



EPHESIANS

AN EIGHT-WEEK BIBLE STUDY



INTRODUCTION

Disunity. Tribalism. Fierce division across cultural, ethnic, and religious lines. Alienation from those around us.

Sound familiar?

These issues are found deeply embedded in our culture today, and yet they are not unique to us. Two millennia ago, these very issues were at the center of culture in Ephesus, and were the focus of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. In this letter, we find disunity and alienation pervading not only their relationships with one another, but with God Himself. In fact it is this chief disunity, this alienation between God and humanity that has caused the ripple effect of division that they saw in their culture and that we continue to see today.

The beauty of Ephesians is not found in its common issues with our culture, but in its declaration that God has brought an end to these issues through the work of Christ! Where there was disunity with God, there can now be unity because of Christ. Where there was alienation, there can now be reconciliation. Where there was a ripple effect of division, there can now be a ripple effect of restoration!

STUDY OUTLINE

RIGHT THINKING

WEEK 1
EVERY BLESSING

WEEK 2
**INCOMPARABLE
POWER**

WEEK 3
DEATH TO LIFE

WEEK 4
A NEW HUMANITY

RIGHT LIVING

WEEK 5
MATURE IN CHRIST

WEEK 6
**OUT WITH THE OLD,
IN WITH THE NEW**

WEEK 7
CHILDREN OF LIGHT


WEEK 8
READY FOR BATTLE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Unity. Christ died 'to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth'. (Eph 1:10) Unity is at the heart of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, but if we fail to see the depth of disunity that Paul is addressing, the fullness of unity that Christ brings will be lost on us. In other words, we must understand the context in which this letter is written. The first two questions to be asked involve the author and his or her recipients, and they find their answers in verse 1 of chapter 1:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1)

The Author: Paul the Apostle

Christianity was birthed out of Judaism. Jesus claimed to be the Christ ('Anointed One'), a leader prophesied by many in the Old Testament that was to come and free the Jewish people from their oppressors and restore them back into right standing with God. In Jesus' day, the most obvious oppressors were the Romans, and so many thought the Christ would be a great military leader to overthrow Rome. However, Jesus pointed to a much deeper oppression, the oppression of our souls under the weight of our sin. What the Jewish people desperately needed (and humanity as a whole), was not a powerful leader, but a merciful savior! And Jesus came to be this savior for us. 

After His death and resurrection, many Jews came to believe that He truly was the Christ, and yet many still rejected Him. This meant that Jewish people were both Christianity's first converts and first persecutors. Paul, the author of the letter to the Ephesians, fell into this latter category. He grew up studying under Gamaliel, a prominent Jewish rabbi, and persecuted Christians until he himself had a dramatic conversion experience. It was on his way to Damascus where suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed all around Paul, blinding him. In the midst of this light, he heard the voice of the Lord say, "Why do you persecute Me?" He was then led by the hand to Damascus where Ananias, a follower of Jesus, restored his sight by the power of God. That day Paul's eyes were opened in more ways than one! He went from killing Christians to being willing to die as one! God had chosen Paul for a special role, to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people), and over the course of his ministry, he traveled all over the Roman provinces sharing the Good news of the Kingdom of God with all who would hear. Paul's missionary work led to the planting of many multiethnic churches consisting of people from every corner of Roman society, both Jew and Gentile. Ephesus was home to many of those multiethnic churches, and it is to Ephesus that we now turn.

The Recipients: The Churches in Ephesus

Anglican theologian John Stott says this of Ephesus in his commentary on Ephesians:

"Originally a Greek colony, Ephesus was now the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a busy commercial port. It was also the headquarters of the cult of the goddess Diana (or Artemis) whose temple, after being destroyed in the middle of the fourth century BC, had gradually been rebuilt to become one of the seven wonders of the world. Indeed, the success of Paul's mission in Ephesus had so threatened the sale of silver models of her temple that the silversmiths had stirred up a public outcry." (The Message of Ephesians, pg. 23)

Ephesus was one of the most prominent cities in Asia minor and a wealthy port city. Because of its location among several key land routes, its port, and its temple of Artemis, Ephesus was a busy city full of economic, ethnic, and spiritual diversity.

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent three years in Ephesus preaching the Gospel. Much of his time there is outlined in Acts 19 of which a few passages will aid us in our study.

