

# THE CHURCH

GOD'S GIFT FOR OUR GOOD AND HIS GLORY



CHRIST THE KING  
- C H U R C H -

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*The Church: God's Gift for Our Good and His Glory*

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

The church is God's plan for the good of his people and for his glory.

The church is God's wise plan for the good of his people. One aim of this study is to demonstrate to followers of Jesus that we need the church. God has designed the life of faith in such a way that our survival depends on the community of the church. To be a follower of Christ is to be a member of a local congregation. The church is necessary for our own growth in godliness and for us to join in God's mission.

Not only is the church for our good, but God has also designed the church to glorify himself. As Paul unfolds the mystery of God's purpose to include all kinds of people in his plan of redemption, he writes in Ephesians that the Lord's purpose was "so that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:10). The church displays the manifold wisdom of God. The church, as the company of those who have been redeemed, exists to the praise of God's glorious grace (1:6). In his wisdom, our God has intertwined his glory with our good in the church.

The daily rhythm for this study is to read the assigned passages, reflect on the questions provided, and memorize and meditate on a focal passage. As the Bible is best studied in community, there are questions for group discussion, and then each week will culminate in a sermon that highlights an important truth about the church from that chapter in Ephesians.

Our prayer for you in this study of God's Word is the prayer Paul offered for the church at Ephesus: May "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (1:17-19).

## DAILY LITURGY

For this series, the daily liturgy will be guided by passages and prayers from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. One quick reminder: Liturgy simply refers to the pattern of our private and public worship. At CTK we hope to use liturgy, both in daily devotion and in gathered worship, to help us rejoice in God by remembering Christ's death and resurrection, and so be renewed through the gospel by the Spirit to display and declare the gospel with our lives.

**Before we read God's word we need ask for His help to understand because these things are spiritually discerned. Consider praying Ephesians 1:16-20 before opening God's word:**

*<sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup>that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.*

**Now that we've read God's word we should praise Father, Son, and Spirit by ascribing worth, honor, and glory to Him. This is the proper response to God's gracious disclosure of Himself in Christ by the Spirit through the written word. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a great passage to lead us in praising God:**

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

**Praising Father, Son, and Spirit for His glorious grace will make us acutely aware of the reality of sin and suffering, both ours and our neighbors. So now we ought to pray for assurance and encouragement from our mighty and merciful Father in the love of Christ through his Spirit in our inner being. Ephesians 3:14-19 can aid us here:**

*<sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through*



*faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,<sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,<sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

**Assured and comforted in the gospel we turn our prayers outward; that our lives individually and as a church would display and declare the gospel. In line with Jesus’s words in John 13:34-35, Paul encourages us to love one another as God has loved us. Let Ephesians 4:32-5:2 guide your petition:**

*<sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you... <sup>1</sup>Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

**Further, we want to pray for those beyond our homes and CTK. Now we can turn our prayers toward our gospel partners. Each week we highlight in our email update and Sunday worship one of our partners in the gospel. You can pray for them here. Even further, we can pray for our community and societal leaders - elected representatives, school employees, emergency personnel, and so forth. Ephesians 1:2 and 6:23-24 leads us to pray for the blessings of the gospel—grace, peace, and love - to manifest in the lives of others.**

*<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ... <sup>23</sup> Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*

**Finally, we need one final reminder of the gospel. We need to remember that our Father hears us on the basis of our exalted Savior, not our excellent praying. So we receive Ephesians 3:20-21 by faith and go about our day.**

*<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

#### **MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | EPHESIANS 4:4-6**

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

# EPHESIANS 1

## CHRIST'S COMMUNITY

What comes to mind when you hear “church”? A building? An institution? A particular congregation? Whatever comes to mind, Scripture teaches that the church, first and foremost, is the people of God. It is those people who have trusted in Jesus and, by the Father’s grace, have been blessed with every blessing of the Spirit in Christ Jesus (1:3).

**Challenges of Church.** No matter what comes to mind when we hear the word church, we are all familiar with some of the challenges of church. Whether that is a difficult person you have encountered or a wide-ranging scandal, the church has many blemishes. Even without these challenges, we can all admit that what was true of the first-century church in Corinth is true of the twenty-first century church today:

Consider your calling, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:26-27).

### KEY THOUGHT

The church belongs to Jesus. Christ is the head of the church, and his people are his body.

Not many of us possessed wisdom that would appeal to the world. Not many of us were powerful in the world. Not many of us came from influential families. Instead, God chose those of us who are foolish and weak in the world’s eyes. What the world considers foolish, God chooses to display his wisdom. In Ephesians 3:10, the Apostle Paul tells us that the Lord is now using his church to show off his unparalleled wisdom “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” The church is the wisdom of God on display.

**In Christ.** God’s wisdom in the church begins with redeeming his people. In Ephesians, Paul describes salvation by grace alone. God alone saves. He redeems those who apart from his grace were without hope in this world. Redemption and all of its benefits only come to God’s people “in Christ.” As we trust in God by faith, the Spirit of God unites us to the Son of God. We are saved because we have been united to Christ and are found in him.

This union with Christ Jesus has profound implications for how we live as believers. In Ephesians, Paul particularly draws out what the nature of our salvation means for life in the church. To be united to Christ by faith also means that I am united to all of God’s people. Union with Christ means union with his body, the church.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us in this letter how we should live in light of our shared union with Christ. As we will learn, the church is essential to our lives of faith. For the Christian, the church is not an optional part of following Christ. Rather, by God’s design, the church proves essential for all those who seek “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1).

**Maturity & Mission.** For us as followers of Christ, the church is indispensable for growing in Christ and to overcome our adversary. We will only reach maturity as Christians in and through the ministry of the church (4:11-16). We not only need the church for our maturity but also for our survival. As followers of Jesus we are at war not “against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:12). We are embattled against a spiritual enemy, and God empowers us by his Spirit and gives us each other in order to stand firm.

Not only is the church necessary for each of us, but the Lord has also made the church integral to his plan for the entire cosmos. God’s plan of redemption encompasses far more than just saving our souls. His plan includes the redemption of all creation. His plan is to unite all things in Christ, “things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10). As the church is the body of Christ, we are part of God’s plan to bring this to fruition (1:22-23). In fact, even now the Lord is showing off the church as part of his grand plan of redemption (3:10).

