

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

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Lesson 1: Purpose, Background and Structure

Ephesus

- Second in importance only to Rome
- Made capital of Asia (Turkey)
- Some say up to 250,000 in Ephesus but probably too high...more like 50-60k
- Home of the temple of Artemis (one of the 7 wonders of the world) and that is reflected in Acts 19:24

Occasion (Paul)

3 Missionary Journey's

- 1 - Antioch to Cyprus to Asia Minor (Turkey) and back to Antioch (with Barnabas)
- Jerusalem council – Acts 15 (48/49 AD)
- 2 – Jerusalem (49) to Antioch (dispute over John Mark) – Barnabas carries on with John Mark and Paul picks up Silas – Derbe - Lystra (meet Timothy) – Philippi – Athens – Corinth (Priscilla and Aquila – followed him on to Ephesus) – Ephesus – Caesarea – Antioch (1 year)
- 3 – Galatia – Ephesus (2 years see Acts 19:10 – wrote Corinthians during this time) – Macedonia – Achaea – Philippi – Troas – Miletas – Tyre – Caesarea – Jerusalem (arrested)
- Imprisoned in Caesarea (2 years)
- Transferred to prison in Rome (2 years) – ends book of Acts
- Tradition:
 - Released from prison – further ministry (not sure where he went)
 - Imprisoned again by Nero
 - Executed

So Paul was in Ephesus twice, the second time staying 2 years (third missionary journey). He established this church and knew these Christians.

- Acts 19:1-2 – when he got to Ephesus there were already some believers there (from his 2nd journey?)
- Acts 19:8ff – Paul teaches the Ephesian Jews about Jesus for 3 months – mixed results (19:9 but 19:17-18)
- 20:1 – Paul left the disciples there and went on his way to Macedonia (3rd missionary journey)

That is when Paul was in Ephesus...but when did Paul write the letter?

- Eph 3:1 – prisoner of Jesus Christ
- Eph 4:1 – I, the prisoner of the Lord
- Eph 4:11 – prisoner for the Lord

- Eph 6:19-20 – ambassador in chains
- Most think this was written during his first imprisonment in Rome

Ephesians is ¼ prisoner letters of Paul, which include:

- Ephesians
- Colossians
- Philippians
- Philemon

Occasion (Ephesus)

Occasion drives the purpose. So if we can figure out a plausible reason why Paul would have said something, we might have a clue as to what was going on in that church.

- You don't teach correctively on problems in worship if the church has no problems in worship.

Written to Gentile Christians (Eph 2:1ff) who lived in the city of Ephesus.

- Acts 19:17-20 Ephesus was a place of a lot of magic and spiritual powers were emphasized.
- Ephesians was written to Gentile Christians (2:1) many of whom might have used to practice the magic arts
- Ephesians has a lot of language of power and even reminds them that is how they used to live (**2:2-3**)
- Highly possible – Ephesians written to Christians who had made their way out of a pagan past but needed to be taught **why and how (in that order)** to live for Christ.

Why, then how – the structure of Ephesians:

There are 41 commands in Ephesians

- 1 in chapters 1-3
 - 2:12 – “remember”
- 40 in chapters 4-6
 - 4:1 – transitional verse between 2 obvious sections
 - “lead a life worthy of the calling”
 - 1-3, then, are the things one needs to know to live that life
 - 4-6 is what one needs to do to live that life
 - What we do is driven by what we know

How do you get to be who God wants you to be?

- Checking boxes – we memorized your commands Paul and now we are doing them (say he only wrote Eph 4-6)
- Knowing all the right stuff – we had all the right doctrine but didn't know what to do with it (say he only wrote Eph 1-3)
- Paul wrote 1-6 and in the order of: Understand who God is and what he has done for you, so that

Letter writing in the Roman World

If you were to write a personal letter, how would you format it?

Name of writer: Paul (1:1)

Name of recipient: God's holy people in Ephesus (1:1)

Greeting: "Grace and peace to you..."

Prayer/thanksgiving: "Praise be to the God and Father...(1:3ff, see also 1:16 – thanksgiving and prayer!)

Body: 2:1-6:20

Final greeting:6:21-24

Contemporary letter example:

Claudius Agathas Daimon to most beloved Sarapion, greetings. Since I am going to Thebes, I salute you dearest, sweetest Sarapion and I exhort you also to do the same thing. If you need anything from Thebes, I encourage you to write to me, dearest, and it shall be done. I pray for your health continually together with that of your children, Farewell.

- Written 2nd century in Egypt

Paul adapted this form – "Grace and peace"

- Grace – common Greek greeting
- Peace – common Jewish greetin
- Adapting Jewish Greeting - Typical Jewish greeting – mercy and peace – adapted to grace and peace
- Adapting Greek greeting – χαιρειν (Greetings or hail) to χαρις (Grace)

See Acts 15:23-29 as another example (Uses greetings instead of grace)

Thousands of ancient letters have been found and the majority follow these rules.

This is a letter written in its day to a particular audience. It is inspired scripture and so, it is beneficial to use to read it and apply it to our present situation...but first, it must be understood as it was in it's day.

Read Ephesians – listen for the why in the beginning and the how in the end. Next week, we will dive into Ephesians 1.

Lesson 2: Ephesians 1:1-14

Review:

- Paul is writing this as a letter to the Ephesian Christians
- Paul knows them
- Paul is in prison
- They are mostly Gentile Christians (see 2:11) and is probably writing this letter to help them have a theological foundation and understand that how they live comes straight out of what they believe.
- It also seems he is trying to help them understand their place in the kingdom alongside the Jewish Christians (2:14ff)

Have the class come up with all the things they can think of that God has done for us - List on the board

We are going to read Paul's list - Read Ephesians 1:1-14

Greeting/Salutation

- Paul, an apostle – transliteration (like baptism)
 - Noun form of the verb “to send”
 - Apostle is literally someone who is sent

All about God (1:1-14)

What verbs/actions does Paul say God has done for us in these verses?

