

All Together Now

A Look at the Letter to the Ephesians



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Moms Group
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Introduction



Paul wrote this letter to the believers in the busy, cosmopolitan city of Ephesus while he was under house arrest in Rome. The Jews in Jerusalem were not happy with Paul's message and actions, especially when it came to his relationship with the Gentiles--the pagans who were unfit for relationship with God according to their Jewish tradition. They had him arrested for challenging their system of belief and refusing to stop talking about Jesus. Because he was a Roman citizen, he was eventually taken to Rome to be tried by the authorities there. The trip to Rome involved a perilous sea journey, a camp-out on an island, a poisonous snake bite, some unwanted praise and some miraculous healings (Acts 28).

In Rome, he was chained and guarded, but allowed to live in his own rented apartment. He was able to have visitors and write letters to the churches he had started on his journeys. He had a thriving ministry in Rome, speaking to crowds who came to hear what he had to say about Jesus. Even the Roman guards were listening and believing. His imprisonment does not seem to have diminished his preaching and teaching, but the fact that he was forced to stay in one place gave him the space to write the "prison letters"-- Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians and Philemon.

Situated on the Aegean Sea in modern day Turkey, Ephesus was a city second only to Rome in its international influence and wealth. It was a cultural and religious tourist destination, with a busy port and a temple to Artemis (the Roman Diana) that was at least twice the size of the Parthenon in Athens. The temple was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient world. It was a place of riches, and foreigners brought their money to Ephesus for safekeeping in the temple; it was an early type of banking center. Ephesus was also home to a huge amphitheater, where wild beasts--and sometimes people--fought in front of cheering crowds, and athletic competitions were held. There was a library and a busy market, with sellers not only of goods of every kind, but also of slaves.

Artemis was worshipped here for a very long time--it was a practice rooted deep in the earliest beginnings of the city. One story of the origins of the city holds that the first temple here to Artemis was built by the Amazons, the mythical tribe of warrior women. Though the city changed hands many times, ruled by the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Egyptians and the Romans at different times, devotion to Artemis remained steadfast. She was worshipped here as the goddess of fertility and the originator of all life. Perhaps because of this, women in Ephesus had similar status and power to men.

Paul had been to Ephesus about 10 years before he wrote the letter, traveling there with his friends Priscilla and Aquila. He didn't stay long on that visit, but he came back later and lived there for three years. This is when the church took shape in Ephesus.

This passage from Acts gives some background about the recipients of the letter that Paul would be writing from his room in Rome.

Scripture

Acts 19 New Living Translation

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them.

"No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

"Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked.

And they replied, "The baptism of John."

Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus."

As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Paul Ministers in Ephesus

Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. But some became stubborn, rejecting his message and publicly speaking against the Way. So Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then he held daily discussions at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for the next two years, so that people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the word of the Lord.

God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.

A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

Afterward Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!" He sent his two assistants, Timothy and Erastus, ahead to Macedonia while he stayed awhile longer in the province of Asia.

The Riot in Ephesus

About that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way. It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy. He called them together, along with others employed in similar trades, and addressed them as follows:

"Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. But as you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't really gods at all. And he's done this not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her great prestige!"

At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was filled with confusion. Everyone rushed to the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, who were Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. Paul wanted to go in, too, but the believers wouldn't let him. Some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, also sent a message to him, begging him not to risk his life by entering the amphitheater.

Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander forward and told him to explain the situation. He motioned for silence and tried to speak. But when the crowd realized he was a Jew, they started shouting again and kept it up for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said. "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. Since this is an undeniable fact, you should stay calm and not

do anything rash. You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess.

"If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the officials can hear the case at once. Let them make formal charges. And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say." Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?

Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?

How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?

Is God inviting you into something new?

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



The Plan Revealed



This first chapter in Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus talks about unity--the believers close, family union with Christ and Christ's ultimate union with all things in heaven and earth. We tend to separate the two, with the here and now being life on earth, and heaven a far-off hope for the future when we die and leave earth. There is no separation of the two in Christ, according to Paul.

Jesus--who is God in flesh, born into our human form--is the Christ. Christ is the eternal Word of God, a person of the Trinity who has existed eternally. Christ was there at creation, and has been working and loving all throughout history and will continue forever. Jesus walked on earth at a specific time and place in history. His title, Christ, is the larger reality that is integral to his identity. Richard Rohr calls Christ the "eternal blueprint for all of creation," the original design and motivation for everything that is. "Incarnation is the oldest Christian story. Through Christ, God is pouring God's self into all creation. To be Christian, then, is to see Christ in every thing." (Richard Rohr)

Scripture

Ephesians 1, New Living Translation

Greetings from Paul

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Spiritual Blessings

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 1:7-10

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

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Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Us and Them



It's not new--people tend to build walls to separate themselves from others, making groups that are right and wrong, legal and illegal, good and bad. At the time of Paul's letter, the Jews wanted to draw distinctions between themselves and the people that they determined could not know and enjoy a relationship with God the way they did. The Ephesians were some of those outsiders, and Paul's letter explained that because of their union with Christ, there could no longer be this division.

In the Western church, we may have our own walls around the community of believers, and want to keep those with different cultures or expressions of faith out of the inner circle of Christ followers. Christ is bigger than our own experience and understanding, though, and brings all his children together in one family.