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. **9** But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. **10** This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. (Acts 19:8-10)

Although Paul was initially met with stubbornness by some of the Jews in Ephesus, he found great receptivity in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. So much so that he spent two years in Ephesus preaching the Gospel which led to many, both Jews and Gentiles, believing in Jesus all throughout the province of Asia.

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, **12** so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them...**18** Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. **19** A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. **20** In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:11-12, 18-20)

The great receptivity of the people coupled with powerful miracles attesting to Paul's message led to people from all different types of backgrounds coming to know Jesus. In this passage we see the sick and the possessed being healed and delivered, those practicing witchcraft and various occult practices giving up their old ways of life, and even the wealthy acknowledging God, for the value of the scrolls burned came out to 50,000 days wages!



There are two conclusions that we can make about the culture of the church in Ephesus that will help us read Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

TWO CONCLUSIONS ON CULTURE

Ethnic Diversity

The church in Ephesus was multiethnic *despite* the deep prejudices that existed at the time. Jews criticized Gentiles for being immoral and without God, and Gentiles criticized Jews for being arrogant and narrow minded. Jewish Christians were tempted to feel superior since Jesus came first to the Jews, and Christianity came out of Judaism (see above). On the other hand, Gentile Christians were coming into the faith in droves and the ongoing persecution of Jews by Rome could have led many Gentile Christians to distance themselves from any Jewish relations. The success of Paul's ministry in Ephesus led to many people from many different backgrounds coming into community with one another rather quickly. It is in the midst of these temptations that Paul urges the churches in Ephesus towards unity.

Spiritual Curiosity

The church in Ephesus was planted in the midst of a culture that was highly spiritual. There was a great openness and curiosity to spiritual things in Ephesus. It is perhaps for this reason that Paul speaks with such cosmic language in his letter to the Ephesians. It is in this letter where the church is first seen, not just as a local body of believers, but as a universal society of both Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of the church as transcendent; believers are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms far above all principalities and powers. It is remarkable to know that Paul, even while imprisoned in Rome at the time, weaves these themes of the supremacy of Christ and the power made available to believers into his letter to the Ephesians.



THE NEXT 8 WEEKS

Paul's letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 focus on exposition, the teaching of doctrine in which Paul challenges us to think rightly about God, ourselves, and one another. Chapters 4-6 focus on exhortation, the teaching of practice in which Paul challenges us to act rightly in our relationships. In the first half, Paul urges us towards unity by describing God's purposes for us in Christ. In the second half, Paul urges us towards purity, as a response to and preservation of what God has done for us in Christ.

John Stott again sums it up well in his commentary on Ephesians:

"The whole letter is thus a magnificent combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, Christian faith and Christian life, what God has done through Christ and what we must be and do in consequence. (The Message of Ephesians, pg. 25)

This study will mirror this division with the first 4 weeks going over the first 3 chapters while focusing on right thinking, and the last 4 weeks going over the last 3 chapters while focusing on right practice or living.

Every Blessing

1

Ephesians 1:3-14

After his usual greeting, Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with 12 verses that, in the original Greek, constitute one long, complex sentence! But it is hard to blame Paul for not being more succinct when we consider the topic he is trying to address: the blessings of God in Christ. He begins with the assertion that God has blessed us with 'every spiritual blessing' and then spends the next 11 verses describing what those blessings are. In it we get a beautiful picture of who God is and what He has done for us. It is within this hymn of praise that we see God's purpose in Christ revealed, 'to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth'.

Does God 'predestine' some for salvation and others for damnation? Verses 4, 5, and 11 speak of those who believe as being 'chosen' and 'predestined' by God which has caused many to wrestle with the sovereignty of God (His right to exercise His rule and authority over creation), and how it relates to our own free choice as human beings. However, God's choosing of us does not supersede our free choice of Him, it merely *precedes* that choice. Before you ever chose to follow Christ, He predestined (or determined beforehand) to choose you in love! God's choice does not diminish or negate humanity's choice, but instead reveals that His intentions towards us are kind and that His character is one of grace and mercy. It is a misunderstanding of the Gospel message that causes one to choose Christ, hoping that one day their work for God may dissuade His hostility towards him or her. This would be far from good news! It is God's loving choice of humanity, made possible by the work of Christ, that has allowed us the opportunity to choose Him in return!

Many verbs are used to describe God's action towards us. He **chooses** (vs. 4), **adopts** (vs. 5), **redeems** and **forgives** (vs. 7), but all of these various actions seem to point to one ultimate purpose, to bring **unity** to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ (vs. 10).

