



**alive  
together**

*Studies 1-4*

***EPHESIANS***



<b>SUMMARY OF EPHESIANS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>STUDY ONE   Ephesians 1:1-14</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>STUDY TWO   Ephesians 1:15 - 2:10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>STUDY THREE   Ephesians 2:11-22</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>STUDY FOUR   Ephesians 3:1-21</b>	<b>16</b>

## SUMMARY OF EPHESIANS

The following is an excerpt from *Ephesians for You* by Richard Coekin (pp218-220). The letter neatly divides into two halves of three chapters, each chapter conveniently diving in two:

### Chapters 1 - 3: Gospel doctrine

Paul proclaims God's cosmic plan to unite everything under Christ (1:10), by reconciling us to God and each other by his death and resurrection (2:4-6, 14), through the proclamation of the revealed mystery of the gospel of Christ crucified for all nations, that is displayed in his church to the spiritual realms (3:6,10).

**1:1-14:** is an explosion of praise to God for every spiritual blessing in the spiritual realms in Christ; supreme among them is being chosen for adoption by the Father, redeemed for revelation by the Son and sealed for inheritance by the Spirit- in which God's focus is summing up all things in the heavenly realms and on earth in Christ.

**1:15-23:** is a report of Paul's prayers for his readers to experience the precious spiritual privileges of knowing God better, knowing the hope to which he's called us, and knowing the resurrection power which he has committed to bringing us to be with him.

**2:1-10:** is a celebration of God's amazing grace in bringing us from being dead in sin by nature, to life by grace in Christ--this is in order that in the coming ages he might show us the incomparable riches of his grace.

**2:11-22:** proclaims that believing Gentiles, previously separated, excluded, and foreign to the blessings of Israel, have been reconciled with believing Jews in a new humanity in Christ, through his death that destroyed the barrier of the law; so now people of all nations may become citizens of God's kingdom and members of his family, built upon the gospel of Christ and growing as the holy temple dwelling of God.

**3:1-13:** explains that Paul's imprisonment for preaching Christ crucified was all part of God's glorious plan to use despised messengers to advertise the mystery of the gospel, now revealed, that people of all nations can share in the blessings of Christ, this is so that the wisdom of God in the gospel of Christ crucified might be displayed to the evil powers in the spiritual realms in the trophy cabinet of his church.

**3:14-21:** reveals Paul's prayers for God to grant his readers power to become holy people, fit dwellings for the presence of God's Spirit; and for power to appreciate how wide and accepting, long and lasting, high and exalting and deep and sacrificial is the massive love of Christ for us; to him be all the glory!

## **Chapters 4 - 6: The practice of gospel churches**

Paul calls upon churches to respond to the truths of the first three chapters by preserving their unity under Christ-preparing each other for ministry to grow in maturity by speaking the truth in love, in order to be made new in their minds, live Christ-honouring lives in the church, at home and at work, and stand firm in the gospel against the devil's schemes.

**4:1-16:** calls the readers to live lives worthy of our calling by applying our spiritual unity in Christ to a practical unity in church; this can be done through Bible-teaching that equips church members to contribute their ministry to grow the church in maturity into Christ.

**4:17-32:** calls the readers to preserve their unity by putting off the worldly thinking of our old selves and to be renewed with godly minds of Christ-like love; Paul gives practical examples of loving attitudes and speech to become imitators of God by living lives of love, just as Christ loved us.

**5:1-20:** calls the readers to preserve their unity by living as children of light by abstaining from immorality, impurity and greed; Paul calls them instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to each other and to God with songs of thanksgiving.

**5:21-33:** begins a section on the unity of household relationships in the church by calling on wives to submit to their husbands in everything as the church submits to Christ; and upon husbands to love their wives sacrificially as Christ has loved the church and as a person loves their own body; Paul concludes by explaining that this discussion of marriage is really about the gospel mystery of the intimate union of Christ with his church.

**6:1-9:** calls the readers to peace in serving Christ at home and at work-telling children to honour their parents and fathers not to frustrate their children, but to raise them in the instruction of the Lord; and telling slaves (and employees) to serve wholeheartedly as to the Lord, and masters to treat their workers well as they share the same master in heaven.

