EPHESIANS To Unite All Things

Welcome to EPHESIANS

Imagine taking a trip with the purpose of seeing the vastness of creation. Start by looking to the skies through a giant telescope—a vast range of the galaxy flooding your perspective. Then move to a great overlook like the Grand Canyon in Arizona or Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. Move to the delivery room of your local hospital and see the birth of a little baby girl. Finally move to an electron microscope and see the beauty of human cells pulsating with life.

In a way, this is the theological majesty of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. It lays out the theological richness of the gospel and its cosmic impact on the world through Jesus and His body, the Church. The letter tells the story of how Jesus takes on every separation, whether massive or modest, and through His sacrifice, brings things back together.

His means? The Saints. The Ephesians. The greater region of Asia Minor. You and me. Paul's discourse takes this sweeping cosmic vision and presents a cosmic challenge—how we who call Jesus King should live so that even "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" take notice.

You. Your families. Your workplaces. Your very lives are designed to be a signpost to the cosmos.

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Using this STUDY GUIDE

This curriculum is designed for group learning, interaction, and practical steps to living faithfully.

First Thoughts

These are simple ice-breaker questions. They are to engage your group into the conversation about the letter.

The Text

Read through the Bible text together. This is important to get the feel of Paul's thought. Take turns if necessary, but make sure to read the text aloud.

Open

The opening thought is to be read aloud as well. It will give you a starting point before going into the questions for the study.

Reflect

This section includes a series of questions designed to help you think through the text, how it may relate to other similar texts in the Bible, and provide a bridge to consider how these truths speak to us in our lives today.

Respond

We all need to recognize our walls. Walls that separate us from others, Walls that have been erected internally to shelter and insulate us from reality. Applying what we learn is often difficult, but critical. DON'T SKIP THIS OPPORTUNITY. Read this section together at the end of your study and take action. Throughout your week, think and pray about what you should do (or stop doing). Find others in your group or elsewhere to help keep you on the path.

HIS Will HIS Grace

Ephesians 1:1-14

FIRST THOUGHTS

What kind of letter writer are you? Long and wordy? Short notes? Don't write?

When was the last time you received a hand-written letter? How did it make you feel?

Describe a family blessing that has been handed down to you.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Iesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 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, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ 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, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Intro

Paul was in prison and facing trial. Now was the time to craft a summary of his teachings concerning the significance of union with Christ in the church for all believers and a clear statement of God's purpose through history. The letter has no personal greetings and does not deal with any local questions. It is a letter expressing Paul's foundational beliefs and his motivation to live for Christ. The letter opens with a description of the spiritual blessings brought to us in Christ. No other book in the Bible gives such a panorama of God's redemptive purpose from before the foundation of the world to its consummation in the fullness of Christ. Read, meditate, and share together what God has done for you in Christ.

Reflect

This letter is addressed to "the saints who are in Ephesus." These saints are identified as "faithful in Christ Jesus." Do you consider yourself a saint? Why or why not?

If the letter did not include the words "who are in Ephesus" would much change? If not, what does that tell you about the letter?

In the original manuscripts, verses 3 - 14 are actually one long, complicated sentence of praise. How does the words "blessed" in verse 3 provide a key to understanding this run-on sentence of praise?

Scan through verses $I-I_4$ noting the phrases "in Christ" and "in him." How many times do they occur? What would you say is Paul's point in this opening to the letter? How would you explain in your own words what being *in Christ* means in your life?

For Paul, all believers are in Christ and bound to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Why is it necessary to keep this perspective of God's plan for our salvation? How do you see yourself in God's plan?

In Ephesians 1:4-5, Paul uses the words "chose" and "predestined." What do these words communicate to you? What do the words, "in love," at the end of verse 4 add to his thought?

Of all the things Paul says God has done for us in Christ, which one is the most striking to you? Why?

The phrase "in Christ Jesus" sometimes refers to personal identification with Jesus and other times a relationship with Jesus. Seeing all that Christ has done for us, what encourages you most about God's relationship to you through Jesus?