- Blessed us – 1:3
- Choose us – 1:4
- Predestined us – 1:5
- Given us grace – 1:6
- Redeemed us – 1:7
- Forgave us – 1:7
- Lavished on us the riches of his grace – 1:7-8
- Made known to us the mystery of his will – 1:9
- Chose us – 1:11
- Predestined us – 1:11
- Included in Christ – 1:13
- Marked with the Holy Spirit – 1:13

These are things God has personally done for us.

What does all of this say about how Paul sees God?

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These words were meant to have an effect on the readers of the letter. *What effect do you think Paul intends to create within them through teaching (praying?) so much about God?*

- It makes an overall impression about God to them/us
- God is powerful/able
- God is loving and merciful
- God has and gives blessings
- God is abundant, not stingy...

What does this say about us?

- We have been blessed by God, chosen by God and forgiven by God and his abundant grace
- We have no fears, no worries...no trials that cannot be overcome with God doing all of this on our behalf.

Lastly, what does all of this actually mean?

God & Christ:

Summary - What God has done through Christ for us.

Spiritual (1:3)

"All spiritual blessing in Christ" – we hear "spiritual" and what do you think? Non-material.

- Spiritual in the NT has more to do with the work of the Holy Spirit than it has anything to say about non-material blessings (intangible blessings)
- Paul is not making a distinction between the physical/material and the non-physical here

Election

Most difficult part to understand – God choose us before the creation of the world.

- Calvinism?
 - T – Total Depravity
 - U – Unconditional election
 - L – Limited Atonement
 - I – Irresistible Grace
 - P – Perseverance of the saints
- Is that what this is talking about? God choosing some apart from their choice and condemning others before they were born?

This question comes down to who "us" is.

- Calvinism and even Western culture today is very focused on the individual.
- 1st century Judaism was more about the collective...about the community
 - They found their identity, not in their individuality but in their communal heritage
 - Children of Abraham over son of Joseph

- People of Israel
- So, who is “us”?
 - Read Eph 2:11-21
 - This is God’s larger plan – to unite Jews and Gentiles (all nations) under the Lordship of Christ.

God set that up before the creation of the world that “we” would all be picked to be a part of that. God choose “us” (Jew and Gentile alike) to be a part of His family, His house, His body.

Now hear Ephesian 1:3-14 again

Make more sense?

Why does God do all of this?

- Because it brings glory back to himself (1:5-6)
- Because it is who he is – a God of grace and love and mercy (1:7)

What does require of God to bring about this unity?

- 2:14-18 – God had to remove the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (which was the law)
- *How did he do that?*
 - He did it through the cross

Mystery and wisdom (1:8-10)

Work through this backwards

- God is bringing unity to all things in heaven and on earth through Christ (**see also revelation 21:1 & Romans 8:18-25**)
- When the time was right this unity/reconciliation was a mystery God planned on revealing
- He did reveal it to us, ultimately by his wisdom (he understood the mystery) and through Christ.

More of the mystery revealed (1:11-14)

“In him (Christ) we were chosen”, who was chosen?

- 1:12 – those who were first to put their hope in Christ (who was that? The Jews)
- 1:13 – “and you also” ...who else? The Ephesians Gentile audience

Holy Spirit (1:13-14)

How can we be sure of these things and that God will see it all through?

Both Jew and Gentile Christian alike have the same deposit of guarantee – the Holy Spirit

What is our inheritance as God’s adopted children?

All of this is for God's praise and glory. *Why?* Because he is the one who planned all of this, initiated all of this and had the power to carry it through to completion for us – we have no boast except to boast in Christ.

Lesson 3: Ephesians 1:15-23

Start back with predestination – help them see how in the OT we know God chose a people for himself but in the NT we have a hard time seeing it that way...we are so about individual salvation (which is valid) that we don't get choosing of a whole people very easily.

Predestination continued:

How were you saved as a Jew in the Old Testament?

- You were born into a Jewish family
- Older – obeyed the commandments

Back up – why was the means of salvation the Jews?

- Deut 7:6 – chosen from all the peoples on the earth

Could a Jew turn their back on Judaism?

Could a Gentile get “born into” the family of faith?

- Gentiles could become Jews by circumcision, kosher, holy days, keeping Torah

So God choose the descendants of Abraham to be his people – but that promise didn't guarantee that every Jew would be saved and every non-Jew would be lost.

- People still had to opt in

Church – God choose the church (1 Peter 2:9-10)

How do you become a part of the church?- through faith in Christ, baptism, etc.

- God has told us how to be a part of his chosen church
- If you are a part of that you are in his chosen people
- If you decide not to you aren't.

God chose Christ to be the means of salvation for those who would have faith in him – that is now called the Church. If you are in Christ you of the chosen people.

The problem of Western filters – seeing things as a 21st century Western individualist. When we hear we are chosen we immediately want to go to “I am chosen” but that is not how their world saw things. They saw identity in community, not in individuality. They emphasize the body, we emphasize the parts.

Back to Ephesians 1...Ephesians 1:15-23

What two things did Paul hear about these Ephesian Christians?

- Their faith in the Lord
- Their love for God's people

- *What does that sound like from the Gospels/Jesus' teaching? – 2 greatest commands (Matt 22:36-40)*

Faith, hope & Love (1:15, 18) – Tom's handout

What has Paul been doing for them since that time?

- Paul constantly prays for the people he ministers to
- It should serve as an example to us to pray specifically for other Christians
- It should also teach us to pray, not just specifically, but regularly for other Christians

Do you pray for the church here at Westside? For particular Christians here at Westside?

How does that come up in your prayer life?

Do you thank God for other Christians? Why is it important that we do that?

The content of Paul's prayer (**1:17-23**)

- Spirit of wisdom – *What do you think that means?*
- Spirit of revelation – *What do you think that means?*
- Why – so that these things might better point you back to a knowledge of God.
- Eyes of their hearts be opened – to be able to understand their hope (future glory and inheritance) & to know the power of God
 - The power of God is no ordinary power but the same power that was at work in Christ's resurrection is at work in our lives!

