone, through faith alone, for God's glory alone.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

In chapter 1, Paul gave the big picture of God's big plan: he is bringing all things under Christ. Here in chapter 2, he zooms in on one part (perhaps the most incredible part) of this plan: God has taken sinners and transformed them saints, as trophies of his grace.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 2 Prince of the power of the air - also described in this passage as 'the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience', the devil. See also 2 Cor 4:4.

Vs 3 Flesh - Paul uses this word in several of his letters to refer to our sinful nature, including our sinful thoughts and self-indulgent desires. So when Paul says 'passions of our flesh' and 'desires' he is not describing everything we may be passionate about. He means those drives and desires which are against how God says we should live.

Vs 8 Faith - the logic of the passage makes it clear that faith is not a good work we do in response to God's grace. It is the open, empty, hand which receives his gift. In fact, even our faith is given to us by God.

Extra prep?

There's some brainstorming in this study. Consider bringing butcher's paper/ arrange a physical/digital whiteboard, or extra paper for members to use.

The first 'Sink it in' question ask people to reflect on Tim Keller's list of differences between Religion (works) and the gospel (grace). You could print this off for people (See overleaf), or send them a link to it so they can pull it up online.

You can find it (among other places) at: https://www.courageouschristianfather.com/religion-vs-the-gospel-by-tim-keller/#google_vignette

Religion vs. The Gospel Tim Keller

Religion

I obey—therefore I'm accepted.

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

I obey God in order to get things from God.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or my self, since I believe, like Job's friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

My prayer life consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.

My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work. Or how moral I am, and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to 'the other.'

Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God.

The Gospel

I'm accepted—therefore I obey.

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get to God—to delight and resemble Him.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am "simul iustus et peccator"—simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am. I've no inner need to win arguments.

I have many good things in my life—family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

Study # 4 - Eph 2:11-22

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 2:11-22

Think for yourself: how does the cross bring this dramatic reconciliation?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That we would see how the gospel brings us peace with God *and* each other.

What's the big idea of this passage?

When he died on the cross, Christ reconciled Jews and Gentiles to God *and* to each other because he made them all part of God's household.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

God has blessed us in Christ as part of his plan to bring all things together under Christ (ch 1). As part of this plan, we are saved by grace as individuals (2:1-10). So nobody can boast that they earned God's approval (2:9). This has implications for us as a group (11-22). If we are all saved by grace, we are all entering through the same door - the one opened by work of Christ on the cross. We are saved the same way (being united with Christ) and hence are united together. The implications of these truths will be picked up later in the book, particularly in chapter 4.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 11, 12, 13, 14, 18 etc Gentiles ('you') & saints and gentiles ('us') Out of the whole book, this is the section we perhaps see most clearly that Paul is speaking as a Jewish Christian, to Gentile Christians. We also saw it in chapter 1, where 'we' was Jewish Christians, and 'you also' in 1:13 was when he addressed his gentile readers. The division between Jews and Gentiles was due to God-given covenant boundaries under the Old Testament Law, but it had solidified into a wall of hostility. Gentiles could weave into the people of God (e.g. Rehab in Joshua 2, Ruth - Ruth 4; both notably included by Matthew in his genealogy in Matt 1). But it was rare. In Ephesians 'saints' usually refers to the Jewish Christians, but not always e.g. the gentiles are called 'saints' in 1:1 and a holy temple in 2:21 - such is the extraordinary work of God, gentiles have been made holy.

Vs 11 'The uncircumcision' lit 'the foreskin', likely a term of ridicule and abuse emphasising gentiles were 'cut off' from God. Such name-calling would have gone both ways (and sadly still does in some contexts).

Feeling in, feeling out: some may feel proud of being on the 'inside' with God/church. Others may feel lesser/on the outside. Sometimes false teaching (e.g. holiness movements, second blessing teaching) has compounded this. Similarly past sins (or present struggles) can make us think God will always keep his distance from us. This passage is a great opportunity to correct and bring comfort to each of these.

Extra prep?

You might like to bring spare paper for when they draw verses 19-22.

Study # 5 - Eph 3:1-21

NB: you might skip GG this week if members are attending Nancy Guthrie on 29 May.
First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 3:1-21

Think for yourself: which verse best shows the sheer size of God's plans for his people?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That we would see God's big gospel timeline and treasure the opportunity we have now to be part of his plans, and even suffer for it.