The goal of this study through Ephesians is for us to grow in our love for our God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we grow in our love for God, our prayer is also that we would grow in our love for what he loves: his church. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:25). If we love Christ, we will love his church for whom he died.

The Greek word we translate “church” is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*). While our English word for “church” has a wide range of meanings, when Paul speaks of the church in Ephesians, he primarily has in mind the people of God who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. “Church” can be used broadly to speak of all those throughout time and space who have trusted in Jesus. We call this the universal church. More often than not, Paul uses “church” to describe a local body of believers who gather together to worship and to serve our Triune God.

# EPHESIANS 1

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.



# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 1

■ Psalm 38:1-14

■ Genesis 24

■ 2 Corinthians 6

*The first chapter of Ephesians largely is made up of Paul's prayer. He begins with praising God for his great plan of redemption, and then he turns to pray for the Ephesians. As he prays, Paul teaches us much about who the Lord is and how he saves us.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Do you notice any key or repeated phrases?

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 1:1-14

■ Psalm 38:15-22

■ Genesis 25

■ 2 Corinthians 7

*As he praises God, Paul unfolds the Lord's plan of redemption that began even before the foundation of this world. Paul praises God for his gracious plan to redeem his people that began in eternity past and has now been accomplished through the work of Christ. As people hear the gospel and believe, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit.*

- What benefits have come to us through Christ?
- How do these benefits come to us?

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 1:15-23

■ Psalm 39:1-6

■ Genesis 26

■ 2 Corinthians 8

*In these verses, Paul prays for the Ephesian believers. We would all confess the importance of prayer, but our prayer lives often tell a different story. For many of us, we want to pray, but we do not know how. As you read and reflect on this prayer, consider how Paul's prayer could shape your prayers for others.*

- For what three things does Paul pray for the Ephesians?
- How can you use this prayer as a guide to pray for others?

- Consider taking time right now to pray this prayer for one person in your life.

#### DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 1

■ Psalm 39:7-14

■ Genesis 27

■ 2 Corinthians 9

*In reading Scripture, particularly the letters of the New Testament, looking for purpose statements helps make sense of what we read. Key phrases such as “in order that,” “so that,” and “to” indicate that the author is explaining a purpose. As Paul praises God for his redeeming work, he mentions several purposes the Lord has in this work of redemption.*

- As Paul praises God for his work of redemption, he outlines the history of redemption. In doing that, what in verse 10 does Paul say is the purpose of God’s plan to save?
- When Paul says, “all things,” in verse 10, what does he mean? Consider what he includes in Romans 8:18-25.
- Look at verses 6, 12, and 14. In addition to the purpose in verse 10, what does Paul note is another reason for God’s saving work?

#### DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 1:22-23

■ Psalm 40:1-8

■ Genesis 28

■ 2 Corinthians 10

*Through this week in Ephesians 1, it has become clear that Jesus Christ is at the center of God’s plan of redemption. He is uniting all things in Christ (1:10), and in these verses today, we read that God is putting all things under his feet and making him head over his church.*

- What two things does Paul note in verse 22 that God the Father does for God the Son? Why is this such good news for us?
- The New Testament says much about Christ reigning at the Father’s right hand. Look up one of the following references and note what it says about Jesus’s work as he now reigns: Acts 2:32-35; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 Peter 3:22.
- According to verse 23, what does Christ’s role mean for us as his church? How should you live in light of the fact that you are part of the “fullness” of Christ in this world?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What first comes to mind when you hear the word “church”?
- How does the New Testament speak of the church?
- According to Paul in Ephesians 1, what blessings come to believers in Christ?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be the head of his church?
- What evidence would demonstrate that a local church is living with Christ as its head?
- What are some signs in your own life that you are submitting to Christ’s headship of the church rather than trying to assert your own will and opinions on the church?
- What does the image of the church as the body of Christ tell us about what it means to be the church? What does this image teach about our mission as a church? Consider John 20:21.
- How does one come to be part of this body?
- Consider committing as a to pray 1:15-23 for one another by name and for your whole church this week.

# EPHESIANS 2

## UNITED IN CHRIST

Paul emphasizes three main points in Ephesians 2: we were dead in our sin, we are saved by grace, and we are united in Christ. These points build upon each other and culminate with Paul's insistence that the church is one in Christ no matter what divisions might have existed outside of Christ.

**We were dead in sin (2:1-3).** In Ephesians 1, Paul set forth God's plan for redemption in Christ. Now as he begins chapter 2, Paul goes back to who the Ephesians were—indeed who we all were—apart from Christ. We were dead in our sin. We deserved God's wrath. Notice how far gone all people are outside of Christ. Our sin is an active rebellion against the Lord. We reject him and instead follow "the prince of the power of the air" (2:2). Apart from Christ, we all share in this common condition of deserving God's judgment.

**We are saved by grace (2:4-10).** From the reality of our condition apart from Christ, Paul then turns to God's gracious work of salvation. Out of his mercy and his love, God takes the spiritually dead and makes them alive in Christ Jesus. "By grace you have been saved" (2:5). This salvation comes about entirely by God's grace. It is totally his work. We have nothing we contribute to our salvation. We merely receive it by faith. This salvation by grace brings praise to God (2:7), and it undercuts any attempt at human boasting (2:9).

The Lord is praised because his great work of redemption highlights his love, his mercy, his justice, and his power. Salvation by grace alone negates any human arrogance because we contribute nothing to God's work. Paul concludes this section by reminding us that we are new creations in Christ to do good works. We can do no good work that would earn favor with God, but once we are saved by grace, his Spirit so works within us to produce good works. As John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Reformer succinctly stated, "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone." Salvation by grace alone produces faithful obedience in God's people.

**United in Christ (2:11-22).** These first two points culminate in the third and final point of this chapter: all of God's people are united in Christ. A little background is needed to understand how radical a point Paul is making in this chapter. In the ancient world, there existed a fundamental divide between Jew and Gentile. This division was ethnic, cultural, religious, and national in nature. The two groups saw themselves opposed in almost every way imaginable. As you read the pages of the New Testament, the disdain these two groups had for one another is evident. Yet, God in his grace saved people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Churches across the first-century Mediterranean world were having to figure out how these two divided groups could be reconciled in one congregation.

