

# IN CHRIST



THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS



# Overview of the Letter to the Ephesians

## 'In Christ': The Letter to the Ephesians

'Only Romans could match Ephesians as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality' (Raymond Brown). The letter to the Ephesians was John Calvin's favourite letter and Samuel Taylor Coleridge described it as 'the divinest composition of man'.

Ephesians is a very contemporary letter, addressing issues that impact us as believers today. Yet it is ultimately a timeless exposition about who we are 'in Christ' and becoming what we are 'in Christ'. Ephesians really is a rich treasure for our Christian spirituality if we would open our mind to the spiritual reality of us having been made alive in Christ, raised with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly realm now, having every spiritual blessing in Christ.

### **1) Authorship: Who wrote Ephesians?**

Ephesians 1:1 clearly states 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God.' The early church unanimously and widely accepted Pauline authorship, as recorded by people such as Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Hermas and other apostolic fathers.

Pauline authorship was only questioned in the 18th and 19th century, on the grounds of 'historical circumstance' (it's quite an impersonal letter when Paul had been in Ephesus for 2 ½ years); an apparent 'realized' eschatology; its similarity to Colossians; and the grammatical style. None of these arguments hold any real weight, and Pauline authorship is still widely accepted.

### **2) Audience: Who was Ephesians written to?**

The phrase 'in Ephesus' is absent from early manuscripts, with the suggestion that Ephesians is not written to one mega-church in Ephesus, but rather is a circular letter to a number of churches in Western Asia Minor.

Ephesus was the chief 'mother city' of Asia Minor at that time. It was a major political, economic, social and religious centre, being home to the temple of Artemis (one of 7 wonders of the ancient world). Paul stayed

in Ephesus for nearly 3 years (AD52–55), thus Ephesus became the church planting centre for the region, sending out converts to nearby cities such as Hierapolis, Laodicea, Pergamum, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia.

### **3) Date: When was Ephesians written?**

Most agree it was written whilst Paul was imprisoned in Rome, around AD60–62 (Acts 28:30–31) alongside the other prison epistles (Colossians, Philemon, Philippians). Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were all delivered by Tychicus in around AD62.

### **4) Background: What's the background to Ephesians?**

Luke's account of Paul's Ephesians ministry dominates Acts 19–20. To summarize, Paul entered the synagogue, speaking boldly for about 3 months and arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. Some believed, some were obstinate and refused to believe and publicly maligned the way (Acts 19:9). Paul lectured for 2 years in the hall of Tyrannus. Interestingly Paul's ministry was associated with extraordinary miracles because Ephesus was a centre for magic, idolatry, and occult. There were as many as 50 gods and goddesses being worshipped, including Artemis. The influence of Artemis, and the cult attached to her permeated every area of life, with her spiritual powers being said to influence life for good or ill. God did extraordinary miracles in Ephesus, with many people being converted, including a number of Jewish exorcists. After a mass burning of scrolls and other pagan/mystical artifacts, the riots started (instigated by Demetrius, the silversmith), because people's money and industry of statues and magic was under threat. The emphasis in Ephesians on Christ's power and authority in the spiritual realm now makes more sense!

Paul later summoned the Ephesians elders (Acts 20:35–35) and urged the leaders to watch themselves and the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. They must be on their guard against false teaching and they must hold onto God and the word of his grace.

The church in Ephesus had a mixed history. Paul later encouraged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to address false doctrine and to teach people how to conduct themselves in church (1 Tim). In his final ever letter (2 Tim) Paul talks about how everyone in Asia Minor has deserted him (2 Tim 4:16). By the time we get to the book of Revelation, the risen Lord Jesus says the church in Ephesus have 'lost their first love.'

## 5) Purpose: Why was Ephesians written?

Ephesians is not written to address some particular false teaching in a specific congregation. Paul seems to have a 5-fold purpose:

- to assure them they have everything they need 'in Christ'.
- to encourage them to stand firm 'in Christ', especially in face of spiritual warfare.
- to enlighten them about the gospel of reconciliation and unity we have 'through Christ'.
- to exhort them to live as people united 'in Christ', through 'the church'.
- to unpack the mystery of God in summing up and bringing together all things 'under Christ'

## 6) Themes: Are there any big themes in Ephesians?

There are lots of different themes, yet they are all interlocking and unfolding in a logical fashion as the letter progresses.

### a. Union with Christ

This theme is deeply woven into the fabric of Ephesians, being central in every other theme such as 'salvation', 'Jew and Gentile reconciliation', the 'church', 'spiritual warfare'. The most common phrases are 'in Christ' (or 'in him', 'in whom'); 'with Christ' (or 'with him'); 'through Christ' etc..

It is 'in Christ' that we have every spiritual blessing and 'through him' we have been made into that one new entity called the church. The theme of union with Christ receives royal treatment in the opening doxology (1:3-14), unpacking some of the spiritual blessings of being 'in Christ', such as Chosen 'in him' (1:4); Being predestined for adoption 'through Jesus Christ' (1:5); Being lavished with God's grace 'in the beloved one' (1:6); Receiving redemption 'in him' (1:7); God's good pleasure was purposed in Christ (1:10); Receiving an inheritance 'in him' (1:11); Hope 'in him' (1:12); Sealed with the Spirit in him' (1:13). Salvation by grace (2:1-10) is soaked in 'with Christ' language, emphasizing the participation in his resurrection, ascension and exaltation. What is true of Christ in his resurrection and ascension is true also of us! The Jew and Gentile reconciliation (2:11-22) is also soaked in 'in Christ' and 'through Christ' language.