Understanding (1:17)

3 words for this in this verse

- Wisdom – Sophia (capacity to understand)
- Revelation – apokalypsis (to make fully known)
- So that you may **know** him better (gnosis – so that you may know)

In other words I pray that God give you the capacity to understand what he is revealing so that you may really, really know him better!

Spiritual knowledge: These are things made known about God by the Spirit of God. Jesus promised us the Spirit would do those things – **John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15**

- That last one talks about things from Christ that the Spirit will make known to the followers of Christ.
- That is what this is talking about.

God's resurrection power (1:19-20)

God's power has been made known to us specifically through the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

The power of God that raised Jesus is the same power that makes us His church, His body. God has united us with each other and with Christ (as our head).

This is who we are and how we got to where we are, in Christ. It all goes back to the power and purpose of God.

Christ

Closing the prayer with a note about the authority of Christ as demonstrated by the power of God that raised him.

God raised him to what? – to a position of all power and authority

How? – By placing every authority, power, and dominion under His feet!

Prophecy concerning Christ fulfilled

- Seated – see Psalm 110:1
- Everything beneath his feet – Psalm 8:6

Made him our head, that is, the head of the church. He is our leader and his power is then at work within us!

The church

Last, he mentions the church – it is the body of Christ with Jesus as our head. The church is also the fullness of Christ as he is the one who fills everything in every way! See 1 Corinthians 12 – we are the body of Christ

Application

What does it mean for us to be the body of Christ?

What responsibilities come with that?

How does that affect the way we treat each other?

Lesson 4: Ephesians 2:1-10

What is wrong with humanity?

- Very important question to answer – if we think people are basically ok and that heaven is for everyone...that God is just there for the tough times but that we got it the rest of the time by our own goodness or smarts...that is not biblical.
- Humanity's problem is sin and death.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

Life without Christ (2:1-3)

What does Paul tell them they were before they had Christ?

Why is life apart from Christ a life that is actually death?

What does that mean for anyone you know who is not in Christ?

- They may seem very much alive but the reality is they are a corpse.

O'Brien breaks this death down into three areas:

1. Our environment – ways of this world 2:2
2. Our desires – cravings of our sinful nature – 2:3
3. Supernatural powers – ruler of the kingdom of the air – 2:2

2:2 Spiritual death is a “way of life”

- **2:2 - Literally – “in which you used to walk around” (way of life)**
- We don't always equate sinful decisions with living in line with a system of the powers of darkness
- Paul says here that there are spiritual powers of darkness that are real and working in this world
- Apart from Christ we are at home with those powers

What is the ultimate result of that kind of living?

- The wrath of God

Paul makes it clear – apart from Christ we don't have spiritual life...we are dead in sin and the object of the wrath of God.

What is the “ruler of the kingdom of the air”?

- **Most likely the devil – see 4:27, 6:11, 6:16**

Why the “air”?

- Air was the place between heaven and earth and was thought to be the realm of the demons

- Eph 6:12 – the heavenly realms are the location of evil spiritual forces that must be combatted.
- It is not that the devil has a kingdom in the air but that it is the place where he tries to exert his influence.

What is the role of the devil in the world today?

Col 2:14-15 – *If the Devil has been defeated by Christ , why is he still a problem?*

- Even in defeat, he continues to fight against God and against God’s people – Eph 4:27

What can we, as Christians, do to resist the devil?

- 1 Peter 5:8-9 – resist the devil
- Eph 6:10-20 – put on the armor of God

How do we actually put on the armor of God today?

How did Jesus handle Satan in Matthew 4?

We can only use scripture if we know scripture.

2:3 – all (Jew and Gentile) are guilty of satisfying the cravings of the flesh.

- Jew and Gentile are alike in their sin and in their deserving the wrath of God.

Deception of the world - Appearance of wellness:

Now, do we really believe all of that stuff??? That there is a little red guy with a pitch fork trying to get people to hell? That there really are evil powers at work in this world personally trying to lead you astray? That sin is really that bad and that God really does have wrath?

It can be easy to think that people are alright. They seem like nice people, do nice things, seem to have it together. Apart from Christ none of that matters...

Here is how N.T. Wright said it,

“Often, today people don’t believe there’s much wrong with the human race, and with themselves in particular. As a result, they don’t see very much need for God’s grace. Perhaps, they think, God might help me out in a tight corner here or there but basically I can get along fine without him. All that God then has to offer, it seems, is a kind of spiritual enhancement of ordinary life, a gentle enrichment of what’s already there rather than a radical rescue from imminent disaster...But Paul’s gospel is all about grace that is more than mere enrichment. It gives life to the dead. It is God’s free, undeserved gift.” – Wright, Prison Letters, 22

How does the world try to get us to believe sin is no big deal...especially not about death?

The turn – from sin/death to grace/life in Christ (2:4-10)

What qualities does God have that Paul says resulted in God making us alive in Christ?

- Great love for us & God who is rich in mercy

Why does our salvation require the mercy and love of God?

Who is the one who made us alive?

Notice, we didn't do it ourselves...we didn't get out of the grave alone. God did it. God re-created us...new creations. God made us alive (again) since we had previously been dead.

What does Paul tell us was necessary for this in 2:5?

2:6 – raised us up (resurrection language)

- We were dead – God made us alive (2:1-3, 4) – resurrection language
- God raised us up (2:6) – resurrection language

Why did God do this?

- Because he loves us (2:4)

What results from God saving us?

- We are raised from death
- God's infinite grace is demonstrated (2:7)

2:6 – seated us with Christ in the heavenlies...*what does this mean?*

- God's Spirit has already sealed us – 1:13
- It is so certain it is like it has already taken place

Key verse – 2:8

How is it we are saved by grace, not by works and yet scripture lays out things God requires of people to be saved?

Romans 11:6 & 4:2, 16

There is a difference between earning salvation through works and receiving salvation as a gift.

