

# **EPHESIANS**

Core Group Leader's Guide  
Spring 2022



# GUIDE TO THE LEADER'S GUIDE

Some quick guidance on how to use the curriculum when preparing for your group.

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## 1. Vision

This semester's vision is to take a book of the Bible and complete a holistic study—reading, studying, and applying the whole text. Our hope is to see how the many segments of Ephesians inform one another. How Paul's letter to Ephesus fits in with the message of the Pauline genre and the whole of the Biblical Narrative. Ephesians is by no means as expansive as Paul's other writings but, as N.T. Wright notes, it provides a breathtaking view of the landscape of the Pauline letters.

Due to the nature of the letter, Paul's words will likely inspire questions and, perhaps, debate. Both are encouraged. A few doctrines mentioned in Ephesians have been debated by the church for the span of its history. So, despite disagreement about what Paul meant by 'predestine' or 'submit,' we are called to unity by Paul in this letter. So, ask away. And respond graciously.

During the first week the curriculum will guide the group through the whole letter, observing all the themes Paul pulls out of the landscape. Each subsequent week will study a segment of Ephesians, giving time to each individual theme.

## 2. What's in the Curriculum?

The curriculum has 9 major parts. We know this is a lot! But this is NOT a step by step guide for leading the group. These 9 things are resources for you to soak and grow in. We'll talk about that more in the next section. Here are the 9 things in each week of the leader's guide:



1. **Historical Context & Background:** These are important notes about when the book was written, the context it was written in (or why it was written), and notes about how it fits into the surrounding chapters within the book of the Bible.



2. **Related Scriptures:** These are references to other parts of the Bible relevant to the week's discussion.



3. **Key Terms:** This is a glossary of important or confusing terms in the passage.



4. **Key Themes:** This is the meat of the guide. These are the various major ideas which come to the fore in the passage.



5. **Quotes & Stories:** These are quotes and anecdotes which illustrate something from the passage. This is to get your imagination going, or to hear about someone who lived out the passage well. You can share these with the group if you want, or not.



6. **3 Main Points:** These are what we think are the most important points to walk away from the passage understanding. If your disciples left group that night only knowing 3 things, this is what they should know.



7. **Discussion Questions:** These the potatoes of the guide. Here are questions designed to open up conversation about the passage, the themes, and lead to thinking about personal application. They usually aren't in any particular order.



8. **Application & Practice:** These are a list of 3-5 ways your disciples can choose to apply something from the week's discussion to their lives. It's at your discretion how to use this, but do not ignore application. It's obviously the goal.



9. **Going Deeper:** These are extra resources for you, the leader—sermons, books, articles, etc. about the passage or its themes. Use them if you want; don't if you don't.

### 3. How to use the Curriculum

So you get to your week and we plopp down this massive tome in front of you. (Really it's only like 4-5 pages, which is still a lot, but a pretty quick read). What do you do with it?

**Do not take the guide into group with you.** It is *not* a step-by-step walk through of a Core Group. *If you do this, your group will probably suck because your group will think you have all the answers so why should they even try?* It will certainly suck more than if you prepared for it. Don't be lazy. Don't be lame. **What this does mean, though, is that you choose what information/resources you take. And that's the purpose of it.** We've given you an arsenal to choose from, and you're just going to take the best weapons for your group. What this also means is that you've got to prepare for group beforehand. And it should take an hour or so to do it.

#### Before Group

So you get the document. First, ignore it. Crack open your Bible and read the passage yourself. Spend time soaking in the Scripture, and pray for God to illumine what needs highlighting in your group. After spending a few minutes doing that, grab a notebook, pen, and highlighter and start reading through the document section by section. **Make notes, highlight what you think is important. The goal here is to compile about a page worth of notes to have during group.** So obviously you won't use everything!

Think of the members in your group. As you read the guide, make notes about what will help them. **Much of the guide is only for you.** Treat it that way! Sections like the context and terms are for you to know in case a question or confusion comes up. Don't spend 10 minutes defining what a drachma is. But know it in case someone asks. In the guide there are neat tidbits that you shouldn't spend forever talking about in group, but they're there for you—the leader—so you can guide the conversation to the important conversations you need to have.

So read it and jot down a line or two of helpful information (as you deem it) about context and terms. Read through the key themes and 3 main points section, looking for the couple of things you really want your group to key in on. **Don't forget the goal stated above.** As you're reading the guide, write down those points and the way that the passage shows those points. Write why you think it's important. Go to the discussion questions section. You shouldn't pick every question, and you can obviously come up with your own as well! **Write down the questions you think will be engaging, deep, and fruitful in discussion. Ultimately you want questions which lead students to the points you want them to walk away with.** Make sure you choose questions which ultimately invite students to think about how this passage applies to them.

Look through the application and practice section. You want to give your group members options for ways they can practically begin to live what the Scripture illustrates. Some are fun and quirky, some are serious and somber. None are overburdensome! Write down all of ours, or you can substitute your own! **But don't skip the application. We must begin living life with God, not just talking about him.** Finally, take 5 minutes and pray for your group members by name.

## In Group

Take your notes to group. Be intentional about setting the order of what you do in group. You don't have to stick to this 100%, but it's super helpful to have a structure. **Know what kind of flow you want your group to have.** Is your group a chatty group that thrives on discussion? Load most of your time there. Just make sure you have great questions. Does your group appreciate the depths of Scripture by walking through it systematically? Organize your discussion: walk through the passage in short chunks. Pick and order discussion/application questions in a way which allows you to do this.

I would always read the passage twice. For the first reading, you can give the important pieces of context you picked (if any), but soak up Scripture early. Read the passage aloud first. For the second reading, let them read it silently by themselves. Give plenty of space for this. **But also, give them something to do during the reading, so it isn't aimless! There are great types questions that every good reader asks when they read the Bible. Here are some:**

1. What words, phrases, images, or verses stick out to you? What do you think the Holy Spirit is trying to say to you by drawing your attention there?
2. Where do you see the gospel in this passage? How do you see Jesus here?
3. What do you think the original hearers would have heard from this passage?
4. What does this passage mean for us, for me, on campus in 2020?
5. What do we learn about God from this passage? What do we learn about people?

6. What images or words are repeated in this passage, and what's associated with them? What other parts of Scripture does it remind me of?

Pick 2-3 questions from this list for them to answer in their journals as they read. Also have them write down any questions they have about the text in their journals.

Discuss what they wrote down first. Then move onto the rest of the discussion questions you've prepared. **To the best of your ability, don't just preach at them. The key themes section of the leaders' guide isn't sermon material. It's knowledge that allows you to direct conversation.**

## 4. Helpful Group Tips

- Prepare prepare prepare. Wing-it groups are always worse than prepared groups.
- Sit beside, not across from, the over-talker.
- Let students lead discussion as much as constructively possible.
- Don't be afraid of awkward silences, provided the questions are good.
- If students are missing a main point, give it to them shortly. Then ask them if they agree or disagree. Talk it through.
- Go on helpful tangents. Sometimes these are the most important conversations.
- If a question falls flat, move on quickly. Don't make it a slow death.
- Don't pretend you do know when you don't.
- Don't let group be shallow. Ask tough questions if you have to.
- No matter how neat they find questions about the text, always move group toward seeing themselves in the passage.
- Make room for doubt. Jesus did.
- Don't batter your group for an hour each week talking about what sins they've committed. Confession should be willing and healing.
- Don't ignore sin. It festers.
- Practice what you preach. Own it when you don't.
- Hold students accountable for doing the practices they volunteered for.
- Have fun.
- If your group persistently stinks, ask for help from a lead staff member.
- Pray for your group.

## 5. A Model Small Group Time

This is an example, so it's not how your group has to flow. It's just how one group could go on any particular night.

### **Begin with prayer (5 min)**

As you move from group hang time into bible study, have someone pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation and lead you to walk closer with Jesus.

**Read the passage (15 min)**

As the leader, read the passage aloud to the group while they follow along or actively listen. Give some space for a 2nd reading. Have each person in your group find a comfortable spot to read. Give them a question or two to guide their reading. Open up Spotify and play a chill track, or just leave it silent. Each person individually reads, but it's active reading. They read, paying attention for whether any of the verses grab their attention, it may be the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They should take notes or write down thoughts in their journal about those promptings, the questions you asked, or questions they have about the text.

**Discuss the passage (40 min)**

Start off the discussion by having the group share what thoughts they have from the passage and what they wrote down in their journals. Move through questions and group discussion, especially focusing in on application the longer you go.

**Practices, Life Debrief, Video, Prayer, Chill (25 min)**

Spend time talking about the practices your group had last week, especially after you have them choose new practices for this week.

But then use this time for whatever you think best suits your group and this week. You could move into individuals sharing about their week. If your group is bigger, you can break off into smaller groups of 3 or 4. You could do a special activity, like watching a Bible Project video! Or you could even do some extended reflection or prayer time, individually or as a whole group. You have the freedom to lead this time! But don't wing it! Anticipate what will work best and have a plan for how to spend this time!

**Close in Prayer (5 min)**

# GETTING ORIENTED

## Week 1: Ephesians 1:1-2

### Group Format

Curriculum this week will be a bit different. Groups will read all of Ephesians together and wrestle with the text as a whole. This may sound daunting, but do not fear! A helpful guide is given! Follow the ordering given below in your groups to create a helpful basis for studying Ephesians this semester. Think of this week as laying the groundwork for the rest of the semester.

### 1. Read Ephesians

This sounds like a lot, but it should take 15 minutes—20 maybe! Why's it worth it? Well, literacy rates were low in Ancient Greco-Rome, so this letter would have been read aloud by one person to the rest of the community. Knowing this is how the letter would be communicated, authors would write their letters like a speech. In group this week, we are going to participate in the ancient way of receiving the text!

In the first portion of group, read all of Ephesians out loud. Go around the room giving everyone the chance to read a section. In our quiet times, we often read Scripture in segments or chapters. Do not hear us say this is an incorrect way to study the Bible. Nonetheless, it is helpful to periodically take time to read Biblical books, namely the New Testament gospels and letters, as a whole. Ephesians was a letter written to a group of people to be read succinctly. Each chapter was not read one day at a time. This was a message Paul intended his audience to hear all together, in one moment—each segment of the text influencing our understanding of the others.

### 2. Context and Historical Background

When reading any Biblical book, understanding it's historical and cultural context is essential for holistic study and interpretation. Some people call this "hermeneutics"... but they're nerds. We'll simply call it informed reading. Have your group focus on Ephesians 1:1-2 and answer the following questions:

***Who is the writer? More than just his name, who does he say he is?***

Ephesians is written by the Apostle Paul, placing this letter with the Pauline letters (Romans, Galatians, etc). Paul's conversion story is found in Acts 9, and it is quite the scene. Remember the Pharisees in the gospels? Well, Paul was one of them. Paul played a role in the persecution of Christians, even holding the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian faith. As Paul traveled the road toward Damascus (planning to per-



secute more Christians), Jesus Christ appeared to him! In short, Paul committed his life to Christ! When he got to Damascus, Paul was no longer a prosecutor of Christians but another apostle preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle was a prominent teacher within the church and commissioned with sharing the Good News. This is the same way Paul introduces himself in most of his other letters. Establishing his authority, Paul notes that it is by God's will that he sends this message.

### ***Who is the letter written to? Who does he say they are?***

The letter is written to—you guessed it—the Ephesians. Specifically, these are Christians in the city of Ephesus located in West Asia Minor. Paul was not writing to a small group. House churches from across Ephesus (a city with a quarter million people) and the surrounding area were the recipients of Paul's letter. For two years Paul ministered to the people of Ephesus (Acts 19) and knew the Christians there. This letter was Paul's reconnection with a people he had been disconnected with because of his imprisonment in Rome.

The Ephesians are described as God's holy people and to be a people who are faithful to Jesus. Ephesus was an epicenter for worship to Greek and Roman Gods. Paul calls the people of Ephesus God's holy people and names them as faithful to Christ Jesus. Calling the Ephesians "God's holy people" connects them to God's people of the Old Testament. By including the Ephesians in the story of Scripture, Paul involves them in the act of redemption and sanctification God has been carrying out since the Creation. Implications for 'faithful in Christ Jesus' go beyond belief in the object, Jesus Christ. Paul uses the phrase in his letters to denote not just faith in him, but also life in him.

### ***What can we make of verse 2? Why was it included in the beginning of the text?***

After introducing himself and addressing his audience, Paul gives a greeting, or blessing. The way it reads may seem like a closing gesture. When we write letters today, we often place such a blessing at the end. However, starting with a greeting was common to Greco-Roman letters. Combining blessings of grace and peace, Paul is using a distinctly Christian greeting.

## **3. Title the Sections**

The bulk of group this week will explore individual segments of Ephesians. This is the part that may seem overwhelming. Bible translations will include headings over segments of Scripture. But these aren't "part of Scripture." They're just later additions meant to help modern readers break the text into segments about common themes. In the student book, all of Ephesians has been provided with *no* headings (gasp!). Read each portion of Ephesians aloud, one at a time. After reading one section, determine together what you would title the segment. Headings can be a one phrase summary of the text or what your group notices is the central teaching. Have fun and dig into it, but don't get caught up finding the exact right title—probably just a few minutes for each section.

### **Helpful Tips/Encouragements:**

- Encourage your group to use the student book for this exercise to avoid influence from headings given by their Bible's translation.
- This will be a helpful tool to look back on while we study the rest of Ephesians! During future weeks, you can look back and see what your group titled each section.
- Cast vision. If this begins to feel tedious, push through! Remind your students that having a deep understanding of the full letter will only deepen your group's study of the Scripture this semester.
- Don't get caught up in theological quandaries. These will be addressed later.