Paul spends the next 4 verses illustrating God's uniting work with the forming of a new community consisting of both Jews (vs. 12 - *we, who were first to believe*) and Gentiles (vs. 13 - *you also*).

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, **9** he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment — to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- How does this passage describe God and his actions towards humanity? How does this passage describe humanity as recipients of God's blessings?
- What does this passage reveal about human dignity and the type of relationship God wants to have with us?
- Paul introduces a major theme of his letter in verse 10, that Jesus Christ came to 'bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth'. Why is unity central to God's heart for His creation? What disunity is God aiming to resolve?

APPLICATION

- How does this passage challenge your current understanding of God's character and heart towards you? What is one way you can bring your understanding of God more in line with who He truly is?
- What sources of disunity existed between you and God? How has He brought unity to disunity in His relationship with you?



God has blessed us abundantly in Christ, and He wants to use us as a conduit of blessing for others. As a core group or as individuals, choose one way you can be a blessing to someone else this week!

This could be individual things like giving a small gift to a suitemate or helping someone with their problem set, or communal things like volunteering to welcome students at Chi Alpha Live or making food for another core group! Be creative!

Incomparable Power

2

Ephesians 1:15-23

Last week, we saw that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing by choosing us, adopting us, redeeming us, and forgiving us all for the purpose of restoring unity to His creation. After pondering these blessings, Paul is led to pray for the Ephesians that they may know God better. His prayer focuses on three things: calling, inheritance, and power. Our calling brings memories of when we first gave our lives to God and the hope that filled our hearts. Our inheritance casts our eyes to what lies ahead of us in eternity. But what about power? The power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly realms, this power now fills this new united community called His church, and it is able to lead us from the hope of our calling to our inheritance in eternity.

Paul often speaks of God in trinitarian language throughout his letter. Last week we saw God the Father choose and adopt (vs. 4-5), God the Son redeem by His blood (vs. 7), and God the Holy Spirit filling us as a seal of our inheritance (vs. 13-14). In our passage this week, Paul asks that 'the God of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the glorious *Father*, may give you the *Spirit of wisdom*'. Paul is intentional to illustrate that God exists as a community of unity in diversity, and it is this very community that we have been invited into.

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, **16** I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. **17** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. **18** I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20** he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. **22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- We often think of our salvation in terms of us calling out to God, and yet it was God first calling out to us. What hope does God's calling fill your life with?
- Paul speaks of the 'riches of His glorious inheritance' which seems to speak of some future fulfillment to be expected and anticipated. What inheritance is Paul talking about?
- According to verses, 20-23, in what ways is God's power displayed in Christ?

APPLICATION

- Paul wants the Ephesians to know God *better*. What is one way you have grown deeper in your knowledge of the character of God? What is one characteristic of God that you are understanding and experiencing in new depths?
- How have you seen God's power at work in the world? In your community? In your own life?



God's incomparably great power fills His church! Share one way you would want to see God's power at work in your core group. Some ways God's power can be at work in your core group include:

- Bringing peace to stress, anxiety, or hopelessness.
- Filling you with passion for God where there was once apathy.
- Allowing forgiveness to replace bitterness and resentment.
- Providing healing to those who are in need emotionally or physically.

This is by no means a comprehensive list! Whatever you decide, commit to pray every day this week for God's power to be seen and how God may be asking you to participate in its fulfillment.