- If works earn your salvation then you deserve it – that would mean God would make a way to save you based on you being "good enough"...apart from Christ's sacrifice
- If salvation is a gift, then we receive something we couldn't pay for ourselves.
- God can put conditions on the gift...meeting the conditions is not earning salvation.

1 Cor 1:29, 31 – boast in the Lord, not in yourself. He is the one who is working

Acts 17:28 – in him we live, move and have our being...

We don't do anything to earn salvation. We do, do things in response to what God has done for us through Christ.

- Baptism doesn't earn salvation – baptism is a response of surrender to the power of God to kill our sinful self and replace it with a new person...raised to walk in newness of life
- Confession doesn't earn salvation – it is a necessary response of faith
- Faith is necessary for salvation but doesn't earn it. God has said he will save those who have faith – he never said that faith was a merit badge that forces God to save us because we earned it
- Salvation is getting what we don't deserve. Salvation is not a wage but a gift.

God lined all this up for us (2:9-10) and it is up to us to participate in what God is up to.

2:10 – we are a new creation, God's workmanship (2 Cor 5:17)

Application

How should we live if we have been raised from the dead?

How should this motivate us to reach those who are still dead?

Lesson 5: Ephesians 2:11-22

This section is about God's grand plan to reconcile humanity with himself. It all started back with Abraham in Genesis when God made him the covenant promise to be a blessing to many nations. This has finally come to fruition in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has taken two hostile and distinct groups and made them one.

2:11-12 – Paul starts with the status of the Gentiles before they had faith in Christ.

What three things does Paul say about the separation that was present in the Gentiles before coming to Christ?

Paul is saying there was a clear demarcation between the Jews and the Gentiles before Christ came and reconciled the groups with an offer of unity to all who would have faith in Christ. Paul would argue in Romans that this actually wasn't something new but the fulfillment of something old because even Abraham was seen as righteous prior to his circumcision because he had faith in God prior to his circumcision, making Abraham not just the father of the circumcised but the father of people of faith (Rom 4:9-12).

2:13-18 – Paul starts off verse 13 with a very important word, the word "but." Paul is showing them that who they were and their status apart from faith in Christ has changed. They are no longer who they once were. Paul says that it is by the blood of Christ that they have now "been brought near." This is an important phrase because of the distance we saw in 2:12 (separate, excluded, etc). Those who were far off are now near.

Just how near did God bring the Gentiles? (See 2:14).

God hasn't just brought them close up to the Jews. God has taken two groups and made them one group. In 2:15 he calls this "one new humanity." This would have been unimaginable to the Jews in that day to be unified with Gentiles in this fashion. This is why Paul calls this the mystery of Christ in Ephesians.

Paul recognizes this hostility in 2:16 and says that Christ has disarmed and reconciled these things in order to end the hostility that was so prevalent between these two previously distinct, now unified, groups.

How does or at least should the cross bring unity to those who are at odds with each other?

Who was Paul talking about when he said those who were "near" and those who were "far away" in verse 17?

In verse 17 what message did Christ preach to both those who were near (Jews) and those who were far off (Gentiles)?

Just as Christ brought an end to their hostility through the cross and by his blood, the result is peace. Jesus wants his people to be at peace with each other and that means to eliminate the previous arbitrary distinctions that we, in our flesh, have erected between people of faith.

2:19-22 – Paul brings this home with two final analogies – citizenship. The “you” in verse 19 seems to refer to the Gentile Christians and Paul is telling them that there is now no value difference in Jews and Gentiles and now identity or nationalistic differences from God’s perspective because there is only one kingdom that matters and that is God’s kingdom. There is only one kingdom we are ultimately, as Christians, identified with and that is God’s kingdom.

Then he makes it even more personal. Not only are Jews and Gentiles citizens of the same kingdom. They are members of the same household. This is personal. This is real fellowship. This means eating together and living together, at peace with each other. This is to show honor and extend grace to the other because you are now of the same family.

And this isn’t any household, verse 21, this household is God’s household...his temple! We are not just people in the house, we are the house! It is not wise for the bricks that compose the walls of the house to refuse to touch each other or else the whole thing can come tumbling down!

Application

How do we make arbitrary distinctions among people today?

What can we do to bring unity where the world brings division?

Lesson 6: Ephesians 3:1-21

Ephesians 1:1-14 recap

- It all starts with God
- Redemption comes through Christ...his death brings our forgiveness
- The mystery of God's will (1:9)
- This is by the grace of God to bring to unity all things (1:10)
- This was God's plan from the beginning (1:11)
- Sealed/guarantee of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14)

Ephesians 1:15-23 recap

- Paul's prayer for God to strengthen and bless them and give them wisdom
- Christ is the head of all things

Ephesians 2:1-10 recap

- Gentiles (non-Jews) were dead in sin before you knew Christ. Now you are alive by the grace of God

Ephesians 2:11-22 recap

- Similar to 2:1-10...reminds them that Christ saving the Gentiles was the mystery of God's will (look back to 1:9) and that it is God's Holy Spirit that is at work in this (look back to 1:13-14)

Read Ephesians 3

Connecting points with Ephesians 1-2

- God's grace – Ephesians 3:2, 7 - 1:6-7
- Mystery of God's will – Ephesians 3:3, 9 – 1:8
- Understand – 3:4, 19 – 1:8, 17
- One body – 3:6 – 1:23
- His power – 3:7, 18, 20 – 1:19-20
- Riches of Christ – 3:8. 16 – 1:18
- Rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms – 3:10 – 2:2, 6
- His eternal purpose – 3:11 – 1:9, 11, 2:15
- Approach God through faith – 3:12, 16 – 2:8

Ephesians 3 – revealing the mystery of God to the Christians in Ephesus (purpose of the chapter is stated in 3:4)

Paul's imprisonment bookends to the section (3:1 & 3:14)

- 3:1 – Paul is a prisoner, in chains
- 3:13 – don't be discouraged due to Paul's sufferings for them

How is Paul suffering for them? – Well, why is Paul in prison? (**Acts 21:28-29**). Paul was arrested because of his work with the Gentiles. So his imprisonment is “for them” or for their sake...he ended up there because he was reaching out to them. That is why it might discourage them...but Paul tells them not to be discouraged (**3:13**)

God’s grace given to Paul

- Twice Paul says he is doing this only because of the grace of God (**3:2, 3:8**)
- *Why is God using Paul to reach the Gentiles an act of grace?*
 - He had been persecuting the church

What was Paul preaching to the Gentiles? (3:8) – boundless riches of Christ

Inheritance in Christ

3:6 – Gentiles are co-heirs with the Jews:

- in the Lord’s body
- sharers of the promises in Christ Jesus

What is an heir?