### KEY THOUGHT

Despite being drawn from different backgrounds, the church has been reconciled to God and therefore reconciled to each other by the redeeming work of Christ on the cross.



In this context, Paul reminds the Ephesians, who were predominantly Gentile believers, of who they were apart from Christ (2:11-12). They had no share in the promises of God. They lacked all hope and did not know God. "But now in Christ Jesus," Paul explains, "you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (2:13). Christ reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God, and as they were reconciled to God, they were reconciled to one another (2:14-17). In Christ, they shared in the grace of God, which includes having access to the Father in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

These two groups are now reconciled into the one new people of God (2:19-22). They are no longer primarily identified by their previous ethnic, cultural, religious, and national distinctions. Instead, they are God's redeemed people. Out of these two divided people, God is working by his grace to create one new people who are his temple, his dwelling place.

**Truth for Today.** Salvation by grace alone short-circuits any human boasting or divisiveness. Our salvation depends entirely upon God's grace, and as the Lord saved us he has united all his people in Christ. All who have been saved by God's grace are united in Christ by his Spirit. As you read and reflect on Ephesians 2 this week, consider how the truths of salvation by grace and union with Christ should shape your life as a follower of Jesus in your local church.

Saving faith is more than knowing about God. As James warns, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:19). Faith has three necessary components: (1) knowledge of Jesus Christ through the gospel, (2) belief in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and (3) personal trust in Christ alone for salvation.

## EPHESIANS 2

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 2

■ Psalm 40:9-17

■ Genesis 29

■ 2 Corinthians 11

*In Ephesians 2, Paul emphasizes the fundamental unity that all believers have in Jesus Christ. We are united in Christ. To make this point, Paul begins by discussing our sinful nature before Christ and salvation by grace alone. As you read this chapter, consider how understanding who we were apart from Christ and how we have been saved promotes unity within the church.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note throughout the chapter how Paul discusses what life is like before Christ and then how it changes with him.

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 2:1-3

■ Psalm 41:1-4

■ Genesis 30

■ 2 Corinthians 12

*In these verses, Paul describes who we all were outside of Christ. Before the Lord saved us by his grace, we were all dead in sin. We were actively rebelling against God and deserved his righteous judgment.*

- What is the common condition that all people are in apart from Christ?
- How does this shared condition break down any boasting we might do?

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 2:4-10

■ Psalm 41:5-13

■ Genesis 31

■ 2 Corinthians 13

*While the first three verses of Ephesians 2 describe who we were apart from Christ, the next seven verses tell what God has done to save his people. Salvation is entirely by God's grace. Our salvation is totally God's work. We receive this free gift from God by faith. For what three things does Paul pray for the Ephesians?*

- How are we saved? Whose work is it?
- How does the fact that salvation is entirely a work of God remove any room for boasting?

DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 2:11-17

■ Psalm 42

■ Genesis 32

■ Mark 1

*All those who have been saved by God's grace are one in Christ. We are united in Christ by the Holy Spirit. This new reality supersedes any other human distinctions and fundamentally changes the way we relate to other believers.*

- Apart from Christ, what is our condition before God?
- In Christ, how does Paul describe our condition?
- How does being in Christ change our relationship with other believers?

DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 1:22-23

■ Psalm 43

■ Genesis 33

■ Mark 2

*No matter their background, all who have placed their faith in Jesus are now the one people of God. Paul uses several images here to describe this reality, and he concludes with the truth that God's people are now his temple. In the Old Testament, God's special presence dwelt in the tabernacle and then the temple. Now, God dwells in his people both individually and corporately.*

- What does verse 18 teach us about how we pray?
- What does it mean to be part of the temple of God? Compare these verses with John 2:13-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-5. Note any observations about what it means for the church to be the temple of God.





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why was the division between Jews and Gentiles such a major issue in the first century? Consider 2:11-12.
- What do you see as the greatest division that threatens Christ's church today? Social, ethnic, economic, political? How do the truths of Ephesians 2 help us overcome these divisive issues?
- How does understanding who we were outside of Christ help bring unity to the church?
- How does understanding that salvation is entirely by God's grace help bring unity to the church?
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of reconciliation with God. Out of that vertical restoration with God comes horizontal restoration with others. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and discuss what our role must be in helping others be reconciled to God. How are you being an ambassador for reconciliation?
- If you have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, then that should affect your relationships with others. Is there someone with whom you need to work for reconciliation? What is a specific and realistic step you could take toward reconciliation? Reflect on what Jesus says about forgiving others in Matthew 18:21-35. Also, consider the type of forgiveness we are to offer others according to Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13.

# EPHESIANS 3

## GOD'S WISDOM ON DISPLAY

As Paul finishes discussing the church as the new temple at the end of chapter 2, he seems poised to offer a prayer for the Ephesian church. However, he interrupts his thought to go into detail on the nature of his ministry, the mystery of the gospel, and God's purpose for the church.

**Ministry (3:1-2, 7-9).** God called Paul to the particular ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Yet, in serving the Lord, he finds himself imprisoned and describes himself as suffering for the Ephesians. Paul is likely writing this letter while imprisoned in Rome somewhere in the years AD 62-64. Notice, however, that he does not describe himself as a prisoner of Rome but as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" and it is "on behalf of you." Paul is bound by the call of Christ to make the gospel known.

For all his sufferings and imprisonments, Paul understands his ministry to be a gift that comes to him from God's grace. Yes, he's been entrusted with the "stewardship of God's grace," but even the suffering service he endures he describes as a gift from God. As a servant of God, Paul's work is to proclaim "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and "to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God." He has been called to announce the good news of Jesus Christ.

**Gospel (3:3-6).** Throughout his writings, Paul uses "mystery" to describe something that was hidden but has now been revealed. This mystery is the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications. Before Christ, the fullness of the gospel had not yet been made clear, but since his life on earth, it has now been made known. In Ephesians 3:6, Paul highlights one particular aspect of the gospel: through the work of Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. By his grace, God has overcome this division between Jew and Gentile to create one new people who are united in Christ.

**Purpose (3:10-13).** In God's perfect plan, Jesus opened the way for all people to share in God's promises. As people come to faith in Christ, they share in God's grace and become the one people of God. This plan of God to redeem all kinds of people displays God's wisdom as they are united in the church. Where sin divides people, the gospel unites them in Jesus. What the wisdom of this world could never accomplish—bringing people together across every type of human division—God accomplishes through Jesus's death and resurrection.

