

Exploring Ephesians

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PREFACE

The Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by laying out the significance of spiritual blessings which Christians have in Christ. In Christ, God has chosen us to be holy, adopted as his children, redeemed, forgiven, and sanctified. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In Christ, our salvation is secured and sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance in the Kingdom of God. In Christ, we have a new life. Whatever our role is, either as a husband, a wife, a child, an employee, or an employer, we are to carry out our responsibilities out of reverence for Christ. All our thoughts, words, and actions are to be Christ-centered. Paul knows that this will not be very easy for us to do, because we still have enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil. Paul assures us that the Triune God continuously sanctifies and fills us with all the fullness of him. The Triune God also provides us with his divine armor to fight our daily spiritual battles against the devil. As we look forward to the return of Christ our Savior, we are to persevere in this life on Earth. Together, we can defend one another and win our spiritual battles. Together, we can build up one another and bring many to Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Introduction

The book of Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the churches in the area around the city of Ephesus, known as Asia Minor. Apostle means messenger of God. Paul was specifically chosen by Jesus Christ to be his messenger to the international world, bringing the good news of salvation, the message of hope that people can have in him. Most likely Paul wrote this letter during his imprisonment in Rome about 60-62 A.D. Acts 19 tells us that Paul went to Ephesus and planted a church. He stayed there for two years. The church consisted of some Jews and mostly Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, a major city in the Roman world. It was famous for the Temple of Artemis (Diana), the fertility goddess. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Lesson 1 – Spiritual Blessings in Christ (Part 1)

Read Ephesians 1:1-2

What is the significance of Paul's explanation that his calling is by the will of God (v.1)?

Why are Christians called *saints* (v.1)?

All true followers of Jesus Christ are *saints*. A saint is someone who is *set apart* by God. 1 Peter 2:9 describe who true Christians (*saints*) are, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Paul also addressed this letter to children in chapter 6. Children of Christians are also *saints*. They are holy before God (see also 1 Corinthians 7:14).

Why are grace and peace important in Christians' lives (v.2)?

Who are the sources of spiritual grace and peace (v.2)?

Why is it important to say that both God the Father and Jesus Christ are the sources of spiritual grace and peace?

What is the significance of calling God as our *Father* and calling Jesus Christ as our *Lord*?

Read Ephesians 1:3-10

With what God the Father has blessed us in Christ (v.3)?

How is this significant to you?

To be *in Christ* is to be in union with Christ. Our whole being—our bodies and souls—is united with Christ permanently in a mystical way. Christ’s death for the penalty of our sins is credited to us as our own death. Christ’s bodily resurrection is credited to us as a guarantee of our future bodily resurrection. Christ’s righteousness and holiness is credited to us as our own righteousness and holiness. Christ himself will share his glory and heavenly blessings to us. Ultimately, what Christ has, we have.

When did God choose us in Christ (v.4)?

What is the purpose of God’s choosing us (v.4)?

God is working in each Christian to make him/her holy and blameless. This is Christian sanctification, the work of God’s free grace renewing us completely after the image of God, enabling us more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

In what God predestined us to be adopted as God’s children through Christ (v.5)?

What is the ultimate reason of God saving us in Christ and adopting us to be his children (v.6)?

The doctrine of election or predestination has been greatly debated in the history of Christianity. In 1646, one hundred twenty-one Puritan theologians put together the Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapter 3 of the confession explains this doctrine.

“Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, has chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace” (section 5).

“As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only” (section 6).

“The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withdraws mercy as he pleases, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice” (section 7).

"The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel" (section 8).

What do we have in Christ (v.7)?

What does it say about God's grace (v.7-8)?

Grace is an unmerited and undeserved favor. We do not deserve or earn God's grace. God simply gives his grace to us out of his love and goodness to us.

What is God's plan for the fullness of time (v.9-10)?

This is the mystery of God's will, which God makes known to us. God is working to unify things in heaven and things on earth in Christ. God will finish his mission at the end of this broken world—when Jesus returns again to bring judgment to this world and to raise up his people in glory. God will create a new heaven and a new earth—heaven on earth—uniting things in heaven and things on earth.

In Christ, you have every spiritual blessing. In Christ, you are chosen to be holy, adopted as God's child, redeemed, forgiven, and sanctified by God.

How will you live your life in this light?

Memorize

"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" (Ephesians 1:3).

Lesson 2 – Spiritual Blessings in Christ (Part 2)

Read Ephesians 1:1-10 for review.

Read Ephesians 1:11-14

In Lesson 1, we learned that in Christ, we have every spiritual blessing. In Christ, we are chosen to be holy, adopted as God's children, redeemed, forgiven, and sanctified by God.

What else do we have in Christ (v.11)?

1 Peter 1:3-4 explain about our inheritance in heaven, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

Our inheritance in heaven is God's gift for us as his children. We do not earn God's gift, but we simply receive it according to God's grace for us. God and his kingdom are our inheritance.