What do we inherit as heirs of God?

3:8 – “boundless riches of Christ” – *what riches do we have in being part of God’s family?*

There is great blessing in being a Christ – it should remind us to abstain from the false hopes the world has to offer but just can’t seem to deliver on. God will deliver (sealed by his spirit to guarantee that – **1:13-14**).

Making plain the mystery 3:9

What was the mystery? – that God purposed since the beginning of time to bring the Gentiles in with the Jews via Christ.

- Past - Kept hidden for ages past – 3:9
- Present - Revealed through the church – 3:10
- Past - According to his eternal purpose – 3:11 (God always knew he was going to do this!)

How did God accomplish this?

- Not through our perfect obedience
- Through Christ (3:11)

Approaching God

Through Christ we can approach God how?

- Freely

- Confidently

How does that contrast with an Old Covenant/Old Testament way of approaching God?

Summary

Paul is in chains for the Gospel to the Gentiles...in those chains he continues to reveal the mystery of Christ...to make that plain...that God is bringing unity to Jews and Gentiles alike through Christ to bring both together in peace and harmony (2:11-22) so that God's eternal purposes can be satisfied and his grace displayed in us.

Paul's prayer (3:14-21)

For this reason...for what reason?- look back up at previous verses...that they have been included in Christ and Paul gets to participate in this mission of radical transformation.

What is Paul's prayer for them?

- God will strengthen them with power (think resurrection power of 1:20)
- Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith
- Rooted and established in love
- Power together (Jew and Gentile alike) to grasp the love of Christ
- Know – love that surpasses knowledge (**irony there**)
- Filled to measure of fullness of God

How can all this happen? – only God can do it...so Paul prays to God last of all. What does Paul pray about God? (3:20-21)

Application

Unity – we aren't struggling with Jew/Gentile unity in the church but do we ever struggle with unity with other Christians?

- What might Paul say to us about that?

What does it mean to you that the power of God is working in your life?

How special do you feel knowing things that were mysteries for thousands of years but has been revealed to us since Christ?

Lesson 7: Ephesians 4:1-16

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Transitioning 1-3 & 4-6

4:1 - Transition from who God is, what he has done, etc to what God then expects of His people. Bring on the 40 commands!

Read 4:2-6

What is Paul emphasizing here?

- What it takes to get along
- Recognizing the unity that we have in Christ

Think back to chapters 1-3. *Why might unity be an issue in this church?*

- Eph 1:12-13 – we who were first and you...
- Eph 2:14-18 – two groups one
- Eph 2:18 - through him ***we both***
- Eph 2:19 – no longer strangers but fellow citizens
- 2:21 – the whole building
- 3:6 – Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel
- 3:18 – together, with all of God’s people

Commands to be humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another...every effort to keep unity of Spirit in bond of peace – 7 “one”s in 4:4-6

Paul is now giving commands that enforce the unity that God has already given to them. God unifies us, we are to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Where does division come from?

How does humility, gentleness, patience, etc help maintain unity in the body?

Ephesians 4:7-13 – The work of Christ to equip his church:

- 4:12 - For works of service
- 4:13 – for unity
- 4:13 – for knowledge of the Son of God
- 4:13 – for maturity
- 4:13 – to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (explanation of what maturity looks like)

The result (4:14-16)

What does Paul say will result from this?

- No longer infants = mature
- No longer tossed around by everything that comes along
- Ability to speak truth in love
- Grow the body of Christ in every respect

Being a part of Christ's body (4:15-17)

This metaphor illustrates the points he is making.

This is the ultimate illustration of the unity that we, as Christians, must find in Christ. He is what joins us together into a new body with Christ as the head. We then work together to support, grow and build up the body in love

How is this done? – as each part does its work.

Going back to 4:1 - Why is unity an essential part of living the life worthy of the calling we have received?

Back up – what calling have we received? – The calling to be unified under the Lordship and headship of Jesus Christ.

Application

Broad level – how can congregations attempt to find more unity among themselves?

Micro level – how can individuals seek to be more united with other Christians?

Is there anyone in your life that you are at odds with?

What can you do about that?

Conflict Resolution (Matt 18:15-20)

What is the first thing Jesus says you are to do?

- Go to them and show them their fault

The attitude in which this is done is extremely important.

How would you approach someone like this in a way that shows you care?

If we are not careful we will go to someone to prove we are right. *How can an attitude of arrogance rather than love short-circuit this process?*

- It shows that we are not as interested in helping the one who was wrong and heal the relationship with them than we are getting our way or trying to be better than they are.

What does Jesus say is the result if that person listens to the correction?

- They will be won over.

What else will happen to that relationship?

- It will be mended and healthy again.

What does Jesus say to do if they will not listen?

- Take some witnesses and then, if still not resolved bring it before the church/elders.

Notice, Jesus doesn't say to go and talk to a whole lot of people about the problem. He doesn't advocate spreading rumors. We often don't really have all the facts when we think someone has wronged us. It is important that you not judge too quickly and ask questions rather than make accusations. Telling anyone about it other than the person in question is a last resort.

Why do people tell everyone but the person in question?

Why is it important to go to mature Christians with the problem rather than "itching ears" or a young Christian?

- You are seeking more than a witness—when you take the second step you are seeking counsel. Maybe in that process you get feedback and information that you didn't realize before.

What does Jesus mean by "treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector?"