The body of Christ image of 4:12-16 is an essential image for Paul's teaching on 'union with Christ'. And the extended address to husbands and wives in 5:22-33 draws heavily on union with Christ themes, the climax being that Christ and the church share

a profound 'one-flesh' union. So 'union with Christ' is nothing less than an intimate marriage-type union.

Finally, in our struggle against the dark spiritual forces in the heavens (6:10-17), we share the armour that Christ wears, thus believers draw on Christ's vast strength by virtue of our union with him.

### **b. Supremacy of Christ**

Christ is supreme over 'every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given not only in this age, but also in the one to come' (1:21)...and seated at the right hand of the Father (messianic position), everything has been subjected to Christ, who has been appointed head over everything (1:20-22). Christ is also supreme as we stand against the schemes of the devil and all other evil spiritual powers (6:10-17). Christ is also pictured as the centre of the entire cosmos, since God's purpose is 'to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him' (1:10). So the end point of history is a church, a group of redeemed people from every nation, tribe, language, tongue, who have been reconciled to God and to one another in Christ, singing his praises for all eternity.

### **c. The Heavenly Realm**

The theme of 'the heavenly realm' is significant in Ephesians since it appears at the beginning (1:3) and end (6:12). The heavenly realm is where Christ has already been seated above the evil spiritual forces (1:20-22) and believers are seated with him (2:6). It's also where the hostile powers are (3:10). So 'the heavenly realm' is not just equated to heaven, it's the spiritual realm where Christ now rules and reigns over every 'authority' (1:21, 2:22, 3:10, 6:12) and 'ruler' (1:21, 3:10, 6:12). This gives us a unique vertical perspective on our salvation and the church!

### **d. Salvation**

Salvation means we are 'made alive with Christ and raised with him' (2:5). Since we were spiritually dead in our sins, salvation involves a spiritual resurrection! But we're also 'seated with Christ in the heavens' (2:6), this being a present reality (not just a future expectation). Whilst we share in his elevated status, we continue to battle spiritual forces (6:10-17).

Salvation also involves a change of conduct so we no longer 'walk in

the ways of the world, or devil' (2:1–3), but we walk in the good deeds that God has prepared in advance (2:10).

### **e. Jew and Gentile Reconciliation**

Both Jews and Gentiles rely on the mercy of God to raise them from spiritual death (2:1–5). Paul reminds the Gentiles they were once without Christ and excluded from citizenship (2:11–12), but have been brought near by the blood of Jesus (2:13), with Christ as the peace between the two factions (2:13–17). The unification of Jews and Gentiles in Christ is massive in salvation history! Paul has been given an insight into 'the mystery of Christ' (3:4–6), that the Gentiles are co-heirs and partners in promise in Christ through the gospel. So proclamation to the Gentiles is part of God's profound wisdom being made known throughout the cosmos (3:10–11).

### **f. The Church**

A new oneness between Jews and Gentiles is foundational to the church, that is a united universal church (not just distinct local congregations).

We strive for unity of the Spirit because we are already one (4:3–6). Yet the church matures in unity of faith and knowledge of Christ through the diversity of gifts being used by all the members (not just elite few) (4:7–16). Maturity also comes through replacing ungodly behaviour with those consistent with love and unity (4:25–32) and through proper relationships within households (5:1–33). The church is thus: built on the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ; characterized by unity and diversity and grows into conformity to Christ; pictured as the bride of Christ with intimate bond!

### **g. Spiritual Warfare**

There's an ongoing battle between believers and spiritual enemies (6:10–17). We are able to stand against them if we make proper use of the Lord's armour. The 'now-not-yet' tension means Christ is already victorious over the spiritual forces of evil BUT the spiritual warfare continues. The spiritual forces have been defeated, but not yet vanquished. Paul's personal experience in Ephesus (surrounded by magic and occult and spiritual darkness) highlights his passion to emphasize Christ's victory over Satan and evil, yet the battle is still raging!

## **h. Mission of God**

'Peace' is a central theme of Ephesians, with God making peace with us through the cross. Yet we have also been entrusted with this gospel of peace, both in a message to be proclaimed and peace to exhibit in our church behaviour. The church then becomes both the fruit and the vehicle of God's mission in the world. 1:9-10 is a significant statement of God's ultimate missional purposes for the entire cosmos.

## **i. The Glory of God**

The doxology (1:3-14) contains the repeated refrain to the praise of the glory of God (1:6, 12, 14). Whether its believers being strengthened according to the 'riches of his glory' (3:6), or the glory of God being seen in the church and in Christ Jesus (3:21), all that God has done for believers in Christ ought to issue in praise to his glorious grace (1:5-6, 12, 14). God's glory is the ultimate end of everything from Paul's perspective – the goal of life, humanity, and all creation!