**Truth for Today.** God has made the church a necessary part of his gospel plan in order to display his wisdom to the spiritual powers that oppose him. The church stands as a beacon of his wisdom as divided and different people are united in Christ. The gospel not only reconciles people to God but also to one another, and the church shines as a visible representation of God's grace and wisdom in the gospel.

The church also displays the reconciling power of the gospel to the watching world. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if

### KEY THOUGHT

The gospel unites people in the church across every human distinction. God's wisdom is displayed as followers of Jesus live out this gospel unity.

you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). The more surprising the love then the more powerful the witness. When our church is made up of people who are not natural friends, our lives together display the wisdom of God. When the people of God come together in the church, we show the world the power of the gospel by our surprising love for one another.

“What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in light of the fact that they have all been loved by Jesus himself, they commit themselves to doing what he says—and he commands them to love one another. In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus’s sake.”

D. A. Carson

## EPHESIANS 3:1-13

<sup>1</sup> For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup> assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. <sup>13</sup> So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.



# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 3

■ Psalm 44:1-8

■ Genesis 34

■ Mark 3

*Before you read the whole chapter, read 3:10. Then, as you read chapter 3, consider how the truths of this chapter explain how the church displays the manifold wisdom of God.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note the references to mystery

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 3:1-6

■ Psalm 44:9-16

■ Genesis 35

■ Mark 4

*Paul feels compelled by the gospel to suffer and even be imprisoned so that others might hear of Christ. He understands the gospel as a treasure entrusted to him to be distributed to the Gentiles. As you read these verses, notice the three times Paul uses the word "mystery" (he also uses it in 3:9). For a reminder of the sharp division that existed between Jew and Gentile, look at the reaction in Jerusalem to Paul's announcement of his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-22).*

- What is the mystery Paul describes? Why is this truth now revealed?
- Why is the revealing of this mystery good news for us today?
- Compare how Paul uses "mystery" in this passage with Romans 16:25-26 and Colossians 1:24-2:5.

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 3:7-9

■ Psalm 44:17-26

■ Genesis 36

■ Mark 5

*Paul describes his proclaiming the gospel and suffering for Christ as a gift of God's grace. He rejoices that he has been given the opportunity to be part of God's work in the world.*

- Why does Paul see his work for God as a gift?
- How can you work to shift your view of making disciples from seeing it is a duty to seeing it as a gift of God's grace?

#### DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 3:9-10

■ Psalm 45:1-9

■ Genesis 37

■ Mark 6

*Paul says that the church displays God's wisdom to the spiritual powers opposed to God- "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."*

- How does Paul explain in this chapter that the church is able to display God's wisdom?
- How does the incredible spiritual significance Paul place on the church encourage you to engage with your local church?

#### DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 3:11-13

■ Psalm 45:10-17

■ Genesis 38

■ Mark 7

*Paul explains the ministry that the Lord has given him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He understands his ministering to be part of God's grand plan of redemption that he established in eternity past. Notice how this "eternal purpose" comes to pass "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:11). As we have seen throughout Ephesians, all of our salvation is coming to pass in Christ. From our hope in Christ, we can both pray and endure suffering with confidence.*

- What comfort do you find in knowing that God's plan for redemption is part of his "eternal purpose"?
- How can 3:12 encourage you to pray?
- What lessons can you learn from Paul about enduring hardship?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the mystery Paul describes in this chapter?
- Why is he willing to suffer so much for this mystery?
- In light of what Paul says about this mystery, how is it that “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10)? In other words, what about the church shows off God’s wisdom?
- To whom is God’s wisdom made known in 3:10? Why is that significant?
- Based upon Paul’s expectation that the church should be displaying God’s wisdom, what can you celebrate about how your church is doing in showing off the manifold wisdom of God?
- What is a realistic and specific step you could take to help your church be a brighter display of God’s wisdom?

# EPHESIANS 3

## FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In 3:14, Paul begins his prayer for the Ephesians, picking up where he left off in the first verse of this chapter. The prayer highlights the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Paul prays for the church to live as the new temple of God, enjoying and spreading his glorious presence.

**Trinity.** This prayer is richly trinitarian. Paul prays to the Father that his readers would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit, so that Christ would dwell in their hearts and that they would know the love of Christ. This leads to Paul's prayer that they would "be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19). This prayer is nothing less than that they would be filled with the whole of the Trinity. To have Jesus dwell in your heart is to have the fullness of God there.

### KEY THOUGHT

As the new temple of God, the church enjoys and spreads the glory and presence of God in this world.

**Temple.** This prayer for the fullness of God is a prayer for the church to live as the new temple of God. This prayer builds off the end of the second chapter. The "for this reason" of verse 14 continues the thought of verse 1. The reason for the prayer is that through the gospel God has united all believers in Christ. As Paul describes the reality of the one people of God, he describes believers as a holy temple where God dwells (2:19-22). Furthermore, this language of "filling" is temple language (2 Chronicles 7:1). This prayer for the church to be filled with the fullness of God is a prayer for the church to be God's temple in the world: the place of his presence and glory.

**Rooted & Grounded.** Paul describes the church as "being rooted and grounded in love." Rooted is an agricultural image and grounded is an architectural image. The church, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:9, is both "God's field, God's building." This building is nothing short of God's new temple (1 Cor 3:10-16; Eph 2:20-22).

As the new temple, the church not only enjoys God's presence and glory but also works to spread his glorious presence in the world through the gospel. In the Old Testament, Israel's temple was to serve as a light to the nations, drawing all peoples to worship the Lord. There's also a connection in this prayer with Ephesians 1:23. There, Paul calls the church the fullness of Christ; it is the church who is now Christ's body in the world. We are his representatives, doing his work in the world. As Jesus commissions his first disciples, "As the Father has sent me, even

so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). Yet, we will only be his body as we are "filled with all the fullness of God." Only as we are indwelt by God can the church be who we are called to be and make the gospel known in the world.