- That is an odd statement because Jesus treated tax-collectors and sinners with love.
- Yet, the ones Jesus spent time with were repentant and trying to do better.
- Jesus is saying treat them as you would someone who has no interest in the things of God.

Reconciliation is an important concept for Christians to understand. We often realize our need

to be reconciled to God but what about our need to be reconciled with each other?

Learning From God's Example of Reconciliation—Romans 5:6-10

We see in this passage that Christ didn't die for us because we were nice or pretty or had it all together. *Who did Christ die for?*

- The ungodly.

Christ's death brought about our reconciliation with God. God initiated it even though we were the ones who had done wrong. *When someone does you wrong how important is it that you initiate the reconciliation process? Why?*

We often want someone to come and say they were wrong or sorry but it doesn't always work that way. If God can forgive and reconcile us when we were still sinners, how should that make it easier for us to reconcile with others?

Application:

Make a list of who you have open conflicts with or things that were never resolved. *How could you go about bringing a resolution to those conflicts and reconciliation with those people?*

Who is the hardest person or what is the toughest situation you may have to go out and reconcile?

Lesson 8: Ephesians 4:17-31

In 4:1-16 Paul talked a lot about unity:

- Striving for unity – 4:1-3
- Reality of our unity – 4:4-6
- Gifts that lead to unity and maturity – 4:11-16

Paul turns now to something that can easily divide us – Read 4:17-32

What is the first command Paul gives in these verses? – Don't live like the pagans

What does he call their thinking?- futile

4:18-19 – describes why their thinking is futile

- No understanding
- Separate from God
 - Why? – “because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts”
 - They have no faith
 - They have no life
 - They are dead in sin – see back to 2:3-4

What does 4:19 mean – give themselves over to sensuality and every form of impurity?

Desensitization – to cause something to be less and less affected by something – to make indifferent or unaware.

“having lost all sensitivity?” – What does that mean...sensitivity to what?

- When you sin, it should do something...guilt, etc
- Guilt can be healthy
- Guilt can remind us there really is a right/wrong and we need to pull back in line with what is right

What happens when you lose that?

How do you lose that?

- Rationalize – I am still better than most of my friends
- Long period of sin – finally give up and give in

Isa 5:20 – “woe to you who call evil good and good evil”

- Dangerous place to be!

How does our world call evil good and good evil?

Are we, as Christians, tempted to do that?

Eph 4:20-24 – *How are we called to live once we are Christians?*

- 4:21 – you were taught things about Christ you have to live by
- Won't be perfect...but we try. Repent when we fail
- Because we still have that sensitivity toward sin and truth

***If you, or someone you know, have just given up to sensuality and passion...
you are in a dangerous place***

4:22-24 – old and new (reminds me of Romans 6)
What are we supposed to do with our old ways?

What do we do instead?

How is being a Christian being like a new person?

What is the new self created to be like? (4:24)

That means if God would partake, we partake. If God would not, we don't either. We live a life in line with our Father in heaven.

How to live like that – the specifics

Read 4:25-32

What does this look like in real life? What commands does he give?

- Put off falsehood
- Speak truthfully
- In anger don't sin – notice he didn't say anger is wrong in and of itself
 - *When might anger be ok?*
 - Some things are worth getting angry about – just be careful once you get there!
Don't stay there!
- Do not let sun go down on anger – *What does he mean by that? How do you do that?*
What might anger do to you if you let it fester?
- Stealing:
 - Negative – stop stealing
 - Positive – do something productive
 - Nice to get both sides of a sin – instead of doing wrong, do this!
- Language – nothing unwholesome
 - I hear Christians say it is fine to cuss
 - Nope.
 - Again negative/positive – what does he say to do instead?

- **Read Luke 6:45 – overflow of heart**
- If our words are poison, we have poison in our hearts
- Tree/fruit – what kind of tree is that? I don't know...check its fruit
- Fruit is outward expression of what something is inside
- Don't grieve Holy Spirit...huh?
 - We can figure this out by what Paul has already said about the Spirit in Ephesians
 - 1:13 – sealed with the Holy Spirit
 - 2:22 – God lives in us by his Spirit
 - 3:16 – strengthen us with power
 - 4:3-4 – brings us unity
 - If we act out of line with the very Spirit God gave us, what does that do to the Spirit that is in us?
- 31 – more negatives that maybe we struggle with less
- 32 – instead, these things...

Application

Question for us is, what sorts of things do we need to rid ourselves of? What happens if we don't?

Easy to think sin just affects us but it can have huge ripple effects. You have seen this happen either in your life or in the lives of others.

Why does sin have ripples?

We have an obligation toward each other to live in line with the Spirit we have received.

Lesson 9: Ephesians 5:1-20

Former way vs new way

- 2:1 – 2:4 dead vs. alive
- 2:11-12 vs 2:13 – far away have been brought near
- 4:17 – 4:20 former way of life vs. new way of life learned in Christ
- 4:25 – therefore, here is how you are to live...
- 5:8 – once you were darkness but you are light in the Lord
 - Notice he doesn't say you were "in" darkness and "in" light but that you were darkness and now you are light
 - Something changed not about your location...but about the reality of who you are in the Lord.
- 5:15 – unwise vs. wise
 - 5:17 – do not be foolish but understand the Lord's will

How we live matters...as Christians we are called to a very specific way of life. It is the way of Christ

That means some things will have to be a part of that life
Other things cannot be a part of that life.

Clearly, we have a decision to make and Paul calls us to make it and make it wisely.

How do we make that decision? – it is not just a matter of right belief (Jesus is Lord – see **James 2:19** – even demons believe the right stuff). It is about **how we live**

How we live, the choices we make...actually matter.

So Paul tells us what kind of choices he expects Christians to make:

5:1-2 – Imitators of God

How on earth do you imitate God in heaven?

Paul answers that in 5:2 - Walk in the way of love

- Walk is metaphor for living
- Comes back to this in 5:8 & 5:15 – live as children of light, be careful how you live

Live in love – If you do that, everything will work out. Then he goes on to tell them just how to do that.