Scripture

Ephesians 2, New Living Translation

Made Alive with Christ

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Oneness and Peace in Christ

Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

A Temple for the Lord

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Questions for Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

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I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



The Great Mystery



The union of the people of God with the masses of dirty outsiders was shocking enough, but now Paul reveals that this expansion of God's family has another, larger purpose. The church, which is Christ's body in the world--another incarnation involving not just one person, but every person in his widespread family--is fulfilling a plan that has been shrouded in mystery. The church will reveal Christ to all of creation, seen and unseen, in heaven and earth.

Think about that for a moment. It's an incredible plan, one that is unfolding all around us even if the earth and all the people on it seem to be in upheaval. Christ is at work, building his church and revealing his wisdom and love.

Scripture

Ephesians 3, New Living Translation

God's Mysterious Plan Revealed

When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles . . . assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.

And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.

God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Growth

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 3:14-19 (ESV)

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

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Growing Into Your True Self



Just as every cell in our body carries our specific DNA, so every individual person in Christ's body, the church, carries Christ's essential being. The Holy Spirit is at work in us, moving us closer and closer to living out the life and works that God had in mind for us when he created us.

Paul reveals more of Christ's mysterious plan in this chapter. To build the unity of the church, each part of the body has been giving a specific gift to help the other parts grow, creating a healthy and whole body. Somehow--astonishingly!--we are part of his plan to fill the entire universe with himself.

Scripture

Ephesians 4, New Living Translation

Unity in the Body

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism
one God and Father of all,
who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say,

*"When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Living as Children of Light

With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And "don't sin by letting anger control you. "Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV)

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

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I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Walking in the World



As the letter draws to a close, Paul addresses practical matters. Yes, we are part of a great and glorious mystery, but we still need to put one foot in front of the other, day after day. Here he writes practical encouragement to walk wisely. He is not suggesting that we are on our own here; the Holy Spirit, whose influence on us is compared to drinking wine, is crucial. The Spirit is the power to live a life of love and gratitude that reflects our unity with Christ.

Scripture

Ephesians 5, New Living Translation

Living in the Light

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said,

*"Awake, O sleeper,
rise up from the dead,
and Christ will give you light."*

Living by the Spirit's Power

So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spirit-Guided Relationships: Wives and Husbands

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body.

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 5:1-2 (ESV)

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

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!


I will be honored by every nation.

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Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Equipped and Ready



Between the banalities of everyday living and the great mystery of Christ's plan, there is a battle. It's a struggle to live as a member of Christ's family in our world where we can't always see the big picture. The effort is important; our responses and interactions are living examples of the big picture. Collectively, we are living out Christ's life in the here and now. To help us as we work out God's plan, Paul offers more exhortations about family life, then finishes up with some practical tools. In the cosmic struggle to reveal the unified body of Christ in the universe, we will need strategy and protection: Paul calls this the Armor of God.

Scripture

Ephesians 6 New Living Translation (NLT)

Children and Parents

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

Slaves and Masters

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.

Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites.

The Whole Armor of God

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

Final Greetings

To bring you up to date, Tychicus will give you a full report about what I am doing and how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work. I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you.

Peace be with you, dear brothers and sisters, and may God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you love with faithfulness. May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?
Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?
How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?
Is God inviting you into something new?

Key Verse

Ephesians 6:10-11

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Epilogue



In the last book of the Bible, Jesus' disciple John writes down messages for the churches that he received in a vision from God. One of these is addressed to the church in Ephesus, written about 30 years after Paul's letter to them. The church seems to be going strong, but has settled into routine and lost sight of the most important thing: loving Christ and each other. The plan that Paul shared with them in his letter centered on loving Christ by loving each other--loving Christ in each other--in order to reveal Christ to the world.

Resisting the influence of the heretical cult mentioned here must have been significant, to be given such prominence. Perhaps they were maintaining an outer appearance that pointed to Christ, but had let the inner well of love necessary to the true life of the church run dry.

Scripture

Revelation 2 New Living Translation (NLT)

The Message to the Church in Ephesus

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first. Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.

"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

Reflection

What do you notice in this passage?

Is there a person or event that you relate to?

Is there a word, phrase or idea that stands out to you?

How does it connect to your life today?

What challenges you about this passage?

Is God inviting you into something new?

Contemplation & Prayer

Bring any thoughts, fears or convictions that have surfaced to God. After offering them to Him, simply be quiet in His presence.

Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world." Psalm 46:10

Make a note of any actions that you want to take if they come to mind.



Sources



This is a list of the materials, other than Bible passages, that I looked at while working on this study:

Overview

[Introduction-to-ephesians](#)

A sermon by Chuck Swindoll on Ephesians

<https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-pauline-epistles/ephesians>

A sermon by NT Wright on Ephesians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCRMRSiV2c>

The history of Ephesus

<https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-greece/ephesus>

More info about Ephesus, including daily life, slavery and food

[Mythology_of_artemis.htm](#)

Info about Paul's missionary journeys

[Ephesus- Apostle Paul missionary journeys.html](#)

A pattern for Lectio Divina

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/lectio-divina/small-groups>

Richard Rohr, [The Universal Christ](#)

<https://universalchrist.cac.org>

I am reading this book now and am loving it--challenging and very hopeful!