Ephesians I:II and I4 speak of an inheritance. What do you think this inheritance might include?

Respond

One of the meanings of the word, "bless," is to extol as holy, to exalt, lift up, and glorify the Lord. Read Psalm 103. The Psalmist recognized the benefits of God's care, mercy, and rule...but the mystery of Christ had not yet been revealed. Now read Ephesians 1:3-14 again. Note the overwhelming glory of the addition of Christ to our inclusion, destiny, and purpose. In your prayer time consider blessing (praising) the Lord for your benefits *in Christ*. Think through how you can personalize and include some of Paul's statements as part of your glorifying God in your prayers.

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Glorious Inheritance

Ephesians 1:15-23

FIRST THOUGHTS

Have you ever received an inheritance? How did it make you feel?

When you care for someone, are you more likely to send a funny card or a touching card? Why?

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his

power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ 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. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Intro

In the opening verses of Ephesians I, Paul has described the blessings we have in Jesus Christ. It is all God's doing. Now Paul turns to pray for those to whom he is writing. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce writes, "Paul prays here that his readers may appreciate the value which God places on them, his plan to accomplish his eternal purpose through them as the first fruits of the reconciled universe of the future, in order that their lives may be in keeping with this high calling and that they may accept in grateful humility the grace and glory thus lavished on them." ^IAs you share this prayer together, reflect on God's desire and action that you have a deeper, fuller life with him. Encourage each other to put your roots deep in Jesus' love.

¹F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, p. 271, Eerdmans

Reflect

According to Ephesians 1:15, what motivated Paul to pray for these people? How do you see yourself in these areas that motivated Paul?

In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him..." How would you describe what Paul is asking God to do? How does his idea develop?

In Ephesians 1:18-19, what three things does Paul pray that you would know as the result of your enlightened heart? How would knowing these things motivate your living for Christ? How might knowing them strengthen you in times of trial or suffering?

Ephesians 1:18 indicates that we are God's inheritance. How does it affect you knowing you are of such value to God?

Ephesians 1:19-21 describe God's power toward us. How would you describe this power in your life to another person?

Why and when do you typically choose to pray? What usually stops you from praying? Do you ever ask others to pray for you? Why/why not?

Do you ever use scriptures as a model for your prayers? For example, how would praying Psalm 73:25-26 affect you? What have you found helpful to develop a richer life of prayer and worship? Share any strategies you may use that could help others.

How do you think your group might change if you all prayed verses 15-19 for each other this week?

Respond

In the busyness of our lives it is easy to lose our focus on our hope, our value to God, and the power of God toward us. We need people to pray for us a prayer like Paul's, that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened. Is there someone in your life for whom you are thankful? Every day this week, use Ephesians 1:15–19 as a model to thank God for them and to ask God to enlighten the eyes of their hearts to know the hope to which He has called them, their value in His glorious inheritance and the immeasurable greatness of His power toward them.

Notes and Prayer	

Session Three

By Grace, Through Faith Ephesians 2:1-10

FIRST THOUGHTS

What do you think of hard work? What formed your opinions about it?

Read Ephesians 1:19. What are the verbs the Apostle Paul uses to describe God's wonderful work toward the faithful believers?

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace

you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Intro

Paul's opening words are "you were dead." That's a strong statement. But consider what it takes to make a dead person alive. Power, resurrection power, the same power that raised a crucified Jesus to life. The God from whom this power flows has seated believers with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places. The plan was set forth before creation when God willed to save the dead, disobedient, deceived and drifting sinner. Ephesians 2 makes clear that God alone gives life to the spiritually dead. Like Ezekiel speaking the word of the LORD to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37, Paul says the believer is saved, sealed and Spirit-filled after hearing the word of truth. Glory to God for His grace.

Reflect

With the multitude of words in the Bible, wrath is a heavy one. What emotions and thoughts come to your mind when hearing "wrath"? When, if ever, is "wrath" good?