How does God work and what does it mean (v.11)?

The purpose of God giving us a heavenly inheritance is to the praise of his glory (v.12). The grace of God for us reveals his glory. He is worthy of all our praises.

When were we sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (v.13)?

The dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us is promised for those who believe in Jesus Christ by faith. Believing in Christ is accompanied by repentance of sin when we heard the word of truth, the gospel (good news) of salvation in Jesus Christ. When people hear the gospel, repent, and believe in Christ by faith, they receive salvation from God. The Holy Spirit immediately seals their salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in them. Consequently, their whole being (body and soul) is connected to God. The Holy Spirit has revived their souls, bringing their souls alive from dead (Ephesians 2).

What does it mean by the Holy Spirit is the *guarantee* of our inheritance (v.14)?

The ultimate purpose of all our spiritual blessings in Christ given by God is to the praise of his glory (v.14). God is the only one worthy to be praised and he is worthy of all our praises.

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

What had Paul heard about the Ephesian Christians (v.15)?

All Christians need to grow: (1) their faith in Christ and (2) their love toward one another. A healthy church is a church that is known for the member's faith in Christ and their love toward one another.

Why are these two aspects very important in the life of a church?

Can other Christians speak well about your faith in Christ and your love for them?

How can we help one another to strengthen our faith in Christ and our love toward one another?

Paul continuously prayed for the Ephesian Christians and thanked God for them (v.16). This is a good model of prayer. We need to regularly pray for other Christians and thank God for them. Every true Christian will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives, although some bear less than others.

How often do you pray for other Christians and thank God for them?

If we regularly pray for others and thank God for them, what will be the impact on them and on ourselves?

Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesian Christians a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him (v.17).

What does it mean? Why is this important for Christians (v.18-19)?

Not only is God and his kingdom our inheritance, but we are also God's glorious inheritance (v.18). Both God and we will inherit each other in a perfect bond of a covenant relationship. There is nothing that God desires but us in perfect glory and holiness. God patiently waits to have us as his glorious inheritance.

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Knowing that you are God's glorious inheritance, how does it impact the way you live your life?

How did the greatness of God's power work in Christ (v.20-23)?

What is the significance of Christ's authority and dominion is above all (v.21)?

Christ is also the head of the church. The universal, spiritual, and invisible church is a collective group of all Christians. This universal church is the body of Christ (v.22-23). Each Christian is a member of this body. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

What does it mean that the church—as Christ’s body—is the fullness of him (v.23)?

Christ fills every Christian as a member of his church with his Word and the Holy Spirit. Christ sanctifies us. This is his grace for us. When we disobey Christ, we slow down the process of our sanctification.

How can we help one another to be obedient to Christ?

Memorize

“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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Lesson 3 – Our Salvation: by God’s Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Christ Alone

Read Ephesians 1:11-23 for review.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

Every Christian was once dead in sin (spiritually dead). Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. Every person is born spiritually dead in sin. In other words, everyone is born a sinner. We sin because we are sinners. Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law in any way. We sin against God in our thoughts, words, and actions.

When we were dead in sin, what did we do in our lives (v.2-3)?

Give some examples of what you did.

When we were dead in sin, everything we did was sinful before God. What we did came from our sinful hearts—a heart that reject God and do not love him. Everything we did was not done out of love for God and the ultimate purpose was not for his glory. Therefore, everything we did was sinful and was not pleasing to God. God's wrath was upon us. This is the condition of every person.

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

What does the passage say about God (v.4)?

God is just and therefore he must punish our sins. God is also merciful and loving. He wants to save us from sin, evil, and darkness.

What did God do for us (v.5)?

Because we were dead in sin, we were unable to believe in God. God made our souls alive by his grace. So when we heard the gospel of salvation in Christ, we believed in him (1:13). Without God bringing our souls alive from dead, we would not be able to believe in Christ when we heard the gospel. We would not be able to have conviction in our hearts, repent from sin, and put our faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit already worked in us, bringing our souls alive and enabling us to hear his calling to trust Jesus by faith. Therefore, our salvation is by God's grace alone, and it is through faith alone in Christ alone.

For those who are still dead in sin, no matter how many gospel callings are made to them, they will not hear those callings. Their souls are still dead.

What else did God do for us in Christ (v.6)?

We are still on Earth, but the text says that God “seated us with Christ” (past tense). When God saves us in Christ, we are united with Christ. What Christ has done and accomplished for us is credited to us. His death and resurrection is credited to us. What Christ has in heaven is credited to us as well. Being in union with Christ is much deeper than just these things. From God’s perspective, our salvation has been completed. We are already seated with Christ in heaven.

What is the purpose of God saving us in Christ (v.7)?

What we have in the present time in Christ is a glimpse of all the abundant blessings we will have in the future time in Christ. God continuously shows the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ. Every moment we come to a deeper realization of God’s love and grace for us, we are grateful to him. Our appreciation and love toward God grows every moment. When Christ returns and gives us our heavenly inheritance, we will be overwhelmed with the immeasurable riches of his love for us.