## **7) Structure: What's the structure of the letter?**

<b>Ch 1 – 3</b>	<b>God's accomplishment of his eternal purpose in Christ</b>
1:3-14	Doxology All the blessings of being 'in Christ'; election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness
1:15-23	Thanksgiving and prayer For growth & enlightenment as to their glorious inheritance & God's power
2:1-10	Raised with Christ God changes spiritual death to new life in Christ – by grace, through faith
2:11-22	Joined together in Christ Jew & Gentile reconciliation – one new people in Christ
3:1-13	Paul, prisoner of Christ Paul's ministry to Gentiles & mystery revealed



3:14-21	Prayer for spiritual power Power to grasp & to know the love of God in Christ
<b>Ch 4-6</b>	<b>Admonition to live as 'church' in Christ</b>
4:1-16	One body Maintaining unity & maturing church through diverse ministry
4:17-32	New for old replacement Putting aside previous ungodly behaviours in favour of new godly ones
5:1-14	Walking in the way of love! Walking in the light of Christ
5:15-6:9	Wise living (specifically in terms of relationships) Implications for each family member, in the household codes
6:10-20	Spiritual warfare Be strong in the Lord!
6:21-24	Closing

## **8) Recommended books on Ephesians**

- The Message of Ephesians, by John Stott (Bible Speaks Today Series)
- Letter to the Ephesians, by Con Campbell (Pillar)
- Ephesians, by Walter Liefeld (IVP)

# Connect Group Study 1

*Ephesians 1:1-3 - 'In Christ' - Union with Christ*

Read Ephesians 1:1-14. 1:1-2. Life on earth is the simultaneous reality of being 'in Ephesus' and 'in Christ'.

1. We are living, wrestling, struggling, seeking, growing, and hoping as imperfect people in an imperfect world.
2. We have also been spiritually united with Christ for the permanent, full, and final transformation of our eternal reality.

Q. How do you experience this tension of heaven and earth?

Q. When do you find your attention pulled down to earth?

Q. When do you find your eyes most focused on heaven?

1:3. Union with Christ is essential. It is the primary theme of Ephesians, and the central reality for 'every spiritual blessing' of the gospel.

Walk through v1-14, highlight every mention of 'in Christ/him'

- What does it mean to be 'in Christ'?
- What is it?
- What isn't it?

Walk through v3-14, highlight or list every spiritual blessing.

- What strikes you?
- What confuses you?
- Note down any questions (we'll study v3-14 in the following weeks).

Read 1:3 again. Praise is the ultimate response from theology.

- How do many know theology with depth yet seem to lack reverence or worship?
- How do many overflow with praise and worship yet shallowly or falsely understand God?
- How can we be believers with hearts full of gospel truth and gospel praise?

Q. What are you hoping to get out of this series in Ephesians?

(Biblically, theologically, practically, experientially, anything goes)

Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied.

*Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 2

*Ephesians 1:3-6 - Union with Christ: Election*

The doctrine of Election is one of the quickest way to (1) confuse Christians or (2) divide Christians. Let's do neither. Today, let's seek the beauty of the gospel in this text and remain united if/when we disagree.

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

Focus on 1:4.

- What purpose did God choose us for?
- Why is it significant that he chose us before the world was created?
- He could have left 'in him' out, so what does 'in him' draw out?

Focus on 1:5-6.

- What does he predestine us for?
- 'Adoption to sonship'. Why the emphasis on sons... is this males only?
- Why does he predestine us at all?

Two purposes **for people** in election: we would be 'holy and blameless', and 'adoption to sonship'.

- How does holiness feature (or not feature) in the direction of your life?
- How do you rest in your identity as a son or daughter of God?
- How is your pursuit of holiness informed by your status as children?

One purpose **to God** in election: 'the praise of his glorious grace'.

- How does the priority of his praise shape our vision of the gospel?

The logic? It all begins from the decision 'in him' v4, and freely flows 'in the One he loves' v6.

- How does this stir your awe and wonder?
- How does this increase your understanding of Christ?
- How does this transform the ordinary parts of life?

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# Connect Group Study 3

*Ephesians 1:7-10 - Union with Christ: Mystery*

Before you read ahead: Why do you think God sent Christ into the world?

Read Ephesians 1:1–14

Focus on 1:7–8a.

- What does 'redemption' mean? How does it fit with 'forgiveness of sins'?
- Why does Paul use the image of 'his blood'?
- What image does the word 'lavished' evoke? What does Paul want us to see?

Q. What keeps you from regularly living with a full understanding of God's grace in your life?

Focus on 1:8b–10.

- What is he referring to by the 'mystery of his will'? Why is it a mystery?
- This was purposed (lit. planned beforehand) in Christ. What are some of the implications that the Triune God planned the end (v10) before the beginning?
- What does this 'unity' (lit. to sum up or bring together) of heaven and earth in Christ mean (NIV has 'under Christ' but it is the same phrase as 'in Christ')?

We view the world, our lives, and even the gospel through human-centric terms. Ephesians disrupts that spectacularly. 1:9–10 are a banner declaring the future of the cosmos: everything united in Christ.