God's love, mercy, kindness, and wrath are all jammed together in one thought here. Which seems to receive more attention? How does this inform your understanding of and belief in God's plan so far in the book?

Why do you think the Apostle Paul reminds the Ephesian believers of their past condition before being saved in Christ?

Ephesians 2:1-3 indicates three challenging influences that are common to us all. What are they and which influence would you say takes the greatest toll on your life and why?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4. Who is "the prince of the power of the air" in Ephesians 2:2? How do you recognize this influence in your life?

How do grace, faith, and works interact based upon Paul's explanation here?

Read Ezekiel 36:22-27. What is the purpose of the new heart? What is God's goal and how is this like Ephesians 2:10?

Considering Ephesians 2:10, life included a lot more "walking" in the first century than now. What would be a more contemporary word to use? Where in your life does it seem you are stumbling rather than walking?

Respond

If you grew up in church, you're probably familiar with a lot of the Old Testaments stories of wrath, judgment, and plagues. This may have turned some people off and left them with a distorted view of the Lord. Church history has recorded for us that this is nothing new. Some thought the Old Testament God was different than the New Testament God. Although God's wrath is clear, it should be seen in light of Him being "rich in mercy" and His "great love" toward us who sin, combined with the "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This chapter started with "and you" then gave the true diagnosis of humanity. The best words in the Bible are "but God." God and His mercy quickly take the stage. After thinking on this, does it motivate and stir you to live anew for God and obey Him? Consider something from your life that has been a recurring problem for you. This week pray about this particular challenge, and follow it with "but God" and list His promises you learned here and elsewhere in the Bible. Let Him have the last word on it.

Notes and Prayer	
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FIRST THOUGHTS

Some of us have been born and raised in the United States of America. What does the word "United" mean to you? How would you define unity in a broader sense?

Has there ever been a time when you were asked to work with another person or team on a project? How did it go? What made it easy? What made it difficult?

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 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,

¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Intro

Like most churches founded by the Apostle Paul, the Ephesian Church had a mixed group of Gentile (non-Jewish) and Jewish believers. Even though the LORD is King of all nations as Jeremiah 10:7 states, we know that God divided mankind. In Genesis 11, we read of the LORD confusing the languages of the people and dispersing them over the face of the earth because of their pride, but in Genesis 12 He calls Abram for the purpose of blessing the nations through a particular people—the people of Israel. Ephesians 2:12 explains that Gentiles were those "having no hope and without God in the world." But now in Christ, those things that divided us have been torn down. Now everyone, the Gentile who was far off and even the Israelite who is near "have access in one Spirit to the Father." The Temple that once typified that separation and division has been replaced with the Church. The Saints are now the household of God being built together into a dwelling of God.

Reflect

Describe what you know about the Temple in Jerusalem. What were the different sections that you remember?

Read Acts 21:27-31. What were the things the Jews accused Paul of? Were they true? And how did the people react to it?

Similar to Ephesians 2:1-10, this section starts with the bad news, then proceeds with the good news. Why do you think Paul emphasizes such contrasts? Discuss your own conversion and how this contrast may help you recognize changes that are happening in your own life.

Read Galatians 3:27-29 and Colossians 3:5-II. What do these sections say about differences? Is Paul saying these differences no longer exist or something different? Explain.

In 70 A.D. the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. How do you think this event changed life for Jews? How might this event have influenced how early Christians understood unity?

How do you view your place of worship? How do you view the people you worship with?

Is there a time you recall when you chose conflict, not peace? Explain. Why did you choose conflict?

The idea of Jesus as a "cornerstone" has Old Testament roots in Psalm 118. Read Matthew 21:33-44 and Acts 4:8-12. How are Jesus and Peter using cornerstone and how do they compare to Paul's use here?

Respond

Western culture is polarized. Several cultural waves have caused this division. "Identity Politics" has divided us along gender, race, and socioeconomic lines, to name a few. Should this be how the church responds to each other? Distinctions do exist, but even Christians can get caught up in the same divisions. But for the saint's, true peace can only be found in Christ. This is where a Christian's primary identity and value are found. Is there something you're holding against a person or people? Identify an area where you are creating walls (divisions) in places where God has broken them down.