**6:10-23:** is the climactic finale of the letter calling readers to stand firm against the lies of Satan that will threaten to divide them from God and from each other; they will be strengthened by God to stand firm in the armour of God worn by Christ in defeating Satan at the cross, ie: gospel convictions; and to keep on praying for world mission - this is victory in spiritual warfare.

## **STUDY ONE | EPHESIANS 1:1-14**

### **AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST (vv 1-2)**

Paul is the church planter and missionary set apart for the task of bringing the gospel to the nations according to God's revealed purpose (see 3:1-11). His bond with the Ephesian church is established in their holy status made possible through the work of Christ (v 2). Grace is the means by which this gift is possible and peace is the outcome they enjoy with God and one another (v3).

### **CHOSEN IN CHRIST (vv 3-6)**

God is to be praised because we have been blessed in Christ before the foundation of the world. He chose us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. He chose us to be adopted as his children according to his will and the praise of his grace through Christ. The emphasis is on inclusion and unity.

Family life is important for Paul in the letter. God's plans are fulfilled in Christ so that the blessing of being his children might be a shared one. While the passage is usually the trigger for debates about predestination, the Apostle's concern is the praise of God. This is the author of our salvation whose intention was always to share the blessings of the Godhead with those who could not rightfully claim them.

### **REDEEMED IN CHRIST (vv 7-10)**

God is to be praised because we have been blessed through Christ coming into the world. In Christ we have been redeemed through the work of the cross. We have received the unfolding of God's will and purpose which will be fulfilled when Christ returns and all things will be summed up in him.

The forgiveness of sins is the prerequisite for any believer to enjoy the blessings of Christ. We cannot enter into life with God other than through the work of the cross (v 7). That same work is the guarantee of the fulfilment of God's promises to unify all things under Christ (v 10) when the times reach their fulfilment.

### **SEALED IN CHRIST (VV 11-14)**

God is to be praised because we have been blessed through Christ beyond this world. Interestingly Paul does not specifically mention the return of Christ in this letter, but the blessing of the inheritance to come affirms his commitment to a future glory for God's people, for which he is to be praised. Paul cites both Jew (v 11) and Gentile (v 13) as those who have been guaranteed this sealed inheritance and so are to live for the praise of his glory.

The work of the Holy Spirit is important for Paul in the letter and also speaks to God's revelation of the gospel (3:5), the experience of the love of Christ (3:16), the source of unity (4:3) and the means for prayer (6:21).

## SHARE

1. If your neighbour were to ask you about your purpose in life what would you say to them?

## OBSERVE & REFLECT

Read verses 1-14

2. What do you think is a 'spiritual blessing'? What are the 'spiritual blessings' listed in this passage?
3. Why do you think Paul begins his letter talking about these spiritual blessings?
4. In church circles, God choosing us often triggers debates about the doctrine of 'predestination'. What does the passage say is the reason God chose us (v 4)? What guarantees this outcome?
5. How can we be certain of being adopted into the family of God's people (see also v 3 & Romans 8:15)?

6. Several times in the passage Paul refers to the will of God (vv 1, 5, 9, 11). What effect does this have on how you think about these spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ?
  
7. Similarly several times in the passage Paul refers to the praise of God (vv 3, 6, 12, 14). What is the link between God's will and praising him?
  
8. What does it mean that Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the inheritance to come (v 14)?

## **NEXT STEPS**

9. Spend some time meditating on all the spiritual blessings mentioned in this passage. Which of the spiritual blessings are you most prone to forget about in your day to day life? Perhaps ask God to help you appreciate this blessing more in the week ahead.



## STUDY TWO | EPHESIANS 1:15 - 2:10

### 1:15 - 23

#### **Paul is really excited!**

He's excited about something that might at first glance not seem particularly special ('faith in the Lord Jesus' and 'love for all God's people' v15). Yet as we will discover, these seemingly unspectacular characteristics of the Ephesian church are in fact direct evidence that God is doing something truly special, mighty and powerful among them.