Death to Life

3

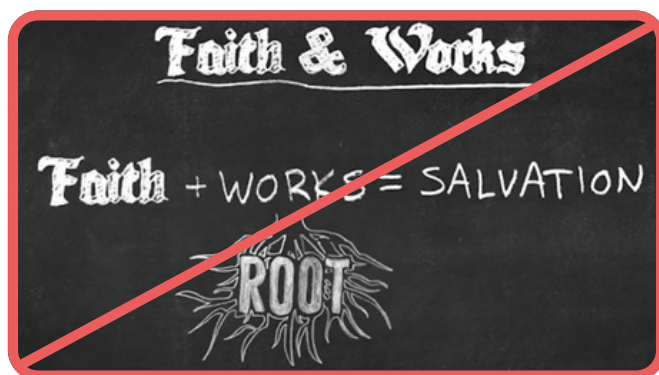
Ephesians 2:1-10

Dead. Not exactly a compliment, and yet this is how Paul describes the state of the Ephesian believers' souls before Christ. One of the clearest representations of the Gospel happens to be our passage this week, and when we notice its intimate connection with last week's passage, we begin to understand why it starts with death. Paul had just finished describing God's incomparable power displayed in Christ by Him being raised from the dead and having victory over sin and how that power is able to do the same for us. This is good news if we believe that we are in need of new life, and indeed we are, so Paul begins with death. Death is a friend of sin, and sin has found its home in every human heart. We think, say and do things we regret, hurt those we love, and are hurt by those we love. Sin and death pervade everything, but this is why Jesus came! Through His death on the cross, Jesus redeemed humanity, paying the price for their sins and purchasing their freedom from sin and its consequences. What we see in this passage is that Jesus' death brings us new life, but only if we first confess our need. For if Christ is to bring us life, we must lack it in some meaningful way. It is those who acknowledge the death within them that experience the life-giving power that Jesus has, or as He says Himself in Mark 2:17: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

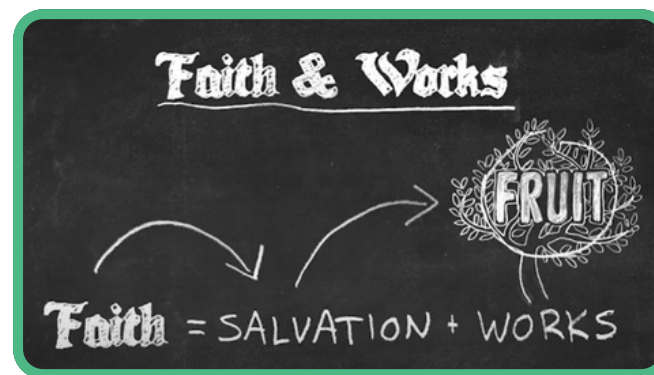
Both Faith (belief in God's saving grace) and Works (doing the right thing) are necessary aspects of the Christian walk, but how do they relate to our salvation? If I simply believe that Jesus died for my sins, does that give me freedom to live however I want? If God expects me to live in accordance with what is good, does that mean I am not saved until I live up to His standard?

Jesus taught that we cannot *earn* our salvation, it is freely given in response to our faith in Him. At the same time, when we are saved, we are changed in a very real way!



Many people believe that if we have faith in God AND we live good enough lives, God will save us. This puts works as part of the root or cause of our salvation. But this is not how Paul explains the Gospel in our passage today.

Instead, it is faith in Jesus' work on the cross that saves us and makes us new. When we are saved, we are changed in a very real way and want to serve God out of love and gratitude. The Gospel shows that works are the fruit of our salvation. In other words, our salvation is the cause of our good deeds.



1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. **4** But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. **6** And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, **7** in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – **9** not by works, so that no one can boast. **10** For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- What does the passage teach us about the spiritual condition of humanity apart from Christ? After Christ?
- What motivated God to save us?
- If good works did not merit (or earn) our salvation, what role do they play in the believer's life?

APPLICATION

- Paul describes an amazing transformation that happens in the life of a believer. By faith in Jesus, they go from death to life! How have you seen God bring life to you? In what areas of your life do you see Him currently bringing transformation?
- We are saved by grace through faith apart from works, and yet it is so easy to believe we need to earn God's favor. In what ways do you still seek to earn God's salvation and kindness towards you?



In this passage, we see that God did not just save us *from* our sin but *for* good works. He has called us out of an old way of life and into a new one in which His plans for us are good.

Reflect this week on what God has saved you from. This could include destructive habits or ideas, hopelessness, a loss of purpose or identity, or an unhealthy relationship with someone or something. Write those things down, and praise Him for His work in your life!

Then, reflect on and write down what God has saved you for. This could include seeing yourself in a healthy light, loving others well, serving those in need, or being generous with your resources. Choose one way that He is leading you to walk in newness of life and share it with a friend.

A New Humanity

Ephesians 2:11-22

Our passage this week concludes Paul's discourse of God's power displayed in Christ. He started with a prayer that the Ephesians would know 'God's power toward us who believe'. This power was the same power displayed in Christ when He rose from the dead and defeated sin. But what must we believe if we are to see God's power in us? Last week, we answered that question by seeing that through His death on the cross, Jesus redeemed humanity, paying the price for their sins. When we acknowledge the sin within us and believe that Jesus' death can bring us life, God's power is displayed in us in the same manner as it was in Christ: We are raised from the dead and the power of sin is defeated in our lives. In summary, we are reconciled to God and brought back into unity with Him. This week, Paul takes it one step further and shows how in Christ, God has made the church, both Jew and Gentile, into one new, unified community. If last week's focus was on God reconciling us with Himself, this week's focus is on God reconciling us with one another.