- How does this challenge our vision of the gospel & the Christian life?
- If the whole cosmos are brought to unity in Christ, how do we fit into the picture?

Come back to the beginning question. Why do you think God sent Christ into the world? How has this study enriched your answer?

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# Connect Group Study 4

## *Ephesians 1:11-14 - Union with Christ: Inheritance*

*Important note: v11 is tricky to translate. The verb is lit. 'to be appointed by lot'. Some translations take it generally to refer to being destined or chosen, as it is very occasionally used elsewhere (NIV). Others take the primary meaning of the verb, and understand Paul referring to the assigning of portion or inheritance that is ours in Christ (ESV). Feel free to talk about the differences! But for the purpose of this study we'll assume 'inheritance'.*

Read Ephesians 1:1–14. Focus on 'Inheritance'.

- What is an inheritance? Who receives it? How does that fit into what we've read already? (see 1:5)
- What do you think our 'inheritance' in Christ might refer to?
- Read Rom 4:13 & Gal 3:18: how does that inform our picture of inheritance?

Don't miss the enormity of this! If you stood to inherit a multi-billion dollar fortune it would change how you live.

- How does being 'spiritual sons' with a God-sized inheritance change how you look at your life?
- How does it change how you should think about yourself?

Focus on 'the Holy Spirit'.

- In what way does God 'seal' believers with the Spirit. Why is this one of the 'spiritual blessings'?
- 'Deposit guaranteeing our inheritance'. How does this foster confidence in the believer?
- In the Graceo-Roman world, a 'deposit' was the promise of more to come, meaning we already have some of our inheritance in the Spirit.

There are two key spiritual flow-ons from this: our perseverance in the Spirit and our foretaste in the Spirit.

- What sort of confidence should having the Spirit give us? How do we draw strength from that confidence?
- What sort of blessings or joy do we already derive from the Spirit? How do they keep us and carry us forward?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 5

*Ephesians 1:15-19 - Exalted over the Heavenly Realms*

*In our pursuit of Spiritual Renewal it is essential to pay attention to these prayers. They describe the direction of our renewal, the journey of our renewal, and the means of our renewal (prayerful power).*

Q. If you could pray anything at all knowing that God would answer 'yes', what would you pray?

Read Ephesians 1:15-19a

Focus on 1:15-16 (note that Paul is in prison as he writes this letter, 4:1).

- Why does he give thanks for this community?
- How does Paul's prayer life challenge or inspire you?
- When do you pray? Who do you pray for? How do you pray?

Focus on 1:17-19a.

- If we already have the Spirit, why is he praying for the Spirit (v17)?
- What does it mean to 'know God better'?
- How does v18-19a flow from 'knowing God better'?
- What would a life that firmly experienced v18-19a look like?
- Summarise what you think Paul is praying for in a single sentence.

Q. What part does prayer play in spiritual growth?

Q. What do you find hard about prayer? What questions do you have about prayer? What do you think is stopping you from a rich prayer life?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 6

*Ephesians 1:19-23 - Exalted in the Heavenly Realms*

Read Ephesians 1:19b-23

The world of Ephesians (and the New Testament) is very comfortable with spiritual realities and assumes an unseen spiritual realm that is foreign to our culture and even us as Christians. We're going to begin this study by considering this reality before we go further.

Read 1:3, 1:10, 1:21-22, 3:10, 6:12, and any other verses you feel may help.

- What are the 'heavenly realms'?
- Who is there? What is God's relationship to the heavenly realms? What is our relationship with the heavenly realms?
- How does this reframe our understanding of our world right now?

Now, turning to the rest of our text.

- What sort of picture is Paul painting?
- Is this a 'now' reality or a 'future' reality? Why does that matter?
- What do you think it means that Christ is 'head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.'?

Q. How should this change how we walk through the world?

Q. How does this change your perception of Jesus? Our prayer life? Our worship?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 7

## *Ephesians 2:1-5 - Regeneration: Spiritual Resurrection*

Read Ephesians 2:1–10. Focus on 2:1–3.

- What do you think Paul means when he says 'you were dead'? Metaphor or something more?
- The whole book is filled with 'in Christ' (it's our series title!), how does that contrast with 'in transgression and sins' here?

Christians have historically defined the spiritual struggle in three categories: the world; the flesh; and the devil. 2:1–3 is talking about our pre-made-alive-with-Christ past.

- Do you think these remain enemies or struggles in the Christian life? What is different now vs not different, now that we're 'in Christ'?

The world.

- What does Paul mean when he speaks about 'the ways of this world'? (especially given he also references the devil and the flesh alongside the world)

The devil.

- Why do you think the devil is described in this way? How is he 'at work in those who are disobedient'?
- How present is Satan/spiritual opposition in how you look at the world/faith?

The flesh.

- How do you define 'the flesh' (v3)?
- What do the cravings, desires and thoughts of the flesh look like?
- How can understanding 'the flesh' help our Christian life?

Focus on v4–5.

- What do you think the importance of being made alive **'with Christ'** is?
- Love, mercy, and grace are all so familiar. What does each refer to here? How does each add something to the gospel?