What's the big idea of this passage?

God chose Paul to open up the secret that the gospel was for the whole world.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

Paul has explained the impact of the gospel on individuals and communities. Now, he side-steps to consider his role in the spread of that gospel. The gospel includes a now-revealed mystery: Gentiles are now included in God's people. This is the last 'doctrine' section before the letter switches to consider the implications for life in chapters 4-6.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 4-6 Mystery - mystery in the sense of a 'secret' - the now revealed surprise that the Gentiles are also heirs with the Jews of God's promises. It was a secret plan of God, hidden from human reason for a time until revealed as God intended.

Vs 5 Apostles - the apostles were a unique group, sent out by Jesus with the gospel. Paul was sent out by the risen and ascended Lord Jesus (Acts 9). So there are not modern-day apostles.

Vs 5 Prophets - also in 2:20 and 4:11. Could be OT prophets, i.e. the OT prophets proclaimed God's revelation in Christ in advance. OR could be NT prophets i.e. new covenant believers with the gift of prophecy. This seems more likely given the ordering of 'apostles and prophets'.

Vs 10...made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places - another example of the cosmic scope of the letter (see also 1:3, 10, 20-21; 2:2, 6; 4:10; 6:9, 11-12). Paul is looking at the impact of the gospel not just on Jews and Gentiles but on the whole cosmos. The rulers and authorities are those spiritual/heavenly forces that have been put under Christ (1:21). Even spiritual forces against God will come to know his remarkable wisdom as they see how Jews and Gentiles are united in our church.

Extra prep?

It would be good to either have large paper/a whiteboard or a screen you can scribble on for the timeline and optional drawing in the study. If you're worried about time, considering splitting the group in two. One group does the 'Time dimension' section. The other does the 'Heavenly Dimension' section. Then let them report back to each other and finish off the study altogether.

Study # 6 - Eph 4:1-16

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Think for yourself: Which verse most clearly shows God's tender care for his church?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That our group will build one another up in love with God's word, because God has united us through the gospel.

What's the big idea of this passage?

Jesus gave different gifts to the early church so they could keep their God-grounded unity through building each other up (and building in new believers).

Structure of the passage

Be united! (1-3)

Because our God is united (4-6)

Christ gave different gifts to unite us (7-10)

Keep united - by building up each other up (11-16)

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

We've reached the hinge of the letter. From chapter 4:1, Paul more fully draws out the implications of chapters 1-3. Jew and Gentile believers are now 'one new person' (2:11-22), and Paul has just prayed for them to fully understand this (3:16-19). Here, Paul explains how to walk together as that new body.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 4 One body - people may have history of being hurt by church division or by churches that enforced unity in an unhelpful way.

Vs 5 One baptism - people may have come from churches where a certain type of baptism - or baptism within that particular church - was seen as needed to be 'properly saved'. But here Paul is talking about how all believers are 'baptised' in Christ's death (see Rom 6:3) by faith. Water baptism is a reflection of this spiritual reality.

Vs 5 One Lord - Paul almost always means Jesus when he says 'Lord'. Our unity is based on the Triune nature of God as Spirit (vs 4), Son (vs 5) and Father (vs 6).

Vs 5, 13 One Faith/the faith - most likely the set of commitments believers share, rather than their subjective experience of faith.

Vs 1, 4, Calling - not a call to a particular life situation (e.g. a job/ministry job/ marital status). It's the irresistible call every Christian receives from God to follow Christ.

Vs 6 Over all and through all and in all - God the Father is not a 'set and forget' creator, he is the ongoing sustainer of all that is. He's not part of his creation (as in pantheism), but he works through and sustains all of it.

Vs 9 8-Ascended...descended into the lower regions Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, with a

twist. He most likely he deliberately changed it (within the bounds of fair use), so Christ is doing the giving (rather than God being the receiver). This actually matches the bigger picture of Psalm 68, particularly 68:35b. But when did Christ descend? Options include the place of the dead (unlikely), his pouring out of his Spirit at Pentecost, his incarnation to life on earth and his death (perhaps most likely).

Extra prep?

Bring paper/arrange some other means of brainstorming.