The logic is this - because there is evidence that the Ephesians are trusting in the Lord Jesus, accompanied by evidence that the Ephesians are showing a radical counter cultural kind of love for each other, Paul is now compelled to pray for them even more. Why? Because as we discover, the power that moves someone from unbelief to belief, is actually of the same magnitude, the same source, the same type, as the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Think of it this way - how easy is it for people, in their own strength, to come back to life? Not very! How easy is it for people, in their own strength, to know Jesus, to know their future hope, to know their inheritance, to know and love the new family God has called us to be part of? According to these verses, this too is impossible in our own strength! In fact it takes the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.

And Paul is now so excited because he actually sees evidence of this power at work in the Ephesian church, because he has heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their accompanying counter cultural, cross-cultural love for each other - this could only be the result of God's powerful work. And so he wants them to know just how magnificent the work that God is doing (and will continue to do) among them really is. It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

## 2:1-10

This passage is written so that we would begin to understand the depths of God's grace and the purposes for which we have been saved. To do this we first need to see that the diagnosis of humanity is far worse than we would ever like to admit. In v1-3, we see a description of our slavery to both ourselves (our flesh) and also to forces outside ourselves (the ways of this world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit at work in the disobedient). We also see the reality of life without Christ described not simply as broken, sick or weak but as dead. And to be dead is, well, a dead-end. Isn't it?

Worse still, those without Christ are described as being by nature deserving of wrath. This is more than hopeless, it's almost too harrowing to contemplate. And yet of eternal importance, this is not where we're left! The grace and goodness of God is far, far greater. In these verses, we're shown much more than a rescue plan. It would be enough 'good news' just to hear of even the slightest relief of the bleak reality described in the verses above (v1-3), but our good God goes so much further! He doesn't just rescue and save us in a short-term, limited sense, he raises us with Christ and seats us alongside him, in royalty! He gives us an incredibly high status and a divine purpose.

The **'heavenly realms'** is not a reference to 'heaven' as it has been traditionally understood (in the sense of 'heaven' and 'hell'), rather it is a reference to where Jesus is now, where he is ruling from and where the stuff of eternity is being worked out. Spiritually speaking this is where all of us in Christ are also seated now, not just in the future.

Why is Paul telling us this? This really flows directly out of his prayer and desire expressed in the previous passage, the prayer that the 'eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe' (1v18).

He is telling us this so that with renewed hearts, we can align our horizons and purposes with God's purposes and that we will delight in the fact this glorious salvation is a sure, unearned gift from God for all who trust in Jesus. This means we are now free to serve God, to do 'good works', not to earn salvation, but because of it. The catalyst for our good works comes from the grace of God, not from our desire to prove ourselves. We are not saved by good works, but God saves us for a life of great significance and purpose, a life that transcends the temporary, the here and now, a life that looks beyond ourselves and instead glorifies Jesus.

## SHARE

1. Share an example of a type of work or job that might appear unimpressive and mundane to an outsider but for those who understand what's really going on, it's extraordinary and even awe inspiring?

## OBSERVE & REFLECT

Read verses 1:15-23

2. Paul lists two pieces of evidence – the Ephesians' 'faith in the Lord Jesus' and also their 'love for all God's people' as the trigger for him to be extra thankful and prayerful. What is the connection between these two things? Why do you think Paul mentions both?
3. If a church had a reputation for possessing only one of these two things (ie known for trusting Jesus OR known for loving each other), what might be the danger for that church in each case?
4. Having heard of their authentic faith demonstrated in action, Paul moves from thanksgiving to prayer. Without reading ahead what might you expect Paul to ask God for on behalf of the Ephesians? What does Paul actually ask God for? Why is this so important?
5. How do these prayer requests compare to our typical prayer requests?
6. What gives Paul confidence to pray these prayers? Do you share his confidence?
7. 'What do you think is the connection between vs 20-23 and vs 15-19? What might Paul be teaching us about how we should think about the work God is doing in his church?
8. What is the significance of Paul connecting 'the power for us who believe' with 'the power ... he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead'?

### Read verses 2:1-3

9. If Paul wanted to make the point that things outside of Christ are not good, he could have just said that (and saved some precious first century ink!). What specific lessons is he teaching us about the particular reality of life without Christ? Which lessons do you find most difficult to believe? Why do you think this is?
  
10. Sometimes we like to take credit for our good decisions, and blame others for our bad ones. How do these verses teach us that our transgressions and sins are both the result of our own choices and also a consequence of the activity of others?