What does the passage say about our salvation in Christ (v.8-9)?

How is this different from other religions in the world?

Christians’ salvation is completely the work of God in us. It is the gift of God for us. It is not the result of our actions or our will, so that we may not boast.

How would you answer someone who says that if salvation is completely the work of God, then we are just like robots, being controlled by God?

What does the passage say about Christians and what does it mean (v.10)?

From God’s perspective, *good works* are: (1) done from a heart that has been purified by faith, (2) done out of love for him, and (3) for the purpose of his glory. Anything that is not of these three categories is not a *good work* before God.

What are some of the good works that we should walk in them?

Memorize

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Lesson 4 – We are God’s Dwelling Place

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 for review.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

The Jews labeled the Gentiles as “the uncircumcision” (people who were not circumcised), because the Jews were circumcised people. Paul told the Ephesian Christians that when the Jews called them “the uncircumcision,” it was simply referring to “made in the flesh by hands.” It is an external religious and fleshly matter, rather than an internal and spiritual matter. Ephesian Christians did not need to be concerned about this. Paul told similarly to the Roman Christians that what matter was circumcision of the heart made by the Holy Spirit of God—an internal and spiritual matter (Romans 2:29).

What was the condition which once Christians had (v.12)?

When God made covenants with the forefathers of Israel (Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, etc.), all the covenants contained promise that ultimately pointed to Christ. Gentile Christians would have not known these.

What is the condition which Christians have in Christ (v.13)?

What does it mean by *Jesus Christ is our peace* (v.14-16)?

In the Old Testament’s Temple of Jerusalem, the Jews and the Gentiles did not worship in the same area together. The Gentiles worshipped in the outer area of the temple—*the Court of the Gentiles*. There was a *dividing wall of hostility* that separated the Jews and the Gentiles.

God commanded the Jews to regularly offer animal sacrifices as atonement for their sins in the temple. God was teaching them that the punishment of their sins was death. Animals had to die as their substitutes. The animal sacrifices were imperfect and had to be done regularly. The animal sacrifices pointed to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ—once and for all. Christ was the perfect lamb who died as our substitute for the punishment of our sins.

By sacrificing himself for both the Jews and the Gentiles, Jesus has created one new man (one new people of God) in himself without a dividing wall. Jesus’ sacrifice has brought two reconciliations: (1) he reconciles God and men, and (2) he reconciles the Jews and the Gentiles.

Christ came to preach and bring peace to all his people around the world (v.17). Christ continues to unite his people from different cultural backgrounds and to make them into one people of God in himself. This is part of the plan of God to unite all things in Christ, “things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10). Christ brings peace to us, reconciling us with God and reconciling believers with one another.

The peace that Christ gives to us will be completed when he returns. In a complete sense, this divine peace means the complete well-being of our lives—the Hebrew word that describes this is *shalom*.

In this broken world, we still have troubles. One day, our sanctification will be completed and we will be glorified. God will create a new heaven and a new earth—heaven on earth—for our dwelling. We will have *shalom* in a complete and full manifestation.

What else do we have in Christ (v.18)?

Christ has made himself the spiritual temple of God for his people. Through him, we all have access to God the Father in one Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit help us to approach God the Father?

What does the passage say about Christians—Jews and Gentiles (v.19)?

All Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are members of the household of God. We are one family in Christ.

The church of Christ is built on the foundation of the apostles (represent the New Testament) and the prophets (represent the Old Testament), with Christ himself as the cornerstone of the church (v.20). In a construction, a cornerstone is the first stone placed as a foundation. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone. Therefore, the cornerstone shapes the position of the entire structure. Paul illustrates the church of Christ as a spiritual structure, in which Christ himself is the cornerstone. The prophets and the apostles are in reference to Christ. All Christians are joined together in Christ. We grow into a holy temple of God in Christ (v.21).

This has several significant implications:

1. God is constructing a kingdom—uniting all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (1:10)—with Christ as the corner stone of this kingdom structure.
2. The spiritual structure of this kingdom is still growing. God is still bringing people from all around the world to Christ and into this structure.
3. God has made Christ his spiritual temple for us. In Christ, we have access to God the Father.
4. God also makes every Christian a spiritual temple—a dwelling place for him (v.22).

What does it mean to you personally that you are a dwelling place for God?

Memorize

“In him [Christ] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

Lesson 5 – The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 for review.

Read Ephesians 3:1-6

How did Paul identify himself (v.1)?

Paul lived his life for Christ by serving God's people. He was willing to be a prisoner, in order other people could know Christ. His life was a sacrificial life—a Christ-centered and other-oriented life. As Christians, our lifestyle should be Christ-centered and other-oriented. Everything we do, we should do out of love for Christ. We are to put away our self-centered lifestyle, and put on a Christ-centered and other-oriented lifestyle.

What is *the stewardship of God's grace* that has been given to all Christians (v.2, Matthew 28:19-20)?