## 4. Reflect

If you find yourself with extra time, here are a couple questions to conclude your group with. If exploring the text takes up the rest of your time, that's okay! Pick some of these questions to send home with your students as a form of application that focuses on Scripture reflection.

### **Questions:**

- After reading this letter from Paul to the Ephesians, what sections stick out to you as the most interesting or relevant for your life?
- What's one question you have after reading through Ephesians?
- What seems to be Paul's purpose in writing this letter?

## Application and Practice

**Reflection.** If you were not able to finish segmenting the text or sharing responses to the questions above, have your group complete the process at home. Share your section headings and answers to the questions with one another next week!

**Lectio Divina.** Pick a segment of Ephesians that stood out to you and meditate on it through Lectio Divina, meaning "Divine Reading." The chart on the opposite page walks you through how to practice this ancient approach to Scripture. Have your students go to [ukcsf.org/core-group](http://ukcsf.org/core-group) to access the chart.

**Rest**

2 minutes of silence

Let your heart and mind come to a place of rest.

**Read**

Read slowly 3 times

Listen for the word addressed to you.

**Reflect**

How is my life touched by this word?

**Respond**

What prayer is rising in my heart in response to what I have read and encountered?

**Rest**

Read the passage one last time.

Rest in the word of God.

## Going Deeper

**Video.** "Ephesians" by the Bible Project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y71r-T98E2Q>

**Video.** "New Testament Letters: Literary Context" by the Bible Project.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPZ2uABVMKA>

**Video.** "The Apostle Paul: Acts 8-12" by the Bible Project.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiVAbkINtRU>

# ELECTED IN LOVE

## Week 2: Ephesians 1:3-14



### Related Passages

John 15:15; John 17 – Christ himself discusses being “in him.”



### Key Terms

“**In him**”: See below!

**Blessed** (*eulogetos*): This is where we get the word eulogy—a eulogy is a public praising and blessing of a person’s life, a good (“*eu*”) word (“*logos*”), spoken at their funeral. But the first person Paul blesses isn’t an individual: it’s God. Also this wasn’t an address at God’s funeral. Obviously.



### Key Themes

**Trinitarian Grace:** Ephesians 1:3-14 is the key passage for understanding the blessing of grace. These verses are weird for a reason that most of our translations don’t communicate well: Ephesians 1:3-14 is all one big, long, crazy sentence. It’s the longest sentence in the New Testament. You get the sense that Paul is expending all of his energy to praise God. And the first word of this spirited prayer of worship in the Greek is “blessed.” But one of the neatest things about Paul’s praising of God is that it’s not some *generic* praising of God. Paul praises *our trinitarian God* specifically, and in doing so teaches us, his readers, who our God is—Father, Son, Holy Spirit: One God, three *persons*.

Paul often begins his letters with long expositions of doctrine and praise, preparing the reader for instruction. To know what *to do*, you must know what is true. Here, Paul’s good word teaches us about grace and the Trinity. All of Ephesians is very Trinitarian, but in Ephesians 1:3-14 this is especially clear. In this section, each member of the Trinity showers grace on us. A helpful exercise would be to go through Ephesians 1:3-14 and figure out how *exactly* are we shown grace via each person of the Trinity.

- The Father blesses us with every spiritual blessing, adoption, love (the Father’s plan of salvation 1:3-5).
- The Son blesses us by redeeming (literally “to buy us back”) us from our sins (fulfillment through Christ 1:7-8). You could have your group memorize 1 Peter 1:18-19 this week as a way to remember what it cost God to redeem us from our sins.

- The Spirit blesses us by sealing us with as a guarantee of our deliverance (inheritance through the Holy Spirit 1:13-14): the promise that what the Son paid will take full effect so that we can become fully what the Father makes us: sons and daughters.

God gives us the Spirit to mark our identity as his. The seal Paul is referring to in 1:13 would have been a wax seal. Rulers wore “signet rings” with their “mark” on it. So when you saw a document that was sealed with wax, you could identify which ruler had sent the document by whose mark was on the seal. God “seals” us by impressing his Holy Spirit into us, claiming that we fully belong to him. We are literally sealed by the identity of God. Another good exercise could be to ask your group: What are other things that compete to claim our identity? When people look at the “wax” of your life, what mark is left on it? One of the blessings of God is the freedom from the false identities which try to make their mark upon us.

**Election, in General:** One of the key themes of this passage is about what’s come to be known as the doctrine of **election**. Election can be a really tricky concept to understand, but it’s biblical, so we need to deal with it. So what is election? As Americans, we hear the word election and think of voting for a president. In this scheme, we have the power to pick one person to represent us in government. So naturally we think that biblical election means that God *picks* some individuals for eternal salvation and others for eternal damnation. But that’s a very modern view of election, and it’s not the view that a 1st century Jewish Christian like Paul would have held.

The scope of election: For Paul (and for the rest of the biblical authors), election wasn’t primarily about individuals. It was about a group. So in the Old Testament, Israel is the elect group chosen to display God’s blessings and glory to the world. Individuals within Israel could be unfaithful—like King Ahab, who introduced idol worship in 1 Kings 16. And individuals outside of Israel could be favored by God (Melchizedek, Cyrus, etc.). But to be “in Israel” meant that you were in a group that was chosen to receive and dispense God’s blessings. Other people could enter this group, even enemies of God like Naamam in 2 Kings 5. In the New Testament, the Church with Christ at the head is the elect *group* that’s chosen to display God’s blessings and glory. This is why Paul uses the plural pronouns “us” and “you.” (This is difficult to see in English because we don’t have a distinct word for the plural “you,” but most other languages do—though we try to compensate with creations like “y’all.”)

The *purpose* of election: It’s also hasty to assume that election automatically means salvation and damnation. In the Old Testament Israel’s election wasn’t just about the afterlife. It wasn’t really connected with the afterlife at all. Rather, there was a *purpose* which the elect (nation) carried out, namely to be the mechanism by which God blesses the whole world (this is the Abrahamic promise). The New Testament does connect the notion of election more closely with the benefits of eternal salvation, but we can’t just revise the meaning of the language of election, which comes from the Old Testament, to simply mean “saved” or “damned.” This error lies, for example, at the heart of the misreading of Romans 9-11. But even there, those who are hardened—Israel (9:11)—will be saved (11:25-26). In Ephesians, however, Paul does seem to have in mind that election is tied with salvation because to share in the election of Christ is to share in his eternal life. The next point should make that clearer.

**Election, “In Christ”:** A great method of studying and engaging the Bible is the “word study.”

So you could also teach your group a little lesson on how to read scripture. Throughout Paul's thirteen letters, the phrase "in Christ," "in him," or a similar phrase is used over 150 times. In Ephesians 1:3-14, this type of phrase is used at least *eight times* in just eleven verses. A helpful exercise is to map out where this happens, and ask at *each instance*: How does each use of "in him" explain something fresh about the blessing of God's grace to us?

- 1:3 "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **in Christ**"
- 1:4 "for he chose us **in him** before the creation"
- 1:5 "adopted as his sons **through Jesus Christ**"
- 1:6 "grace, which he has freely given us **in the One he loves**"
- 1:7 "**In him**, we have redemption through his blood"
- 1:11 "**In him**, we were also chosen"
- 1:13 "you were included **in Christ** when you heard"
- 1:13 "when you believed, you were marked **in him**"

The first major thrust of this section is to show that we *merit* nothing. This is the great litany of grace. Everything good is Christ's. We get it only in virtue of sharing in what he merited. So we're adopted children whereas Christ is the true Son; yet our adoption occurs as we *participate* in Christ. It's grace, all the way down. And this passage tells us why it's grace all the way down; it tells us the governing value, which guides how we understand it all: *in love* he predestined and adopted us. Whatever we will say of God must make sense of his nature as love (1 John 4:8).

The second major point of the "in him" study is to nuance the discussion of election a bit more. We said above that election in the Bible is primarily about groups. But the picture is actually a little more complicated. The groups come to be elect *in virtue* of the individual election of the group's "head." So God chooses Abraham to father the nations, and those who are "in Abraham" (his offspring) will share in Abraham's blessing. Corporate Israel is elect because the individual Jacob—called Israel—was elected by God. The connection is in the names! Now individuals, as stated above, could enter or leave this elect group, because in entering or leaving the group they are "in" Abraham (or Jacob, etc.). So election is maybe best understood as "those who are *in* the elect one, and so receive the benefits of the elect one by participation."

If we map this onto Ephesians, we see the same pattern. There is an elect one: Christ. And individuals come into Christ (Romans 6:3) share in his election, but not by works but by faith (Eph 1:13-15; 2:8-9). The phrase "*in him*"—which is repeated 36 times in Ephesians in the original language—signifies that we've become part of this elect group by uniting ourselves to Christ, and that whatever we receive as a result of this election comes through him: in some sense it *is* his. We share in it. This language of participation—being "in" someone—permeates the New Testament. We see Jesus speak of in John 17:20-23 and we see spoken of in Romans 5-6. We really do participate "in" someone: Either we are "in" Adam and reap *his* consequences, or we participate in the New Adam: Jesus, and we inherit *his* blessings by being "baptized into Christ" (Romans 6:3).

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

“Not far from where I was born there is an ancient castle. It stands imposingly, high above the banks of a river, defying anyone to attack it. These days, the likely attacks come from bank managers and tax-collectors rather than marauding raiders; so the owners have taken steps to use it profitably. The castle has become a wonderful spot for tourists to visit — and for movies to be made. Many historical films have included it, at least in the background. Part of the famous Harry Potter film was shot there.

“It is still, though, a family home. The same family — one of Britain’s ancient noble lines — has lived there for many centuries. It has been handed on from father to son. Or, in some cases, from brother to brother. Not long ago, the Duke who lived there died quite suddenly, in early middle age, and had no son or daughter to inherit. In a flash, his brother found himself thrown into the spotlight. All unexpectedly, he had received an inheritance which changed his life for ever.

“He and his wife rose to the occasion. If they were going to have an inheritance like that, it was worth doing something with it. As I write, plans are being put into effect to make the castle gardens among the most spectacular in the country.

“These days, an inheritance is often simply money — or something that can quickly be turned into money. But very often in the ancient world, and particularly in the Jewish world, an ‘inheritance’ consisted, like the castle and its grounds, of land that was not to be got rid of.”

N. T. WRIGHT

**“In Christ” & Tupperware Illustration:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0eec8ez-Sw>

## ! Three Main Points

1. To understand who we are and what we’re to do, we must understand who God is and what he’s done for us.
2. When we enter into Christ, by faith and baptism, we share in his election and become heirs to everything he’s promised, by virtue of being “in him.”
3. It’s grace all the way down, all due to the love of God, who “desires that no one should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9) and be “in Christ.”

## ? Discussion Questions

### Observations

- How does verse 13 clue us in to the way we can enter into the blessing of grace?
- Where do we see Paul testifying to the reality of the Trinity: One God, three divine persons? What does each of these persons *do* which communicate the grace of God?

- What has God predestined us to be? What has he predestined us to do?

### Contemplation

- Why do you think Paul began his letter this way?
- This whole section is one long sentence. Why do you think Paul did this? (He did know how to punctuate, by the way.)
- What do you think is the difference between a “spiritual blessing” from “the heavenly realms?” Why this weird phrase?
- Why did Paul repeat the phrase “in him” so many times? Surely he’s trying to get across some important idea. What, in your own words, is that key idea that Paul keeps coming back to?
- What do you think it means when it says “in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ?” (1:5)
- What do you think it means to be “marked with a seal?”

### Application

- If someone were to ask you to sum up what you believe and what you praise God for, what would you say? How does your answer differ from Paul’s?
- How well do you understand the basics of the Christian faith?
- What are other things that compete to claim our identity? When people look at the “wax” of your life, what mark is left on it? Some ideas: school or GPA, career/job, being seen as “holy,” parent’s approval, future earning potential, being well liked, being good at something, dating relationships, etc.
- Paul says we’re predestined to be “holy and blameless” in God’s sight. What’s one way we can become more blameless this week so as to display the glory of God more?

## Application and Practice

**In Christ.** Jesus says in John 15:15, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” That if is a scary word, but it’s a good warning: Any relationship needs tending. Now our relationship with God is unique, in that whatever tending happens on our end is itself energized by God. But we still have to tend it! Commit this week to some small practice every day to tend that relationship: Reading the Bible for 10 minutes, saying the Lord’s Prayer, etc. (For more advanced groups, think of some other intentional way they can spend time with the Lord!)

**The Marked Life.** This week ask a couple of friends from different areas of your life to very honestly describe you as a person. Ask them to tell you what they think, based on the way you act and speak, the most important thing in your life is. This may be a difficult way to figure out what mark we truly bear in our bodies and lives.





## Going Deeper

**Video:** "Ben Witherington on Election and Salvation"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t40bEg0kwAI>

**Video:** "Ephesians 1:1-14 Summary of the Blessings 'in Him'"

<https://vimeo.com/202231068>

# HOPE

## Week 3: Ephesians 1:15-23



### Historical Context & Background

This week we are going to look at one of Paul's prayers for the people of Ephesus. We are going to look at three main ideas. Paul's prayer is that the people may know the hope to which they are called, the riches of their glorious inheritance, and the incomparably great power for believers. Paul is writing to a people who up until now they most likely believed in pagan religions. So, one of Paul's main goals was to teach them sound doctrine. One of Paul's first things he wanted to teach them was to live with the reality of their new eternity.



### Related Passages

Romans 8:18 - Our present suffering pales in comparison to the glory that is to come.

Matthew 6:19-21 - We store up treasures that are eternal in heaven instead of the fleeting possessions on earth.



