

Ephesians Small Group Series

Lesson 1 - Introduction to Ephesians & Chapter 1

The Extent of God's Love and Power

Ephesus:

Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman empire (Population 250,000) in what is today the country of Turkey. In Acts 19 we read about Paul's trip to Ephesus and how the city was full of idolatry, especially the worship of Artemis. Ephesus was also famous for magic and sorcery (see Acts 19:19). These are important pieces of information because it helps us to relate to what Christians in Ephesus were dealing with and the pressures they faced from society.

This background helps shed light on verses like Ephesians 6:12-13 that says,

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the **powers of this dark world** and against the **spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**.¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

These verses make more sense when you realize Ephesus was famous for witchcraft and idolatry.

Paul's visit and his letter:

Paul visited Ephesus in 52 AD and wrote this letter back to the churches that had begun there in 60 from prison in Rome. Paul identifies himself as an “apostle” (1:1) which literally means someone who is sent. Since he cannot be there in person, this letter stands as his representative. The letter can be summed up in one sentence: “Because of who God is and what he has done for you (Chapters 1-3), here then is how you are to live (Chapters 4-6).

The letter divides at 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Paul spends three chapters laying the foundation of who God is and what God has done and then closes with three chapters of what God then requires of those who believe that to be true. You can see this in when Paul uses commands. There is only one command in the first three chapters and that is found in 2:11 where he tells them to remember. There are 40 commands in the last three chapters! Before you get practical, Paul understands that they first must understand something about God. You don't rush into or jump into application ignorantly. You first must understand who God is and what he is doing or else you get yourself in a mess.

Ephesians Chapter 1

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

These opening verses are all about God. Here Paul lays out at least seven things God has done for us. *What seven things does Paul say God has done for us?*

Chosen us (1:4), predestined us (1:5), given us grace (1:6), redeemed us (1:7), forgiven us (1:7), made his will known to us (1:9), marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit (1:13)

Why do you think God has done all of this for YOU?

- Because we are valuable to God and he loves us

God sees you as valuable

All these things God has done for us reflect how valuable we are in God's sight.

Chosen/predestined (1:4-5):

We all know how it feels not to be picked. Whether it was when we were a kid and we were the last one to get picked for the team or whether it is a job interview that doesn't go so well and we don't get the job. We don't like not being wanted. We don't like rejection.

God loves you so much, he chose you. We think about how we are supposed to seek God. *But have you ever stopped to think that he is seeking you out as well? What do you think about that?*

Being chosen is not that God picks out individuals before they are born and is going to save them no matter what, regardless of what they do in life. This being chosen is about how God has chosen for himself a people, those who believe in and follow his Son Jesus Christ.

Grace, redemption, & forgiveness (1:6-7):

The only way God is able to do all of this is mentioned by Paul in 1:6-7. God's grace. *Why does God have to be graceful if he is going to accept us as his own?*

What does that teach us about who God is?

What does it teach us about the value he sees in each and every one of us?

The reason Paul probably wanted to remind them of these facts about who God is and what God is doing is to keep them from thinking the world is able to offer them what they need. *How does the world today attempt to deceive us to think we don't really need God?*

Let's pretend for a moment that none of what Paul says about God and how God views us in Ephesians 1:1-14 is true. No redemption, no being chosen by God, no forgiveness...*where would that leave us?*

How do these verses show that yes, we really do need God?

- Apart from God we have no hope
- Apart from Christ's sacrifice we have no forgiveness (Heb 9:22)

Sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14):

The last thing Paul says God has done for us gives us some assurance that God is going to make good on seeing us through to have life in him.

What does Paul mean by "inheritance"?

- This includes heaven but it is more than that.
- Our inheritance is our status as God's holy people who have a special relationship with him from the moment of our baptism until we live with him forever.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians (1:15-23):

What three things does Paul's prayer for them include?

- Thanksgiving (1:16)
- Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17)
- Opening the eyes of their heart (1:18)

In 1:9 Paul said God made known to us the mystery of his will...now he says there is still more we can learn about God as Christians need even more wisdom to learn even more about God and his will (1:17-18).

The last thing Paul focuses on is God's power (1:19-23). *What does Paul say God did that demonstrates just how powerful he really is?*

- Paul says the power God used to raise Christ from the dead is far greater than any power on the earth and has more authority than anything else for all eternity.
- This world pretends to have power but it is nothing compared to God's power.
- No matter what this world throws at us, even death itself, it cannot defeat God's people

How does it give you hope to know how powerful God is, that he loves you so much, and that he is willing to use that power to benefit you and your life?

Application:

How can you live more and more like someone chosen by God?

Have you ever doubted your own self worth? How does seeing yourself through God's eyes help you see the value you really have in the eyes of your creator?

How does this chapter give you hope to face whatever challenges are ahead of you at this point in your life?