**Truth for Today.** As followers of Jesus, we need each other in the church to live out our calling. Only as we join together as the temple of God are we filled with the fullness of God and display his glory to the world. We are living stones who are being built together into God's temple (1 Pet 2:5). A single stone does not make a temple. We must be joined together on the foundation of Christ if we are to be who God intends for us to be, a living temple that carries his presence and glory to a lost and dying world.

## EPHESIANS 3:14-21

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

## REFLECTION

### DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 3

■ Psalm 46:1-7

■ Genesis 39

■ Mark 8

*Before you read the whole chapter, read 3:10. Then, as you read chapter 3, consider how the truths of this chapter explain how the church displays the manifold wisdom of God.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note the references to fullness and filled.

### DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 3:14-21

■ Psalm 46:8-11

■ Genesis 40

■ Mark 9

*Paul clearly prays in a trinitarian manner. In reality, all Christian prayer is trinitarian. Typically, we pray in the pattern of the NT: to the Father, in the Son, and through the Holy Spirit.*

- Notice from how you marked up the passage on the first day of this week how Paul highlights each member of the Trinity in this prayer. Why do you think it is important that the Father, Son, and Spirit are actively involved?
- We pray to the Father. Consider Matthew 6:9-13 and Galatians 4:6.
- We pray in the Son. Consider John 15:16 and 16:23.
- We pray through the Holy Spirit. Consider Romans 8:15 and 8:26.

DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 3:14-21

■ Psalm 47

■ Genesis 41

■ Mark 10

*Paul connects his prayer for the church with his earlier discussion of the temple.*

- Read Ephesians 2:19-22. How is the church the new temple? What does John 2:18-22 add to our understanding of how the church is the temple?
- Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-3. What parallels do you see between the first temple and how Paul speaks of the church?
- Paul speaks of the church as the temple in 1 Corinthians 3:5-17. How can this image encourage and challenge us in our serving the Lord in his church?

DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 3:14-21

■ Psalm 48:1-8

■ Genesis 42

■ Mark 11

*In addition to enjoying the glorious presence of God as his temple, the church has also been commissioned by God to take his presence to the ends of the earth through the announcing of his gospel.*

- In John 20:21, Jesus sends his followers out as the Father sent him. What aspects of Jesus's ministry does the church fulfill today?
- Early in chapter 3, Paul describes his own ministry. How should we be following his example?

DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 3:14-21

■ Psalm 48:9-14

■ Genesis 43

■ Mark 12

*Our hope in prayer is that God can do far more than we could ever ask or imagine. A key aspect of Paul's prayer here is that God the Father would be glorified in both Christ Jesus and in his church.*

- As the Father is glorified in Jesus, so too he is to be glorified in Christ's church. Based on the whole of Ephesians 3, how can we glorify God in the church?
- Consider taking time now to pray 3:14-21 for people in your life and for your church.





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what way is the church the new temple?
- What was the role of the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament? How do we see that being fulfilled in the church today?
- Ephesians makes clear that all of our salvation comes in union with Christ. So, too, this notion of being the temple of God comes through our union with Christ. Consider John 2:18-22. How is Jesus the new and better temple?
- Paul applies the language of the temple to both individuals (1 Cor 6:19) and groups of believers (1 Cor 3:16-17). How does the collective use of this language push against our own individualistic tendencies? What does it say about the idea that faith is merely a private matter?
- How does the reality of the church as the new temple shape our view of the importance of our life together as a church?

# EPHESIANS 4

## UNITED AND EQUIPPED

Before Christ, all “were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Eph 2:1-2). Now, those who have been made alive in Christ are urged “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph 4:1). We walked in sin, but now, we walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

We do not walk alone. Christ Jesus has gifted and equipped us to walk together as the church. Together as the body of Christ, we are to walk in unity and maturity as we walk by God’s grace.

**Walk in Unity (4:1-16).** Paul begins Ephesians 4 with “therefore” and so connects what he is about to say with what he has already said. He calls believers to live in a new way because of the reconciling work of God in their lives. The gospel changes how we live. Through Christ Jesus, we have been reconciled to God and to our fellow believers.

In light of God’s gracious work in saving us and our fellow believers, we are to live with one another in humility, gentleness, and patience (4:2). We are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). Paul speaks here of a bond that is greater than merely our shared humanity; it is a supernatural bond wrought by God the Holy Spirit. As followers of Christ, we share a fundamental unity with one another. We live in unity, humility, gentleness, and patience because we are one together in Jesus Christ. There is one body, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, and one God, and so we as the church should be one (4:4-6).

This unity does not mean uniformity. As Paul explains in verse 7, Christ gives gifts according to his wisdom. Not every believer receives the same gifts or the same measure of gifts. Furthermore, Paul has been at pains in this letter to address the ethnic and cultural diversity within the church. The Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ. Paul repeats the same refrain in many of his writings (1 Cor 12:13, Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Unity in Christ spans all ethnic, cultural, and economic distinctions we see in the world. Jesus seems to delight in bringing different people together and uniting them in his body. We are united in Christ, but we are not all the same.

Our differences are part of God’s good plan for the church. God uses the differences in giftings and roles to mature his people. In verses 12-13, Paul outlines the different offices the Lord has used to build his church, and then he explains the goal: maturity (4:12-16). Such maturity is characterized by serving (4:12), unity in our faith (4:13), steadfastness in our biblical beliefs (4:14), truth spoken in love (4:15), and continued growth (4:16).

**Walk in Maturity (4:17-32).** As we grow in unity as the body of Christ, then we will help one another grow in maturity. Such growth in maturity will manifest itself in how we live. We will “no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds (4:17). Walking in maturity is a call to “put off your old self. . . to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self”

### KEY THOUGHT

The church is united because the Spirit has united each member to Christ. This unity does not mean that all believers are the same. Rather, the risen and ascended Christ has given a variety of gifts to the church to equip us for ministry.

(4:22-24). We forsake falsehood, anger, theft, and impure talk; instead, we should live according to the gospel (4:25-29).

Next, Paul draws our attention to what mature living looks like within each church. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of unity (4:30). Instead, the Spirit who has sealed us will bear fruit in our lives as we “let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (4:31). We honor God and please the Spirit as we follow Paul’s command to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you” (4:32).