Paul begins by briefly describing the sources of division that existed between the Jews and Gentiles. They were divided socially, ethnically, and religiously, and these divisions ultimately stemmed from God's covenant law with Israel. This law, often broken into three parts - civil, ceremonial, and moral, formed Israel as a nation and guided their decision making. The neglect of the civil and ceremonial aspects of the law by the Gentile community brought division with the Jewish community, and the breaking of the moral aspects of the law brought division with God as well. However, a look back to last week's passage will show that God's moral law has been broken by both Gentile and Jew alike. All are condemned, but by Jesus' blood, all have the opportunity to be redeemed and given new life. Jesus fulfilled the law and thus set it aside, allowing both Jew and Gentile to be reconciled to one another and to God. The result? A new humanity in unity with God.

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) – **12** remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, **15** by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, **16** and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- What division existed between the Jews and Gentiles? How did Jesus destroy the barrier?
- Jesus created in Himself *one new humanity*, giving us a new identity. How does this lead to unity?

APPLICATION

- Jesus destroyed the barriers and dividing walls of hostility. How have you seen Jesus bring unity to division within your life or community?
- In Christ, everyone has a place at the table, and no one is a stranger in His house. This leads to a wildly diverse community! What benefits come from being in community with those that are different from you? How might it help expand your understanding of God?



God cares deeply about unity and peace. How are you adding to unity or peace within your community? What is one way your core group could exemplify unity this week?

Mature in Christ

5

Ephesians 4:1-16

This week, Paul begins his exhortation section of the letter where he instructs the Ephesians on how to live in light of all that he has just said. He begins by urging them to live a 'life worthy of the calling you have received' (vs. 1), and then gives some practical examples. These include loving well, maintaining unity, using the diversity of your giftings, and ultimately walking towards maturity all in the context of community.

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. **8** This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

9 (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? **10** He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- What are some examples Paul gives of living a 'life worthy of the calling you have received' (vs. 1)?
- We are called to unity, but Christ has made us incredibly diverse and given us all unique gifts. What is the purpose of our diversity?
- Paul urges the Ephesians to become mature in Christ rather than being an infant, tossed back and forth by the waves. How does immaturity and maturity manifest in a believer's faith, speech, actions, thoughts, or relationships?

APPLICATION

- We all make up the body of Christ and every supporting ligament has a part to play. What gifts has God given you, and how can you use them to build up others in love? What God given gifts do you see in others in your core group, and how do they build you up?
- Are you actively growing towards maturity in your faith? How can you take a step towards maturity?



Paul speaks of the life of the believer as rooted in community. It is only in community that we can experience unity, express our giftings, and progress from infants to mature in Christ. Is Biblical community a central part of your life? How might God be leading you to commit to or invest in your community? This could include:

- Being faithful to attend core group or Chi Alpha Live consistently.
- Inviting others into the community.
- Serving your core group or Chi Alpha with your talents or resources.



Out With
the Old,
In With
the New

Ephesians 4:17-32

Our passage this week is full of practical examples of Christian living. Paul builds off of the foundation he laid in chapter 2, that Christ has united Jews and Gentiles and made them into a new humanity. In the following verses, Paul now compares and contrasts the old life Jesus has called the Ephesians out of and the new life Jesus has brought the Ephesians into.

In the midst of Paul describing the new life that Jesus has called the Ephesians into, he pleads with them not to 'grieve the Holy Spirit of God' (vs. 30). In a passage focused so much on doing the right thing, Paul reminds us that our choices are always made in the context of community. Disobeying God is not harmful simply because we ought to obey Him, but because His laws outline what healthy, loving relationships look like. When we choose to live contrary to how God has called us to live, our relationships with God, others and ourselves suffer. This brokenness brought on by our choices grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Obedience to God is thus motivated not by legalism or fear, but by love.