### Key Terms

**Hope:** The Biblical understanding of hope includes a joyful and confident expectation, not an empty wishing.

**Inheritance:** "Kleronomia" is a Greek word meaning inheritance. It tells us of the eternal blessedness of the Kingdom of God which we eagerly expect after the return of Christ.

**Power:** "Dynamis" is Greek for inherent power or power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature.



### Key Themes

**The hope to which he has called you:** It is more evident each day that we live in a sinful and shattered world. All it takes is one click to watch the evil of humanity played out on the news before us. But we see the world differently because of Jesus. Our intimacy with a good God gives us hope. You've might have heard the quote: "Share the gospel always and, if necessary, use words." Of course, it's important to preach with words. But we can point people to hope simply

by the way we live. The beauty of the gospel is played out in every inch of our lives. We live as people of hope. And people see this hope playing out in our day-to-day lives, in the midst of the darkness surrounding us. It opens endless doors for conversations that naturally lead our words to share the good news - that there is hope for them too.

Paul prays that the Ephesians may know “the hope to which he has called” them as well as “the riches of his glorious inheritance.” It may seem like the same thing. But when Paul refers to hope, he is expressing a joyful confidence that he prays believers take hold of the eternal salvation found in Christ. We are reminded that God has saved us now and for all of eternity. That’s easy to know in our heads, but it’s important to allow our hearts to hope, too. As sons and daughters, we are brought to “the riches of his glorious inheritance.” We know the kingdom of God here on earth while also awaiting the fullness of these riches when Jesus returns. Paul is praying for both a mindset of now and then, present and future.

***Riches of His glorious inheritance:*** In Romans 8:18, Paul gives us a greater insight into this glorious inheritance. Our present sufferings, in this pain-filled world, cannot even compare to the glory of what we gain in Christ - eternal salvation. To some extent, we’ve all seen or felt the weight of suffering in the world in the last year. But Paul is inviting us into an eternal and hope-saturated perspective on life. And if we are honest with ourselves, I think we all struggle to live in that way. We hear “eternal mindset” preached to us. But, what does that actually mean? And how do we actually live it out?

Psalm 37:4 gives insight to having an eternal mindset, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” An eternal mindset means to align our desires with God’s and let earthly things pale in comparison. He is the true desire of our hearts. This really goes against the grain in culture; especially, in college culture. We are thrown into the race of picking the right major, getting a big internship, achieving a well paying job, and having a lifestyle of comfort. But, to what end? When we start planning on life with an eternal mindset and purpose it changes everything. It changes how we view ourselves, other people, our time, our money, and our future. What does it look like to take on an eternal perspective each and every day? This is an important conversation to invite your group into this week.

***Incomparably great power:*** This is the third of Paul’s prayers. That we would know the incomparably great power for us who believe. This is the resurrection power. The same power that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms. This same power is dwelling within us - the Holy Spirit. Really sit and think about that truth. One of the most dangerous ways Satan works is to make the truths of Scripture seem mundane to us. That this idea of death to life power feels like old news that we’ve heard over and over again.

If we each fully believe and live from a place of this power that raised Jesus from the dead, what would the work look like? I think it is important to remember that this power is not our own. It’s not mustering up the strength to do incredible things ourselves. We don’t have to be special or extraordinary in ourselves. Rather, we have full access to divine power. The power of God by way of the Holy Spirit allows ordinary people like you and me to do extraordinary things.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

"Eternity is written on their hearts. They are just illiterate and don't know how to read it yet."

CURT VERNON

"God's looking for people thru whom He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only things we can do by ourselves."

A. W. TOZER

## ! Three Main Points

1. The hope that we have in Jesus gives us the ability to be a light in dark places.
2. As believers we are called to live with an eternal mindset.
3. You have access to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead through the Holy Spirit.

## ? Discussion Questions

### Observations

- What do we learn about the character of God in this passage?
- How does this passage convict you/challenge you to grow?

### Contemplation

- What does it mean to have an eternal mindset?
- How do you grieve well but also remember the hope to which we are called?
- What does it mean to store up treasure in heaven?
- What can we learn about prayer through this passage?
- Do you truly believe you have access to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead?
- How much of your prayer life revolves around you?
- In Colossians, it tells us to set our minds on things above. What does that mean?

### Application

- How does our day to day life change when we have an eternal mindset?
- Are you waiting in expectation for God to move?
- What areas in your life do you struggle with having an eternal mindset?
- Are you storing up earthly treasures?
- How are you storing up treasures in heaven?
- How can having an eternal mindset affect the way you make career decisions?
- What are ways you can integrate prayer into your daily lives?
- How can you use the power available to us by the Holy Spirit to impact people's lives?

## Application & Practice

**Self Reflection.** Take time to reflect on things you are storing up on earth that you can get rid of. Make a note of these and determine active sets to walk away from them.

**Pray.** Take what you learned about prayer from this passage and spend 10 minutes in prayer this week.

## Going Deeper

**Song:** Already Gold by Curt Vernon

**Song:** Feels Like Home by Curt Vernon

**Sermon:** Colossians 3:1-2 by Commonwealth City Church

**Article:** Set Your Mind On Things Above by Desiring God

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/set-your-mind-on-things-above>

# ALIVE BY GRACE

## Week 4: Ephesians 2



### Historical Context & Background

In many ways this section continues Paul's normal mode of addressing churches in letters, by laying out theologically the truths of the faith in order to ground his admonitions to the churches. Here he discusses our salvation, leveling the playing field of the "us" versus "them" in Jewish-Gentile relations, so that he can eventually admonish them toward unity, mutual submission, and shared work.

NOTE: Because of this structure of theology → application in Paul's letter, this guide will focus mostly on theological and doctrinal clarity, trying to set out what we believe and what errors to avoid when reading this text. That matters especially in Ephesians 2 because of its contentious nature in establishing Christian doctrine!



### Related Passages

There are a ton of references below in the terms and themes. Look those up as you prepare!



### Key Terms

**Sinful Nature:** We write about this word in almost every semester of curriculum, but it's worth repeating! The Greek word, *sarx*, is often translated as "sinful nature," though its more literal meaning is "flesh." *Sarx* in the New Testament refers to the sin-desiring aspect of our being as opposed to the God-desiring aspect of our being. It is not describing our physical bodies (which a word like *soma* more often refers to).

**Ruler of the kingdom of the air:** This is Satan. One of the more overlooked descriptions of Satan is that he is, in some real sense, the "god" of fallen creation. Paul uses this exact language in 2 Cor. 4:4. Now it's obvious this doesn't mean he's qualitatively the same as God (which is why most translations use a lower-case g). But the New Testament does give Satan, Death, and Sin all cosmic influence and significance. Satan claims authority over the earth, when he offers it to Jesus in the desert (Matt. 4:8-9). Terms like "Principalities and Powers"—which Paul also mentions in Eph. 6:12 but also in other places like Col. 2:14-15—refer to real classes of angels, and so also can refer to real classes of demons (who are just fallen angels). Traditionally the order of *angels* protects nations, groups, and institutions. The demons do the opposite, waging war at the corporate level. Their head: Satan. But how is it that Satan has any actual authority on earth? Isn't God the ultimate authority? St. John Chrysostom puts it this way: "Why does

he call the devil the ruler of this world? Because virtually the whole of humanity surrendered to him. All are his voluntary and willing slaves.”

**Good works:** Traditionally, “good works” here distinguishes living according to the Spirit—loving God and others—from the works of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law cannot save and is not binding, but the new law of the Spirit (which fulfills the law) is what we live to do.



## Key Themes

**Unity in Christ:** The major purpose of this section of Paul’s letter is to ground the practical points he wants to make in chapters four through six. Unity, community, and charity are major themes in Ephesians. But, as with many other places in the early church, the Jews and Gentiles did not always get along. Paul has to attack this at the root. In 2:1 Paul begins by talking about how “you” were dead in “your” transgressions. But immediately after, Paul—a Jew—begins using a different pronoun: us and we. Sin is the great leveller. Jew and Gentile might be different in many ways, and in the Old Testament the difference was significant. But at the end of the day, Jew and Gentile are fundamentally the same in the way that ultimately matters: Both are dead and need to be made alive. If there is some real value distinction between Jew and Gentile—one is better than the other—there couldn’t be a ground for equality. But Paul’s consistent task in his letters (just look at Gal. 3:28) is to show that the Gentiles are equally part of God’s people and promise. In Ephesians 2:1-10 Paul shows that everyone needs saving through Christ, but nobody deserves it. This would have cut against any old sense of entitlement the Jewish Christians might have. Ephesians 2:11-22 shows that everyone can get it, but also cuts against any new sense of entitlement that may come with the new kids on the block (also see Rom. 11:17-21).

At the heart of this passage is the repeated gospel of reconciliation. Jesus “has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Paul is reminding us that we worship the Prince of Peace, who has “great love for us.” And that “us” must be understood to be expansive: It includes everyone. How does he do this? Through the cross he “abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.” What does this mean? The law had a lot of functions, and Christ did not come to destroy the law, insofar as the law laid out a pattern for right living. Rather, in this regard, he fulfilled the law (Matt. 5:17-18). But Christ did come to abolish the law as ethnic marker and cultural divider. So circumcision or dietary laws, laws which mark out Israel as Israel (setting them apart from the Gentiles), no longer need obeying. Where there were two men—Israel and the Gentiles—Christ has come to make “one new man,” making peace. This peace is necessary because we are being built together so that we can be the corporate (the “you” is plural in 2:22) dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

**The Meaning of “Dead”:** In Eph. 2:1 Paul says “you were dead in your transgressions.” This can be an interpretively tricky verse, but only if we don’t grasp that “dead” is a metaphor. We aren’t literally dead (you’re reading this after all). But can we be literally spiritually dead? Are our “spirits” (does that mean “souls”?) dead but our bodies aren’t? But what does that even mean?

I certainly experience my own soul: it exists, and I experience its activity: I think, choose, imagine, love. Perhaps it means something like “We are incapable of doing anything spiritually good or meritorious.” Yes! But that’s not the literal meaning of “dead.” This does matter. There are preachers out there who say things like this: “Dead means dead. Dead people can’t do things; dead people don’t choose things. So we need God to make us alive again and choose for us.” But the problem is that “dead” people do do things; dead people do choose things. They just act and choose wrongly. We must avoid thinking that as sinful human beings we lack some essential human capacity, that it’s gone, “dead”—that we cannot exercise our faculties of mind, will, or body. (If any version of the doctrine of Total Depravity can be believed, it must mean that every aspect of human nature is corrupted by sin, but it cannot mean that any or every part of human nature is completely destroyed or totally evil.) Rather, while we retain every essential feature of our humanity—body, will, mind—we use them and direct them wrongly. And there’s a reason why (the next theme).

But there is a closely related metaphorical meaning of dead for us to grasp. If dead means “insensitive”—a dead body is incapable of sensation—then there is sense (pun intended) in which our souls/spirits do not respond to God. On our own we are insensitive to the Good. But even here we have to be careful. This cannot mean we don’t know what’s demanded of us. Paul puts that notion away in Romans 1:18-20:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since **what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.** For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that **people are without excuse.**

We aren’t insensitive to God meaning that we don’t sense him, but insensitive in the same way that we would call a person insensitive in most other contexts: a husband refusing to care whether his wife is upset, a person who passes a man beaten and bleeding on the side of the road. All but the Good Samaritan were “dead” to the cries of the afflicted man. The death Paul talks about is more significant than these minor examples. As a result of our insensitivity, we are incapable of communion with God: The flesh *never* moves us to love him and respond to him, though we have no excuse for not knowing to do so.

**Faith, Works & Energy:** After describing our condition as spiritually dead, insensitive to God and lacking what’s required to move us—God’s own activity in us—because we’ve followed the desires of the flesh and the ways of thinking of the world and the devil, Paul talks about God making us alive. First, it’s worth mentioning *why* he does so: “his great love for us.” Love is the hermeneutic for understanding God’s work! He provides us a gift: grace and faith. Where our previous lives led not to our flourishing but to the ever-increasing necrosis of our souls, God breaks in and gives his very life for us to flourish as we press further into it. Grace and faith, these are the works of God in us.

All over the place Paul uses this idea of some activity or energy working in us for good or ill. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul says we are incapable of living justly because we’re subject to the bondage



of sin and Satan. Paul tells us that Satan “is now **at work in those** who are disobedient.” This sounds structurally similar to some of Paul’s statements in other places about God acting in us: “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29); or Paul’s famously confusing formulation in Phil. 2:12-13, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” Before we’re “made alive” with Christ, we are not activated, or moved to love what is good. Our faculties—minds, loves, wills—are energized by the wrong things (Satan, sin, and the love of the flesh). And so we do not do good on our own. We are dead because we lived according to the ways of this world, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature. But God comes to re-energize us.

All of the verses so far should keep us from assuming this means we have no role in our own acts: We are not merely passive creatures under the influence—good or bad—of other things. Even though Satan was at work in us, we still followed him, gratified our flesh. And even though it’s God working in us, we still work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. As CSF’s faculty sponsor, Dr. David Bradshaw, puts it, “if we look at Paul in Col. 1:29 it would seem that the divine energy serves two distinct functions. It is at work within Paul, transforming him, so that from this standpoint he is the object of God’s activity; at the same time it finds expression in Paul’s own activity, so that he may also be seen as the agent or conduit through whom God is working..On [Paul’s] view, synergy, the cooperation of God and man, is neither a symmetrical relation nor one in which the divine overpowers and replaces the human. It is rather one in which the human *becomes fully human* by embracing the divine.”

This brings us to the final phrase of the first half of chapter two: We cannot latch onto the work of God in us without looking at the work of God through us. God makes us alive, energizes our wills, so that we can work with him as his coworkers (*synergoi*, see 1 Cor. 3:9) to do the works (*ergon*) he’s set out for us to do. He gives us his Spirit, who activates our wills so we can cooperate with him and choose the good. In short, because of his great love, he gives us the power to love.