Have you ever trusted the world to provide for you more than God? How do these verses help you get that right?

Lesson 2 – Ephesians 2

Members of God's Household

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

The first chapter focused in on God. The second chapter of Ephesians focuses in on us. The first chapter was about who God is and what he has done on our behalf. The second chapter is about who we are as a result and how we come together as God's holy people.

Who you used to be (2:1-3):

Paul takes them back to a time before they were Christians. *What does Paul say they were before they knew Christ in 2:1?*

- They were dead...even though their bodies were alive, they were dead apart from Christ

What does Paul say made them dead (2:1-3)?

- It was a result of our own transgression and sin
- Paul says at that time in our lives, before we were Christians, we followed the ways of this world and gratified our sinful desires.

That is a pretty bad place to be: dead and apart from God.

God came to the rescue (2:4-7):

But verse 4 tells us that God started rescued us. He made us alive. We didn't deserve it but God did it anyway. *What three characteristics of God does Paul list that were a part of why God rescued us from being dead in sin (2:4-5)?*

- Love, mercy & grace

This is a resurrection of sorts. Those who have been baptized into Christ have also been raised with Christ (Romans 6:4-5). What is more, God has seated us with Christ in heavenly realms (2:6). *What do you think that means?*

- The spiritual reality of our lives is that we are united with Christ and that should make a real difference in the way we live our lives.

How did God do this (2:8-10)?

Ephesians 2:8-10 have caused a lot of confusion among Christians. There are two extremes some people take, neither of which are correct:

1. That we do everything to be saved - the harder we try the more likely we are to be saved. It is like we are twisting God's arm that once we are good enough he has to save us. Once we follow all the rules we will be saved.
2. That we do nothing to be saved – Because we are saved by grace, there is nothing we can do that has anything to do with our salvation.

What did Paul really say in Ephesians 2:8-10?

- We are saved by grace, not by works (2:8-9)
- That our salvation is a gift from God (2:8)
- That God did create us to do good works (2:10)

So there is nothing we can do to **earn** our salvation because it is a completely graceful act for God to save any one of us. Yet there are things God expects us to do. In other words, if we had

nothing to do with the process of salvation God, in his grace, would just save everyone whether they like it or not. But scripture is clear that is not the case (2 Thess 2:12 for instance).

The solution – We don't earn our salvation in the sense that once we are good enough, we earned God saving us. God saves us completely by his grace. It is a graceful act because no matter how hard we try we will never deserve it. Yet, God does want us to exhibit a transformed character. God wants us to seek him. God wants us to pursue righteousness.

Saved for God's Household (2:11-22):

Since God has saved us, we have a new identity. These verses have a lot to do with Jews and Gentiles being brought together through Christ. Many in Paul's audience in Ephesus were first generation Christians who had grown up as pagans.

Christ was the one who unified all people so that anyone could become a child of God:

- 2:13 – Christ brought those who were far off (Gentiles) near
- 2:14 – Christ destroyed the barrier of the law to make mankind one to bring peace between Jews and Gentiles
- 2:17 – He preached peace
- 2:18 – He gave all his people access to the Father by the Spirit
- 2:19 – The result is the Gentiles are now just as much God's people as Christian Jews.

Paul finishes describing God's uniting work with the image of a house that is built from various parts that comes together into one holy temple for God (2:19-22).

How do the people in the church come together to form a building for God's purposes?

What does all this mean for us today? It means that the man-made walls of division that spring up are not godly. Anything that divides God's people stands counter to what Christ came to do.

What types of divisions do we see in our culture today?

- Racial, socio-economic, etc

What types of divisions does the church deal with today?

- Divided over doctrine
- Some are still divided racially

While God does not want us to overlook major doctrinal error that so often takes place in various Christian groups he does want us to realize that his intention for us is unity and for us to take that seriously. It seems where this is most practical is not on the church level but on the individual level.

Are there people at Northwest you feel divided from? Why?

Do you ever feel like you aren't good enough for God? How does this chapter help you see that while we don't deserve God's grace, he loves us enough to give it anyway?

How does recognizing our common status in Christ and with his Spirit help us fix those things?

Lesson 3 – Ephesians 3

God's Mystery Revealed

What we read in the first two chapters had a lot to do with how God has called a people to himself from darkness and death to light and life. In this chapter Paul addresses the issue of how God has called the Gentiles (non-Jews) into his kingdom.

In the Old Testament a Gentile could believe in God and become one of his people but they had to be circumcised and obey the law. In the New Testament those dividing lines are being removed as Christ has died for all mankind. This created some confusion for early Christians and Paul is trying to help straighten things out.