### Read verses 2:4-10

11. We talk about 'love' in all different kinds of ways, how does understanding God's mercy help us understand the kind of love God has towards us?
  
12. God has done an incredible work in saving us, read carefully v6-7. According to these verses, what was his purpose in doing this? Is this how you typically view the reason you have been saved?
  
13. We often find psychological (and spiritual) comfort, reassurance and a sense of personal worth and value in the 'good deeds' we have done? Where does this passage direct us to find our comfort, reassurance and sense of worth?
  
14. Is there a place for doing 'good works'? What is it?
  
15. What do you think is the practical difference between doing good deeds for the purposes of salvation and security, and doing good deeds as a result of our salvation?

### **NEXT STEPS**

16. What would it look like in your life and our church life if we all shared Paul's excitement, confidence and prayerful anticipation regarding God's magnificent work?
  
17. Use the prayer in vv1:17-19 to pray for each other.

## STUDY THREE | EPHESIANS 2:11-22

Our passage today is linked to the previous section by the word 'therefore'. It follows a similar structure, 'what you were', 'what God has done' and 'what you now are'. In our previous study we considered this in relationship to the theme of sinners reconciled to their creator. In this passage, a second (and necessary) type of reconciliation is explored – our reconciliation with one another 'in Christ'. The Jew-Gentile division was one of the most fundamental divisions in the first century world. This particular section is directed at Gentiles (non-Jewish people) to help them remember, firstly, all the things they were lacking when they were without Christ (v11-13), secondly, what Christ did to make the church (v14-18), and thirdly, what the church looks like (v19-22). All these lessons are given, so that we (particularly non-Jewish readers) appreciate and better understand the power of the gospel to make a new humanity. To make his argument, Paul employs a number of phrases and terms historically associated with the people and practices of Israel in the Old Testament, and reapplies them to the new humanity (Jew and Gentile) being formed in Christ.

### Circumcision

Circumcision was a badge of God's covenant and an outward sign of being part of God's people. Paul wants to both highlight the historical significance of the badge of circumcision and also remind his readers of the spiritual insignificance of the the practice itself (done by human hands).

### Laws and commands

When Jesus speaks (to a Jewish audience) in the sermon on the mount, he says that he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it. It is significant that Old Testament law foreshadows and points forward to Jesus' ministry. In the context of Ephesians (written to a largely non-Jewish audience), Paul is able to say that Christ has also set aside 'the law with its commands and regulations' as the entry point, requirement and marker for the people of God.

### Holy temple

In a similar way, God and his people no longer intersect in a physical place. Rather, the holy temple is the people of God being built together in Christ Jesus.

## SHARE

1. Discuss a time when you have felt like a foreigner or stranger. What did you feel you were outside of/missing out on?

## OBSERVE & REFLECT

Read verses 11-12

2. Gentile is a word used to describe those outside the covenant of Israel (hence the term 'uncircumcised'). What was the status of the Gentiles prior to the coming of Jesus?

3. Why do you think Paul encourages his readers to 'remember' this reality?

Read verses 13-18

5. How does the story change for those Gentiles who come know Christ Jesus?
6. What kind of peace is Paul referring to in these verses? Peace with whom?
7. What might Paul mean by saying that Christ 'set aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations'? How does this square with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 'Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.'
8. Discuss with your group what 'one new humanity' should look like for God's people. Why do you think the church often doesn't look like this?
9. Do you think some Christians seem more or less spiritual than others? How does vs 18 counter this view?

Read verses 19-22

10. How does knowing we are members of God's household shape our understanding of church? Is it something we go to or something we are? Discuss practical ways in which this reality should be reflected in our priorities.

11. What does it mean to be 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.' How does this foundation help us recognise true and false churches (see also 1 Cor 3:10-11)?

**NEXT STEPS [CHOOSE ONE]**

12. How well does the church live up to Paul's vision? Discuss practical ways we can be part of the solution (instead of making things worse).

13. When we share our struggles in life, how does knowing who we were without Christ and who we are in him give us a framework through which we can view our difficulties? How can we encourage one another to remember our identity as members of God's household.