**Errors In a Nutshell:** There’s a lot to take in from above, but the points above are meant to get around a few key errors when reading Ephesians 2. All of the errors below have been grounded in or are addressed by Ephesians 2, so it’s worth knowing how *not* to interpret the text.

- **Dead & Alive Error 1** (Pelagianism): We can do the good work on our own. Our wills aren’t corrupt so we could choose to obey God without his aid.
- **Dead & Alive Error 2** (Calvinism): We do nothing at all. Dead things don’t have wills so our wills aren’t free to cooperate with God.
- **Faith & Works Error 1** (Works-Based Righteousness): Faith comes from works. We earn our salvation by being good and as a result attain salvation.
- **Faith & Works Error 2** (Antinomianism): Faith has nothing to do with works, and so you can behave as if there were no laws—Anti+*nomos* (law)—whatsoever and behave however you see fit.

As a group leader it’s worth sniffing out whether any of these errors have root in your group members and addressing that. But note: These are two sets of opposing errors! Each goes too

far in one direction, so there's danger in tackling them. If, for example, you think combatting works-based righteousness is the most important thing and spend the hour harping on legalism, but your group *actually* has a problem living righteously, you may inadvertently push them *further* into the opposing (antinomian) error. So take care!

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

"Paul says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that 'if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves.' Thus he added the statement that faith too is not in our own will but in God's gift. Not that he means to take away free choice from humanity...but that even this very freedom of choice has God as its author, and all things are to be referred to his generosity, in that he has even allowed us to will the good."

ST. JEROME

"God's mission was not to save people in order that they may remain barren or inert. For Scripture says that faith has saved us. Put better: Since God willed it, faith has saved us. Now in what case, tell me, does faith save without itself doing anything at all? Faith's workings themselves are a gift of God, lest anyone should boast. What then is Paul saying? Not that God has forbidden works but that he has forbidden us to be justified by works. No one, Pauls says, is justified by works, precisely in order that the grace and benevolence of God may become apparent!"

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

**Power Rangers:** A lame throwback to a kids show from 30 years ago: The Rangers get their abilities because their leader gives them powers. Without the power from their leaders, they're just regular Joes. But with that power, they can slap around Putty Patrollers.

I mentioned it above, but the story of the Good Samaritan is a great example of how many are "dead."

## ! Three Main Points

1. Sin is indiscriminate and plays no favorites. Everyone has been equally bound to sin, Satan, and the flesh. BUT Christ also plays no favorites. He comes to bring peace to all, to knit two into one.
2. Without Christ we are subject to the power of the flesh and Satan, thinking and choosing to be and do what is displeasing to God, making ourselves into objects of wrath.
3. Through his great love God injects his very life into us, giving us the very power to love him and work with him, to become the conduits of him to do the works he prepared for us in advance.



## Discussion Questions

### Observations

- Who is Paul talking about in these verses? Who are the “you” and the “us”?
- What does the person serve, before becoming a Christian?
- What is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air?”
- What causes God to make us alive again?
- What is the gift of God that he’s given us? Does this mean we get no say in the matter?
- What is the reason we’re saved, according to this passage?
- What are we meant to do because of our salvation?

### Contemplation

- What do you think Paul means when he says we’re “dead in our transgressions?”
- Do works matter or not?
- Does the world belong to God or Satan? What does Satan rule?
- How does the cross put to death our hostility?
- How does Christ’s death get rid of hostility between people?
- How is Satan at work in us when we’re not Christians?

### Application

- What are the “dividing walls of hostility” in our culture? How can Christ bring peace there?
- What are “the ways of this world” for us, that tempt us to follow it but actually breed enmity with God?
- If we accept Paul is correct in 2:1-3, how do we understand what we see in the non-Christians around us? They don’t look like they’re serving “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” How would we explain this to them (should we)?
- How does the idea that faith is the work of God affect how you should think about your own behavior?
- Should we care about our “works” or not?



## Application & Practice

**Coworker with God.** This week when you leave your house, try to pay very close attention to the promptings of the Spirit. Report back next week on one thing you felt the Spirit prompt you to do or say where you responded as the conduit of God’s work.



## Going Deeper

**Video.** N. T. Wright on Ephesians - <https://vimeo.com/15289901>

# MYSTERIES, REVERENCE & UNITY

## Week 5: Ephesians 3



### Historical Context & Background

We've already looked at some context for Ephesians, but let's dive a little deeper. Ephesus is a port town and was sort of a cultural hub due to the trading that took place there. This key feature is why Paul made it a center for missions, and as a result the whole of Asia heard the word of God (Acts 19:8-10). At the time this letter to the Ephesians was written, Paul was actually under house arrest. You may have noticed he tells us we should be honored to receive from his sufferings in verse 13. This is because the Romans felt threatened by the rebellion that was starting as a result of Paul's preaching the gospel. This chapter specifically addresses the revelation made available to the church, our role as the church and Paul closes by praying some pretty powerful words of encouragement and activation. So let's dive in!



### Related Passages

Galatians 3:28 - This verse captures the oneness and unity that is meant for the Church.  
Colossians 1:25-27- Availability of the "mysteries" of God to his people  
1 Corinthians 11 - Paul notes he is a good example for how we live and minister.



### Key Terms

**Administration:** The original Greek translation uses *oikonomia* which means administration or stewardship. To clarify, it is used to state the management of another's household or affairs. (Fun fact: It's also the root of our word "economics.")

**Mystery:** The Greek word is *mysterion*. Originally the word referred to a truth into which someone had to be initiated. As a Christian, mysteries have been revealed by God and now belong to the whole church.



### Key Themes

**Mysteries Made Known:** It is easy to distance ourselves from God by saying he is too complex or too (fill in the blank). While we should definitely acknowledge the vastness and transcen-

dence of God, we need to also take ownership of what is offered to us through Christ. We have been afforded an opportunity to know God, and that is precisely what Paul is speaking to the church of Ephesus in this chapter. He explains that what was not known by previous generations has now been revealed through Jesus by the Spirit. In the Old Testament the Jews continually prayed for their deliverance and rescue. They looked for a political messiah who would deliver them from their enemies. Paul here explains that the “mystery” of the faith as revealed in Christ is not that ethnic, political Israel will be delivered, but that *all* of humanity can be delivered in him. And in being shown this mystery, we are given not only a fuller picture of God’s plan for the world, but also a fuller picture of God’s character and nature.

We often think of mysteries as being secretive or obscure, but this is a mystery Paul says God is making known. Christianity is a notoriously *unsecretive* faith. Unlike Islam or The Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), the Christian religion has always been profoundly public (except during times of persecution, where out of necessity meetings are secret). Christ’s resurrection was a public event, which is what grounds its very truth for Paul (1 Cor. 15). So when you hear the word “mystery” here, don’t think of our religion as being secretive, like a Freemason, Scientology, or Gnostic meeting. The mystery of the faith is proclaimed every week at churches around the world: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” What Paul means by the mystery here is what we said above: Even though the Old Testament promises did in fact point to the salvation of the nations (not just Israel), *how that would* be fulfilled was hidden until made manifest through Christ. It’s the heart of the Gospel: that God is bringing all people together as his holy people through Christ.

**Paul as an Example:** 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that Paul lives a life worthy of replication. We can learn many lessons from Paul in this passage. Some obvious things emerge: he’s appointed by God to share the gospel, and he does so with humility and reverence, all while actively suffering. In this passage, we read that he is a servant of the Lord. Paul’s not just a slave in the traditional sense. He means he has devoted his life to serving the gospel. Since Paul is our example, we see in him a template for our own servanthood. His humility especially shines through. He calls himself the “least of all God’s people.” Paul himself is not great, but it is God working through him. Reverence coincides with his humility, and this is on display in two ways. First, notice how he prays: he gets down on his knees before God. The posture with which you pray is important. He also suffers. This appears to be a significant concern for the Ephesian church, given what’s in verse thirteen. Paul gives us a model of how to suffer. Paul is under arrest while writing this, but that’s the least of his suffering. Go read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33, or the opening of 2 Corinthians 6. Paul is an example of how to offer sufferings to the Lord: First, they make them more bearable, knowing that we share in small part the sufferings of Christ. But moreover they make manifest to the world the Christ’s own sufferings. What is Paul’s focus while he suffers? The love of God. The dominant theme of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is to grasp the love of God.

**The Church:** Chapter four will more clearly lay out a message of unity, but we see some important echoes of that theme here. Let’s take a look at verse 10; not only has the church been brought into awareness of the mysteries of God, but we also play a role. We, as the church, get to play an eternal role in displaying the wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heav-

only realms. The church is who unfolds the mystery of God to the world. The mystery spoken of above was hidden not only from those on earth but also those in the heavenly places, the powers and principalities (good or evil). So the church has not only an earthly mission, but a heavenly one. The church's proclamation of the sacrificed Christ and inclusion of all people increase the praise of God by the heavenly beings who now see the eternal logic and divine plan fully laid out. But it also rebukes the principalities Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6:12. Paul speaks of (as we'll see later on in Ephesians) the cosmic war. The church is where the divine intent to win it is proclaimed, and does so by plundering the enemy of his ranks. As one author put it, "The way the evil principalities and authorities have learned of God's mysterious plan, kept secret until now, is by counting their losses as they watch the church grow through the preaching of the gospel." This spurs on the importance of unity. We collectively display the manifold wisdom of God. We do so by living righteously, walking in obedience, and maintaining intimacy with the Holy Spirit, *together*.

Because of the work God is doing, Paul is compelled to preach the ministry of God's grace to all people. Paul has been commissioned by God to share His word, and in part, it is by his obedience that others can receive their inheritance (v. 6). What Paul so eloquently portrays is a beautiful reality: that God enacts his plan and his love through people—primarily through Christ, but also through his body. Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection was the climax of God's work in the world...and yet that work is still ongoing. How? In John 20:21 Jesus tells us: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And so the Church is the primary means by which God continues his work in the world—and even, as stated above, beyond it! We cannot reduce the Christian story to a story about me. Paul's emphases are on live together, for the sake of a cosmic rescue.

## 📖 Quotes & Stories

Corrie Ten Boom was a woman imprisoned during Holocaust for helping the Jewish people hide. She later was released at the end of the war and lived the second half of her life administering the gospel wherever the Lord called her. She is such a good example of someone who accepted the invitation to live within God's love and to love others from a place of overflow. Corrie ministered to the nations and consistently pursued the heart of God, abiding in his spirit, and living out of his love. In her time abroad she witnessed countless healings, salvation, and many counts of God's supernatural provision. Like Paul, she had a passion for sharing God's word, and who suffered with a joyful humility. Her example, like Paul, can be a light and guide to us.

## ! Three Main Points

1. Through Jesus, God's mysteries are made known to us.
2. Humility and Reverence are key characteristics we ALL need. Both help us to be led by and used for God and his purposes.

3. The Body of Christ plays the eternal role of displaying God's wisdom and in doing so, bringing glory to him.

## Discussion Questions

### Observations

- What is the main message of this chapter?
- What is notable about Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?
- What is noteworthy about Paul's character?
- How are you approaching God?

### Contemplation

- What is the purpose of the church according to Ephesians 3?
- How is your time on campus like being in a major center of influence?
- What does it mean to be a good steward?
- Do you understand what Paul is saying about the mysteries of God?
- What is reverence or fear of the Lord? Why is it important?
- What is humility?

### Application

- How do we display the wisdom of God?
- What are some ways you can missionally connect with people or groups on campus?
- Typically, what is your physical posture when you pray? Do you find that it matters, compared to other times that you pray?
- Are you someone who tends to preach the gospel more with your words or your actions? How can you begin to practice both?
- Is there anything about Paul's prayer life that is worthy of implementing in your own life?
- Have you asked God for opportunities to share the gospel? If so, how did that play out? If not, why haven't you asked him?

## Application & Practice

**Posture of Prayer:** Paul talks about kneeling before the Father in prayer as he prays for the church. This week do the same! First, commit to pray for the church this week, that it would be unified and fulfill its divinely appointed mission. Second, kneel during your personal prayer times this week.

## Going Deeper

**Book:** Tramp for the Lord by Corrie Ten Boom.

**Book:** Practice Resurrection by Eugene Peterson.

**Book:** Too Busy Not to Pray by Bill Hybels.

**Podcast:** "N.T. Wright Interview - Getting to Know the Apostle Paul" by the Bible Project

# UNITY, NOT UNIFORMITY

## Week 6: Ephesians 4:1-16



### Historical Context & Background

As we've reached the halfway point of our journey through Ephesians, it may be useful to remind ourselves that this letter wasn't always divided into 6 chapters and subsequent verses. Ephesians is commonly divided into two parts: chapters 1-3, which focus on what God has done for us through Christ, and chapters 4-6, which focus on our response as God's people, the Church, to what God has done. This can be a very helpful distinction to make, in fact it may lead you to encourage your group members to zoom back out this week, to see the big picture. Maybe this is a good week to reread Ephesians in its totality. However, the danger in this distinction is that it would cause us to separate what we ought to believe from what we ought to do, when in reality the two are inseparable and ought to inform one another. Ephesians 4-6 will bring appeals for unity, instructions for living, and even a call to battle. This may all seem overwhelming and impossible to accomplish without the reminder that we are invited into these instructions out of and through the work that Christ has done and is doing in our lives through His Spirit. Keep this in front of you and your group this week and the rest of this semester, so that we can invite one another into the grace of life *with* Christ rather than the striving of living life *for* Christ.



### Related Passages

1 Corinthians 12 - Another New Testament passage from Paul referencing spiritual gifts as well as ideas of unity and diversity in the Church.