How did Christ demonstrate the depths and riches of his love for us? – 5:2 by dying for us

We may not have to actually die for another Christian...but that should be our attitude.

5:3-7 – the “not to do’s”

What does Paul say not to do?

- 5:3
 - Sexual immorality
 - Porneia – fornication but more than that...inappropriate sexual sin
 - Impurity
 - Greed – insatiable drive to acquire more (BWIII)
- 5:4
 - Obscenity -
 - Foolish talk – literally “words of a fool” – not lacking intelligence but to “speech that lacks wisdom or godly perspective on life” (BWIII)
 - Coarse joking – coarse and sexual humor, dirty jokes (BWIII)
- These point to 5:11 – deeds of darkness
- These things don’t fit with the life of the Spirit (5:18-20)

Rather, thanksgiving!

How does thanksgiving disarm coarse/explicit joking?

What does Paul say will result from participating in those things (5:5)?

Two punishments:

1. No inheritance/eternal life with God
2. God’s wrath

Sin actually has consequences – repentance is important

Colossians 3:5 tells us these things are idolatry – God is no longer your God if you go this route with your life.

5:7 – he doesn’t say the wrath of God comes on those who believe the wrong things but on whom? – those who are disobedient.

Disobedient to what/who? – to the things that One who called us has taught us.

5:8-14 – dealing with sin

How should we, as Christians, deal with sin?

1. **Be light** - Starts with realizing we are light and not darkness. Sin is darkness and so we, who are light, should have nothing to do with it.
 - a. 2 Cor 6:14 – not to have fellowship with those in the darkness – that doesn’t mean have no association with them...it does mean not to imitate them or follow their ways...live as they do.
 - b. 1 Cor 5:9-10 – don’t associate with a brother who is doing these things.
 - c. Col 1:13 – rescued us from dominion of darkness

2. **Bear the right fruit (5:9 – goodness, righteousness and truth)**
3. **Find out what pleases the Lord – *How do you do that?***
 - a. Study his word
 - b. Spend time with other Christians who are also seeking to follow Christ.
 - c. Pray for wisdom – **Read James 1:5**
 - d. *Have you ever done that?*
4. **Deal with sin** – expose the fruitless deeds of darkness...because you are light. That is what light does. Light helps us to see sin for what it is – darkness
5. **Being careful how we live**

5:14 – no one knows where that saying comes from...may have been from one of their songs

Life by the Holy Spirit (5:15-20)

1. Be wise
2. Make the most of every opportunity
 - a. Literally – “buying up the present opportunity” (F.F. Bruce)
 - b. *What does that mean and how do you do it?*
3. Don't be foolish – seek to understand the will of God
 - a. *How do you do that?*
4. Don't get drunk – it will take you to some bad places
 - a. *What is debauchery?*
5. Instead...be filled with the **Spirit**
 - a. In other words, don't be filled with the spirits...but filled with the Spirit
 - b. This is not a condemnation of drinking but of drunkenness
 - c. We obviously already have the Holy Spirit at our baptism
 - i. But it is possible by our sin to quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19) or grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30)
 - ii. Also possible, by living in step with the Spirit to be filled with the Spirit
 - d. The Spirit is a source of fullness (F.F. Bruce)
 - e. When you resist...by sin and living opposed to the H.S. you won't be filled with the Spirit.
6. Those filled with the Spirit will...
 - a. Speak to each other with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
 - b. Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord
 - c. Give thanks to God for everything

This is not instructions on worship...this is talking about the reality of a Spirit-filled life. Funny how people have removed the Holy Spirit from worship and then taken these verses to say something they are just not about.

Here is what we learn from these verses:

- Life filled with the Spirit will bear worship as part of its fruit.
- That worship is to the Lord but also for the benefit of those present – “speak to one another”

Application

There are two different ways of life talked about here – we have to choose one or the other.

What characterizes the way/life of darkness?

- 5:3-4

What happens if you choose the way of darkness?

- 5:5-6

What characterizes the way/life as children of light?

- 5:1-2
- 5:9-13

What should you do if you find yourself living, even as a Christian, as someone who has embraced darkness when you should have embraced light?

- Expose it in your life
- Repent of the darkness and live as an imitator of the holy God.

How can we serve as a light in a dark world?

Lesson 10: Ephesians 5:21-33

Paul covers 3 areas that were very typically covered in his world:

5:22-33 - Husbands/wives

6:1-4 – Children/parents

6:5-9 – Masters/slaves

These three divisions of household responsibilities and relationships were very well known in Paul's day:

- Aristotle – “household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household...is composed...the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.” (Keener, Paul Women & Wives, 146)
- See Col 3:18-4:1 as well

Context – tying this back to 5:18-20

5:18 – Don't get drunk, instead be filled with the Spirit.

How? – Paul's answer are 4 participles (think “ing”)

1. Speaking to one another with songs, hymns and spiritual songs
2. Singing and making music in your heart to the Lord
3. Always giving thanks
4. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ

There is not really a new section here...

- Debate on if this goes with the previous verses or with what comes next (household code).
- ***It connects being filled with the Holy Spirit to the household code he is about to give***
- **5:22 – has no verb. 5:21-22 literally says,** “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.”
- The verb needed in 5:22 comes from 5:21

Submitting to “one another” is called “mutual submission. There should be a dynamic in the church where there is a give and take...not ***hierarchical but mutual.***

- Eph 4:3-6 – we are 1 in Christ
- We have 1 Spirit...therefore we aren't about lording things over people
- We are about submission to one another...

Wives to husbands is one example of the larger point of “mutual submission”

What makes submission difficult?

What makes wives submitting to husbands unpopular today?

Why must submission be a part of the life of every single Christian?

Wives have an obligation to their husbands and husbands to their wives

- Paul will go on that the same is true of children/parents and masters/slaves

When Aristotle and others wrote “household codes” they viewed the home as a microcosm or smaller version of the Greek/Roman state itself:

- Supreme head – father
 - Everyone in submission under him

Paul twists this in seeing the household codes as mirroring what Christ has done, not for the state but for the church...the family of God

- Submission of wives to husbands shouldn't be unusual to them because they already have shown they know how to submit to Christ
- Husband is head of wife as Christ is the head of the church
- Husbands – love your wife as Christ loved the church...