**Walk by Grace.** We cannot lose sight of the context of this call to walk in unity and maturity. The first three chapters of Ephesians have reminded us of the gracious work of redemption that God accomplishes for all who trust in Christ. We can only walk in a manner worthy of our calling because we have been called by God’s grace to life in Christ. We can walk in the unity of the Spirit because each follower of Christ has been sealed and is filled with the Holy Spirit. We will only walk in unity and maturity as a church when we walk by grace.

**Truth for Today.** Jesus tells all who follow him, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). We live out this truth with the church. In the face of so much that threatens to divide the church today, we must realize that nothing short of the glory of God in Christ is at stake with the unity of the church. We are maturing in our walk with the Lord as he enables us to die to self in our preferences at church for the sake of God’s mission in the world.

**Tri-unity.** There is no greater unity than the unity of our God. God is one. He is completely and perfectly united; there is no division within him. Yet, God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one and yet diverse. The Father is not the Son, who is not the Spirit. Yet, he is one. The church reflects, albeit dimly, the unity in diversity and diversity in unity of our God.

## EPHESIANS 4

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. <sup>19</sup> They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. <sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ!— <sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 4

■ Psalm 49:1-9

■ Genesis 44

■ Mark 13

*Before you read the whole chapter, read 3:10. Then, as you read chapter 3, consider how the truths of this chapter explain how the church displays the manifold wisdom of God.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note the references you find to "one" and to "unity" in this chapter.

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 4:1-6

■ Psalm 49:10-20

■ Genesis 45

■ Mark 14

*Paul calls us to unity with one another in the church. Equally important to the call is how he grounds the call in God's redeeming and reconciling work, and so we read these verses with the first three chapters of Ephesians in mind.*

- How does Paul instruct believers to live with one another?
- Who empowers believers in the church to live like this with one another?
- Why does the church have a fundamental unity?

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 4:7-16

■ Psalm 50:1-11

■ Genesis 46

■ Mark 15

*Although the church is unified, not every member of the church is the same. The differences in gifts and responsibilities prove to be part of God's good plan for the church to mature us in Christ.*

- What accounts for the differences in gifts in people in the church?
- What types of gifts have people from your church noticed in you?
- How are you exercising those gifts for the good of the church?

#### DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 4:17-24

■ Psalm 50:12-23

■ Genesis 47

■ Mark 16

*Verses 22-24 outline a pattern of “put off the old self” and “put on the new self.” As you read, notice how that pattern bears itself out in the rest of the passage for today. Consider where you need God’s grace to see this pattern become more of a reality in your life.*

- What stands out to you about how Paul calls Christians to live?
  
- What makes the difference in believers' lives that allows them to live this way?
  
- Look at 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. How are people made new? What opportunity do we as new creatures have to serve the Lord?

#### DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 4:25-32

■ Psalm 51:1-12

■ Genesis 48

■ Galatians 1

*Verses 30-32 deal particularly with life within the church. Consider how a lack of unity in the church would grieve the Holy Spirit. As the Father is glorified in Jesus, so too he is to be glorified in Christ’s church. Based on the whole of Ephesians 3, how can we glorify God in the church?*

- Notice that Paul does more than just tell the Ephesians to stop doing the wrong thing. They must “put off” their old ways and “put on” new ways. Where in your life do you need to “put off” and then “put on”?
  
- How does verse 32 help us see how we are able to live as Paul has instructed?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does Paul point to as the foundation for our unity in the church?
- Where can you celebrate the unity of your church? What is one specific and realistic step you can take to help your church be more unified?
- Does unity mean that everyone in the church is the same?
- How are the differences in the church actually good for the health and growth of the church?
- Does everyone in the church have a role to play in the church? How can we be confident that every believer will contribute to the church in some way?
- Where are you active in “the work of ministry” and “building up the body of Christ”? Do you believe you are serving your church well?
- Do you have doubts that you actually have gifts that can serve the church? Do you have trouble seeing where you can minister both in and out of your church? Consider discussing this with a mature believer whom you trust and seeing if he or she can help you discern how you are contributing or where you might serve in the future.

# EPHESIANS 5

## WALK WISELY TOGETHER

As Ephesians 5 begins, Paul continues to unpack how believers are to live in light of the gospel. He carries on the theme of walking as a metaphor for living. He calls on believers, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise" (5:15). As in chapter 4, the individual believer is not to walk alone. Rather, we must walk together as the body of Christ in order to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Together, we are to walk in love, walk as children of the light, and walk wisely.

**Walk in Love (5:1-2).** Ephesians 4 calls believers to live in unity as the church, and that unity will grow, Paul explains, as followers of Jesus are "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32). Paul continues this thought as chapter 5 opens in the next verse, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (5:1). As those who have been adopted as sons through Jesus (1:5), we are to take on the forgiving character of our Father. Moreover, we are to walk in love and to imitate the example of Jesus by loving one another in the church (5:2).

**Walk as Children of Light (5:3-14).** Paul contrasts the self-sacrificing love of Christ with the self-indulgence of the world. If believers walk in love, there will not be even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among them (5:3). Such things are so counter to Christ's love that they should not even be named, let alone made the object of crude joking (5:3-4). Rather than filthiness, thanksgiving should flow from our mouths. Sexual immorality and greed come at an incredibly high cost: God's wrath is poured out on those who practice them (5:6). Yet, grace remains the believer's hope. The Lord has graciously given us new natures: "At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (5:8). In Christ, all who trust in him are now light and now can, by God's grace, live accordingly.

**Walk Wisely (5:15-33).** Self-indulgence brings God's judgment, but in the gospel, God freely offers the hope of redemption and life with him. Given the stakes, Paul exhorts, "Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise" (5:15). Wise living means "making the best use of the time" (5:16), which requires understanding God's will (5:17). His will is for his people to flee drunkenness and to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18). Those filled with the Spirit are marked by (1) addressing one another in spiritual songs, (2) singing to the Lord, (3) thanksgiving, and (4) submitting to one another (5:19-21). Paul has in mind the gathering of believers in corporate worship. Being filled with the Spirit, as all believers are, means that we will gather with God's people in worship. Worship not only honors God, but it also benefits others. We sing to the Lord, but Paul also tells us that we address "one another in psalm, hymns, and spiritual songs" (5:19). Our singing when we gather honors God, and it also encourages and equips our fellow believers. Thus, when it comes to worship, our top priorities are glorifying God and the good of one another. We walk wisely together by gathering to worship the Lord.