Romans 12:3-8 - You guessed it, Paul again talking about giftings, specifically how we ought to approach them humbly and use them to serve one another.



### Key Terms

**Gift:** Or in the Greek "*dórea*," clarifying that the spiritual giftings given to us are just that, a gift. They are freely given and hence not acquired by merit or "entitlement." *Dórea* expresses a brand of giving that highlights the generous desire of the giver. Therefore, our spiritual giftings say more about God than they do about us.

**The Body:** Or in the Greek "*sóma*," can refer to the physical human body, but here and elsewhere is used figuratively to refer to the functionality of the "body of Christ" also known as the Church or people of God.





## Key Themes

**Unity:** In Ephesians 4, Paul begins to guide us into what it looks like to live a life that is responsive to what God has done for us through Christ. This response is two-fold. First, there is a personal element to life with Christ. This looks like creating space for him to form us into people who look like him, who bear the characteristics of Christ. This naturally flows into the second response, which is a change in who we are communally. How does Christ influence not just who we are, but how we interact with others? What does it look like for us to follow Christ alongside one another? Paul wastes no time in getting to the answer, as in verse 3 he invites us to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The key word here is unity. Now, unless you’ve been living under a rock the last 5 years, you understand that what Paul is asking of us here is a pretty high bar. Our culture is currently defined by disunity and disagreement, and the church is hardly an exception. Be it our political preferences, thoughts on the COVID-19 pandemic, or our theological stances, we as the body of Christ aren’t exactly on the same page.

So why unity? And how? These may be some of the questions that jump to mind. Let’s start with why unity is important. As Paul eloquently reminds us in verse 4, our unity as followers of Christ points to the oneness of God. We are all united by one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God. When we are able to live at peace with one another, we cast the vision of one God who is over all things to a world that is scattered and looking for meaning in all sorts of places. Imagine CSF as the “city on a hill” that Jesus talks about in Matthew 5. If we’re able to be a people who set aside our differences for the sake of one another, a people defined by unity, then we will look remarkably different from a world plagued by disunity.

This idea admittedly seems rather utopian, so how do we get there? Here we can look to verse 2 for guidance. First, humility is key. We must lay aside our pride and recognize the dignity of each image bearer of God we meet. What would it look like if we approached each person with the assumption that we have something to learn rather than assuming we know it all? Next, we need to cultivate patience. The NLT translation of verse two instructs us to make allowance for each other’s faults. What if instead of pretending we have it all together, we admit we don’t and in doing so find the capacity for compassion and forgiveness towards others? This is by no means easy stuff, but remember we aren’t called to muster these virtues of our own strength and will. Rather, by submitting ourselves to Christ, and allowing Him to form us, we can become people of humility and patience that bear a communal witness to the love of Christ. If Christ found going to the cross worthy of unifying His people, shouldn’t we be open to the hard work of becoming people who foster unity?

**Spiritual Graces:** So does unity mean we’re all supposed to be the same? A bunch of cookie cutter Christians? By no means. In fact the very opposite is true. A phrase we like to use around CSF is “unity doesn’t mean uniformity.” Paul alludes to this in verse 7 by saying “but to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” This is seemingly in contrast to the vision of unity laid out in verses 1-6, but the beauty of Christian unity is that we all claim one hope, one faith, one baptism, and one God in spite of our differences. In this view, our unique individ-

ual graces serve as a reflection of the multidimensional character of our God.

These “graces” are often referred to as spiritual gifts. In verse 11 Paul highlights just a few, but this is by no means a comprehensive list. In fact, over 20 different spiritual gifts are listed across the New Testament with the implication that there are more beyond what is listed in Scripture. The language of spiritual gifts can be super helpful, and it may even be a fruitful endeavor for your group to spend time identifying and affirming one another’s giftings. However, there can also be real danger in the comparison of spiritual giftings or the development of an unhealthy pride in a particular spiritual gifting. These pitfalls are spurred on by a culture that pushes us to stack ourselves up against one another and to find any way to set ourselves apart as unique or special. We simply can’t afford to fall into these traps and waste the good gifts we’ve been given.

This is where Paul’s language of spiritual graces is so key. Implied in the word grace is the admission that we’ve received this unique gift not of our own merit but only by the allowance of God. This allows us to release ownership of the gift, not allow it to define us, and be grounded in the truth that we have no place to boast in it. Instead, since this gift has been given as grace we can instead turn in curiosity towards the giver and ask how we ought to use it. Why has Christ given me this particular gift? How should I use it? Who is it for? The answer we find in verse 12 is that our gifts or “graces” are for the service of others, for the benefit of the body of Christ. We ought to know our particular giftings, to invite others to identify them, to resist the temptation to boast in them, and instead humbly seek to use them to serve our community.

How may the Lord be leading you to utilize the giftings he has given you to serve your CSF community? Is He leading you to serve at CSF through leadership or discipleship next school year?

**A People of Truth and Love:** To choose to seek unity and to choose to utilize our spiritual giftings for the good of our community is by no means easy work. Yet it is truly necessary. In building one another up, Paul assures us that we will become a people mature in the Lord who know Christ more fully. He then goes on to explain why this is so important. He desires that the Ephesians build one another up so that they would not be children, “tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching.” How relevant to our current moment. Just as Christ hopes to form us in one way, the world hopes to form us in another, much more different and destructive way. It may not be overt, but you only need to open YouTube or TikTok to find the false narratives of what truly brings joy, happiness, and fulfillment. We have a certain fascination with new ideas, they capture us and even spark movements. Yet not every new idea is necessarily good, or true. This theme reaches beyond the digital space into the physical, especially on the college campus, where ideas run rampant in classrooms that run alternative to Christian doctrine.

In the face of this, how are we to respond? The second half of verse 14 offers a defiant other way of being a disciple of Jesus in a secular world, saying “We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like truth.” In a world defined by social media influencers we will acknowledge the fact that the culture is telling us lies. Crafty lies, lies that play to our disordered desires and cultural norms, yet lies nonetheless, and refuse to believe

them or live as if they are true. As verse 15 proclaims, "Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church." The two key words there are truth and love. Not hard truth without love or soft love without truth, but the perfect union of the two. How are we to know what is true? Or to know how to love? By participating in the body of Christ, becoming people defined by routinely speaking truth and love over one another so often that we become hyper aware of anything that deviates from the love and truth we have experienced in Christ so that we may reject it. This is the ultimate vision and deep necessity of Christian unity on campus in 2022.

## BB Quotes & Stories

"The church is not simply a religious body looking for a safe place to do its own thing within a wider political or social world. The church is neither more nor less than people who bear witness, by their very existence and in particular their holiness and their **unity**, that Jesus is the world's true lord, ridiculous or even scandalous though this may seem."

N. T. WRIGHT

"We must approach our meditation realizing that 'grace,' 'mercy,' and 'faith' are not permanent inalienable possessions which we gain by our efforts and retain as though by right, provided that we behave ourselves. They are CONSTANTLY RENEWED GIFTS. The life of grace in our hearts is renewed from moment to moment, directly and personally by God in his love for us."

THOMAS MERTON

"God's vision for his people is not for the elimination of ethnicity to form a colorblind uniformity of sanctified blandness. Instead God sees the creation of a community of different cultures united by faith in his Son as a manifestation of the expansive nature of his grace. This expansiveness is unfulfilled unless the differences are seen and celebrated, not as ends unto themselves, but as particular manifestations of the power of the Spirit to bring forth the same holiness among different peoples and cultures for the glory of God."

ESAU MCCAULLEY

### ***The Spiritual Baseball Team:***

\*sports analogy alert\* When Paul starts talking about spiritual giftings in his letters to the early church, it may seem a little strange. Maybe you've heard a lot about spiritual giftings, or maybe you've heard very little of them at all. Different church traditions approach spiritual giftings in different ways. However, at their core, the idea that different individuals would each carry different gifts and in doing so create a more cohesive union of believers is something we see in all kinds of other contexts in our culture. Take for example a baseball team, each player has a highly specialized skill set, be it pitching, catching, or snagging balls in the outfield. No two players are the same, but at the same time everyone has to step up to the plate to bat. Just as the team, though made up of different players with different skill sets, has a cohesive purpose

of winning games, we as believers, though different in our spiritual giftings, have the cohesive purpose of loving God and loving people. Not only do we see this on a baseball field, but in high school bands, fortune 500 companies, and even college group projects. So let us find our position on the field, our instrument in the band, our role in the company as we discern our spiritual giftings and how those giftings support the community of believers.

## ! Three Main Points

1. Our unity as Christians points to the oneness of God to a world marked by disunity. Humility and patience are key virtues in becoming people who foster unity.
2. Our unique giftings, or graces, are given by Christ without merit to serve the purposes of others and God's kingdom, rather than our own.
3. Our unity and ability to build one another up is a defense against the influences of our culture.

## ? Discussion Questions

### Observations

- What virtues does Paul identify as crucial to living towards Christian unity?
- According to Paul, does Christian unity look like uniformity?
- According to Paul, what is the purpose of spiritual gifts?
- What insight do verses 13-16 give as to why Paul feels the need to express urgency to the Ephesians in verse 1?
- Who is the source of our giftings?
- What types of giftings does Christ give? Are the giftings listed here a comprehensive list?
- What does "maturity" in Christ look like according to Paul? How do we get there?

### Contemplation

- Is the modern day Church defined by unity or disunity? Why?
- Is CSF defined by unity or disunity? Why?
- Is your core group defined by unity or disunity? Why?
- What are the barriers to living out Christian unity in our context?
- Why is it important that we are unified at Christians?
- What does it mean to have one hope, one faith, one baptism, etc.?
- How are we to become people who cultivate Christian unity?
- What does it look like to embody the virtues listed by Paul in verse 2?
- What is the role of spiritual giftings in the Christian life?
- What are your spiritual giftings? How are you currently using them to serve others?
- Why is Christian unity necessary?
- What are the modern day waves of teaching that seek to toss us back and forth?
- What does the world want us to believe and value? How is this in contrast to Christ's vision for our lives?

- What does it mean to “speak the truth in love”?
- Why are truth and love crucial to maturity in Christ both individually and communally?

### **Application**

- What practices may allow Christ to form us into more humble & patient people for the sake of Christian unity?
- What does a truly unified CSF look like? How do we get there?
- How does understanding spiritual giftings as “spiritual graces” change the way we view and use our giftings?
- How might Ephesians 4 challenge you to serve your CSF community through discipleship/ leadership/interning/etc in the coming school year?
- How can you affirm the giftings you see in the people around you?
- How are we to hold to the truth in the face of the modern day teachings (or lies) of our culture?
- How can we foster a community of truth and love at CSF?

## Application & Practice

**Read and Reflect:** You’ve got giftings that can be used to serve God’s Kingdom, that’s awesome! Where can you use them? Sign up for discipleship, for leadership, or apply to intern at CSF. These are all great ways to discover and cultivate your spiritual giftings to advance God’s kingdom on campus.

**Affirmation.** Sometimes we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, but more often we think too lowly of ourselves. We may not have the eyes to see our own giftings, but someone else may. Practice routinely affirming the giftings you see in others in your community. This can be your roommates, core group, or even your fraternity or sorority.

**Hold to Truth.** Ephesians 4 establishes that because the world wants to tell us lies, it’s super important that we’re all on the same page about the truth. If we’re only taking in lies from what we read, watch, and listen to in the culture, we’re going to lose this battle. We’ve got to be in the practice of spending time in truth. This can look like reading scripture daily, memorizing scripture, or even reciting a creed or prayer that affirms Christian truth. A great place to start is the Apostles’ Creed, a historic statement of faith that Christians have held to and recited for hundreds of years.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.



## Going Deeper

**Article:** Spiritual Gifts Assessment. Read the list. Take the test. This is best done communally!  
<https://giftstest.com/>

**Podcast.** Live No Lies by John Mark Comer & Jon Tyson.  
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/6XEFTC5VKgluxVtIShYN38?si=ba3cd7e37d22409a>

# WALK IN THE WAY OF LOVE

Week 7: Ephesians 4:17-5:2



## Context & Historical Background

Ephesians 4 functions as Paul's two part appeal for a different way of Christian living and as a launching pad into the rest of the letter. If last week's scripture (4:1-16) was meant to point us towards Christian unity, then the latter half, which we will focus on this week, is meant to point us towards Christian purity. Both unity and purity function as a testimony to our world, they are a different way of being. Just as unity presents an alternative to the divisiveness of our day, purity offers an alternative to our pleasure-seeking culture. Paul's heart is that we would "live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received"—that we would catch the vision of the way of life set before us by Christ Jesus our creator and choose this way over any alternative the world may offer.



## Related Passages

Romans 1:18-32 – A symmetrical passage to Ephesians 4:17-19 detailing the patterns by which humans are prone to resist God.

Colossians 3:1-17 – More from Paul on what it means and looks like to put off the old self and put on the new self.



## Key Terms

**Gentiles:** Or in the Greek "ethnos" referring to a people separate from Israel, or God's people. Here Paul is referencing those who were unbelieving in his time.

**Hardening:** Or in the Greek "pórosis" refers to a sort of blindness or numbness. Here Paul is asserting that the hearts of those who were unbelieving were blind or numb to the presence of God and warns us against this danger.



## Key Themes

**Live Different:** When Paul explicitly invokes the Lord's authority, as he does in verse 17, we ought to pay careful attention. This precursor gives us a heads up that what's to follow is important stuff. Paul says don't live like the Gentiles do, because they're confused. This is a broad

generalization but for our purposes, imagine Paul saying “don’t live like those who don’t know Jesus do, because they’re confused.” Paul describes these people as being closed off to God and only concerned with seeking whatever pleasure is available before them. He then reminds us who know Christ that this isn’t the way we’ve been taught to live. Remember, he opens Ephesians 4 by urging us to live a life worthy of what Christ has done for us on the cross.