Bonus group ideas:

If you like you could conclude the night by saying a bit of a creed - reciting verses 4-6 together.

Study # 7 - Eph 4:17-31

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 4:17-31

Think for yourself: where in your life do you see echoes of your 'old self'? where have you seen the 'new self' emerging over the past few months?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That our groups would take off the old self and put on the new.

What's the big idea of this passage?

Before they became Christians, Paul's readers were so ignorant of God and their impure lives reflected that. Now they know Christ and so can live new lives of holiness.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

We've seen who we are as God's church (ch1-3). So how do we walk as God's church? He's spoken of unity (4:1-16). Here he turns to holiness.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 17-19 In the futility of their minds... This is a strong description of the futility and impurity of living for self. This is deliberately striking. It's worth taking the time for people sense the weight of it.

Vs 22 Put off your old self For those struggling with ongoing sin, this passage may raise doubts about assurance - 'I still struggle with X, am I really saved?'. A key question is: is there a repentant heart? Note: Paul is encouraging his *saved* readers to 'put off' the old self. It's something we all need to keep on doing. We have a new self, created by God, but with his help we need to keep putting it on. Struggling with sin can in itself be a sign of God's saving work within us.

Vs 31 ...anger, and clamor...forgiving one another. Some may struggle with anger or have been deeply impacted by the anger of others. Similarly, forgiveness is a hard but fundamental part of Christian living. Here are some resources that may be helpful:

- If struggling with Anger consider: 'The Heart of Anger' (by Christopher Ash),
- If struggling with forgiveness consider: 'Forgive - Why Should I and How can I' (by Tim Keller).

Extra prep?

For filling in the table on Ephesians 4:20-31, some of the contrasts could include: truth vs falsehood (21, 25); Steal vs labour/honest work (28); Corrupting talk vs building up talk (vs 29); Bitterness vs tenderheartedness (vs 31).

Please note that this study involves dividing into pairs and groups at a couple of points. Online groups may need to adjust this e.g. do it all as a group or let the group choose which verses to focus on and answer those questions altogether.

Study # 8 Eph 5:1-14

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 5:1-14

Think for yourself: What would it look like for you to 'take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness' at home/work/study, online, with your friends.

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That we would see (and treasure) just how distinctive Christian living is, in particular how it's characterised by love & light (purity).

What's the big idea of this passage?

We're pursuing a different plan (God's plan to bring all things under Christ), we're part of a different people, so live different. Live controlled by love, and live as the light.

Structure of the passage

- 1) 5:1-7 You are your Father's **children**, so **walk** in love
- 2) 5:8-15 You are light in the Lord, so **walk** as **children** of light

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

Paul continues to unpacking the implications of ch1-3. We are to walk out our new identity. We are to copy God's graciousness (4:32), his love (5:1-2), and walk in his light.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 3 Sexual immorality in the scriptures covers the whole range of extra-marital sexual relations, (e.g. bestiality, incest, homosexual sex, other forms of sex outside marriage).

Impurity can have sexual connotations or be broader. Some (including us!) may have history of various forms of sexual immorality. They may feel defensive, uncertain how to see it or heavy with shame/guilt. Ephesians helps us see our sin with clarity & humility *and* shows us the infinite depths of God's grace (e.g. 2:1-10). **Covetousness** could include greedy sexual self-gratification or just plain greed. Helpful resource: 'Why does God care who I sleep with?' By Sam Alberry. - you can also find free talk-versions online.

Vs 5: no inheritance in the kingdom ... if a person never stops persisting in these sins (among others), they won't enter God's kingdom. Paul is talking about a direction of life, not occasional lapses. God is in the business of saving sinners (e.g. 2:1-3), but not those who keep choosing to deliberately walk away from him and his ways.

Do not become partners with them vs 7. See also 1 Cor 5:9-10. Not that we must avoid contact with non-Christians, but they must not be our influencers regarding sin, we must avoid being involved in the wrong aspects of their way of life.

Extra prep?

Not this week

Bonus group ideas:

If there's a week to do Growth Group by candlelight/torchlight, this is it!

Study # 9 - Eph 5:15-6:9

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 5:15-6:9

Think for yourself: which verses point (directly or indirectly) to the goodness of Christ?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That our group would yearn to, and be equipped to, live Spirit-filled lives. That is, to live wisely in the ordered relationships we are in. And that by doing this we would display the unity we have as Christ's body.