## STUDY FOUR | EPHESIANS 3:1-21

### 3:1-13

#### **Story so far**

As Christians we have been chosen for adoption by God the Father, redeemed for living in unity under God the Son and sealed for inheritance by God the Spirit. God has made spiritually dead sinners, alive in Christ forever. We are reconciled by his grace and this grace also reconciles us to each other.

#### **The Mystery**

There has been a mystery troubling the people of Israel for centuries. This mystery concerns God's salvation plan. This mystery is now solved in an incredibly, unexpected way.

#### **Prisoner**

Paul begins this section reminding them that he is a prisoner. He describes himself as a 'prisoner of Christ'(v. 1) He makes clear that he has been imprisoned for teaching about Jesus. He also describes poignantly that this is 'for the sake of you Gentiles'(v. 1). It is valuable to have this in the front of our minds as we explore this section together.

#### **'Heirs together'**

Paul describes Gentiles and Jews as being 'heirs together'(v. 6). It is worth considering what it is that they inherit. It is also worth exploring how meditating on being heirs would be such an encouragement to Paul who is in prison and to the Ephesian church located in a pagan city. If your group has time, looking up Revelation 22:1-5 and asking these questions would be very helpful.



## 3:14-21

### Prayer

In this part of the letter we see the Apostle Paul's incredible heart for prayer. He begins a prayer in v.16 that is full of joy and hope. It is also a prayer that is incredibly bold and ambitious. Importantly he gives us a model of what it looks like to pray for each other and to pray for our church and other churches. God our Heavenly Father is concerned about the smallest details of our daily needs but sometimes this can be an excuse for us to focus on trivial things. We can quite easily read Paul's magnificent prayer and then pray for the everyday things of kids at school and colds to get better. If we could learn to pray like Paul we would be more likely to witness God answering our prayers. The truth is that God cares more about our kids and grandkids becoming a fit dwelling for the Holy Spirit than about how they do in the HSC.

### 'For this reason'

In v. 14, Paul resumes his letter where he broke off in v.1. He is praying that 'for this reason' – in light of all the blessings in Christ that we saw in chapter 1, in light of God's great plan laid out in 1:10, and unpacked more fully in 3:2-13, and in light of God's great grace in bringing us from death to life, and from exclusion from his people into his church which we saw in chapter 2.

### Family or Father?

In v. 15 the NIV translates the word as 'family' with a footnote that it is also possible to be 'father'. The key is that Paul is conscious of who he is praying to and so we can think of it this way: "the Father, from whom every family [all fatherhood] in heaven and on earth derives its name" (3:14-15). Paul kneels in reverence to our loving heavenly Father, who provides and enables many kinds of family, which reflect the "family" of the Trinity. These include his family of angels in heaven and his families of every culture around the world. Families are created by God as the basic loving community of our societies for nurturing children to love him. Importantly it also includes his local church families of adopted children everywhere.

## SHARE

1. When you think of the idea of the mystery of God's plans, what comes to mind?

## OBSERVE & REFLECT

Read verses 1-6

2. What is the mystery made known to Paul?

3. How did Paul know the solution to the mystery?(v.3, 5)

Read verses 7-13

4. What is Paul's role in the revealing of this mystery?(v. 7-9)

5. What incredible truth do we discover about our churches in verses 10-11?

6. Paul is suffering in prison:  
How does Paul see his sufferings(v.13) ?

How should the Ephesians see his sufferings (v.13)?

Read verses 14-19

7. What does Paul ask the Father to give the Ephesian Christians(v 16, 18, 20)
8. What does he ask God to do through the power of his Spirit? How would you put Paul's requests into your own words?  
v.16-17  
v. 18-19

Read verses 20-21

9. Why can we realistically hope to become more suitable dwelling places for the perfect Christ?
10. How can we truly know the unknowable love of Christ?

**NEXT STEPS [CHOOSE SOME]**

11. How does this section change:
  - how we feel about meeting as a church ?
  - how we view suffering in order to share the gospel message?
12. How might sharing Paul's priorities allow you to shape your response to hardship?
13. How do these verses help us when:
  - we don't know what to pray for?
  - we begin to think prayer doesn't work?
  - we feel inadequate as believers?
  - we feel we are unloved or misunderstood?
14. Paul is in prison when he prays this bold prayer full of hope and joy. As we think about our own prayer lives how does this
  - encourage us?
  - challenge us?