How does carrying out the stewardship require us to live a Christ-centered and other-oriented lifestyle?

Paul has written briefly concerning the mystery of God uniting all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (1:9-10). Paul also calls this *the mystery of Christ*. The mystery is fulfilled in Christ and believers can understand now (v.3-5).

What is the mystery about (v.6)?

The Jews did not know that Gentiles (non-Jewish people) are: (1) fellow heirs of the kingdom of God, (2) members of the same body of Christ, and (3) partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Both the Jews and the Gentiles receive all the spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-14).

Read Ephesians 3:7-13

How was Paul made a minister of the gospel (v.7)?

How does God provide us with special grace as we carry out the stewardship that he has given us?

Paul said that *preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ* was God's grace for him (v.8).

Why is our calling to share the gospel a part of God's grace for us?

Why did Paul say that he was *the very least of all the saints* (v.8)?

Why is humility an important character trait we need to grow in?

God is revealing the mystery of his plan to his people. The Bible—the Word of God—brings light to our minds the unsearchable riches of God’s grace in Christ. Christ has died for his people, and he is gathering them from all nations to himself. This mystery was hidden for ages before Christ came (v.8-9).

How does the church make known the manifold wisdom of God (v.10)?

Rulers and authorities in the heavenly places most likely refer to both good and evil spirits—the good angels and the fallen angels. The universal and spiritual church is the body of Christ—a group of people from all nations who come to saving faith in Christ. Both the good spirits and the evil spirits have been watching God gathering people from all nations to Christ. 1 Peter 1:12 tells us that the good angels long to see the salvation of God’s people—one by one—in the course of history.

Christ has accomplished the eternal purpose of God’s will. In Christ, we have access to God the Father (v.11-12). In the Old Testament, people were afraid to approach God. His holiness could make them die. Therefore, God assigned a holy priest to be their mediator. Now, we have Christ as our Mediator to approach God the Father.

How does faith in Christ give us boldness and confidence to approach God the Father?

To be in union with Christ means we have the same privileges as Christ has. Christ has access to the Father. Likewise, we have access to the Father through Christ.

How was Paul’s suffering the glory of the believers (v.13)?

What can we learn from Paul’s suffering?

Memorize

“... in whom [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” (Ephesians 3:12).

Lesson 6 – Being Filled with All the Fullness of God

Read Ephesians 3:1-13 for review.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Why did Paul bow his knees (v.14)?

What does it tell us about his attitude before God?

What does the passage say about God the Father (v.14-15)?

Every family means everything is created and named by God. God is the Creator of the physical realm—the universe—and everything in it. God is also the Creator of the spiritual realm and everything in it.

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that:

1. They might be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit in their inner being (v.16)
2. Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith (v.17)
3. They might be rooted and grounded in love (v.17)
4. They might have strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth (the fullest dimensions) of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (v.18-19)
5. They might be filled with all the fullness of God (v.19)

How is Paul's prayer a good model of praying for other Christians?

What do you usually say to God when you pray for other Christians?

In his prayer, Paul mentioned the three persons of the Trinity—God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit in our prayers to God the Father, and we pray through and in the name of Jesus Christ our Mediator.

The Holy Spirit works in the inner being—the heart or the soul—of each believer (v.16). The Holy Spirit continually sanctifies our inner being. He strengthens us from the inside. The Holy Spirit can also give special empowerment to us when we are witnessing or facing temptations or troubles.

Have you ever experienced a special empowerment of the Holy Spirit in your life?

What should we do in order to be daily strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Paul used the Greek word *katoikeo* rather than *paroikeo*, which both mean *to dwell* (v.17). *Paroikeo* means to dwell temporary as a visitor, while *katoikeo* means to dwell permanently as a resident. Paul

prayed for the Ephesian Christians to have faith in Christ and no other. He wanted them to have Christ as the only one who dwelled and occupied their hearts permanently.

Have you given all areas of your life to Christ?

What areas of your lives in which often times you want to have control of rather than surrendering them to Christ?

Paul prayed that they might be rooted and grounded in love (v.17). There are four words in Greek that mean love: (1) *phileo*—friendship love, (2) *storge*—family and community love, (3) *eros*—romantic and sexual love, and (4) *agape*—unconditional and sacrificial love. The Greek word used for *love* in this passage is *agape*.

Agape is love that God demonstrates to us. It is love that is demonstrated in a covenant relationship. It is love that put the needs of others above self. It is God-centered and not self-centered love. God wants us to demonstrate *agape* love to him and to one another, in order that we may have strength to comprehend with all the saints—as a covenant family in Christ—what is the breadth, length, height, and depth (the fullest dimensions) of the *agape* love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (v.18-19).

We can keep getting deeper to comprehend the love of Christ, and we will see that we never reach its end. The *agape* love of Christ for us is beyond our comprehension.

Why do we need one another—as a covenant family—to understand the fullest dimensions of the *agape* love of Christ for us?