### KEY THOUGHT

Living wisely means living together in a way that honors the Father, Son, and Spirit, encourages other believers, and is marked by humbly submitting to one another.



Paul also includes “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” as part of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:21). This phrase describes how we live with one another in the church. We defer to others and die to our own preferences for the good of others and the glory of God. Our lives in the church should be marked by self-sacrificing service to others. From 5:22-6:9 Paul expands on this idea of submission to discuss three relational dynamics for believers: wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters. Relationships of submission and authority have been transformed by the gospel, so that they are now marked by self-denial and service to one another for the Lord’s sake.

**Truth for Today.** “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:25). In teaching about marriage, Paul continues teaching us about the gospel and the church. If we love the Lord Jesus, we will love the church he loves and for whom he died. Out of his great love for us, he gave himself up for his church, and the same Spirit who was in him is now in all who believe. We will love the church if we love Christ and are filled with his Spirit. Such love for the church demonstrates itself as we walk in love toward one another, as we help one another walk as children of light, and as we walk wisely together for the glory of God.

**Walk.** Paul employs the word “walk” (περιπατέω) as a metaphor for how one lives. Seven times in this letter he uses this word to describe a way of life. Before Christ, people walked in sin (2:1-2), but when God saves people, he creates them “in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Then in 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, and 5:15, Paul elaborates on what such walking entails. The rich doctrinal content of this letter has essential practical applications: those who have been saved by grace must walk by grace in a manner worthy of that calling.

## EPHESIANS 5

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 5

■ Psalm 51:13-19

■ Genesis 49

■ Galatians 2

*This chapter describes the way followers of Jesus should live. Before you read this chapter, review Ephesians 2:8-10 for a reminder of the connection between good works and salvation by grace alone.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note where Paul uses the word walk in this chapter.

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 5:1-2

■ Psalm 52:1-4

■ Genesis 50

■ Galatians 3

*Paul continues his thought from chapter 4, discussing how Christians should live. Consider what a high-calling these two verses are and the necessity for the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives for such living to be possible.*

- Why is Ephesians 1:5 necessary before you can live out Ephesians 5:1?
- What would it look like for your life this week to be characterized by Christ's self-sacrificial love? Where do you need to die to self in order to better love someone in your life?

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 5:3-14

■ Psalm 52:5-9

■ Exodus 1

■ Galatians 4

*While Christ's love distinguishes itself by his self-sacrifice, the world is characterized by self-indulgence. Sexual immorality and greed prove to be some of the main temptations toward a self-serving life.*

- How are you still tempted toward the self-indulgence of the world?
- Look at 1 John 2:7-17. What evidence does John cite that someone is walking in the light? What demonstrates a love for the world?
- How is God at work in us to enable his people to walk as children of light?

#### DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 5:15-21

■ Psalm 53

■ Exodus 2

■ Galatians 5

*In this passage, the controlling idea is "be filled with the Holy Spirit." Each subsequent action that Paul lists is what it looks like for the believer to live as one filled with the Spirit.*

- What does Paul describe as characteristics of those who are filled by the Holy Spirit?
- Why is gathering for corporate worship important for believers?
- Read Acts 4:23-31. How did gathering together for worship affect these believers in the early church?

#### DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 5:22-33

■ Psalm 54

■ Exodus 3

■ Galatians 6

*Here Paul continues to elaborate on what it means to "walk in love" and to "be filled with the Holy Spirit." Building off of 5:21, Paul articulates what godly submission and authority looks like in three key relationships. He calls on believers to forsake the worldly patterns for these relationships and to imitate Christ's self-sacrificial love. He addresses marriage here and will address two other relationships in chapter 6.*

- Why does the Bible use marriage as a picture of Christ's love for his church?
- How do you think Paul would respond to someone who said that he loved Jesus but did not love the church?
- If you are married, what change is the Lord calling you to make in your relationship with your spouse based on these verses? How can you better love and serve your spouse in a Christ-like manner this week?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the truth described in 1:5 make 5:1 possible?
- What is the connection between 4:32 and 5:1? With whom is Paul emphasizing we need to live in this way?
- What would living out 5:16 look like in your life?
- How do you do what Paul commands in 5:17?
- In 5:18-21, Paul describes what happens when the church gathers together in worship. Why is gathering as a church so important for your life of faith? What are some ways that gathering to worship as a church has blessed you?
- Have you ever had to miss gathering in worship for an extended period of time? What did you learn about the importance of gathering as a church during that time?
- How has being a part of a local church allowed you to walk in love, walk wisely, and walk as a child of light?
- Paul says that Jesus loved his church so much that he gave up his life for her (5:25). If you love Jesus, you will love what he loves. Do you find it difficult to love the church? Why?
- What is one specific step you can take to show love for your church this week?

# EPHESIANS 6

## EQUIPPED FOR BATTLE

As Paul concludes this letter, he calls on his readers to put his teaching into practice by reminding us of the great spiritual battle that rages. To win such a battle, we must be strong in the Lord, put on God's armor, and advance the gospel of peace.

**Be Strong in the Lord (6:10-12).** Paul brings all his teaching on how to live out the gospel to a head in these verses. To put the gospel into practice requires one to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (6:10). As with this whole letter, even this being strengthened must happen *in Christ*. Paul summons us to live out what he has already prayed: that we would know God's great power (1:19) and be strengthened with his power through the Spirit (3:16). The Lord must strengthen us if we are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. To stand strong in the Lord is to "put on the whole armor of God" (6:11).

We need Christ's strength and the armor of God because we as believers find ourselves engaged in a spiritual war (6:11-12). We face the devil, his schemes, and his demonic forces in the world. We need God's strength to endure because we are in the middle of a vast spiritual battle as the devil and his forces rage against God's plan to unite all things in Christ (1:10).

Our hope as Christians is that we are empowered by the God who has already defeated his enemies. All things are now under Christ's feet (1:22), and we are seated with him in the heavenly places (2:6). Yet, the war rages. Such is the already/not yet tension of God's redemptive plan. Christ's victory is secure, and yet we wait eagerly for its completion. As we in God's strength stand against the devil, we stand against an enemy who has already been defeated by Christ's death and resurrection.

