



EPHESIANS

becoming
who we are

bible study guide

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Ephesus was an important city in Western Asia Minor (Turkey) due to it being a major trade and commercial centre. Paul spent three years with the church in Ephesus and writes this letter to them during his imprisonment. It is a carefully composed and deeply reflective letter focussed on Jesus Christ and the Church. Unlike Paul's other letters which were generally written in response to false teaching or conflict, this letter is a positive theological reflection by Paul on all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ and our response to that. For this reason, it is believed that this letter to Ephesus was circulated around many churches, being equally relevant wherever it was read.

Pauls' letter to Ephesus remains equally relevant to the congregations of Parramatta Baptist Church today. At times you will notice the cultural differences that exist between then and now, but those differences do not change the thrust of Paul's letter. God in his great kindness has blessed us in every way in Christ Jesus, and we in turn respond by living a life of humility, gentleness, patience and above all, love. We are to "grow up" into Christ.

This booklet accompanies the 9 sermons and provides questions for reflection based on the previous Sunday's sermon. Our desire is that we would move beyond a theoretical discussion of the passages. Paul wrote this letter not simply to expand our knowledge of the Triune God. His intention was that this knowledge of who God is and what he has done for us in Christ would transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. That we would live out the grace, truth, faith, love and hope planted within us by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives, including in the church, in our family and in our workplace.

As we have said before, this is both God's work and ours. It is God who is at work in our lives through His Holy Spirit. Yet we are called to join in this work by setting our heart and mind on Christ, allowing them to be transformed. May the testimonies that we share and the lives that we live be to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:1-14. We are Eternally Blessed

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon from May 5.

To start with

Share an attribute of God (for example, his love, forgiveness, faithfulness, kindness, etc) that you often find yourself thankful for and the reason for that.

Reflect

Paul's letter begins with praise and blessing for what God has done in Christ Jesus. This phrase, "in Christ" appears 12 times in these opening verses (in the Greek). Read through the passage and note each occasion that Paul uses this phrase. What impact does Paul's repeated use of "in Christ" have on you?

Verses 3-4 serve as a summary to the whole letter. What has God done and for what purpose?

Verses 5-8a serve as an introduction to chapters 1-3, explaining how God has blessed and chosen us in Christ. What key words and phrases does Paul use to unpack the depth of our salvation in Christ? Discuss the rich meanings and implications of these words and phrases.

Verses 8b-14 then serve as an introduction to chapters 4-6 as Paul explains God's plan for us and for eternity. Again, identify the key words and phrases that Paul uses and discuss their meaning and significance.

How many "spiritual blessings" can you identify in this passage?

What does this passage reveal to us about the reality of who God is?

Because of what God has done for us in Christ, what is the reality of who we are?

Respond

In verses 3-14, Paul has used 5 key words in to describe what it means to follow Jesus: grace, truth, faith, love and hope. What would it look like for you to not only *understand* these words, but to *experience the reality* of them being lived out in your life?

Spend time in praise and prayer, thanking God for the blessings that he has blessed us with in Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-10. We are Spiritually Alive

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on May 12.

To start with

Share one thing from your life where you have experienced real and significant change from what you once were because of your faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Reflect

This passage begins with Paul saying “you (all) were”. Then there is an abrupt change in verse 4, beginning with “But”. What is confronting about the way in which Paul describes what we were, ie dead?

Paul describes 3 negative influences on our lives: the world, Satan and the flesh. How did each of these influence our lives?

Verses 4 and 5 signal a dramatic change. What words does Paul use to describe the character and the motivation of God?

Paul refers to grace in verse 5 and then comes back to it again in verse 8. What is his intention in emphasizing this?

Notice that Paul consistently uses the past tense in describing our salvation in verses 5 and 6. We were “made alive”, God “raised us up” and “seated us with him”. What is the significance of these verbs being in the past tense when it comes to understanding our identity in Christ?

Verses 8 and 9 capture beautifully what Paul has been saying about God’s great love, his rich mercy and his kindness toward us. What assurance do these words provide regarding our salvation?

How does verse 10 bring clarity to verses 8 and 9?

Respond

We are “new creations” in Christ Jesus. Paul contrasts our old life of living in the influence of the world/Satan/flesh with the new life of being made alive with Christ and raised up with Christ. Spend time asking the Spirit to increasingly lead you in walking in the newness of this identity.

We are not saved by works. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Ask the Lord for opportunities this week to live out this calling.

Ephesians 2:11 – 3:13. We are Reconciled

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on May 19.