What does it mean by being filled with all the fullness of God—the Triune God (v.19)?

Our salvation is the work of the Triune God. The ultimate purpose of God sanctifying us is to make us like him—filled with all the fullness of him. God fills us with his own characteristics—*agape* love, holiness, wisdom, etc.—until we are filled with the fullness of him.

What does it mean by *God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think* (v.20)?

Paul concluded his prayer by giving praise to God (v.21). To God be all the glory forever and ever.

Memorize

“... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Lesson 7 – Growing in the Fullness of Christ

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 for review.

Read Ephesians 4:1-3

What does Paul urge Christians to do (v.1)?

What is our calling (see 2:10)?

What do we need to do (v.2)?

Humility and gentleness go together. Humility is the internal attitude and gentleness is the external demonstration of it. The opposite of these two are proud and roughness.

Patience and bearing with one another in *agape* love also go together. Patience is the internal attitude and bearing with one another in *agape* love is the external demonstration of it. *Agape* love is love that puts the needs of others above our own needs. It is sacrificial love. As a covenant family of God, we need to be patient, concern, and forgiving to one another. Everything we do, we need to do in *agape* love.

What else do we need to do (v.3)?

The Greek word translated “eager” is also translated “make every effort.” It has the idea of working for something difficult with a determination to make it happen. We are self-centered in our nature. We have tendency to be selfish, either we are at home, at work, or in the church.

What causes quarrels in the church?

The unity and love of Christians for one another is a powerful instrument to bring people to church. We should be eager and make every effort to maintain our unity and peace.

Read Ephesians 4:4-6

Paul gives seven descriptions of Christian unity: (1) one body – the body of Christ, (2) one Spirit – the Holy Spirit, (3) one hope – the glorious hope in Christ, (4) one Lord – Jesus Christ, (5) one faith – faith in Christ, (6) one baptism – in the name of the Triune God, and (7) one God – the Father.

There are two significant meanings about Christian unity: (1) the Triune God is the basis of Christian unity, and (2) our unity should reflect the unity of the Triune God.

How does the unity of the Triune God look like?

Read Ephesians 4:7-16

All Christians have received the grace of salvation from God (v.7). At the moment the Holy Spirit makes us spiritually born in Christ, he also gives us at least one spiritual gift for the benefit of Christ's church. While Christ was on Earth, he modeled humility and service. We are to imitate what Christ has modeled and done for us.

In the past, when a general won a battle, he would lead his captives to attend by his chariots, cast money to the spectators of his triumph, and give gifts to his soldiers. Paul uses this to say that Christ has also conquered his enemies and won the war. Christ's ascension to heaven marked his triumph, and he gave the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost to empower the believers. Since then, Christ continues to equip his church with gifts and graces (v.8-10).

Whom does Christ give to equip the church (v.11-12)?

The Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different people to equip God's people for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ.

Until when do we need to do the work of ministry (v.13)?

We should grow to be mature Christians and be filled with the fullness of Christ, and not remain immature like children—spiritually speaking—who are easily tossed to and fro by man-centered liberal teachings (v.14).

What are the contemporary man-centered liberal teachings that infiltrate the church?

What should we do (v.15-16)?

Speaking the truth in love and pursuing to be equipped in God's Word are evidences of spiritual growth. Telling the truth without loving the person is cruelty, and loving without telling him/her the truth is coward-sentimentality. We need to tell the truth and love the person as well. We need to daily study God's Word and be filled with the fullness of Christ. We need one another to grow as one body of Christ. We cannot grow well alone.

Are you currently involved in a ministry to serve and grow with other Christians in a local church?

Memorize

"... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Lesson 8 – Our New Life in Christ

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 for review.

Read Ephesians 4:17-24

What does the passage say about the conditions of unbelievers (v.17-19)?

All Christians—before being spiritually born again in Christ—were once unbelievers. Paul gives seven major descriptions about unbelievers—people who have not been born again in Christ: (1) their minds are futile, (2) their understanding is darkened, (3) they are alienated from God, (4) they are ignorant, (5) their hearts are hard, (6) they are callous, and (7) they give themselves up to every kind of impurity.

These are the descriptions of the lives of all sinners who are dead in sin (2:1-3). In Romans 1:18-32, Paul describes the sinfulness of unbelievers and the wrath of God upon them.

How was your life before believing in Christ?

How did you learn about Christ and become a believer?

What should we do as believers in Christ (v.22-24)?

The Word of God renews and sanctifies our minds. The Word of God gives us the knowledge of God and grows us into spiritual maturity (v.13). We need to guard our minds from being corrupted.

How does living in righteousness and holiness look like in our daily lives (v.24)?

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

This passage gives descriptions of how our new life in Christ should look like. Our daily lifestyle should be Christ-centered and other-oriented.

What should we do to one another as members of one body of Christ (v.25)?

How do we learn to always speak the truth without mixing with lies?

What else should we do (v.26-27)?