What we see here in all of this is that Christ has set the standard for how we live in the home:

- The love of Christ is mirrored in the love of husbands to their wives
- The submission we have to Christ is given by wives to husbands

These 2 things must go together for this to work

- Wife submit to husband – 40 words addressed to her
- Husband love wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her – 115 words addressed to him (O'Brien, 409)

How did Christ give himself for the church?- died

If a husband loves his wife that much, he might just be the kind of man she is willing to submit to.

What does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband?

How should a husband, then, make decisions for the best interest of his wife?

So she submits to him and he gives her everything...his very self.

5:26-27 Wedding/Baptismal parallels with the wedding bath – washing, purity and holiness. The church is to abstain from relations with the world and be true and faithful to Christ...just as husbands and wives are expected to be to each other.

5:28-29 – How else must husbands love their wives?

- As their own bodies
- *Where did Eve come from?* - From Adam's body
- ***If we treat her poorly it is like we are harming our very self – that is foolish***

Application:

How do love and respect go together?

Do men and women emphasize one over the other? Why?

Lesson 11: Ephesians 6

Children and parents (6:1-4)

Paul gives children 2 reasons to do what he is telling them:

- It is the right thing to do
 - Paul has mentioned righteousness several times now (4:24 – part of the new self & 5:9 – part of the fruit we bear)
 - Right living requires obeying your parents
 - **Context** - This is also a continuation of life by the Spirit (going back to 5:18-20)
- It is commanded of them in the Old Testament

Exodus 20:12 – “Honor your father and mother...”

- Does come with a promise – “so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

Understanding the world of the 1st century – Honor & Shame

1 - Patriarchal society where the eldest male...your father/grandfather would run the entire household. He was the patriarch. So even adult children still have obligation to their parents.

- So this is not just for young children – this is for children of all ages

2 - Honor/shame – their world was much more communal. Your identity was wrapped up in the group, over the individual. Once you value the group over the individual for identity formation, then your value comes from how other people see you. (Honor/shame from Malina)

- Honor is a value that you have in your own eyes and in the eyes of society. It is to be maintained and advanced at all costs.
- Honor is given by birth and can also be acquired by doing great things. The honor of the patriarch is passed on to the kids as part of the family.
- Maintain your status – do things that bring honor to your name, family
- If you dishonor yourself in the public eye – it brings shame on you and extended family. If someone else of equal or lower status dishonors you, it is a huge slap in the face.
- Example: Going to court – if you take your equal to court, it brings dishonor on you because it shows you didn't have the wherewithal to deal with it yourself.
- Example – if you get beat up on, all that matters is that you continue to try to get up...showing that you didn't give up. You don't have to win the fight, you have to appear to have made an effort toward maintaining your honor

Conclusion: So this isn't just about being nice to mom and pops...this is about doing things to maintain the honor of the family and the family name.

Father's also bear a responsibility to their children – 6:4

- Exasperate also found in Romans 10:19
- NRSV – “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” – better translation as “exasperate” is confusing.
- Instead – bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord
 - *How seriously do families and father's take that calling?*

- We need to do a better job of equipping parents to raise their children in faith
- Children's and youth ministry has become a place to get this done for us and that just won't work...it has to supplement what is going on in the home.

Masters and slaves (6:5-9)

The way they serve their earthly master is a reflection on their service to the Lord. This doesn't mean earthly masters are on par with the Lord but that there is something formative about how we live under authority that says a lot about what is in our hearts.

Understanding the 1st century – Slavery

Greco-Roman 1st century slavery was very much unlike 17-19th century American slavery. Bartchy, in his ABD entry on "Slavery (Greco-Roman)" lists the major differences:

- It was not racial
- Education of slaves was encouraged (some slaves were better educated than their owners)
- Carried out even highly sensitive jobs
- Could own property...even other slaves
- Most slaves worked their way out to emancipation by age 30.

Greek and Roman society were nearly built on slavery. Slaves and former slaves made up a very large percentage of the population (in most cultures roughly 1/3 of the population). Slavery was a part of every major culture in the time of the NT.

Ways one became a slave:

- Sale of yourself:
 - Settle a debt – forced on you
 - Advance in social standing – honor of your master – done by choice
- Prisoner of war
- Captured by pirates
- Child of a slave
- Children left to die on the rubbish heaps could be raised as slaves

Slaves had some amazing professions (Bartchy, 69):

- Doctors
- Accountants
- Etc

How they gained freedom:

- Purchase themselves back out – could earn and save money
- Death of owner – surviving family often freed the slaves
- Marry your owner and have a child

Paul's letter to Philemon – he urges Philemon to view Onesimus as a brother

Back to Ephesians 6

- Paul urges slaves and masters to have a reciprocal relationship of sorts
- There is still the hierarchy and the ownership (of which there are ways out)
- But both sides have responsibilities
- Both sides are under the fear and authority of the Lord
- God will judge not just slave but also master

Progressive Paul to masters – treat them in the same way. What does that mean? With reverence for Christ.

Slavery condemned or not?

1 Timothy 1:10 – condemns slave traders. People who would capture and sell other people. It is interesting those people are condemned but not the entire practice of slavery.

Why didn't Paul outright condemn the practice of slavery?

- It wasn't the same kind of slavery we are accustomed to talking about
- See Keener – Paul, Women and Wives

1 Cor 7:20-22 promotes slaves finding their freedom.

The armor of God (6:10-20)

Devil's schemes – look back to 4:27

6:12 – back to the evil spiritual forces at work in the world.

Putting on the armor of God is something we are told to do, not just something God is doing to us. *What is the significance of that?*

Look at each piece and discuss how we might benefit from thinking about these things in these ways.

Final Greetings of the letter (6:21-24)

Review/Wrap up