The temptation to blend in to the crowd is a naturally human one, and this is only amplified on the college campus. How tempting it can be to slip into the culture of parties, relaxed sexual norms, and idolatry of drugs and alcohol as an escape. Even more dangerous is the temptation to convince ourselves that it’s not that bad, not even at odds with being a Christian. When our logic becomes “I can still be a Christian and...” we’re in a pretty dangerous place. This is where we have to call Paul’s words back to mind. He says don’t live like campus; campus is confused. He is reminding us that campus culture doesn’t know Christ, doesn’t honor Christ, and therefore doesn’t live in a way that is, as Paul puts it, is “worthy of the calling you have received.” Paul’s appeal is to be who we were created to be—better yet who we were *saved* to be by the blood of Christ. However, we’ll never tap into this life if we’re content to blend into a world and culture shut off to knowing Jesus. Like 2 Chainz circa 2018, we just have to be different.

**The New Self:** To claim life with Jesus is to embark on a completely new path. It’s not adding in a new hobby but rather a total reorientation of our lives around a new and decidedly different purpose. This is why Paul invites us to throw off our old selves. This removal of the old self is in part instantaneous and in another sense ongoing. If we have claimed Christ as our Lord and participated with Him in His death through baptism, our old self has been put to death by the blood of Jesus. We are no longer slaves to the patterns and desires of our old lives. Yet, even though we have power over our old sinful desires through Christ and His Spirit, they still like to hang around. In fact, for as long as we exist in this fallen world, we’ll find sin pervasive to keep creeping back in, if we let it. This is especially true if we find ourselves closed off to God, as we need His power to resist temptations that persist. There is a daily duty then to wage the war against our old self and partner with Christ in putting our old self to death.

We can see then that our role in becoming imitators of Christ is not one of being a passive bystander. While Christ is the primary actor in our sanctification, we must create space for Him to help us put off our old self and put on our new self. This is summarized well in the NLT translation of verse 23, saying “let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.” This isn’t a Carrie Underwood, Jesus-Take-the-Wheel-type theology. It’s not “let go and let God.” Instead, the placement of verse 23 offers an alternative to living as those who have closed themselves off from God by creating space in our lives for the redemptive work of His Spirit. We have to acknowledge that our default is to drift, to copy the pattern of those around us. This is a basic human tendency and a real danger if left unchecked. We must be willing to do the work of opening ourselves to God each day so that we can throw off the old self and put on the new.

**Communal Formation:** So what does putting on this new self tangibly look like? Well, Paul has plenty of guidance on that starting in verse 25. We would be wise to meditate on these instructions and implement them into our own lives. One commonality in all of Paul’s instructions that’s important to note is their communal nature. We are to speak truthfully to one another, to



not let anger persist against one another, to not speak poorly of one another, and so on and so forth. This is not to gloss over Paul's instructions here, as the most fruitful conversation for your group may be to zoom in on one of these instructions that they need to hear. Rather, it's important to note that we can't be holy people in a vacuum. It's not simply about our relationship with God in the quiet place but also how our relationship with Christ is lived out in our purity in conduct towards one another. This is consistent with Paul's appeals for unity, that we would look different from the culture at large and thereby a testimony to the work of Christ. Think about it, our culture tells lies, harbors anger, hoards possessions, and spreads gossip. What if CSF instead was a place of truth, reconciliation, generosity, and encouragement. What message about who Jesus is would that send to campus?

The trouble is, because of the pervasiveness of our old selves, the tendencies of our culture have seeped into our Christian culture. We hold grudges, speak down to one another, and at times can even be hesitant to lend a helping hand. If this is how we treat one another, what kind of message are we sending about Christ to the world? Does His life really matter? Does His love actually form us into more joyful, loving people? Plus, if this is how we treat our fellow Christians, how much worse will we treat those who don't share our faith? Hopefully we're beginning to catch the vision of why Paul so urgently desires purity amongst the church in Ephesus. Paul understands their purity as one of the most powerful tools towards the advancement of the gospel.

So then how do we grow? How do we become a community that "walks in the way of love"? It starts personally, by opening ourselves to God through his means of grace, allowing Him to form us into a different self. Out with the old, in with the new. Then, our Christian communities offer us safe spaces to practice a more loving way. Imagine your home or your small group gatherings as a training ground for spiritual formation to live into the vision Paul lays out for us in Ephesians 4. Finally, as we go out into the world, we can encounter those who don't know Christ as people full of grace that cause them to take notice. This isn't easy work, and it doesn't happen overnight, but this is Paul's vision if we're willing to open ourselves to God daily for Him to form us into a new type of people.

## BB Quotes & Stories

**Rocky.** When I think about this portion of Ephesians 4, one of the famous training montages from the Rocky movies with that iconic background music comes to mind. If you're not familiar with these movies, Rocky Balboa is a small-time boxer from Philly who in the first movie of the series gets the chance to fight the world heavyweight champ. I think we could benefit from taking a page out of Rocky's book when it comes to his training regimen. In order to get in shape for the fight Rocky has to train daily. This includes both doing things that are good for him, like running and working out, and not doing things that are bad for him like eating junk food. We don't often think of our life of faith as a heavyweight boxing match, but maybe we should. We've got an enemy that is crafty and would love to keep us down on the mat. We've got to be willing to train like Rocky, taking off the old self, putting on the new, so that we're ready for any

punch Satan has to throw at us. Like Rocky, this looks like both letting go of old, bad habits and replacing them with good, life giving practices that will prepare us for the fight. The good news is, just like Rocky always has a trainer to push him, we've got the ultimate trainer in Jesus Christ pushing us towards being the very person He created us to be. So cue up that famous Rocky music and let's get in spiritual shape!

Rocky training montage sample: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM-y8ahz-G0>

## ! Three Main Points

1. We're supposed to be different. We're not meant to do as the world does, love what the world loves, or believe what the world believes. We've been set apart to live as children of God.
2. We are not passive bystanders to our own formation. Our natural tendency is to gratify our desires and live as the world does. To instead put on our "new self" is daily, intentional, Spirit led work.
3. Our formation happens in and for our community. We aren't formed in a vacuum but rather through learning to exist in a community defined by love.

## ? Discussion Questions

### Observations

- How does Paul say the Gentiles have become confused?
- According to Paul, how does Jesus call us to be different from the "Gentiles" of our day?
- What practical guidance is given in the passage as to how to be a "new self" in Christ?
- How does our identity as children of God amplify our need to put on the new self?

### Contemplation

- What insight does the pattern of the Gentiles who have distanced themselves from God give us for patterns we ought to avoid in our own lives?
- What patterns of sin do you see as prevalent at UK? In your own life?
- Is taking off the old self and putting on the new a one time deal?
- Does Jesus just want us to be good people? Or is there more to it than that?
- Do we put off our old self and put on the new by our own strength?
- What does it mean to "let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes"?
- In which of Paul's instructions on how to put on the "new self" do you find yourself most convicted and in need of growth?
- What message does Christian purity give to the world?
- What message does a lack of Christian purity give to the world?
- What does it mean to "give the devil a foothold"? Could this be helpful language beyond just anger?
- What does it mean to "walk in the way of love"?

- What is the role of community in putting on the “new self”?

### **Application**

- How do you personally feel called to look different for the sake of Christ? What may this require letting go of?
- In what ways does CSF look different from campus? In what ways can we grow to further set ourselves apart in Christian purity?
- Have you claimed the power Christ gives you to take off the old self and put on the new? If you’re a baptized Christian, why not? If you’re new to faith, is this something you need?
- Are you treating life with Jesus as a hobby or as the sole purpose of your life? How do the two look different and what would it look like for you to center your life around Christ?
- In which piece of Paul’s guidance in verses 25-32 do you most need to grow personally? What does this practically look like?
- In which piece of Paul’s guidance in verses 25-32 does your group most need to grow communally? What does this practically look like?
- What is one practical way that you can create space in your life this week to let God begin to help you put off your old self and put on the new?

## Application & Practice

**Reflection.** Take some time to process how you might be following the patterns of the world and keeping on your old self. In what areas do you find yourself living as the world does? Do you notice any habits, events, or relationships that lead you to live in this way? What boundaries may you need to set in place to let go of this way of living? What life giving practices can you implement instead? Who can you welcome in to hold you accountable to live in this new way?

**Create Space.** Change is hard. It doesn’t come naturally to us and if we attempt to do it under our own power, we’re likely to fail. Luckily, Jesus is eager to intercede on our behalf and do the work of forming us into people who look more like Him. All we really need to do is give Him space in our lives to do this work. Could you set aside just 30, 15, even 10 minutes each day this week to spend time with Jesus in scripture, prayer, or simple silence?

## Going Deeper

**Workbook:** Rule of Life by Practicing the Way.

<https://practicetheway.org/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/workbook>

# BECOMING LIGHT

Week 8: Ephesians 5:3–20



## Related Passages

Romans 6:21 - “What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!”



## Key Potentially Misunderstood Terms

**“Immorality”:** (*porneia* in the Greek—hence “pornography”) can refer to any sexual activity outside of marriage: from adultery, sleeping around, homosexual sex, or masturbation to incest, prostitution, or even bestiality.

**Greed:** This might mean greed the way we typically think of it: the desire to possess or consume more and more material things. But one can see, too, how Paul might be applying these ideas to sexuality, his overarching topic here. Seeing someone as something to be possessed or consumed (as in lust in general, or pornography in particular) is certainly a type of sensual greed.

**God’s Wrath:** This is a word which often is met with too much zeal (by those eager to “defend” God or condemn wickedness) or with dismissal (by folks wanting to be “gracious”). Either way, God’s wrath can seem 1) distant; 2) arbitrary; 3) harsh. Let’s consider each for just a second:

1. God’s wrath isn’t just a punishment waiting for people on judgment day. Romans 1 suggests that God’s wrath might often entail him simply giving people over to their sinful desires in this life, here and now (Romans 1:18-27).
2. “Giving people over to their sinful desires” often means letting them taste the rotten fruit of their choices. God’s wrath, as N. T. Wright puts it, “isn’t an arbitrary thing whereby God makes up some rules to stop people enjoying themselves and then threatens to get cross with them if they go ahead anyway. God’s wrath is built into creation itself. There are certain ways of behaving which are so out of line with the way God made the world, and humans in particular, that they bring their own nemesis.” If you insist on wanting wickedness, God may let you have it.
3. None of this means God has given up on these people. The point of this whole process—God’s desire for it, as with the parent who must let their child make a dreadful mistake—is that in experiencing the emptiness of their sinful desires, they would *turn from* these “fruitless” ways and seek out, instead, life to the full. “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live” (Ezekiel 18:32)



## Key Themes

**The Weight of Your Daily Life:** Paul doesn't say that we were living in darkness, but now we are living in the light. He says we *were* darkness but now we *are* light. Obviously this has to do with our actions—we choose to do dark things sometimes, to enter into darkness, like when we nurse a lustful thought or harbor a grudge. But even moreso, Paul is showing us the extent to which our actions affect the central part of who we are. Doing these things doesn't just mean living in the dark or in the light—it also inescapably means *becoming like* one or the other.

When Paul admonishes us, “Wake up, sleeper,” he puts his finger on the reality that too often we spend our days making choice after choice, all without giving thought to how *this choice* is going to shape us and make us into a different kind of person—one who is more likely to choose obedience or choose sin, more like light or more like darkness, more heavenly or more hellish. This is why you must be “very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity” (5:15-16). The daily, small choices you make are all moments of decision: moments that move you further into the life and light of God or baby steps back into the darkness and death of sin.

The weight of our choices makes it all the more important to bring our “darkness” into the light. Practically, this might look like not continuing to nurture our sin “in secret” but, instead, “exposing” our sin for what it is. This might mean confessing (to a friend or a spiritual leader, but also maybe to ourselves for the first time) the reality and the extent of our sin. In particular, this is essential for our sin that, in some part of our heart, we actually want to cling to—sin that we enjoy and want to keep alive but hidden in the shadowy corners of our lives that others cannot see. If we will recognize and surrender these, these are the kind of illuminating moments that God uses to change the central part of us, changing not only our actions but our innermost parts.

Finally, when that happens, “everything exposed by the light...becomes a light” (5:13). And this has two important implications:

1. The sin you bring into the light will become a light to—a point of connection with and a ministry to—others who are living in the darkness of this same sin.
2. Inviting light into this one dark corner of your soul will help to illuminate the rest of your heart and your life. Sin always clouds our vision, obscuring our ability to see others, God, or ourselves as they really are. Every time you allow part of your life to be “exposed by the light,” this will help you see the rest of your life more clearly—things like sin you were blind to, where God wants to work in you, etc.

**Let's Talk About Sex (But Be Careful How You Do!):** The kind of careful living Paul is admonishing here—one careful to avoid “even a hint of sexual immorality,” even down to “coarse joking”—is a way of living mocked by the world. Our world tends to think of people who think and live this way as backwards and repressive. In fact, if you're actively conscious of and diligent to avoid these things, you're likely to be called a “prude” (or worse). That word, “prude,” has negative connotations nowadays; but it comes from the word “prudence,” which is all about having practical wisdom, good judgement, or discretion. St. Augustine says that “Prudence is

the knowledge of *what to seek* and *what to avoid*." No wonder the world scoffs at this! Most of culture sees sex (and most other pleasures) as something to be sought or avoided however your desire dictates—as a good thing that maximizes your experience of pleasure, which is the aim.