Angry here refers to holy and righteous anger. Holy and righteous anger is anger to someone in defense of holiness and righteousness, because the person is damaging or hurting what is good, holy, or righteous.

Sinful anger is anger against someone in defense of yourself, because the person is damaging you or your own interest. Sinful anger is self-centered and self-oriented, but holy and righteous anger is Christ-centered and other-oriented.

Jesus was angry with the sellers who defiled the temple of God (John 2:13-22). Jesus defended God and the people who came to worship God against the sellers who were damaging what was holy. He drove them away and overturned their tables. Afterwards, they—along with the religious leaders—got angry with Jesus in defense of their own interest—their profit from the business.

God is always angry with sin. The more spiritually mature we are, the more we become like God—always angry with sin and unrighteousness. We need much wisdom on this and we need to be careful of the devil who likes to tempt us to fall into selfish anger.

What else should we do (v.28)?

Paul encourages Christians not only to work with honesty, but also to give what we have to others who are in need. Christians are to be generous to help others, just like Christ who has given himself for us. We, who have received much love from Christ, should love others much as well.

What else should we do (v.29)?

Not only should our talk be clean and truthful, but also be good for building others up. Our words should be edifying and encouraging. Our words should be Christ-centered and other-oriented.

What else should we do (v.30)?

God can grieve because he is a personal God. We grieve him when we disobey him, because he loves us.

What else should we do (v.31)?

What else should we do (v.32)?

Because we have been forgiven much, we can forgive others much as well. Because we are loved much by Christ, we can love others much as well. Only if you have never felt the depth of Christ's love for you and the forgiveness of all your sins in him, then you will not be able to love and forgive others much.

Memorize

"... to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Lesson 9 – Be Imitators of God and Walk in Love

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 for review.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

What is the most important behavior that we should do (v.1)?

Because we are God's dear children, we should be like God our Father, who is holy and righteous. Our lifestyle should be God-centered. Everything we do should be for God's glory. All our thoughts, words, and actions should be God-centered.

What else should we do (v.2)?

Our lifestyle should also be other-oriented. Being God-centered and being other-oriented go hand-in-hand. We are to walk in *agape* love, just as Christ loved and sacrificed himself for us. We are to love and serve others sacrificially. We are to continuously be thinking about others more than ourselves. Christian lifestyle is God-centered and other-oriented, and not self-centered and self-oriented. Just as Christ's life, our lives should be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Read Ephesians 5:3-21

This passage teaches us about behaviors that are and are not God-centered and other-oriented.

What should we not do (v.3)?

All impurity and covetousness includes all sexual thoughts, words, and actions that are not holy and pure. This is not appropriate for God's holy people. We are saints (1:1), and we are to desire purity and holiness.

What should we do and not do (v.4)?

How can we improve our thanksgiving to one another and to God?

People who consistently practice sexually immorality and impurity prove that they do not have a repented heart. They will not enter the holy kingdom of Christ and God (v.5).

What is another warning for us (v.6)?

The world's culture is unholy, unrighteous, and man-centered. We should not be deceived and follow the course of this world (2:2). Instead, we should study much of God's Word and let our minds be filled with God's Word. We need to be able to discern what is of God and what is of this world.

What should we do and not do (v.7-10)?

God calls us to be the light of the world and impact non-believers, so that they too can come to the light of Christ. God does not want us to assimilate with or separate from unbelievers. God wants us to engage and impact their lives with love and with the gospel. This is pleasing to the Lord.

What should we do and not do (v.11-14)?

God will expose what every person has done in his/her life, whether it is done in the darkness or in the light. We should attempt to produce much fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and not be a part of the work of darkness (see also Galatians 5:19-24).

What should we do and not do (v.15-17)?

How can we be wiser and more understanding of the Lord's will?

What should we do and not do (v.18)?

Paul encourages us to be filled with all the fullness of God (3:19), with the fullness of Christ (4:13), and with the Holy Spirit (5:18). Being filled with all the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is what it means to be Christians, so that what is true of our Maker (the Father), our Savior (Christ), and our Sanctifier (the Holy Spirit) is true of us—that we are like the Triune God, who is holy, righteous, loving, and just.

What should we do (v.19-21)?

To worship God on Sundays and to have regular fellowship on the weekdays are parts of the Christian life. We need one another. We cannot be filled with all the fullness of the Triune God if we do not grow and serve one another.

What does it mean to do things out of reverence for Christ (v.21)?

It is in the community of believers, we learn how to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and learn how to walk in love. We need to be imitators of God. Our lifestyle should be God-centered and other-oriented.

Memorize

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Lesson 10 – Christ-Centered and Spouse Oriented Christians

Read Ephesians 5:1-21 for review.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

What is God's command for Christian wives (v.22)?

Why (v.23-24)?

A local church is a collective group of Christian families. Each Christian home is *a small church*, where a family worships, prays, and studies God's Word together. The husband has the role to lead his family in worship and in obedience to God's Word.