To start with

Human history is littered with instances of “us and them” – Slave and Free, Catholic and Protestant, White and Black, Hutu and Tutsi. In Paul’s world, it was Jew and Gentile. Can you identify any contemporary examples? Why is the temptation to divide people into “us and them” so strong?

Reflect

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Paul, addressing Gentile converts, asks them to remember what they were. Not only were they derided by the Jews as the “uncircumcised”, but their spiritual condition was dire. What are the 5 phrases that Paul uses to describe their former condition?

In verse 13 there is another “but”. What follows is a description of their (and our) new spiritual condition. Using verses 13-22, finish these phrases:

No longer separated, but...

No longer hostility, but...

No longer excluded, but...

No longer foreigners, but...

No longer without hope, but...

No longer without God, but...

What point is Paul making about the nature of the church?

What are the implications when he says that Christ has set aside the law with its commands and regulations?

Read Ephesians 3:1-13. Why at this point does Paul pause to speak of (defend?) his ministry calling?

Respond

Verse 22 describes the church as the dwelling place in which God lives by His Spirit. How does this challenge or affirm your views and attitudes toward the Christian church as a whole?

Are there Christians that you personally need to seek reconciliation with?

Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21. We are Loved

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on May 26.

To start with

“I keep asking” (1:17). At the beginning of this year we encouraged people to commit to praying for God’s transforming presence in the life of someone else. If you put your name on the “soil”, how has that commitment gone?

Reflect

Read the 2 prayers. Paul begins both with the phrase “For this reason...” What were the reasons that drove Paul to his knees to keep asking?

In his prayers, Paul asks that they would “know” (or grasp) a number of things. What were those things and why is the knowledge of those things so important for the Christians in Ephesus and for us?

In both prayers, Paul speaks of the Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit and the work of each of them in our lives. How might this shape or change the way you currently pray?

In both prayers, Paul also speaks of and prays for “power”. What is the nature and purpose of this power in the lives of those he prays for and for us?

Paul’s prayers refer to the past, to the present and to the future. How does this pattern of prayer encourage us to persevere in praying?

Both prayers finish with a declaration of the majesty, power and authority of our Triune God. Why does the context of Paul’s letter bring an added layer of depth to the way he finishes his prayer? What encouragement is that for us?

Respond

Select one (or more) of the themes from Paul’s prayer and pray them either for yourself, or if you are in a group, for each other. Finish by declaring the power and authority of God over all things, both now and forever.

Ephesians 4:1-16. Living as One Body

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on June 2.

To start with

What is one attribute from your childhood or youth do you wish you still had?

What is one attribute are you thankful that you have grown out of?

Reflect

In chapter 4, Paul moves from declaring what God has done for us in Christ to our response. In verse 1 he urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. From what you have read in chapters 1-3, what is that calling?

What are the characteristics that Paul calls for and how do they contribute toward keeping the unity of the Spirit?

What point is Paul making when he refers to seven “ones” in verses 4-6?

In verses 7-13, Paul uses the image of a conquering hero who distributes gifts to his people. What 5 gifts does Paul say that Christ has given to his people? How do you understand each of these gifts?

For what purpose does Christ give these gifts?

What description does Paul give of what spiritual maturity (or growing up into Christ) looks like as opposed to spiritual infancy? How does spiritual maturity express itself in the Christian church of 2019 (think of specific ways).

The city of Ephesus was diverse culturally and ethnically and it is safe to presume that the church reflected that diversity. Further, Paul describes a diversity of gifts that are given to the church. What is needed for the church to hold both unity and diversity simultaneously? Where have you seen this done well, or perhaps not so well?

Respond

Think of one specific aspect of your life where you need to grow in spiritual maturity. What are the things that you can do (or cease doing) to facilitate the work of the Spirit in this area? Is there someone you can make yourself accountable to in this and who might pray for you?

Ephesians 4:17-32. Living as New Creations

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on June 9.

To start with

It has been said that there are 3 dimensions to Christianity: belief, behaviour and belonging. If you were to arrange these in order of importance, which would come first? Last? Why?

Reflect

Paul continues to unpack what a “life worthy of the calling” looks like. In verses 17-19 he draws a sharp distinction between their old life as Gentile unbelievers and their new self. Regarding their old self, what effect does their condition have on the head, heart and hands?

In verses 20-24, Paul contrasts their old self with what they learned and were taught by using the metaphor “put off” and “put on”. He begins not with specific behaviours but by referring to desire and attitude. Why are these of primary importance in seeking “true righteousness and holiness”?

In verses 25-32 Paul addresses specific behaviours. For most of these, Paul says what should be “put off” and what should be “put on” in its place. Discuss each behaviour to be put off and the corresponding behaviour Paul says (or implies) should replace it. What outcome is Paul desiring to see in the church as a result?

