

CORE Seminar

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

Week 1: Introduction to the Letter to the Ephesians

WELCOME

Welcome!

Thank you all for signing up for this CORE Seminar on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. If some of you didn't realize this is the Seminar that you signed up for – we still welcome you!

We're excited about spending the next couple of months diving into this letter. As we explore this letter, we will encounter three main themes:

- Christ has reconciled all creation to himself and to God.
- Christ has united people from all nations to himself and to one another in his church.
- And, Christians must live as a regenerate people.

QUESTION: Which of these three main themes could have the most impact on you and why?

Each week we'll dive into a particular chapter of Ephesians – you will have a participant guide – and at the end of each participant guide you will have the Scriptural content for next week's lesson. Please read AND study ahead. This will make our time more interesting as we grow together and learn together.

Before we begin there are a couple of things we should go over:

- Max length of each night should be 2 hours – this includes food/ fellowship and study. If it goes over, it is ok to get up and leave.
- House Rules [opportunity to go over house rules]
- And how to take care of the kiddos.

PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

The goal of this Seminar is to give everyone a working knowledge of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. This seminar has been written with an expository approach in mind. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas of each

section should be the substance of what is taught. The whole group is STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to read Paul's Letter to the Ephesians several times. Before you read through it, pray that the Holy Spirit would open your heart to the truth's of God's Word and open your mind to questions that you may not understand from the text.

There will be some words in this text that have traditionally been "scary" for the reader. Our goal is to work through these words with an understanding of how Paul intended them. There will be definitions from the Greek – don't worry you don't have to know the Greek – to help you understand the context and meaning of the word. Our hope is to simplify the "scary" parts so that we understand Paul's letter more fully.

Ok... let's get started!

Author of Ephesians

The author of Ephesians was the Apostle Paul. He clearly states this in **Ephesians 1:1 & 3:1**. Paul took several missionary journey's that took him through Ephesus. These visits include:

- During his second missionary journey [**Acts 18:19-21**] in the early 50s A.D.
- During his third missionary journey, Paul ministered in Ephesus for 3 years [**Acts 20:31**] in the mid-50s A.D [**Acts 19:1-41**], his longest stint in any one place during his three missionary journeys. At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul briefly met with the elders of the Ephesian church in Miletus [**Acts 20:17-38**].
- And, in **1 Timothy 1:3**, Paul seemed to take a fourth missionary journey, which included a stop in Ephesus.

As was Paul's custom, he first went to the Jewish synagogue, preaching for 3 months [**Acts 19:8**]. After encountering some resistance, he spent the next two years preaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus [**Acts 19:9-10**].

QUESTION: How do you think Paul's calling – on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 – and his missionary experiences – in Ephesus Acts 19 – affect the way we listen to his teaching to the Ephesians?

Who were the Ephesians?

The city of Ephesus – situated in modern-day Turkey – was a significant city in the Roman province of Asia. The city had a large population – mostly Gentiles – and was known for worshipping idols at the Temple of Diana – one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

During Paul's time, his preaching led to a disturbance in Ephesus, particularly affecting the worship of Diana [**Acts 19:23-41**]. Later on, history reveals that the Apostle John and Timothy served as church pastors.

Today, if you were to visit Ephesus you would find that the church is gone and the city is in ruins.

QUESTION: What kind of challenges do you think the church in Ephesus faced?

- **How are these challenges similar to what we face today?**

Background of the Letter

Paul penned the letter to the Ephesians while he was in prison for the first time around AD 62. This was roughly five years after his last encounter with the church leaders in Ephesus, as mentioned in **Acts 20:17-35**. At this point, Christianity had been around for about 30 years, and it was still in its early stages.

Unlike some other letters in the New Testament that were prompted by issues or conflicts, Ephesians stands out. This is because it seems to be a very general book. So general, in fact, that it's not even clear that it was written specifically to the Ephesians at all. In most of your Bibles, you'll see a footnote next to the word "Ephesus" in **1:1** saying that in many early manuscripts, the letter just says, "To the saints [blank], the faithful in Christ Jesus." In fact, this letter appears to have been intended for broad distribution, written to all the churches Paul had seen planted in the region of Ephesus during his nearly three-year stay there.