When a wife submits to her husband's headship and uses her God-given gifts to help him, she enables her husband to fulfill his responsibility to lead the family according to God's Word. The goal of a wife's submission is helping her husband to be what God wants him to be.

A self-centered and self-oriented wife often times tries to make her husband to be what she wants him to be. A Christ-centered and husband-oriented wife helps her husband to be what God wants him to be, which is to be filled with all the fullness of God. If her husband disobeys God's Word and sins, she must refuse to support his disobedience. She must help him to repent and obey God. Above all, a Christ-centered and husband-oriented wife promotes Christ and Christ-centered living in her home.

What is God's command for Christian husbands (v.25)?

Christian husbands are to follow the example of Christ—to love (*agape*) their wives just as Christ loved (*agape*) the church and sacrifice himself for her.

What does Christ do for the church (v.26-27)?

What is God's command for Christian husbands (v.28)?

A self-centered and self-oriented husband often times tries to make his wife to be what he wants her to be. A Christ-centered and wife-oriented husband helps his wife to be what God wants her to be, which is to be holy, without blemish, and filled with all the fullness of God. It is towards this end that he daily loves his wife and sacrifices himself for her. Her sanctification is his primary responsibility as the head of the house. He is to put her needs above his own needs. This is *agape* love.

What else does Christ do for the church (v.29)?

Paul quoted God's own words in Genesis 2:24 when God instituted marriage. In marriage, God makes a man and a woman become one flesh (v.31). The woman becomes his own flesh (v.29) and members of his body, just as believers become one flesh with Christ and members of his body (v.30).

How should a Christ-centered and wife-oriented husband nourish and cherish his wife as his own flesh?

Biblical marriage is a covenant relationship instituted by God between a man and a woman. In a covenant relationship, two people promise to be faithful regardless of the actions of the other. A covenant is not the same as a contract. A contract is based on limited liability, while a covenant is based on unlimited liability. A contract can be voided by mutual consent, while a covenant cannot be broken regardless circumstances. A covenant is a permanent relationship and commitment. It is a binding promise of love and commitment.

In our modern day, many marriages have become contracts or consumer relationships. People stay in their marriage as long as it benefits them. They leave their marriage when they see that it does not longer benefit them. They are simply consumers. They say, "I will meet your needs as long as you meet my needs. I will make you happy as long as you make me happy. I will love you as long as you love me." This is not a covenant marriage. In a biblical covenant marriage, both the husband and his wife say to each other, "I will meet your needs even though you do not meet my needs. I will cherish you, even though you do not cherish me. I will love you even though you are not loving and being difficult. I will be faithful to you regardless of your actions." A biblical covenant marriage is Christ-centered and spouse-oriented.

What is God's command for Christian husbands and their wives (v.33)?

Christian marriage is for a man and a woman to help each other in their sanctification—to be holy and blameless. When a husband and his wife help each other towards accomplishing this purpose, they will have a great marriage. When they face each other's weaknesses and encounter challenging situations, they see that God is growing them into holiness. Their marriage is a covenant relationship and a sacrificial commitment for the good of each other.

Memorize

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:22, 25).

Lesson 11 – Christ-Centered Children, Parents, Employees, and Employers

Read Ephesians 5:22-33 for review.

Read Ephesians 6:1-4

What is God's command for children (v.1-3)?

Paul calls Christians as saints (1:1). A saint is someone who is *set apart* by God. In chapter 6, Paul addresses the children of Christians, who are also *saints*. Children of believers are holy before God (see also 1 Corinthians 7:14). Believers have a covenant relationship with God. Children born in the holy covenant community of saints are also saints. They are children of the covenant and God sees them as holy. They are under the care of their parents until they are able to respond to God on their own.

Children of the covenant have two major duties: (1) they are to obey their parents in the Lord, and (2) they are to honor their parents as God has commanded in the Ten Commandments. God has given the Ten Commandments for the covenant community of believers, including their children.

What does it mean by *to obey in the Lord*?

God promised the children of Israel that if they obeyed his command, their lives would be well and they would live long in the land that God would bring them to. Paul applies the promise of God to all children of believers, that God will bless them and their lives will be well—primary in the spiritual sense. The well-being of their lives is under the care and protection of God.

All the outward acts of obedience must come from an inward heart of reverence for Christ. Children are to be Christ-centered in their lives.

What is God's command for fathers (v.4)?

What does it mean by *do not provoke your children to anger*?

What does it mean by *to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*?

Parents are sinners and full of weaknesses. They can lose self-control when disciplining their children. They can misuse their authority and fall into sinful pride. Parents are not to simply force their children to be what they want them to be. Parents are to bring them up according to God's Word. Children are not the objects of exercising authority and punishment. Parents must ask God for wisdom, humility, and guidance in parenting their children. Biblical parenting is Christ-centered and child-oriented. Parents must be careful not to fall to their own self-centeredness and provoke their children to anger. Parents need to know how to instruct, discipline, and punish wisely. Parents are to bring their children up with much love, humility, wisdom, and reverence for Christ.