Q. How can you specifically pray for your Christian life after reading this?

Q. How can you specifically be thankful to God in your own life after reading this?



# Connect Group Study 8

*Ephesians 2:6-10 - The Life Prepared for Us*

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Focus on V4-7 (these verses are a single sentence with three main verbs painting a single picture of the gospel).

- What's the importance of the repeated 'with Christ'? What does that teach us about the gospel?
- What does being 'raised up with' and 'seated with' Christ refer to? Is this a now, future or both reality? How does this change our life right now?
- The ultimate purpose of our blessing in 1:3-14 is the praise of his glory, and here is to show his incomparable grace. Is God being prideful or conceited? Why are these so important?

We have so much 'in Christ', but we live in a post-Christian, un-spiritual, and relentlessly busy culture. So, thinking about all the spiritual blessings from 1:3-14, and now 2:1-10...

- Describe the life of someone utterly convinced these were the most important truths.
- How do we keep our spiritual reality in Christ front and centre?
- How do we keep translating temporary concerns through eternal truths?

Focus on 2:8-10.

- Unpack the relationship between grace, faith, and works. Can you be saved without good works?
- What do you think defines a 'good work'?
- God has already prepared our good works (v10). How do you feel about that? Why do you think Paul tells us that?
- We often long for 'God's plan for our lives' in terms of job, purpose and calling.
- What do you think 'God's handiwork' or 'created in Christ Jesus' refers to? Read Gen 1:26-28. How do these passages fit together?

Take a couple of quiet minutes to reflect on the shape of your life and good works (3 T's: time, talent, treasure). Then share

- How important or prominent is doing good in your life?
- What keeps you or helps you in this?

# Connect Group Study 9

*Ephesians 2:11-18 - Union with Christ: One Body*

Read Ephesians 2:11-18

Define and discuss the importance of these key terms:

- Gentiles/Israel, uncircumcised/circumcised (v11)
- 'Citizenship in Israel' (v12)
- 'covenants of the promise' (v12)
- 'the law with its commands and regulations' (v15)

Q. Why would this teaching have sent shockwaves through the ancient world?

Q. How did Jesus make 'one new humanity' (v15)? Why does the repeated 'in Christ', 'in himself' matter here?

Q. How does this teaching on 'one new humanity' (v15) have implications today?

Q. How do we fail to embody 'peace' and 'oneness' in the church? Think big all the way down to small.

Q. What would a local church look like that embodied this? What would that community feel like?

Q. What can we do as individuals to foster 'peace' and 'oneness' in our community?

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# Connect Group Study 10

*Ephesians 2:19-23 - Union with Christ: God's Dwelling*

Q. Why do you think the church matters? What do you think is the most important reality that defines the church?

Read Ephesians 2:19–23

Paul uses three images in this text, what does each uniquely capture about the church? What do all three together communicate? Feel free to pull from other Scripture that come to mind.

- 'Fellow citizens with God's people' (v19)
- 'Members of his household' (v19)
- 'The holy temple' (v20–21)

Q. Why does he mention 'the foundation' and 'the cornerstone' of the building?

Q. How would a Jewish believer receive this teaching about 'a holy temple in the Lord'? What would they be thinking about?

Q. What do you think it means that God dwells among the church by the Spirit? Cool theological point, but what is actually happening, and why does it actually matter?

Q. Do you think we think about church in the right way? Do you think we value church enough?

Q. How should this shape our approach to church? How we engage when we're at church? What we do as a church?

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# Connect Group Study 11

*Ephesians 3:1-13 - The Mystery: The Church*

These aren't trick questions: What is the gospel? What is the purpose of the gospel?

Read Ephesians 3:1–13. Focus on 'the mystery'

- Why does Paul refer to this aspect of the gospel as 'a mystery'? What is so mysterious about it?
- What is the mystery? Why does it matter so much?
- What does he mean by 'the administration of this mystery' (v9)?
- We wouldn't often emphasize what Paul emphasizes when we speak about the gospel. Should we incorporate this more? What are we missing if we don't?

Focus on 3:10–11. (We considered 'the heavenly realms' in the 1:19–23 study. If you skipped this study feel free to head back and consider those questions)

- Who do you think Paul is referring to by 'rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms'?
- Do you think these powers make an impact in the visible world?
- How does the church reveal the wisdom of God to these powers?
- Why is this the 'eternal purpose of Christ'?
- How should this facet of what Christ has done feature more in our faith?

Q. Paul describes his ministry as a 'grace' (v8) while sitting in a prison. How is the ministry he's given a grace for himself? Where in your life and faith should this change your perspective?

Q. Consider Paul's calling 'to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ' (v8). What are the riches you know about in Christ? What is he referring to as 'boundless'?

Q. How is Paul suffering the church's glory (v13)?

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# Connect Group Study 12

*Ephesians 3:14-21 - Filled with the Fullness of God*

*In our pursuit of Spiritual Renewal it is essential to pay attention to these prayers. They describe the direction of our renewal, the journey of our renewal, and the means of our renewal (prayerful power).*

Q. What do you think it means to grow as a Christian? 12 months from now, what do you hope will be different in your faith?

Read Ephesians 3:14–21. Focus on 3:14–15.

