



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 1:1-2 :: “In Christ” [4.7.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: “In Christ” is used 27 times in the book of Ephesians. Christ is in us and we are in Him. Believers reside in the world and in Christ. Like a scuba diver in an alien environment, the world can be a challenging environment, and a wonderful place. Today, we learn how to grow in Christ in a place like Ephesus (or Ventura County).

Subject: Ephesians overview

Object: Grow in Christ

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. Following Christ in Ephesus (1:1-2)

1. Faithful in Christ (1)

The author, Paul, and the recipients are identified at the beginning of the letter as was the style of the time. He identifies himself as an *apostle of Jesus Christ*. The Greek term *apostolos* refers generally to one sent on a mission, and in Paul’s case the special authority resulting from his encounter with the risen Lord and direct commission by Jesus (Acts 9, Acts 26:16-18, 1Corinthians 9). Paul recognized this calling was *by the will of God* not something Paul could strive to attain.

He is writing to the *saints* or believers who are *in Ephesus*. Paul refers to believers as saints nine times in this letter.

Saints refers to set-apart ones, and all believers are set-apart to God in Christ. Paul wrote this letter about 60 A.D. during his first imprisonment in Rome. He also wrote Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon during that season. Ephesus was the largest city in the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) with a population of about 300,000. It had the best harbor in the area and was a wealthy seaport. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The impressive temple had 127 marble columns each 60 feet high. Diana was worshipped as fertility goddess, and temple prostitutes promoted worship of the goddess through sexual pleasure. Silversmiths prospered selling idols of Diana.

2. Faithful in Ephesus (1)

The ruins of Ephesus testify of the great wealth of the city. In a city characterized by material comfort, sexual pleasure, and where worship of a God that forbids idols would be opposed, it may seem surprising to find people *faithful in Christ Jesus* who are *in Ephesus* (1). Yet, the church at Ephesus is arguably the most influential early church. Almost one-third of the NT books (8) are connected to Ephesus (Ephesians, Acts, Revelation, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, 1st and 2nd Timothy). The seven churches mentioned in Rev. 2-3 were all likely birthed from the church at Ephesus. So how did the church become so effective in such a place like Ephesus?

B. Growing in Christ (Acts 19:1-10)

1. You need the Spirit (1-7)

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples ² he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."³ And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."⁴ Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷ Now the men were about twelve in all.

Paul was at Ephesus for the better part of three years (Acts 20:31). When Paul arrived at Ephesus, there was a small group of *twelve* who claimed to be *disciples* (1,7). Paul asked them, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit?*" (2) Why did Paul ask? Something appeared missing from their spiritual lives. They didn't know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They had been exposed to *John the Baptist's teaching that emphasized the need for repentance* (3-4). Repentance involves changing your thinking about God and your sin. Yet, even when you want to do the right things and want to stop doing the wrong things you discover how difficult it is. C.S. Lewis observed, "No one knows how bad they are until they try to be good." The problem relates to the weakness of the flesh (Romans 7:13-25). So, Paul explained more fully about the ministry of Jesus, and faith in Christ's atoning death on the cross, and the resurrected life empowered by the Spirit (4-5). Then they were baptized in the authority of Christ and the Holy Spirit came upon them (5-6). The Holy Spirit is *with* us to convict us of sin and draw us to Christ, and *in* you when you receive Christ (John 14:17). Jesus promised, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come *upon* you (Acts 1:8)." When the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer, there is evidence of transformation.

The disciples at Ephesus spoke with *tongues and prophesied* (6). Tongues is a language of heaven or earth previously unknown to the speaker and is used to praise God. Prophecy is foretelling the future or revealing God's encouragement to build up others. Not all believers have the gifts of prophecy or tongues (1Corinthians 14). The most common manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts was boldness to share faith in Christ. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in Christ. Being filled with the Holy Spirit means to be controlled by God,

directed by and empowered by His Spirit. In contrast, we can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19, Ephesians 4:30) by resisting the Spirit and living contrary to God dominated by the flesh. God desires to make His Spirit available to you, and is waiting for you to ask and seek Him (Luke 11:9-13). We need to remember that life in Christ is a spiritual experience, and not simply self-discipline or intellectual assent to a creed or set of rules.

2. You need the Scriptures (8-10)

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

For the first three months, Paul went to the synagogue and would *reason* with the Jews using logic and persuasion to show how the Old Testament Scriptures reveal that Jesus is the Messiah (8). When Paul was opposed by some of the Jews he moved away from the synagogue. During the midday while the *School of Tyrannus* was on break, Paul would use that space to teach the Scriptures (9). After two years of teaching, *the word of the Lord* spread through the *whole city and the region* (10). Paul had taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20-27). Thus, Paul did not avoid sensitive, unpopular, or even uncomfortable portions of the Scripture. He understood that the Bible is uniquely inspired by God and is profitable to learn doctrine, correction, reproof, and instruct us how to be right with God, be mature, and be prepared for what God has called us to be and do (2Timothy 3:16). At Calvary Nexus, we emphasize teaching the Bible verse-by-verse. After spending five months studying “Hebrews” we now begin a verse-by-verse study through Ephesians. Bible learning is necessary to be disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). We encourage personal Bible learning. Bible reading plans on our site to encourage this discipline. Neighborhood Groups (small groups) reinforce Bible learning.

C. Transformation through Christ (Ephesians 1:2, Acts 19:18-27)

1. Growth in Christ transforms individuals and communities

a. Grace and Peace (Ephesians 1:2)

Grace is God’s undeserved favor, and peace speaks of spiritual completeness. We are in Christ because of His grace. We have peace with God, and experience the peace of God, because we are in Christ.

b. People turn to God (Acts 19:18-27)

People turned from false religions, philosophies, the occult, and idolatry to the true and living God.

c. The community became saturated with Jesus and His gospel (Acts 19:10-27)

The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. The community became saturated with people learning about Jesus, His gospel, and the Word of God.

Communion (Revelation 2:1-7)

In Revelation 2:1-7, Jesus affirms the Church at Ephesus for their zeal, good works, enduring faith and sound doctrine. But He corrected them for leaving their first love. They were doing the right things, and knew sound doctrine, but Jesus had lost His rightful place as the master passion of their lives. They were encouraged to remember what it was like when He was the master passion of their lives, repent, and redo. All of our response of love flows from appreciating God's love for us proven at the cross.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some of the characteristics of your community that make it a challenging culture to follow Christ?

Q2. What have you been reading in the Bible lately? What are you learning, or how has God been speaking to you from the Bible?

Q3. What was taught regarding the overview of Ephesians that you want to be sure to apply (or keep applying)?

Q4. Read Rev. 2:1-7 regarding Jesus' exhortation to the church at Ephesus. Note Jesus' affirmation and correction. What might help people to make Jesus the master passion of their lives; and keep Him first?

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. In John 4 we read of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman. Jesus emphasized that God is seeking worshipers who will worship in spirit and in truth (21-24). Therein Jesus connects the need for the truth of the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit. How would you like to be strengthened in both areas in this season?

2. Here is a helpful article regarding the filling of the Holy Spirit: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Spirit-filled.html>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Invite someone where you live, study, work, play or worship who doesn't have a home church to join you for Sunday services learning the Book of Ephesians.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 1:3-14 :: "In Christ You Are Blessed"