For the Christian, however, sex is neither a dirty thing (such that we should be ashamed of having desire) nor an unqualified good (such that we should embrace whatever desires we have). In other words, it's something to be pursued in some contexts (marriage) and to be avoided in others (anything outside of marriage). To be clear: sex is a good gift from God. It makes possible a level of intimacy and vulnerability and fertility available to a man and woman in no other way. But it is precisely *because* it is such a wonderful gift that we must reject all cheap imitations of it. It is a blessing so potent that it is safely experienced only inside the God-ordained, God-sustained, mutually-self-giving commitment of marriage.

And it's worth noting that, for Paul, maintaining purity isn't just about not crossing the line with your boyfriend or not looking at porn—though these are both admirable and wise. It's also about being mindful of the way sex enters into your speech: the jokes you tell and laugh at, the way you talk about those you pass by on campus, the songs you sing in the shower. Because, again, these will inevitably shape the way you *think about* sexual desire, which will shape the way you *act upon* sexual desire.

**Thanksgiving & Songs of Worship:** We've said that our actions and our words have the ability to shape the very kind of person we become. So what can we do to help ensure they shape and direct us toward the life of God, not away? Paul gives us two prescriptions: thanksgiving and songs of worship. If you want to *become* light, *fill yourself* with light (see 5:13). On one hand, this is a general reminder that we ought to be careful about what we give our ears, our eyes, and our time to—because it is to these things that we're giving our hearts and our minds. That's why Paul reminds us elsewhere to give our minds not to just whatever happens to be in front of us or is popular with our peers, but to whatever is true, pure, lovely, etc. (Phil 4:8).

But Paul also goes beyond general advice and admonishes specifically that we dwell upon "songs, hymns, and spiritual songs." It's hard to know exactly what he has in mind, as it's difficult to really know much about the music of the 1st century world, Christian or otherwise. (Which, by the way, is a bizarre thing to think about—we can't *hear* anything from then, after all). Nonetheless, many scholars think that Paul preserves for us a part of one of the earliest Christian poems or hymns in 5:14. It's a wild, almost magical thing to imagine the worshiping life of the earliest church. Imagine the faithful men and women of the 1st century—some of whom had seen the risen Christ—gathered and joined together in song: "Wake up, sleeper, / rise from the dead, / and Christ will shine on you." Just as you may have remembered the words to a worship song or hymn in a moment of trial, it may be that as some of the martyrs were going to face death for their faith it was this song to which they clung—*this song* that reminded them of the reason for their great hope, even in the face of death.

All this should point us to the importance and power of worshiping in song. Music and poetry have the power to stir our spirits in a way that is uncommon, that opens us up to beauty and

to the things unseen. Songs can be (maybe *should* be) one of the most effective tools for getting ideas from our head down into our heart. And so those who write or lead or even just sing songs of worship today can do so knowing that they are taking part in a noble, even Divine practice. At the same time, we should remember that this is a noble, Divine tradition—that the Church has worshiped in song for ages and ages. The Jews of old and the earliest Christians certainly turned to the Psalms to guide them in worship. And all this means there is a vast treasury of spiritual riches and resources for us today in the hymns, poems, and psalms of the Christians of old. If we will worship along with them, we might find spiritual and theological insights that we’re unlikely to find in the songs of our own time.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

*[On Thanksgiving and Worship]* “If you don’t want your garden to grow weeds, one of the best ways is to keep it well stocked with strong, sturdy flowers and shrubs. If you don’t want your mind and heart to go wandering off into the realms of darkness, one of the best ways is to keep them well stocked with wise and thankful themes, so that words of comfort, guidance and good judgment come bubbling up unbidden from the memory and subconscious.”

N. T. WRIGHT, EPHESIANS FOR EVERYONE

*[On Our Daily Lives]* “Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.”

C. S. LEWIS, MERE CHRISTIANITY

## ! Three Main Points

1. Sex is a good gift, but one to be governed (like all good things) by prudence: good and life-giving when pursued rightly, harmful and dangerous when pursued wrongly.
2. Our daily choices are constantly shaping the kind of person we are—making it easier or more difficult to be faithful—and so we ought to consider the weight of even our “smaller” everyday actions.
3. Songs, psalms, and poems have a unique ability to get into our hearts, rooting us in good things and pushing back against the devices and desires of our own hearts.

## ? Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that “everything that is illuminated becomes a light” (5:13)? In what

- ways can the once-darkness of your life become a light?
- Paul calls the type of living he's warning against "fruitless deeds of darkness" (5:11). What makes them fruitless? How can you tell if a choice you're making is one that is fruitless or fruitful?
  - What does it look like to "expose" the kinds of things Paul calls "fruitless deeds of darkness"?
  - Why does Paul harp upon sex so much? Is sexual sin somehow more harmful or more dangerous than other sins? In what ways might this be true? In what ways is it not?
  - Paul reminds us: "**you were once darkness**" (5:8). For many of us, this rings all-too-true. There are "deeds of darkness" in our past that still haunt us. So:
    - What is the danger of *forgetting* or ignoring the darkness of our past?
    - What is the danger of *dwelling* on the darkness of our past? How might we sometimes speak about our past in ways that hinder us from living, instead, as light?
  - Paul condemns not just sexual immorality but also "obscenity, foolish talk, [and] coarse joking" (5:4). Is Paul being a bit puritanical here? How do you encounter obscenity or coarse joking in your life? Do they feel like as big of a deal as Paul makes them out to be?
  - In talking about the moral life—how we ought to live—Paul warns us **not to be deceived by "empty words"** (5:6). This calls to mind many of the "reasons" people give for living in the ways that Paul warns us not to.
    - What are some of the "empty" ways that our world encourages us to embrace sexual immorality, obscenity, greed, etc.?
    - What are some of the reasons you give for why your own choices or those of others are okay? Spend some time reflecting on these "reasons" and bring them into the light—and see for yourselves how *empty* they are.
  - Are there some sins that—if you were honest, if you look at the way you address (or don't address) this sin—that you *want* to keep in the dark? Are there sins that you know are there but that you keep alive but hidden in the shadowy parts of your life that others cannot see? If so, how might you "expose" this and bring it into the light?
  - What does it look like to have a life characterized by thanksgiving (5:4, 5:20)? How can this become more than a mental thing (i.e. counting your blessings) or even a prayerful thing (though you should do that)? How can thanksgiving be present—or absent—in *all* your daily actions?

## Application & Practice

**Speak to Yourself in Psalms:** To help us avoid foolish ways of living, Paul admonishes us to speak to one another (and, perhaps, to speak to ourselves) in psalms. This sounds a bit weird—but what if the wisdom of the Psalms were so ingrained in you that their words naturally overflowed into your conversations and thoughts. To that end, consider memorizing a psalm this week (or semester) and PRAY IT. Here are a few great choices:

- Psalm 100
- Psalm 139:7-12 or 23-24 (or any of it, really)
- Psalm 86:11-13
- Psalm 62:5-8
- Psalm 130



***Illuminating Your Darkness.*** Think of one or two of the major ways you are consistently guilty of immorality, impurity, obscenity, or “fruitless deeds of darkness.” Now consider why/how you get tempted into these things. What thoughtless or seemingly small choices, patterns of living, etc. open up the door to these? With the help of your group, decide upon one tangible way you can step out of the dark this week—and do it!

***Worship with the Church of Old.*** We encountered this week an ancient song of worship that the early Christians sang not just to praise God but also to root themselves in his ways, in resistance to the foolish ways of the world. Christians have been doing this—in ways that are full of beauty and truth and creativity—for ages. This week, join in with Christians of old and worship with some older Christian worship songs! Here are a few options to consider:

- “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”
- “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”
- “It Is Well With My Soul”
- “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”



## Going Deeper

***Book:*** Liturgy of the Ordinary by Tish Harrison Warren

***Article:*** “12 Songs to Sing During a Crisis” from the Gospel Coalition

***Video:*** “The Curse of Total Sexual Freedom” from Bishop Robert Barron  
Any of the hymns or Psalms above!

# ELEVATING THE LEAST OF THESE

Week 9: Ephesians 5:21-6:9



## Overview

An initial read of this passage may lead us to think that Paul is giving us permission to subject others under ourselves, but Paul's other writings should be in the back of our minds. In Galatians 3:28, for example, Paul proclaims, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ, old social distinctions, under which people were used for personal gain, are dissolved. In Christ—and in his church—every person has value and worth. This background should be on our minds as we read Ephesians 5. More on this context can be found at [www.ukcsf.org/coregroup](http://www.ukcsf.org/coregroup).



## Related Passages

Galatians 3:28 - Paul equates people of lesser value to those of greater value in the Greco-Roman world.

Philemon - Paul implores Philemon to receive his slave, Onesimus, not as a slave but as a brother.



## Key Terms

**Submission:** The Greek word for submission, *hypotasso*, does not imply being subjected by another. Rather, *hypotasso* means to voluntarily submit oneself to another.



## Key Themes

**Wives and husbands:** Ephesians 5:21-33 is one of the most famous (maybe infamous?) passages on marriage in Scripture. But it's also one of the most insightful passages about marriage, dating, and relationships in general. Plenty of people have gotten riled up by Paul's call for wives to submit to their husbands. But before ladies get upset or men think they are off the hook, let's take a step back in order to better understand the idea of submission, as it applies to both man and woman.

The most difficult part of this passage is trying to figure out what “submission” actually means. The authority of another is not something we choose. Our submission to another is voluntary. Tim Keller describes submission as “a loss of pride and self-will that leads a person to humbly serve others.” Whatever else submission might mean, it’s clear that submission should be mutual. After all, Paul begins this section with the command to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). The wife submits to the husband in some ways; the husband submits himself to the wife in other ways.

Wives	Husbands
v. 21 - “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”	v.21 - “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”
v. 22 - “submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord”	v. 25 - “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”
v. 24 - “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”	v. 26-30 - “make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word...”

Looking at this diagram, there’s a visual representation of mutual submission at the top of the list, as the umbrella under which the individual callings of both men and women fall. There’s still some controversy here. How do men and women interact in the family unit? Some, called “complementarians,” think that, because of the fundamental difference between men and women, they have different roles in the household structure. Others, called “egalitarians,” think that men and women, even if different in some ways, are equal and therefore don’t have fixed roles in the household structure. It may be worth mentioning in your group, but don’t get caught up in it. The important point here is that Paul is absolutely *not* giving men license to rule their wives like a master rules slaves. Whatever side of the complementarian/egalitarian debate one comes down on, the text is clear that Paul’s admonition—even command—is for mutual submission: If women are to submit to their husbands, men, too, are to submit to their wives, willing to give their lives up for them.

Paul’s call for mutual submission was extremely countercultural. Roman aristocratic men were apprehensive about *new* religions, such as Christianity. The household was central to Roman culture with the family serving as the basic unit the rest of society was built on. Pleading a case for mutual submission challenged this structure and brought value to women, who were considered some of the lowest members of society. At any point in history, you will see the church treating women with greater value than the surrounding culture. A professor at Baylor University studying European villages noticed an interesting commonality between communities where the Gospel had been accepted. Before the Gospel was spread in these small villages, the bones of women in the catacombs were broken and battered. After their communities were impacted by the Good News, the female skeletons were unharmed. Paul, following in Jesus’ footsteps, challenged the status quo for the sake of the least of these.

**Children and parents:** Children were thought to lack capacity for reason, rationality, strength, and courage. These were considered by Greeks and Romans great virtues. And since children were thought to have *lacked* these qualities, to be a child was to be despised. So children—especially female children—were most often thought of just as a burden and a liability, a thorn in the family's side.

The unfortunate result of this ridiculously low view of children was the culturally acceptable murder of children, specifically infants. This is heavy, disturbing stuff to talk about, but it was a reality in the ancient world. There were some very primitive, very graphic forms of abortion in Greek and Roman culture, but usually the murder of the child was carried out *after* birth.

Infanticide, the murder of infant children, was sometimes executed by strangling or drowning the newborn baby. This murder would most often be performed by the unwanted father, who would kill the child before the eighth or ninth day of his or her life, before the child would be presented to the extended family. After that time, the child would seldom be killed, although the father still had that right. But the most common form of killing infants was exposure, where the parents would simply leave the child beside the road or in the woods. In this scenario, the parents could at least imagine that someone might find the infant and give him or her a home. Still, of those who were rescued and raised, the overwhelming majority were raised as slaves for prostitution (both male and female).

And the reality was that nearly all these abandoned children would die—either being eaten alive by wild animals or succumbing to cold and lack of nutrition. In fact, we even have evidence that the sewer systems of ancient cities were sometimes clogged with the remains of day-old babies. Rick Watts is one of the historians who points people toward this gruesome infanticide, and he argues that if these horrific stories disgust you, “that’s because of the story of Jesus.” What Watts means is that Jesus (and the Church that follows him) actually elevated the status of children, valuing them as the people created in God’s image. And that’s what we see Paul doing when he addresses children in this passage. By speaking to children in Ephesians 6, Paul is giving them dignity, counting them as people worth addressing and instructing, though this was unheard of in the ancient world. When Paul addresses children, he speaks to them as individuals made in the image of God—like everyone else.

**Slaves and masters:** The passage is one of those that can trip people up. In this section, Paul addresses how slaves are to honor God through their lives. The unfortunate reality is that passages like these have been twisted to justify slavery and oppression throughout history. But when we understand the Roman culture the New Testament writers were living in, we begin to see a portrait of the Church giving dignity and personhood to people who were completely devalued and ignored by culture.

To our modern sensibilities, it makes sense that everyone has proper dignity. The Declaration of Independence very quickly states “that all men are created equal” and are “endowed with inalienable rights.” But this hasn’t always been the case. In the ancient world, men enjoyed far greater privileges and honor than women, slaves, and children. Slavery was natural. In their society, slaves and barbarians were all considered to have diminished ability to reason. The Greek

philosopher Aristotle believed that humans had different natures—some servile, others assertive—that assigned them a “natural” station: master or slave.