Notes and Prayer		

Session Five Mystery Rejoined Ephesians 3:1-21

FIRST THOUGHTS

If you experienced being part of a blended family that includes children from different marriages or multiple parents, explain some advantages and challenges you have experienced.

What are some of the current differences between the Jewish and Christian faith? Similarities?

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ 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, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold

wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Intro

Everything Paul has been alluding to so far in Ephesians gets clear here. The mystery is revealed. God's plan is a united family that somehow makes a living statement to the entire cosmos. Outsiders and insiders come together to give God the glory He has deserved from the beginning. But how? The specifics aren't clear quite yet, but Paul uses himself as an example of what this life can look like—persecution and even imprisonment. This section serves as his declaration and prayer to exhort the church into specific ways they should live. This leads to a question; when persecution or terrible circumstances come your way, what will your faith reveal? Will you forget God exists? Will you doubt Jesus loves you? Will you sidestep Jesus and look for someone else to see you through?

Reflect

Read Galatians 2:7-9 and Ephesians 3:2. Why would God appoint some Apostles to pursue the Jews and others to pursue the Gentiles? What might this reveal about how we share the gospel today?

Read Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20. We know Paul wrote this letter from prison. Why would he say he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ and not the Roman Empire? Describe the challenges if you called yourself a "prisoner" in our culture today. Do you think it was much different compared to Paul's day?

How would you react if your church leaders were hauled off to prison? What would you do the next Sunday? What would you post on Facebook if being Christian became illegal?

Read Ephesians 3:13. Paul tells the Ephesians not to lose heart over his imprisonment. Have you ever experienced a challenging situation with a loved one that lead you to "lose heart"? Explain.

How do you think you would you react to being imprisoned or tortured for your faith?

The ability to face persecution comes from an inner strength. Read Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in 3:14-19. Find the places where Paul asks God for them to be strengthened. What is being strengthened? Where does the strength come from? What are the two end goals of that strengthening?

In Ephesians 3:19, Paul asks God that they may "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." Christ's love exceeds knowledge itself, so Paul wants his listeners to know *Jesus*. Do you want to know more *about* Jesus or know Jesus *Himself*? Explain.

The end of this section speaks of a "power at work in us," meaning those that are in Christ. What power is this? Do you feel like you are empowered in this way? Why/why not?

Respond

Have you ever met someone who knows planes are the safest form of long-distance travel, and yet they are afraid when they get on a plane? There are two types of knowing. One is head knowledge and the other is knowledge that drives action. We will never weather the storms of our faith with simple head knowledge, or mere mental assent to truth. We should spend time in the Bible, and continue to learn its meaning, but how do we step beyond the "information"? Paul makes it clear that we must be enabled by His Spirit with Christ in our hearts. This sort of indwelling knowledge can lead to an active trust that can accept difficulties, even persecution. So, Paul **prays**. He prays that the Ephesians would fully grasp the love of God, because that knowledge creates action. Take some time right now to pray for the inner strength to truly know the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Jesus. Go even further. Are you seeking to "know" more before you "go" more? Pray each day this week that your gospel action would keep up with, if not surpass, your gospel knowledge.

Notes and Prayer

Session Six Walk Worthy Ephesians 4:1-16

FIRST THOUGHTS

What spheres of influence and/or leadership are you currently operating in? Briefly list all your areas of influence, where you put the most effort and why those things get your focus. (Examples: parenting, managing at work)

When you tell people under your leadership to do something, do you think it is important to tell them the "why" as well as the "what"? Why/why not?

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the

apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Intro

Up until now, Ephesians has been speaking of God's plan and the believer's reconciled position based upon His goodness. From here out, we move into the 'where-the-rubber-meets-the-road' application section. If our new position and unity in Christ is true, and this collective body known as "the Church" is where the manifold wisdom of God is to be found, then we are to live accordingly. As a literal Roman prisoner, Paul writes not to seek personal help or deliverance, but to beseech the church to live a life worthy of their calling. May God teach us to treasure and live out these instructions for the glory of King Jesus, and may the "why" for these instructions fuel our obedience.