**Armed Together (6:13-20).** As the church, we stand together against Satan and his schemes. The call to war is not a call for lone warriors but for a host of believers to join ranks. As we are united to Christ by the Spirit, we stand together in this battle. All the commands and pronouns of 6:10-18 are plural. This is not a "me" but a "we" battle. We need each other. We need the church in order to stand firm because with the church:

- we hear and are reminded of the truth of the gospel (6:14),
- we join the company of those who are counted as righteous for Jesus's sake (6:14),
- we partner together to advance the gospel (6:15),
- we have our faith strengthened by one another and the Word (6:16),
- we remind one another of the hope of our salvation (6:17), and
- we are equipped to hear, read, and use God's word (6:17).

### KEY THOUGHT

The church on earth is engaged in a battle against principalities and powers. Through Christ, the victory is secure, but in this life we must be equipped by God to stand strong in the Lord and to join in his mission to unite all things in Christ.

Paul's picture of the church at war is a battalion of soldiers with shields locked together as we stand firm in the Lord against the devil. The Lord has united us with his people to help us stand strong in this battle.

**Advance the Gospel (6:15-20).** In the midst of this war imagery, it might seem strange for Paul to speak of "the gospel of peace" (6:15). Our feet must be made ready to carry this good news of peace because the gospel is our weapon in this spiritual battle. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (6:17), which is nothing less than "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (1:13). The gospel is the message that frees people from the dominion of darkness and ushers them into the kingdom of the Son. The gospel tears down every satanic stronghold and is the means God is using "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). This uniting happens now through the gospel as people hear, believe, and are united to Christ. The church joins in God's mission to unite all things in Christ by proclaiming the gospel.

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:6

The church must undergird its mission by prayer (6:18-20). Prayer is not just one weapon among many in this spiritual battle; it proves foundational to all that believers do in this battle. Paul emphasizes the importance of prayer by his use of "all" four times in 6:18: all times, all prayer, all perseverance, and for all the saints. If we are to stand strong in the Lord, we must pray for one another. Then, Paul drives home the abiding power of prayer by asking for prayer for himself that he might boldly proclaim the gospel (6:19-20).

**Truth for Today.** Believers today remain engaged in the same great spiritual battle that plagued followers of Jesus in the first-century. As we face this battle, we have confidence knowing that Christ has already defeated his enemies. Furthermore, we know that we are prepared because we are equipped for this battle through the Holy Spirit. We can take courage that we do not go into this battle alone but lock shields with our church. The battle will be won as we walk by faith and continue boldly to proclaim the gospel.

## EPHESIANS 6

<sup>1</sup> Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), <sup>3</sup> "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." <sup>4</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. <sup>9</sup> Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

<sup>21</sup> So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. <sup>22</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. <sup>23</sup> Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.



# REFLECTION

## DAY 1 | READ EPHESIANS 6

■ Psalm 55:1-8

■ Exodus 4

■ Ephesians 1

*Believers today are engaged in a spiritual battle. As you read this chapter, consider the importance of the church for helping you stand strong in the Lord.*

- Underline any reference to the Father in the color purple, to the Son in red, and to the Holy Spirit in yellow.
- Circle in the color blue any prepositional phrase with Christ (i.e. *in Christ, through Christ, with him, etc.*).
- Note the different pieces of armor Paul describes.

## DAY 2 | EPHESIANS 6:1-4

■ Psalm 55:9-19

■ Exodus 5

■ Ephesians 2

*The gospel affects every human relationship, even the parent-child relationship. Paul calls us to view even this fundamental relationship through the lens of the gospel as we seek to walk in love.*

- In your stage in life, what does it look like to honor your parents? What challenges do you face in that? How does the truth of the gospel help you to live as the Lord calls you?
- What does it look like for your season of life to raise your children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”? Who is primarily responsible for your children’s discipleship: you or the church? If you do not have children, is there a role you can play in discipling children in your church?

## DAY 3 | EPHESIANS 6:5-9

■ Psalm 55:20-23

■ Exodus 6

■ Ephesians 3

*As he continues to describe how to walk in love and in a manner worthy of our calling, Paul discusses how the gospel shapes the relationship between servants and masters. By implication, we can draw applications for our own lives in the working world.*

- Where you are now in life, what would it look like for you to work “with a good will as to the Lord” (6:7)?
- If you are in a position of authority, what does it look like to exercise that authority in a way that honors God?

DAY 4 | EPHESIANS 6:10-20

■ Psalm 56:1-7

■ Exodus 7

■ Ephesians 4

*Paul's admonition to live in a manner worthy of the gospel culminates in this call to "be strong in the Lord" (6:10). To be strong in the Lord, we must put on the armor of God and stand in battle together with our fellow believers in the church.*

- Do you think much about the on-going spiritual battle in this world? Why or why not?
  
- Read Ephesians 1:19-23 and Colossians 2:13-15. How does the reality of Christ's victory give you confidence in the face of this spiritual battle?

DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 6:21-24

■ Psalm 56:8-13

■ Exodus 8

■ Ephesians 5

*Paul concludes his letter with a personal greeting and the commendation of Tychicus. Then he closes with a prayer.*

- Notice the close connection between Paul and the church at Ephesus these verses reveal. Do you feel this kind of bond with other believers? What is a step you could take to grow in your relationships with other followers of Jesus?
  
- The last two verses are a prayer. Consider taking time to pray this prayer for someone today.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have you thought much about the reality of the spiritual battle that is happening now?
- How do all the calls to live in a way that honors the gospel in chapters 4-6 connect with this call to be strong in the Lord and to put on God's whole armor?
- What are the different pieces of armor that believers are to put on?
- How does the local church help arm believers for this spiritual battle? How does the church equip believers to win others for Christ?
- Why does Paul emphasize the proclamation of the gospel as part of this battle? How does the gospel work to defeat Satan and all of Christ's enemies?
- Given the priority of gospel proclamation in this spiritual battle, with whom should you be sharing the gospel? Consider taking time as a group to pray for the salvation of unbelievers by name. Consider making this a regular practice of your group.
- In light of this passage, what are some ways for the members of the church to encourage one another to stand strong in the Lord? Whom can you encourage this week?
- As you reflect on this week's chapter and the study as a whole, what are some ways you now see God's wisdom in gathering his people together in the community of the church?