- 'For this reason' (V14). What is Paul looking back to as he prays?
- Why is it significant for our prayers that family derives from the Fatherhood of God?

Focus on 'power'.

- 'Power' is throughout this whole prayer, and even in the 'immeasurably more'. Why do you think power is so important here?
- What is the 'power that is at work in us' doing? Why doesn't it feel like God's working in me sometimes?
- If Jesus breathed 'it is finished' why do we still need prayers like these?

Focus on 3:16–17a

- What does the 'inner being' or 'inner person' refer to in the biblical view? Why does it matter? (see 2 Cor 5:1–10 if guidance needed).
- He's praying for 'Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith', meaning this is something Christians still need. Is this something we 'receive' or something we grow into?
- What do you think experiencing Christ in your heart is like?

Focus on 3:17b–19.

- Unpack each of the distinct steps in this prayer.
- How are we 'rooted and established in love'? If we have love already, why does he pray that we would grasp love?
- What does grasping more of Christ's love look like in reality?
- How can this love 'surpass knowledge'?
- The end goal is ordinary people 'filled to the measure of the fullness of God'. What do you think that means for our growth now? Our eternity?

Q. How does this prayer change how you look at your life now? Your future?

# Connect Group Study 13

*Ephesians 4:1-6 - The Mature Church: 'in Christ' (pt 1)*

*Chapters 1-3 are often described as the theological half of the letter, while chapters 4-6 are described as the practical half of the letter.*

Q. Have you ever felt guilty as a Christian for not being good enough? What made you feel that way?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 (though we're focusing on 4:1-6)

Focus on 4:1.

- Why does Paul remind them he's in prison at this point?
- What is 'the calling we've received'?
- Why is living a 'life worthy of the calling' so important?
- What is the relationship between our calling and our life?

Focus on 4:3-6.

- He could speak about Christians as 'one' in lots of ways. What is 'the unity of the Spirit'?
- What is 'the bond of peace'?
- Work through all of the 'ones' (v4-6). What does each mean, and why is each important?
- Given everything covered in chapters 1-3, why does unity matter?

Focus on 4:2.

- 'Humble, gentle and patient'. What does each mean? What does someone look like who embodies all three?
- What is significant about 'bearing with one another in love' instead of just saying 'love others'?
- Why do you think he (1) puts these four encouragements together, and (2) sandwiches them between 4:1 and 4:4-6?

Out of the four qualities in 4:2, choose one for yourself for the week ahead. How will you keep that quality before you and practically grow into it?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 14

*Ephesians 4:7-16 - The Mature Church: 'in Christ' (pt 2)*

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 (though we're focusing on 4:7-16).

Focus on 4:7-10 (this is the confusing part).

- What 'grace' does Christ give in v7?
- What does the Psalm he quotes mean?
- How does he bring Jesus into it in v9-10?

Focus on 4:11-13.

- Consider each role in v11. What does each uniquely contribute? Do we still have apostles? What about prophets?
- What common role do each of these roles play? What does this mean in practical terms in the church today?
- What are 'works of service' and how do they build the body of Christ? How do different 'body parts' and 'spiritual gifts' feature in this?

Focus on 4:14-16.

- What does a spiritual 'infant' look like (v14)? Think practically and realistically, what does this look like in our day? Our church?
- How do spiritual 'infants' grow up?
- What does speaking the 'truth in love' look like in practice?

Pulling it all together.

- Why is unity so important in this whole passage?
- What is 'attaining to the measure of the fullness of Christ'? (see 3:19).
- How do we assess maturity?
- Putting ourselves in this passage, how will we grow into maturity together?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 15

*Ephesians 4:17-24 - The Renewed Church (pt 1)*

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 (though we're focusing on 4:17-24)

Focus on 4:17-19.

- What defines the 'life of the Gentile' in these verses? What does this look like today?
- The way Paul writes suggests some Christians are still living like this. What keeps Christians living like the world/the way they used to?
- We live in a different time, but with remarkable similarities. How are 'sensuality', 'impurity', and 'greed' part of our culture?
- How do we (1) guard ourselves from these temptations, without (2) ignoring the world we're apart of?

Focus on 4:20-24.

- What do you think Paul is referring to by 'the way of life you learned'? Do we teach a way of life in the church?
- What does it mean to 'put off the old self'? How do you actually do it?
- What does it mean to 'put on the new self'? How do you actually do it?
- How are we 'made new in the attitude of our minds'?

We often think about these passages generally, but we all have a specific 'old self'. And we all have a specific 'new self', the perfect likeness of God applied to you.

Take 5 minutes to each reflect:

- What are the qualities or behaviours that define 'my old self'?
- Looking at the 'perfect righteousness and holiness of God', what does it look like for me to put on 'my new self'?

Share as you feel comfortable so you can pray for each other.

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*



# Connect Group Study 16

*Ephesians 4:25-32 - The Renewed Church (pt 2)*

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 (though we're focusing on 4:25-32)  
Paul is elaborating on 'putting off the old' and 'putting on the new' particularly within the life of the church.

Why does he begin 'therefore'? Why does falsehood and truth relate to being one body?

What does it mean to be angry and not sin? What does Paul mean by not letting the sun go down while angry? How does anger give the devil a foothold?