Reflect

Paul did not call himself a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner of the Lord. In your own life, what could you re-frame with this God-honoring line of thinking? Discuss an area in your life where this could change your circumstance from a personal obstacle to a divine opportunity to fulfill God's purposes.

How does Paul describe what it looks like to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel? What are the heart attitudes and character traits? Where do you think you are doing well and where are you falling short?

Take time to honestly confess ways you have contributed to disunity. This may include things you should have done like forgiving, being generous or serving, and things you should not have done, like gossip, complaining, and isolating.

Broaden your view and discuss consequences of disunity beyond the individual. Can you give an example of disunity from church history? Give examples from your own life and church experiences, including the effect of the disunity. How can these experiences of disunity ripple outward?

What are your gifts (spiritual, natural, or material)? Be specific.

If God's plan is to "unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth," how should our gifts be used toward these ultimate purposes?

For people you know who don't believe in God, what reasons do they give for possessing and using their personal skills, talents, and resources? How did they get them and for what purposes?

Revelation 2:1-7 describes a time after the Epistle to the Ephesians. What does this tell us about the Ephesian church? In your own life, did you serve God differently or have different heart attitudes when you first knew Him? How can you return to your first love?

Respond

We cannot do everything and give to every charity in existence. But let's not do nothing because we can't do everything. It is said that in most churches, 20% of the members do 80% of the work. Is this what God wants? If you are in the 80% group, choose one new serving opportunity this week. Write it down. Tell your group so that they can encourage you and be encouraged by your obedience. Ask a leader in your church what the greatest needs are. *Like your biological family, it's rarely about finding what you enjoy doing most, but about what most needs to be done.* Employ your gifts in His service; find true life when you give your life away for His sake. And all this for the unity of the body under the headship of Christ for His eternal glory!

Notes and Prayer

Session Seven Put Off and On

Ephesians 4:17-32

FIRST THOUGHTS

Last week we talked about the 80%/20% work distribution phenomenon operating in most of our churches. Depending on your situation, your action step for last week was to either walk in a new serving opportunity or to prayerfully let go of one commitment. Share with your group what happened.

Did keeping the perspective of God's glory and purposes help fuel your obedience in a fresh way this week?

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one

of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Intro

A lofty goal that includes a clear vision can be inspiring and motivating; however, we tend to get bogged down in the nitty-gritty action steps required to bring a dream to fruition. Our experience verifies the saying, "easier said than done." These verses sound simple enough, and we agree with God's plans. But have you ever tried to put these things into practice? Proverbs 14:23 says, "In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty." Use this time to *talk* with the intention of *toiling* in the fear of the Lord.

Reflect

Contrast the elements from Ephesians 4:17-19, where Paul describes "walking as Gentiles," with the elements from Ephesians 4:20-24 for those who learned Christ. What are the key differences?

List all the commands given in Ephesians 4:17-32. (HINT: There are a lot!)

Considering this list, how does disobedience and/or obedience to each command affect God's desired outcome for you and others? For example, if you steal, what are the effects on you, on others, and on God's desire for both of you?

Can you give Old Testament examples of men or women who were angry but did not sin? When is your anger sinful? What are some practical ways you've dealt with anger and managed to not sin?

Spend some time defining "corrupting talk." How can we build others up with our words? What do you think is worse "cursing" or "gossiping" and why? What kind of talk can harm your witness with unbelievers?

Point out every command that gives a "don't do this, but do this instead" formula. Why doesn't God just want us to stop doing bad things?

What does it mean to forgive someone as Christ forgave us? Where might our forgiveness tend to fall short?

Be transparent and bold. Explain a situation where you long to receive forgiveness, but have not or may never receive it.

Again, be transparent and bold. Explain a situation where you are being asked to forgive, but you cannot.