What do you think Paul means when he instructs us not to grieve the Holy Spirit?

Rather than read this passage as insisting solely on good *behaviour*, what does Paul instruct that also impacts upon our *belief* and *belonging*? Why must we hold these three dimensions together?

Respond

Last week I asked that you consider one specific aspect of your life where you need to grow in spiritual maturity. What steps did you take in the past week regarding this?

Did this passage bring any light on areas where your desire, attitude or behaviour is destructive to your relationship with God or other people? If so, join with the Holy Spirit in putting it off and allow him to replace it with something new.

Ephesians 5:1-20. Living as Children of the Light

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on June 16.

To start with

Is Israel Folau justified in expressing his beliefs about the fate of sinners on Instagram? (Google 'Israel Folau post' if you're confused by my question)

Reflect

Chapter 5 flows directly on from last week. What positive instructions does Paul give that tie together what we discussed last week with what he will go on to say? Why is his description of who we are so important?

In verse 3 there's another "but", but this time it signals a shift to Paul urging Christians to completely shun specific behaviours. As you read through to verse 7, does anything strike you? Why is greed considered idolatry?

If the kingdom is about grace, then why would our deeds disqualify our inheritance in the kingdom (v5)? The answer comes in verses 8-14 where Paul comes back to our identity using the metaphor of light and darkness. What is our identity and what is the fruit of that identity?

Verses 15-20 serve to continue the point that how we live out our new identity matters. Paul begins by warning us to be careful how we live. In the Greek it is literally 'watch carefully where you walk'. He then unpacks how to walk carefully:

- Live wisely, redeeming the (making the most of) time;
- Don't be foolish but understand the Lord's will;
- Don't get drunk on wine but be filled with the Spirit.

What does a life lived wisely look like?

What does a life filled with the Spirit look like? (Big hint – verses 18-23 are all the one sentence in the Greek. Ignore the full stops and paragraphs in your English translations).

Respond

Read verses 18-20 repeatedly throughout this week. They portray a beautiful picture of worship, joy, thankfulness and deep relationships. Pray that you would be filled with the Spirit in such a way that these are expressed in and through your life this week.

Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Living Rightly in Relationships

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on June 23.

To start with

When you hear the word “submission”, what do you think of?

Reflect

Ephesians 5:18-23 is a single sentence describing what being “filled with the Spirit” looks like. When you read it as a single coherent unit, how does it impact the way in which you understand what Paul is saying about submission?

Understanding the prevailing culture that this passage was written in is essential. There were 3 foundational sets of relationships governed by strict codes: Husband and wife; Father and child; Master and slave. The Husband/Father/Master held almost unrestricted power in these relationships. How does this impact your reading of this passage?

Why would submitting to one another be so difficult for 1st century believers?

With respect to the relationship between husband and wife, what does Paul instruct? Does this reinforce or reinvent the nature of their relationship?

What arguments does Paul use to explain this?

How is mutual submission between a father and his children to be expressed in the Christian household according to Paul?

How is mutual submission between a master and his slaves to be expressed in the Christian household according to Paul?

Read Galatians 3:28. What truth that has existed from creation and fulfilled by Jesus Christ has Paul grasped?

Respond

Consider how your relationships, be that marriage, family or friendship, can better reflect the submission and self-giving love that Paul urges us live by.

Ephesians 6:10-24. Living in Spiritual Victory

Write down any reflections coming out of the sermon on June 30.

To start with

Has there been a time when you have experienced something that you could only explain as a spiritual attack? Share if you are able to.

Reflect

What does Paul's opening sentence reveal about his understanding of God and Paul's relationship with him in Christ? Why is that so poignant, given his context?

In the first 4 verses Paul urges us to "stand" numerous times. What does it mean to stand against the schemes of the devil? What are those schemes?

Paul uses the metaphor of armour to describe how we stand. What are the pieces he describes and how do each of those pieces serve to help us stand?

There is only one weapon that Paul describes. How is the word of God like a sword? Can you think of places in scripture where the word of God is used against the devil?

Although Paul has finished with the armour metaphor, he leaves us in no doubt that prayer is essential to being able to stand firm. From verse 18, what sense do we get of Paul's approach to prayer?

What do you notice in verses 19-20 about what Paul requests that they pray for? What doesn't he ask for? How does this encourage or challenge your own commitment to pray throughout this year?

Respond

As we finish the letter to the church at Ephesus, look back over your notes and reflections. What truth or revelation has struck you most about your identity in Christ?

What has struck you most about God's purpose and plan for his Church?

What is one thing that has been transformed, or is in the process of being transformed by the work of the Spirit as you have read through the letter?