Read Ephesians 6:5-9

Paul did not support nor condemn slavery in this passage. He simply tells Christians how they should live their lives in the society with a Christ-centered mindset. He gives practical help for slaves as Christian workers in particular, but the principles are applied to all Christian employees in general.

What is God's command for Christian employees (v.5-8)?

As employees, whatever we do at work, we do ultimately for the Lord—to honor him and give him glory. We obey our bosses out of reverence for Christ. We render good service with a good will as servants of Christ, because Christ is our ultimate Boss. We try to please Christ by being good employees for our bosses. The outward acts of service must come from an inward heart of reverence for Christ.

Because Christ is our ultimate Boss, this brings significant implications.

1. Whatever our job position is, we have dignity in him. Either we work as managers or janitors, we have dignity in Christ. Christ himself worked as a servant.
2. We always have comfort in Christ, even if we have bad bosses. Because everything we do at work is ultimately for Christ, nothing will be in vain (v.8, see also 1 Corinthians 15:58).
3. We must try to be good and diligent employees, rendering good service. Our bosses cannot watch us all the time, but Christ does. Because we ultimately work for Christ, we want to do our best for him, who loves us and has sacrificed himself for us.

With Christ-centered mindset, Christians can be very productive employees. We are empowered to work well with a heart that has been changed by Christ.

What is God's command for Christian employers (v.9)?

Christian employers also need to be Christ-centered. They need to know how to use their authority properly out of reverence for Christ. They also work for Christ—their Boss—who is also their employees' Boss. Christ shows no partiality. He treats every person equally.

With Christ-centered mindset, Christians can be very good employers. They can be kind and treat every worker with dignity, no matter what their job position is. They can be inspiring and empowering employers to their subordinates. They can render good service to their subordinates and bring good productivity to the work place.

Memorize

“... as servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord ...” (Ephesians 6:6-8).

Lesson 12 – Our Spiritual Battles and Our Armor

Read Ephesians 6:1-9 for review.

Read Ephesians 6:10-12

Paul encourages us to *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might* (v.10).

What does it mean?

Our lives are in constant spiritual battles. We are to put the whole armor of God, so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil (v.12).

What are *the schemes of the devil*?

We have three enemies:

1. The flesh—our sinful nature that is still attached to our body.
2. The world—this corrupted world gives us many temptations, especially about sex, money, and power.
3. The devil—he uses our sinful nature and this world to deceive us and make us fall into sin. Jesus says the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

Paul tells us that our spiritual war is not *only* against our flesh, but also against the spiritual forces of evil—the devil and his demons (the evil spirits). They are real, and therefore we must be ready all the time to fight our battles. Spiritual battles against the evil spirits are real in every day of our lives. We should not take this lightly but seriously.

Read Ephesians 6:13-24

How can we stand firm in the daily spiritual battles against the devil (v.13)?

The next few verses describe our spiritual armor that we have to wear in order to win our spiritual battles. The background of the text is a Roman soldier's armor.

What is the significance of *the belt of truth* (v.14)?

A Roman soldier used a belt to gather his garments and to hold his sword. When he tightened his belt, he felt confidence. Our confidence is in the truth of God's word and in being truthful in him.

What is the significance of *the breastplate of righteousness* (v.14)?

We are justified and declared righteous because God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to us. In order to defeat the devil, we have to continuously live in righteousness. The breastplate protects our

hearts. The righteousness of Christ that we have received from God and our daily growth in it protect our hearts from the attacks of the devil.

What is the significance of *the shoes of the gospel of peace* (v.15)?

Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ...” (Romans 1:16). We should always be ready to share the gospel that brings peace to those who believe.

What is the significance of *the shield of faith* (v.16)?

A Roman soldier’s shield was large enough to cover his whole body to protect him from arrows. He could also use his shield along with other soldiers’ shields to build a defensive wall. Likewise, our faith in Christ can protect us individually, and together we can build a great defensive wall to protect the church against the devil’s *flaming darts* and schemes.

What is the significance of *the helmet of salvation* (v.17)?

The helmet protects our minds. We can protect our minds from the devil’s temptation by having assurance of our salvation. God will make our salvation complete on the day of Christ (Philippians 1:6).

What is the significance of *the sword of the Spirit—the word of God* (v.17)?

The whole Bible is the Word of God. Jesus defeated the devil’s temptations by using specific words of God. Likewise, we need to study the whole scripture and to memorize many scriptures, so we can use them to defeat different temptations from the devil.

What is the significance of prayer (v.18)?

How do we *keep alert with all perseverance* (v.18)?

Paul reminds us that in the midst of our daily spiritual battles, the love and grace of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ is always with us. God always strengthens our faith (v.23-24). God sanctifies us and fills us with all his fullness. He will complete our salvation and glorify us. To this end, we should keep alert with all perseverance and should pray continuously for one another.

Memorize

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Resources

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