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. **18** They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. **19** Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned **21** when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. **22** You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **23** to be made new in the attitude of your minds; **24** and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. **28** Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- What are some characteristics of the “old self”?
- Why does Jesus command a new way of life?
- What does it mean to be angry and yet not sin? How does prolonged anger give the devil a foothold in your life?

APPLICATION

- Reflect on your own life before encountering Christ and the changes that have taken place since then. What are some specific ways in which your life has been transformed by your relationship with Christ? This might look like overcoming certain harmful habits or sins, broken relationships being restored, or finding peace and trust in areas of your life that were once characterized by stress and anxiety.
- Verses 25-32 are filled with practical examples of what the “new self”, the life God has designed us to live, looks like. In what ways do you struggle to live the way Christ has made you to live? How can you let God transform that area of your life?



We are called to ‘not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen’. (vs. 29) God cares about the words we choose to use. This week, keep a log of your words. Schedule a few times during the day to review your conversations with others or yourself and briefly note if they were helpful for building others (or yourself) up.

Children of Light

Ephesians 5:1-20

This week, Paul continues his exhortation on Christian living, cautioning the Ephesians to avoid even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity or greed, knowing that these things bring death. Again building off of the fact that we are made into a new humanity in Christ, Paul speaks of this transformation in terms of darkness and light. For we were once in darkness, but now we have become children of light.

1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children **2** and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. **4** Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. **5** For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. **7** Therefore do not be partners with them.

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) **10** and find out what pleases the Lord.

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. **12** It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. **13** But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

14 This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. **18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- Paul speaks rather bluntly in this passage. Is there anything that stood out to you?
- Paul says in verse 5 that no person characterized by immorality is a part of the Kingdom. They do not have Christ's rule and reign in their life. How does this shed light on the seriousness of sin?
- Verse 15 and 16 speak of living wisely and making the most of your time. What does it look like to be intentional in the way you live your life?

APPLICATION

- What does it look like to walk in light and expose the deeds of darkness around you? What is challenging about this for you?
- How can you prioritize your time in accordance with God's will and wisdom?



As children of light we are called to avoid deeds of darkness and expose them to the light so that they might become light. Oftentimes this takes the form of confession. Take a moment to examine your life before God. What darkness, or sin, needs to be brought to the light through confession? Pair up with another core group member to share or pray for one another.

Ready for Battle



Ephesians 6:10-20

Paul chooses to end his letter to the Ephesians with a sober dose of reality. He has spent the last few chapters speaking of the loving plan of God to redeem them from their sin and shame and create a new humanity characterized by unity, love, maturity, and purity. However, the Ephesians will not be without trials because there exists a very real enemy of their souls. This enemy seeks to create disunity instead of unity, hate instead of love, foolish idleness and apathy instead of maturity, and reckless pleasure-seeking instead of purity. But God has not left them alone in their fight. In fact, He has given the Ephesians everything they need to be ready for battle.

Paul spends most of the passage using a metaphor to describe our battle against evil and the resources we have at our disposal. The goal of this metaphor is not to show that we have spiritual armor in the same way that a soldier has physical armor. Rather it is to show that God has given the believer *everything* they need to stand firm in their faith even in the midst of temptation and trial. It is not righteousness that shields our heart like a breastplate or salvation that shields our head like a helmet. Instead, it is the combination of truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and God's Word that keeps us well protected and well equipped in our fight against sin and the enemy.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **13** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, **15** and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. **16** In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. **19** Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

- Who is our real enemy and how are they described in this passage?
- How does this passage shed light on both God's empowerment and our responsibility when it comes to standing firm in our faith?
- How might truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and God's Word aid you in your fight against the enemy?

APPLICATION

- Paul describes the Christian walk as a spiritual battle against a very capable enemy. Why is being aware of this reality necessary to the flourishing of your faith? How might being ignorant of this reality endanger your faith?
- Verses 18-20 emphasize the importance of prayer in your spiritual battle. Why do you think prayer is emphasized, and what are some practical ways that you can implement prayer in your fight against the enemy?



The enemy of our souls is called 'the Father of lies' (John 8:44) which is one reason why our weapon against his schemes is the truth of God's Word. The following exercise is a helpful framework for using God's Word to fight the schemes of the enemy.

Take a moment to reflect on the steps below:

- What is a thought that consumes your mind or a feeling (like shame or anxiety) that burdens your heart?
- What is the lie hidden beneath that consuming thought or burdened feeling?
- What is a verse or passage from God's Word that counters that lie?