What's the big idea of this passage?

We are Christ's body. So our lives with one another will look different. In particular, our ordered relationships will be marked by willing submission (and loving leadership).

Structure of the passage

Be filled with the Spirit, Submitting to one another.

Example # 1: Wives submit to husbands. Husbands love wives

Example #2: Children obey parents. Fathers disciple children

Example # 3: Bondservants obey masters. Masters fear God

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

In Chapters 1-3 we saw the incredible unity, diversity and equality we have as God's people. We are each a different part of Christ's body, building one another up, with him as our head. In this section, Paul shows the difference this makes to our relationships with each other. In particular, we will be submitting to one another so that our relationships are Christ-revering and Christ-reflective. Paul zooms in on three examples of this submission - wives to husbands, children to parents, and bondservants to masters.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 18 Filled with the Spirit (vs 18) the contrast to drunkenness helps us understand what this means. Rather than being controlled by alcohol (and so falling into debauchery), instead be controlled by the will of God (vs 17). This 'filling' is not received once-for-all at conversion (like the sealing of the Spirit in 1:13), nor through a 'second-blessing' later. Paul encourages an ongoing filling, i.e. always following his ways, enabled by his Spirit.

Vs 21 Submit to one another As different parts of Christ's body, we work together to a common goal: growing into him as our head (4:15-16). We can glorify Jesus in how we work together by submitting to one another in our various relationships. Paul is not asking every Christian to submit to every other Christian, as to submit means to choose to place oneself under the loving leadership of another. So, when you are in an ordered relationship (e.g. at home, at work, in ministry teams) and you have got the following role, then embrace that role as a way of embracing Christ's leadership over you. Paul

unpacks this with three examples (marriage, parenting, work). The word 'submit' itself implies an asymmetrical relationship, where one is in a form of authority over the other. So, Wives submit to husbands (not vice-versa), children to parents (not vice versa), servants submit to masters etc. This leadership is never absolute, (and may look different in the different types of relationship) but it is still real. So, a child will obey a parent differently to a servant obeys a master. The person submitting does have lesser value e.g. Christ submits to the Father in 1 Cor 15:27-28.

Vs 22 Submit to your husbands . Wives (or women) are not being asked to submit to men in general. Wives submit to their own husbands - those who have pledged to love them sacrificially for life. This submission is 'in the Lord'. i.e. wives are not required to act against what Jesus asks of them. Some men and women may find submission confronting, counter-cultural, confusing or offensive. Others may not. Some have grown up (or are in) marriages that do not have loving husbands (or submitting wives). It's important to recognise these experiences as they can shape the pictures of 'submission' we bring to this text. Looking at the picture of 'head' and 'body' so far in Ephesians (between Jesus and the church) it's not a corporate chain of command. It's a loving, ordered, partnership. In marriage the picture is of two people who profoundly respect one another and treat each other as equals. What does submission look like? An attitude of building up, respecting, leaning into their direction, even as the wife seeks to express her needs and wants. It is an attitude, a 'posture', rather than particular roles ('he does X, she does the ...Y'). This teaching (like all scripture), rightly understood, sensitively applied, is a gift from our loving God for our good.

Vs 24 IN everything - in all areas of life, and within the bounds of reverence to Christ, i.e. carries a holistic sense but not unquestioned, totalitarian rule by husbands.

Vs 23 Head of the wife 'Head' has already come up in Ephesians to describe Christ's relationship with the church (see 1:22-23). It is describing an ordered relationship, where there is authority in this relationship. But (similar to a head's relationship with its body) it's not a picture of domination but of giving and fulfilling, active, mutual, non-reversible roles. Christ is the head who gave himself up for the church, gives gifts to his church, and the body grows, bringing fulfilment to the plans of Christ.

Vs 25 Love your wives The husbands receive the longer instruction here. Their love is to copy Christ's love for the church: sacrificial even to death. NB: not every aspect of the Christ- church relationship is copied in the husband-wife relationship, e.g. he does not take Christ's place in sanctifying her (c.f. 2:1-10). But he is to treasure her, at cost to himself, like Christ did the church. This means never being harsh/domineering nor abdicating responsibility.