Stealing is obviously not ideal in the church. But why the emphasis on work and doing 'something useful with your hands'?

What does Paul mean by 'unwholesome talk'? The danger can be to avoid bad speech and cultivate 'Christian' speech. What does speaking to build others up actually look like? How do we create a culture that isn't fake, but also encouraging?

What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?

What do all the negative qualities of 5:31 have in common? If we're prone to any of these, how do we grow through them?

We can often interpret 'kind and compassionate' as being a nice person. How are these more than that?

What does real forgiveness look like? What keeps us from forgiveness in the ordinary rhythms of church community?

Take a few minutes to each reflect:

- Which of these specific qualities or instructions speaks to you the most?
- What is something tangible that you can do to keep that before you this week?

*Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 17

*Ephesians 5:1-14 - The Light-Filled Church*

Focus on 5:1–2.

- What's the logic of these verses?
- Read the first three words again slowly... 'Follow God's example'. What is it about the love of God that is so different from earthly forms? How do we grow to love like that?

Sometimes we read the prohibitive tone in these passages as if holiness is a life of 'do not's. Remember, this section has come after so much beauty in Ephesians.

- On the positive, what does it actually mean to be holy?

Focus on 5:3–7.

- Why 'not even a hint' of these things?
- What does 'obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking' look like? Is swearing a sin in the church?
- The reverse of bad speech is thanksgiving. Do you find it easy/hard to be regularly thankful to God? How can we cultivate thankfulness?
- Is v5 saying there are certain sins that keep us from the kingdom? Why does he focus on these qualities in particular with this language?
- What are 'empty words' that deceive? Practical examples today?
- What does it mean to not be partners with people in this way?

Take a few minutes to each reflect:

- Which of these specific qualities or instructions speaks to you the most?
- What is something tangible that you can do to keep that before you this week?

Share as you feel comfortable so you can pray for each other.

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 18

## *Ephesians 5:15-21 - The Spirit-Filled Church*

*Please discuss this passage with grace and love. As important as the Spirit is for the Christian life, brothers and sisters can disagree over his ongoing role in the Christian life and still remain united in the gospel.*

Read out the other Spirit-focused verses from Ephesians to help our discussion draw on Paul's theology of the Spirit (1:13, 1:17, 2:18, 2:22, 3:16, 4:3, 4:30, 6:17, 6:18).

What are the active roles of the Spirit in the Christian life? What about our communal church life? What questions do you still have? Feel free to reach out to your pastor if you want further resources or wisdom.

Read Ephesians 5:15–21 (though we're focusing on 5:18–21).

Focus on 5:18.

- Why do you think Paul contrasts 'drunk on wine' with 'filled with the Spirit'?
- What do you think it means to 'be filled with the Spirit'?
- Consider the three main interpretations, that being 'filled with the Spirit' refers to:
  - Receiving the Spirit at conversion as the one-and-done conclusive 'Spirit-filling' moment.
  - The second 'baptism of the Spirit', which is a separate event from the Spirit indwelling us at conversion.
  - An ongoing and continuous reality where Christians already indwelt by the Spirit actively choose to seek, ask and draw upon his power and direction.
- How would our Christian life be different if we lived from this more? What about our church life?

*The following four verbs of v19 (speaking, singing, giving thanks, and submitting) are grammatically dependent on the command of v18 to 'be filled with the Spirit'. To 'be filled with the Spirit' may mean many things, but each of these should be non-negotiable in our Spirit-filled life together.*

Focus on 'speaking to one another' (v19).

- Why do you think Paul wants the content of our speaking to one

another to be 'psalms, hymns, songs' (especially when he's about to command singing)?

- What does it mean to speak 'from the Spirit'? What does it therefore mean to speak not 'from the Spirit'?
- What could this practically look like in our church life?

Focus on 'sing and make music' (v19).

- Paul could have written elders and leaders to make singing part of church life, but instead writes to everyone. Why do you think he commands all of us?
- Can we sing 'from the heart to the Lord' when we're spiritually dry or doubting? Does this mean we need to 'feel' it?
- How do we encourage each other, and create a singing culture of heart-felt worship?

Focus on 'giving thanks' (v20).

- How is this Christian principle different from the modern practice of 'gratitude'?
- 'Always' giving thanks 'in everything'. Why is this so comprehensive?
- How can we have lives full of giving thanks? What about if we find it hard?

Focus on 'submit to one another' (v21).

- This is obviously important since the principle is applied for the next 20 verses to different 'household relationships'.
- Why do you think Christians submitting to Christians matters? Why is 'reverence for Christ' the motivator?
- Sum up 'submitting to one another' as a general principle.

Write a couple of practical/habitual ideas you can try and embody together for this group and broader congregational life.

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 19

*Ephesians 5:21-33 - The Household Church (pt 1)*

*Paul previously described the church as 'members of [God's] household' (2:19). Now, he is reimagining the relational life of the church by applying the mutual principle of 'submitting to one another' (5:21) to the key relationships of the ancient household (5:22 – 6:9).*

Read Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9 (though we're focusing on 5:22–33)

Focus on the idea of 'household' revealed in this text.