Slavery in the modern world was based on race. But that’s not the slavery of the ancient world. Anyone could be a slave, and some even willingly chose it. Not all slaves despised their position. Some, in fact, like slaves in the imperial household, enjoyed great honor and freedom compared to other citizens. But the majority of slaves were conquered enemies of Rome, working class citizens who sold themselves into slavery because they couldn’t pay their debts, and children who had been born to slave parents. With few exceptions, there were no rules governing slave treatment. Masters had complete control over their slaves, even over life and death.

The ancient world’s economy depended on slavery. The Roman silver mines, for example, had tens of thousands of slaves. Slavery was accepted in nearly every region. The historical reality of ancient slavery was the economic foundation of ancient culture. It was deeply rooted in the ancient mindset as a necessary part of society. Slavery was never questioned as an institution, especially on moral grounds, before Christianity came along. Through his letters, Paul brings value to a formerly neglected portion of society.

## ☞ Quotes & Illustrations

In 1939, World War II broke out. An international conflict, commenced by Adolf Hitler’s ambition to dominate the world. Devastation of varied natures were the result, including 6 million Jews who were murdered in concentration camps. Hatred toward Jews was existent prior to Hitler’s schemes. Hitler utilized these antisemitic messages in his campaign as a part of his platform. Convinced of these thoughts, or afraid to disagree, subjugation of a whole people group resulted. Betsie and Corrie ten Boom, among others, were Christians in Germany willing to risk their lives for the sake of saving the lives of others. Despite religious differences, these women sought to deny cultural pressure to devalue certain groups of people. Both were willing to put their lives in danger, and even face the concentration camps themselves, for the sake of the oppressed.

## ! Three Main Points

1. Husbands and wives are called to submit to one another, a countercultural image of the family unit that brought value to women in Roman society.
2. Children were degraded for their mental and physical weakness. Paul falls in line with Jesus’ plea to value the young.
3. Paul brings value to a third group of people in the Greco-Roman system. Ancient slavery had not been challenged before Christianity entered the scene. Paul, in multiple letters, makes appeals for slaves to be treated respectfully by their masters or, even, set free.



## Discussion Questions

### Wives and Husbands

- How does Jesus interact with women? Does that support Paul's teaching in Ephesians?
- How can proper submission by both men and women be empowering and life-giving?
- How can those in relationships begin to live into mutual submission so that it's life-giving rather than taxing?
- For those who are not married, is this passage still relevant? What can single individuals also learn from a Christian understanding of submission?
- Of all the pictures the New Testament uses to illustrate God's love for his Church, the analogy of marriage is the most consistent and strongest metaphor. In what ways is Christ's love for the Church like a marriage? In what ways is it different? (It might be helpful to look at Rev 19:9 and Rev 21:1-3).

### Children and Parents

- In Ephesians 6:4, why does Paul address fathers and not mothers?
- How does Jesus interact with children? Does that support Paul's teaching in Ephesians?
- What does it look like to honor our mothers and fathers? What if our parents aren't believers?
- Even though when Paul speaks to children he gives them a commandment, he says that this instruction comes with a purpose and a promise (Eph 6:1-3). What is that promise? How does it show the way Paul and the Church valued children as children of God?

### Slaves and Masters

- Read Galatians 3:28. How does Paul raise the status of slaves in this verse?
- Read Eph 6:9 and Col 4:1. What is Paul's view on slavery, knowing that he required masters to treat slaves with absolute dignity?
- Read Philemon 1:8-20. In this short letter, Paul is urging Philemon to treat his returning slave as a brother. What does this say about Paul's ultimate view on slavery?
- Reread Eph 6:7-8. How can we serve others wholeheartedly?

### General

- Who are people today that are devalued by modern society? How can the church elevate the dignity of those who are devalued?
- Are there people or groups that you value more or less than others? Why?
- What does it practically look like to bring value to or honor others?
- How can we honor those we disagree with? What does it look like to disagree with yet love another person?



## Application & Practice

**Serve wholeheartedly:** Think of someone you could voluntarily submit to or serve out of love for Christ, and do it! This could include serving your parents, friends, leaders, or professors in some

way this week. Or, think of someone you can bring value through service such as serving at a non-profit ministry (Lighthouse Ministries/Dining with Dignity, Natilie's Sisters, 4Kids, Amachi, etc.).

**Pray.** Think of individuals or groups of people you do not value out of love for Jesus. Make a list, or add them to your prayer request list if you have one, and pray for them daily. Pray blessing for those you do not value and ask for the Spirit of humility to soften your heart.



## Going Deeper

**Book.** Paul, Women, and Wives by Craig Keener.

**Book.** The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller.

**Book.** The Hiding Place by Corrie ten Boom.

**Podcast.** "Seminary Dropout" with Tish Harrison Warren and Jonathan Warren.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/seminary-dropout/id582049752?i=1000385235379>

# THE ARMOR OF GOD

Week 10: Ephesians 6:10-24



## Context & Historical Background

The people Paul was writing to in Ephesus would have been under the rule of the Roman Empire. They would be keenly aware of what a Roman soldier looked like and the armor that they were outfitted with. These people were no strangers to war or battles. When Paul is describing the armor of God, they would have knowledge of what he was talking about and how each piece of armor protected the soldier. The full armor would be required to fully protect each soldier which is why Paul says to put on the full armor to protect against the devil.



## Related Scriptures

1 Corinthians 10:13 – God will always give you a way out of temptation so that you can endure it.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 – Our battle is not against flesh and blood, therefore we cannot use the weapons of this world.



## Key Terms

**Panoplia:** This is a Greek word that is a compound composed of two words meaning all or whole + tool or weapon. Together it fully means “the full equipment of the heavily armored foot soldier.” The effectiveness of a soldier was not dependent on one piece of armor, but rather on the combined protection of the whole armor.

**Be Strong:** This is a verb that implies growing in strength. It is not a stagnant phrase suggesting that we just have to muster up this strength, but rather a strength that grows as we endure.



## Key Themes

**Put on the Armor:** As the saying goes, “There is no such thing as bad weather, just poor clothing.” In the same way that we prepare for the weather outside with our clothes, we must also prepare for the battle that we are up against with our spiritual armor. Paul gives us this arsenal of armor that we are to put on daily to take a stand against the devil’s schemes. He names the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the feet of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet



of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Each piece of armor represents an aspect of God's character.

Instead of going through each piece of armor to explain it, let's focus on a few. With the rest, you're welcome to research and/or discuss them more with your groups.

First, the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate in a piece of armor protects all of the major organs besides the brain. The Blue Letter Bible describes righteousness as "integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, and we are in a state that is approved of by God." Our major organs provide us life and when one is injured, the whole body suffers. When our righteousness suffers, we usually notice that all other aspects of our faith and life with Jesus will suffer.

Then we have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. It has been frequently pointed out that this is the only offensive weapon we are given. When we are fighting against the dark world and spiritual forces of evil, most of our battle will be defensive and protecting ourselves against Satan, but we can use the word of God to fight back—like Jesus did with Satan in the wilderness—and advance in the battle.

**Be Prepared:** Preparation is key to any battle. No military would go into battle without a war strategy, nor would any sports team go into a game without a gameplan. We all "understand" the importance and necessity of preparation, but do we carry that same knowledge into our battle with Satan? Satan's deceptiveness leads us to fall (see: Eve in the Garden). We must be able to discern the truth of God from the lies of Satan. One of the best tools God gives us to learn about his character and what is true, right, and holy is his word. By reading and memorizing Scripture we are not only able to see more clearly who he is; we can also see clearly who he is not. When Satan tries to deceive us, we will not be swayed by his charming and counterfeit claims. We will know who the true God is and what he says to be true.

It's important for us to be prepared for spiritual warfare and the attacks of the enemy. John R. W. Stott wrote "It is not only wrong, but foolish and dangerous to live the Christian life without being prepared for spiritual warfare." When we are not aware of what is happening in the heavenly realm, we can easily be swayed by the deceitful ways of the devil. Satan is able to take truth and slightly distort it so that Christians not well versed in the word can be misled. Think again about when Satan was in the desert with Jesus. He tried to use Scripture against Jesus to get him to fall into temptation. If Satan will try this deception on Jesus, who was the embodiment of the word, how much more will he try to distort the word with us? We must be prepared to seek truth in everything that we do and test everything against the word of God.

**Spiritual Battle & Prayer:** There is no need for us to defeat Satan. As Gabe Measner put it, "Satan already took that fat L." Defeating Satan is not our job, because Christ has already defeated him. Our job in this battle is to resist Satan's attempts to reclaim the territory of our hearts. This is one reason why prayer is so important. The enemy is always on the prowl, so we ask God for his help in rebuffing his advances. Paul talks about the importance of prayer on all occasions for all kinds of requests precisely because prayer is powerful! Prayer keeps us on guard against temptation, and we see this with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks his disciples to keep watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. But each time Jesus comes back to his disciples, he finds them sleeping. It's difficult to keep watch while you're asleep

(your eyes are closed, duh). Jesus is making a seemingly simple request for his friends to stay awake and keep watch so that they will be aware when his betrayer comes. In the same way, we're called to keep watch and stay alert so that we can be aware of how we might fall into temptation, but also how we can resist it.

## 📖 Quotes & Illustrations

**Esther Ahn Kim:** Esther was a believer that lived in South Korea in the mid-1900s. Where she lived, the gospel was not welcomed and she was going to be forced to bow down to something other than her God. Japan had annexed Korea and forced Koreans to worship at Shinto shrines and worship Japanese gods. She knew that following Jesus would mean being thrown into prison. Instead of just living her life normally until she was put into prison, she decided to prepare for the harsh conditions that she would face. She began to memorize over 100 chapters of the Bible along with many hymns. She fasted from food and water and slept in the cold to mimic the conditions of prison. She was eventually put in prison, but her preparation allowed her to minister to many people around her by sharing her food and her faith.

**Dumbledore's Army: Preparing for the Battle with the Dark Lord:** When Dolores Umbridge took over Hogwarts as headmaster, she began to make some changes to the school. One of the changes was altering the curriculum of the Defense Against the Dark Arts class from one with action and physical preparation to one of textbooks and exams. Harry Potter took personal offense to this because he knew that you could not defeat the dark forces simply by learning from a textbook. Some things just have to be learned by experience. Because of this, he banded together with some of his friends (Ron and Hermione) to create a secret society/ club where they could practice the spells and defenses needed to defeat and battle against these dark forces. They named themselves "Dumbledore's Army". They met in a secret room called the room of requirement and were able to learn practical spells for battle. We learned last semester that faith requires action. Sometimes preparation for defeating the schemes of the enemy requires action on our part to memorize Scripture, learn how to pray, and build up our spiritual toolbox so that we can defeat the Devil when the time comes. It is not a question as to if the Devil will tempt or come at you, but a question of when. So will you be prepared when that day comes?

## ! Three Main Points

1. The armor that we put on allows us to fight and protect ourselves against the powers of evil.
2. Prepare for the attacks of the enemy by reading the word and knowing God's truth from Satan's lies.
3. Prayer is a powerful way to resist temptation and stay on guard against the devil's schemes.



## Discussion Questions

- Which piece of “armor” is the least clear to you?
- How does each piece of armor protect you?
- Why do you think there is only one offensive piece? (As long as you don't include the shield as an offensive weapon)
- How do you prepare for spiritual battle? How is this different from the ways you prepare for other things in life?
- We're talking about “standing against the devil's schemes”—aka spiritual warfare. What does spiritual warfare look like? (Spend some time in your group discussing how this doesn't always/necessarily look like *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*.)
- Have you personally experienced spiritual warfare? How did you respond?
- Do you believe that the word of God can actually defeat the devil? (might just be a rhetorical question, but it could be good to have your students think about)
- What stories in the Bible do you see Satan quoting Scripture or using the word of God against God's people?
- What spiritual warfare did Jesus experience?
- In the garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus fervently praying that him and his disciples would not fall into temptation. Do you have the discipline to pray every time you are tempted? Why or why not?
- Have you seen the Lord deliver you from temptation? How?
- Do you feel like you are “asleep” to how the devil is tempting you?
- What piece of armor do you think is lacking in your life? What piece do you think is the strongest in your life?
- What do you use as armor and how do you “put it on”? (Community that leads you to righteousness, prayer that keeps you from temptation, the word as truth, etc.)
- What are some things in your life that are hindering you from growing closer with the Lord?
- What are ways that you can integrate prayer into your daily life?



## Application & Practice

**Memorize Scripture:** We have seen that the sword of the spirit which is the word of God is the only offensive weapon we are supplied with in the armor of God. Memorizing Scripture is one way that we can always take the word of God with us into our daily battles. Choose a verse or passage with your group to memorize this week and come back the next week and recite it together. This may seem a little silly, but the word of God is powerful and is worth writing on our hearts. Here's a couple great options:

- James 4:7-8
- Ephesians 6:14-17
- Psalm 23
- Or anything else in the Bible—it's all pretty decent.

**Pray.** After Paul explains the armor of God, he adds to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. This week, set specific times to pray. (You know when's best for your schedule—but don't just say "I'm going to pray more." Choose a specific time/place to help keep you to your intention.) And then pray! Bring to God all of your prayers and requests and pray with the Spirit of God that is within you.



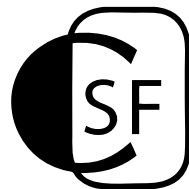
## Going Deeper

**Book.** *The Armor of God* by Priscilla Schrier.

**Video.** "The Christian Soldier" by Alistair Begg.

**Book.** *Live No Lies* by John Mark Comer.





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