Respond

This is a long list of what living a Christian life should look like, and we would agree that it is not exhaustive. Take a moment to allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Is there anything in this passage that specifically convicts you? Maybe some errant words to a coworker. Or maybe you have been secretly harboring anger toward a family member. Confess the ways you have failed to live up to what Paul describes here. Take time to confess to one another as a group or later in the week. Pray for one another reminding each other of Jesus' gracious sacrifice so that you may be healed and restored.

Notes and Prayer			



Fragrant Offering

Ephesians 5:1-21

FIRST THOUGHTS

What is your favorite thing to smell in the world? Why?

Are you afraid of the dark? Why/why not? What is typically associated with the dark?

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Intro

Have you considered your life as an offering? It's an unusual thought, because many of the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings were typically blood offerings—they required a death. But, if you read closely, many of them spoke of fire consuming the best parts of the best you could offer and they produced a "pleasing aroma to the LORD." Paul is taking this old idea from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and extending it to his audience in Ephesus and the surrounding region. Their very lives should make a sweet scent that would swirl about God's creation eventually rising to be savored by His nose.

Reflect

Read Romans 12:1-3. Ephesians 5 is not the only time Paul uses this sacrificial and "smelly" metaphor. Why do you think smell is used? What does it communicate to you?

Compare Ephesians 2:1-3 and Ephesians 5:5-7. What are the common terms to these verses and how has the idea developed?

Do you feel you are good at "discerning what is pleasing to the Lord"? Why/why not? What might make you better at it?

What do you think Paul means by "the days are evil" in this context? How is the same true for us? For you?

Ephesians 5:11 speaks of avoiding "unfruitful works of darkness," not only that but exposing them. Who's works do you think he is referring to? Have you ever exposed someone else's "darkness" and how did that go?

What does being "filled with the Spirit" mean? Does it mean "taken over," or something different? Read Matthew 3:16 and Luke 4:1,14. How was the Spirit involved in Jesus' ministry?

What about others being filled with the Spirit like Peter (Acts 4:5-12), Stephen (Acts 7:55-59), and Paul (Acts 9:17-19)? What did it enable them to do?

This section ends with addressing each other in hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs. Consider Sunday worship services. How can you both worship Jesus and bless other worshipers on that day?

Respond

Sometimes we stink. We have long days full of sweat and toil in our jobs or in school. We have challenging moments that leave us in a pool of our own anxiety and worry. But, sometimes we stink for other reasons. Those times when we spiral into patterns of sin or fits of anger. Those days we choose to live like "sons of disobedience" rather than "children of light." As Christians, we are called into something different. We are called into a deep reverence for Christ. Have you stopped revering this King? The One who saved you and me? Take a moment and read through this passage again and consider the death and darkness you are being called to "awake" from. Share some ways God's grace has changed you. Take a moment to tell a brother or sister in Christ how you see God at work in them making them a pleasing aroma to the King. Spend this week pointing out moments of light amidst the darkness.

Notes and Prayer			

Session Nine HOME/ANOIE Ephesians 5:22-6:9

FIRST THOUGHTS

What's a unique rule in your household that you think others may not have?

What's your favorite mystery story (film or book)? What makes mysteries intriguing?

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers

to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

¹ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. ⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as peoplepleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Intro

Think about molecules. They are made up of different elements each with a different number of electrons, protons, and neutrons that help them to stay bonded together. They operate based upon rules. Water is a good example. Two hydrogen plus one oxygen (H2O), bound together. Turn up the heat and they can fly apart going their separate ways. Paul is looking at the spectrum of human relationships, teaching how to nurture and protect them. He knows that external and internal pressures can cause strife and division unless his hearers understand they are tightly bound into one body under Christ as Head.

Reflect

Without considering the current passage, when is submission bad? When is it good? What is your basis for this understanding?

In your opinion, what are good characteristics of a husband?

In your opinion, what are good characteristics of a wife?