- Describe the different modern pictures of 'family' or 'household'.
- Why do you think they are formed the way they are? What principles sit under how the members relate to one another?
- Describe what you see of the ancient Graeco-Roman picture of 'household' revealed here (feel free to utilise other passages or historical context).
- How is it different from ours? Thinking about the 'why' of Paul's corrections/guidance for the different roles, what worldly principles do you think defined these households?

*These instructions for marriage have different interpretations, lived experiences, and cultural baggage. Please be kind, considerate, and if you disagree? Disagree with love.*

Focus on the bigger picture of marriage.

- How is marriage a 'profound mystery' (v32)? How does Paul ground this theologically, Scripturally, and in the gospel?
- How does marriage reflect this? How does marriage not reflect this?
- Does this elevate marriage over singleness? How do we keep a balanced view in the church?

Focus on 'husbands'.

- Summarise what Paul calls husbands to in this passage. How does this reflect 5:21?
- What does husband as 'the head of the wife' as 'Christ is the head of the church' mean? What does it not mean?
- What does the husband do in mirror of Christ? What does Christ do that the husband doesn't?

Focus on 'wives'.

- Summarise what Paul calls wives to in this passage. How does this reflect 5:21?
- What does submitting to husbands mean? What does it not mean?
- How do his instructions to husbands give context to wives' submission?

Big picture.

- How much does the context of the ancient household and 1st century marriage shape this teaching? How much is universal and directly applicable?
- Practically what can we take away? Marrieds, singles and the church as a whole.

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 20

*Ephesians 6:1-9 - The Household Church (pt 2)*

Paul previously described the church as 'members of [God's] household' (2:19). Now, he is reimagining the relational life of the church by applying the mutual principle of 'submitting to one another' (5:21) to the key relationships of the ancient household (5:22 - 6:9).

Read Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9 (though we're focusing on 6:1-9)

Focus on 6:1-4.

- How does our culture think of children? Parenthood?
- What do you know of this culture's approach to children? Parenthood? Is this specifically about the enduring role of fathers, or Paul speaking into the norms of their culture?
- Why do you think Paul quotes the 10 commandments?
- What should obedience in children look like? How should this be taught or not taught? What constitutes a child?
- What does 'exasperating' a child look like? What could/should raising children in the Lord look like?

Focus on 6:5-9.

- What is the 1st century Graeco-Roman slave/master relationship? Why do you think Paul doesn't call Christians to free their slaves?
- How does this teaching on slave/master help us understand our relationship with God?
- How could this passage change our perspective on our work?
- What are the underlying principles offered to slaves and masters? How could we consider these in light of work?

*Pray together. Try and let your prayers be enriched by the beauty, and language of what we've studied. Don't forget moment to share on experiences of Spiritual Renewal (see page 46).*

# Connect Group Study 21

## *Ephesians 6:10-24 - The Steadfast Church*

What are your experiences of 'spiritual warfare'? How do you think evil spiritual forces affect the world and subvert Christians today?

Read Ephesians 6:10–24. Focus on 6:10.

- Describe someone you know who is strong in the Lord, and his mighty power. What defines them? What makes them that person for you?
- In tangible terms, what does it mean to be strong in the Lord?
- Power has featured already in Ephesians (esp 3:14–21). How does that inform this picture?

Focus on 6:11–13.

- We're familiar with the devil as our enemy (v11). Who/what is Paul referring to as our other enemies here? Is the separation between 'this dark world' and 'the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' significant?
- Few of us likely have a deliverance ministry (though some might!). What is 'the struggle' Paul is talking about?
- Should we consider our spiritual struggle more than we do? How can we be more aware in a non-spiritually-focused culture?

Focus on 6:13–17.

- What is Paul referring to when he says 'when the day of evil comes'?
- Why the emphasis on 'standing firm'? Does that shape how we engage in this struggle?
- Walk through each piece of armour. Why do you think Paul chooses each piece and its corresponding quality? Does that affect how we utilise or employ that quality in our struggle?

Focus on 6:18–20.

- How does Paul link prayer to the struggle and the armour of God?
- What does it mean to 'pray in the Spirit'? What does 'all kinds of prayers and petitions' refer to?
- Is there a link between Paul's ministry, prayer, and this spiritual struggle?

Q. How will we live as prayerful, faithful spiritual soldiers in this world everyday?



# Conclusion to Ephesians - Reflection and Prayer

Feel free to use the below as much as you like, but devote this week to reflecting on the Year of Spiritual Renewal, our series on Ephesians and your own spiritual life up to date. Then spend an extended time in prayer and/or worship together.

## **Reflection Questions:**

Have you experienced anything unexpected or disappointing through life and faith these past months? Surprising and uplifting? How has God been present with you?

How has your understanding of the gospel, the world, God, and the Christian life grown through this series? Which passages/themes stuck out to you most?

How have you experienced spiritual renewal in these past months? How has your pursuit of spiritual renewal been shaped?

Consider where we've come so far, and look ahead to where we're going. How are you personally hoping to grow in spiritual renewal? What are you tangibly going to put in place?

How can we pray for each other in our journey of spiritual renewal?

# Notes

# Notes



*The* Bridge Church