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul starts out by telling us that he isn't just making all this up. *Where does Paul say this information is coming from? (3:3)*

- God revealed it to him

In 3:6 he plainly explains the mystery of what God is doing with the Gentiles. *What three things does Paul say make up the mystery of what God is doing with the Gentiles?*

- Heirs with Israel
- Members of one body
- Sharing in God's promise

Before Jesus came the Gentiles would not have been allowed to be any of these three things without following many of the Jewish rules including the males being circumcised. But now Christ has removed any and all obstacles from the Gentiles being part of God's people. This is not hard for us to understand as most of us are Gentiles who are Christians. But for first-generation Christians this would have been more difficult to understand because it was all new to them.

What does it mean to be an heir with Israel?

- God has promised his people certain blessings, we are now able to share with them in those blessings

What would those blessings include?

- All spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3)
- Grace (Eph 1:7)
- Wisdom (Eph 1:8)
- Eternal life (Matt 19:29)

God brought Gentiles into his kingdom through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 3:11 Paul wrote all these things were accomplished by God through Christ. *What does Paul say, then, we are able to do because of Christ in 3:12?*

- Approach God with freedom and confidence

We cannot physically walk up to God's throne. So what does Paul mean when he writes, "approach God with freedom and confidence"?

- At the very least he is talking about prayer – that God hears and cares about our prayers

When you pray do you do so confidently? How does knowing Christ has opened up a way to God for you and your prayers help you pray with confidence that God cares about what you have to say and wants to hear it all?

How do you balance praying with confidence with letting God's will be done?

- Our confidence is not that God will do everything we say or ask for.
- Our confidence is that because God cares and hears our prayers, he is going to do the right thing. He isn't going to sit there uncaring or concerned.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul immediately goes into a confident prayer of his own. *What does Paul pray for?*

- God would give them strength
- Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith
- Them to be rooted and established in love so they can grasp how amazing God's love really is!
- To know the great love of God

Which of these four things do you think you need the most?

Which of these four things could you pray for someone you know?

Last, Paul tells us a little more about God through his prayer. 3:20-21 is all about God. God is the "him who is able to do." Paul is not talking about talented people in the church. He closes his prayer by giving God glory and praise.

What familiar word does Paul close his prayer with (3:21)?

- Amen
- Amen means truly – testifying that these things are true

Trick question – *Does anyone know which Greek word "amen" comes from?*

- Comes from the Greek word "amen"!

Application:

How does this chapter inspire you to have more confidence in your prayers to God?

How do verses 17-19 inspire you to reflect the love of Christ to others?

Lesson 4 - Ephesians 4:1-5:20

Living for God

One of the questions we should ask ourselves often is, “Who am I really living for?” In the last half of Ephesians, Paul gives us some practical wisdom and commands regarding how we actually live for God. Conversion takes place in more than a moment. Conversion is a lifelong process. In the next two lessons, we will get some practical wisdom on how to live for God.

Read 4:1-16

Live up to your calling:

If you remember back in chapter one Paul told us we had been chosen or called by God. Paul now tells us that calling is so great and honored that our lives should attempt to match it.

What would it mean for a soldier to live worthy of his calling? What would it mean for a Christian?

What five things does Paul tell us in 4:2-3 that would help us live a life worthy of our calling in Christ? Which do you find easiest and which most challenging?

God expects certain things of us. Some people have such a view of grace that they believe God does everything and we do nothing. That is not the case. We don't earn our salvation by the things we do, but God still expects them to be done. Paul reminds us how God's grace makes up for our shortcomings in 4:7

Next, we see this calling is Christ initiated (Ephesians 4:11-16). *Christ gives us responsibilities (4:11) so we can do what (4:12-13)?*

Ultimately Christ wants us to grow into maturity. **Read 4:14-16 again**
What image of a mature body of believers does Paul give us?

The image of God's people as a body joined together by ligaments further emphasizes how unified we are to be as God's people. It is important we make every effort to get along with each other (4:4) because God has joined us together! Unfortunately sin can get in the way.

Read 4:25-31

How does sin disrupt unity in the church?

Some people believe sin is only a problem if you get caught. Here we learn that the results of our sin, even private sins, can have a damaging effect on our unity as God's people. Unity is more than just being nice to each other in public or not raising a stink over things. Unity is a spiritual reality for God's people and we must try our best to live holy lives in order to maintain that unity.

The ultimate answer to Christian unity comes in 5:1-2. *What command does Paul give that if all Christians really followed, we would have a lot less problems in Christianity?*

Why do we often fail to imitate Christ and take on ungodly actions and attitudes?

Paul now tells us more about the results of sin. It is even worse than disrupting the unity within God's people. *What does he say sin results in (5:5-7)?*

Last, Paul tells them to live as children of light (5:8). *What do you think that means?*

- This means we live our lives for the truth. We do not cover things up or do things in darkness that we would otherwise be ashamed of.