Is there more common ground or differences in your descriptions from the previous two questions? What specific characteristics is Paul listing for each? Who does he have more words for? Why do you think he does this?

Paul refers to Genesis 2:26 as he closes the household rules for husbands and wives. Why do you think he did this? Is this about Jesus, husbands and wives, or both? Explain.

Everyone has parents. It is a difficult request, but take a moment to share transparently your challenges with your parents growing up and how you think it impacted you. What would have made it better? What would you have done differently?

In your work or school life, recall someone who was a model employee or student. Maybe a manager, maybe a coworker, or maybe a classmate. What made them successful?

People-pleasing sounds good but it can be deadly. Eye-service is an interesting term Paul associates to people pleasing in the text. When have you completed a task purely for eye-service? Do you ever do the same in your Christian walk? Give an example.

Respond

Our lives are spent in relationships at home and at work or school. These are the venues of our primary daily interactions. It is easy to acknowledge how critical our witness is. Paul doesn't want us to fake it. If we started to live in relationships as he is suggesting, what would it look like? What would your married life look like? What would your workplace look like? Does it make you afraid you would lose control, lose respect or lose ground in some way? Maybe you feel it would actually be dangerous. What's one change you can make to a single relationship this week—maybe a daily encouragement or working diligently at something you have been neglecting? Pray for God to give you consistency and humility in this one step, and give updates on progress to your group or other trusted advocate.

Notes and Prayer			

Session Ten Armor Ephesians 6:10-24

FIRST THOUGHTS

What simple items or processes do you use to protect yourself throughout the year? (e.g. sunblock or brushing your teeth)

How do you think these "protections" compare to earlier centuries or even millennia?

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 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. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Intro

Consider the picture Paul is bringing to mind as he describes armor. Those that would wield this equipment were the forces of the ruling establishment. The Ephesians would be accustomed to seeing the Roman Legionary and Centurions traveling through their region to put down rebellion or to expand the Empire. Paul is identifying the power of the Roman Empire on full display but with a twist. Is this the same equipment the follower of Christ is to wield? Is this the power of the gospel? As he describes these implements of force, he uses Christian imagery both to re-purpose our understanding and redirect our attention to a different set of opposing forces. Know your enemy and the only power sufficient for this ultimate fight.

Reflect

Describe how Jesus was strong. What were the characteristics that showed His strength? How does our idea of strength and power differ?

Compare Ephesians 1:20-21, 3:9-10, and 6:11-12. What are the similarities and differences in Paul's use of "rulers and authorities" throughout Ephesians? Put them together and explain the story that just these three verses tell us. Is this encouraging or frightening?

What have you heard previously about the "Armor of God"? What connotation does it have? Of the previous descriptions, what parts have you agreed with and disagreed with? Explain.

Self-knowledge is important to our faith. What are schemes the devil has used on you? What schemes are most effective against you? In what areas do you need to be most vigilant?

Do you think there is any importance to the order of Paul's listing of the Armor of God? Why?

Do you think the armor described here and its purpose is related to the specific ethical and household codes discussed in the past few sessions? Why/why not?

What would it take for you to be comfortable with the title of "beloved brother/sister" and "faithful minister" as Paul refers to Tychicus? What changes are necessary? Where do you feel like you have shown yourself faithful?

For what does Paul ask the Ephesian and surrounding churches to pray for? As an "ambassador in chains," what didn't he ask for that you might ask for? Why?

Respond

The book ends with the words "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible." Does your love for your King feel "incorruptible"? If not, does this mean you don't deserve grace? Absolutely not! We can't forget the first two chapters of this life-transforming book. Go read Ephesians 1:1 through 2:10 aloud again. We are valuable. We have been saved for a purpose. We are loved and given ultimate hope. Now we need to live like it, no matter how costly. Identify one thing from this study that you are taking as a call or challenge to change in your own life. Write it down. Pray that God would enable you to make it happen. Tell two people and ask them to help you make it a reality. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

Notes and Prayer			



which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things** in him, things in heaven and things on earth.



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