What is obvious about this letter is that Paul was focused:

- On boosting Christian understanding and maturity in the church.
- And, to help believers grow in their faith and insight.

Which leads us to the message of Paul's letter.

The Message of Ephesians

The message again is Christ has reconciled and united people from all nations to Himself and to one another in his church. Simplified, the message is of Jesus's peace *and* grace, to all nations – Jewish *and* Greek – who make up the regenerate body of Christ. It is a letter about the grace of God that brings peace between man and God and between brothers in Christ.

If you'll turn with me to **Ephesians 2:14-15**, we'll see this central message. Paul writes:

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ 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...

God's grace does two important things for those who believe.

1. **First**, it reconciles us to God, changing our relationship from being His enemies to becoming His adopted children.
2. **Secondly**, God's grace brings together people from different backgrounds, like Jews and Gentiles. So, through Christ, you are no longer strangers but become fellow citizens in God's kingdom and brothers or sisters in Christ.

It's a beautiful way of showing how God's grace works both in our relationship with Him and with each other. Really, it can be summed up in one simple sentence: **“You have received supernatural *grace* for the glory of God, therefore, live in supernatural *unity* to the glory of God.”**

QUESTION: Why is it good to be reminded – at least sometimes – of who you were before you repented and put your faith in Jesus Christ?

- **How can being reminded of God's grace and peace help the church to live in unity with one another to the glory of God?**

Some Outstanding Features of Ephesians

1. It is very similar to the book of **Colossians**

Having been written at about the same time, it is not surprising that there are many similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. Most notable is the similarity between **Ephesians 6:21-22** and **Colossians 4:7-8**.

2. Its deep **theology**

Ephesians – much like Romans – stands out for its deep theological content. It explores important doctrines such as the study of Christ [*mentioned more than 60 times*], the study of the church, and the study of salvation.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones [in *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians*] emphasizes that this letter isn't just for exceptional or scholarly Christians. It's not exclusively for theologians or specialists. **Instead, it's a letter meant for ordinary church members.** Paul's teachings in Ephesians are for everyone to understand, and find joy in – regardless of their level of understanding!

3. Its long **sentences**

Paul can write some long run-on sentences – and this is especially true in Ephesians. Just look at **Ephesians 1:3-14** – take a deep breath because Paul writes approximately 203 words [*depending on your translation*] in that sentence.

Want another example? Scroll on over to **Ephesians 1:15-23** – take another deep breath – this sentence is over 169 words [*depending on your translation*]. More examples include Ephesians 2:1-7; 3:1-7; 3:14-19; and 4:11-16.

The best news for us is that our English translations neatly divide these sentences up for us – you know, so that we can take a breath or two.

Conclusion

In your handout, you will see an outline of how we will study the book.

- **February 18th: Introduction**
- **February 25th: [after God @ Work] Ephesians 1** - As for us, we were all dead in our sins, but God graciously made us alive to show His grace.
- **March 3rd: Ephesians 2:1-10** - Salvation is by God's grace through faith alone – not our own works but is the gift of God.
- **March 10th: Ephesians 2:11-22** - As a result, God has destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile, unifying them and being indwelt with his Holy Spirit.
- **March 17th: Hangout Night**
- **April 7th: Ephesians 3** – The gospel call to share the gospel and prayer for spiritual strength.
- **April 14th: Ephesians 4** – Live in supernatural unity to the glory of God.
- **April 21st: Ephesians 5–6:9** – In regeneration, walk in love toward one another.
- **April 28th: Ephesians 6:10-24** – Strength through the whole armor of God.
- **May 5th: Hangout Night or Content Make-Up**

Through this breakdown, we will also hit on how the book is divided into two major sections

1. **Chapters 1-3**, where unity is described as an accomplished fact,
2. And then **chapters 4-6** where unity is seen as a goal.

In other words, the book first describes unity as having been *already* accomplished by God, and then calls Christians to work toward the unity that's not *yet* complete.

PRAYER