The Transparency trap:

More and more we are seeing the transparency trap. Authenticity is valued in our culture. People can smell a hypocrite a mile away. But we have to be careful. Transparency does not mean we can do whatever we want as long as we are honest about it. We see this with many sins but one where this comes out a lot today is homosexuality. People think that by "coming out of the closet" that the person is just being authentic and honest with themselves. Just because something feels right doesn't mean it is righteous! Our feelings and desires are not the ultimate standard for moral behavior.

How have you seen the transparency trap happen? Have you ever tried to rationalize things that way?

Paul concludes this section telling us that we must take care of our lives and our behaviors (5:15). He tells us to seek out the praiseworthy things in life and that when our lives are full of praise and thanks to God (5:19) that we will have truly made the most of every opportunity (5:16).

Application:

What do you believe Christ is preparing you for in ministering to others?

How do you see works of service being tied to maturity in the faith? Is there a connection? Why? (from 4:12-16)

Are there areas of your life that have been kept private because you are afraid what others will think of you? How would you deal with that, if that is what you were facing?

What things (spiritual or physical) do you have to be thankful for so that you can give praise and honor to God over those blessings?

Lesson 5 – Ephesians 5:21-6:24

Practical Instruction

Paul mentions three sets of relationships in chapters 5 & 6 that each have two parts: husbands & wives, children & parents, slaves & masters. Relationship never involved one party having an obligation to the other. All relationships are reciprocal and place requirements on both parties.

Husbands & Wives (Read Ephesians 5:21-33):

First, Paul calls on all Christians to view each other with an attitude of submission. *What do you think submission means? How would you see Christians needing to submit to each other?*

Paul says that Christians should submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. That means out of respect for Christ we love each other enough and see each and every Christian as someone Jesus died for. We don't always have to have our way because other people are too important to just run over. We don't abuse each other or take advantage of other Christians.

Wives are told to submit to their husbands (5:22). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (5:25,28).

What does it mean for husbands that they are to give himself up for his wife, as Christ did for the church?

- This is more than jumping in front of a bullet. It may be easier to have a one-time act of self-sacrifice than to have a daily lifestyle of self-sacrifice for one's wife.

When a husband is being a servant leader and one who is constantly self-sacrificing for his wife, will it make it easier or harder on wives to fulfill their role as defined in 5:22? Why?

Children and Parents (Read Ephesians 6:1-4):

Children and parents have different roles to play. Problems can arise in the home when we get our roles out of order. Today we see that the role of parents and children get reversed. The children are calling the shots and the parents are being their buddy more than their parent. Some parents want so badly for their children to love them that they try to be more a friend than a parent. Paul says that children are to be brought up "in the training and instruction of the Lord." (6:4). While we want to be on friendly, loving terms with our children we also realize that they are depending on their parents to learn how to live their lives in a godly way.

How does a parent find balance between giving their children the love and affection they need and the discipline and training they need?

Slaves and masters (Read Ephesians 6:5-9):

While these roles don't exist in the United States today we can still learn something about how we are to live from them.

Paul could have gone on about how unfair things can be as a slave but he didn't. Instead he points out that how we live in the roles we find ourselves makes a difference in the eyes of God. The question is not how fair life is going to be. The question is how are we going to live a godly life in the situation we find ourselves.

What unfair obstacles do you face in your life or workplace that may be a test of your character?

How are you going to handle those in a way that honors and glorifies God?

For those of us who are the boss Paul has some words about how we treat those who are under our authority. *What does Paul tell masters to do in 6:9? In the same way as what?*

- In the same way as he just told slaves to treat their master in 6:7-8 to do so as to the Lord and in a good and honorable way.

For those of you who have some level of authority in your workplace, what has been the biggest challenge to use that position in a way that honors God? Has it challenged you to see the value in people who are not as high up in position?

The Armor of God (Read 6:10-24):

Now Paul speaks to all those in the house churches of Ephesus. Here he reminds us that we are all in a fight. *Who does Paul say we are struggling against? (6:12)*

- The fight is not against some political party or someone in the church we disagree with.
- Paul says there are spiritual realities in this world that would like to do us harm.

If we are going to win that battle we have to be aware of it (6:18), prepare ourselves for it (6:13-17), and fight!

How do you become more aware of the spiritual realities that surround us on a daily basis?

How do you practically follow Paul's advice in putting on all this figurative armor?

Last, prayer is important in this. You don't go out and fight this battle all on your own. In 6:18 Paul tells them to pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

Complacency is one of the biggest challenges we can face as Christians. One of the best things we can do to combat it is to get in the habit of starting off our day on the right foot, being aware of the importance of each day in God's eyes. We prepare for less important things – having good smelling breath and clothes with no wrinkles. *How are we preparing for the most important things before we start our day?*

What are some things in your life that you have grown complacent about spiritually?

What are some things you could do to start off your day on the right foot?