6:1 Obey their parents... Children of any age are to respect their parents (Matt 15:4). For those who are not adults (as on view here), the pattern of this is obedience. This obedience is 'in the lord' - ie obey parents in a way that pleases Jesus who is their ultimate authority (see Col 3:20). The promise of Deut 5:16 suggests there is blessing and stability in this life for those who can respect their parents - general proverbial principle, not an every-case rule.

Vs 4 Fathers... Be mindful of single mums, or who have non-Christian husbands and how this plays out for them.

Vs 5 Bondservants-masters not the same as employer-employee, but there are similarities. At work we must also be controlled by Christ.

Masters, do the same i.e. masters should remember the judgement day to come.

Extra prep?

Bring paper for the relationship maps in the opening question.

This passage can raise lots of questions and feelings for people. On Sunday there will be further resources available and opportunities to reach out for support. As with any study, if issues are raised which would benefit from extra support - please reach out to your Team Leader or one of the pastoral team.

For the 'Sink it in' questions, here are some verses/truths that may bring comfort and address our risks and fears...

For wives/husbands:

- vs 22 It is the wife who is to submit herself - this is something she does, not something a husband should make her do.
- Vs 22 Wives submit to their 'own husband' (who has promised to love them for life - vs25-30).
- Vs 22 'As to the Lord' -not be required to do anything the Lord Jesus does not want
- Vs 229-32 - the model is the relationship of Christ & the church
- Vs 31 Marriage is to be a relationship of safety & faithfulness - 'hold fast', and love.

For children/parents:

- 6:1 obedience is 'in the Lord' - ie Jesus is the ultimate authority. Parents will answer to him
- vs 4 Father's are to raise children in the Lord i.e. parenting isn't about creating mini versions of themselves or fulfilling their own needs/dreams through their kids. The focus is on the Lordship of Jesus - and who he has made those children to be.

For bondservants/masters

- Vs 5, 9 we are all servants of Christ ultimately. Masters and servants answer to him
- vs 8 Jesus sees everything - the bondservant will receive back what he is owed (literally 'recompense') from the Lord. Justice day is coming with Christ.
- Vs 9 Masters should not threaten, they too will answer to Jesus who does not have favourites.

Study #10 - Eph 6:10-24

First!

Pray: Ask God to shape you by his word, and to shape your group.

Read: Read Ephesians 6:10-24

Think for yourself: How would these verses encourage you when you are feeling defeated as a Christian?

What is our big prayer/hope for this week?

That we'd be emboldened to live out our faith bravely - God himself has given us all we need for ultimate victory!

What's the big idea of this passage?

In Christ, we have the strength to stand firm in any spiritual struggles we face.

How does it fit into what's happened so far?

Throughout the letter we've seen the spiritual realities of our world. We need God to strengthen us to face these realities (e.g. Paul prays for strength in 3:14-20). Here Paul rallies these truths into an exhortation to put on God's armour and so stand firm.

Curly concepts (textual, theological, pastoral)?

Vs 12 Rulers, authorities, cosmic powers ...See previous discussions of the heavenly places in Study 1 & Study 5. The spiritual realm figures strongly in Ephesians. We see it is not just 'out there'. Rather it impacts our everyday life. Like in the throne room at the start of Job, or in Micaiah's vision in 1 Kings 24, the heavenly places are home to both good and evil spiritual forces. Worth remembering that when Paul writes this letter, he likely has been in jail for several years. Furthermore, when the gospel first came to Ephesus it triggered a riot! So Paul is no stranger to physical authorities blocking gospel growth. But he sees that sitting behind these physical authorities were spiritual powers. Yet all of them have been put under the feet of Christ, who has been raised above them all (1:19-21), so believers can stand firm against them with confidence.

Belt, breastplate, shield Paul is drawing on OT images (esp Isaiah 59) of God being a warrior for his people. Leading up to Isaiah 59, God's people are facing the Babylonians. God promises to help. But then in chapter 59 (notably verse 17), God himself puts on his armour, as a divine warrior to deal with the greater enemy their sin. In Eph 6, we get to *put on that armour* since we have been united with God's ultimate warrior - Christ.

Extra prep?

Not this week.

Bonus group ideas:

Last study of term (if applicable), and last study of the series. You could turn it into a bit of a celebration. If there's a week to dress up, this is probably it!