

Ephesians

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST



Contents

02	Introduction from Mark Roberts
04	Background to the Letter
06	Scripture Memorisation
08	Week 1 - Ephesians 1:1-14
12	Week 2 - Ephesians 1:15-2:10
16	Week 3 - Ephesians 2:11-22
20	Week 4 - Ephesians 3:1-21
24	Week 5 - Ephesians 4:1-16
28	Week 6 - Ephesians 4:17-5:21
32	Week 7 - Ephesians 5:21-6:9
36	Week 8 - Ephesians 6:10-24

Introduction

FROM MARK ROBERTS

What does the future hold for us?

Are our best days behind us or in front of us?

What is most important for us to focus on now?

How can we relate well to the diversity of people in our church?

What should we do if we feel discouraged?

As both WBC and CVBC enter the next chapters in our churches' lives, some (or all) of these questions may be swirling through our hearts and minds. That is why we're turning our attention to the book of Ephesians for the rest of the term. In this marvellous book, the Apostle Paul sets out to answer these questions for his readers by drawing our attention to God's cosmic plan to exalt his son Jesus: by rescuing and gathering a people for himself, knitting them together as a family, and transforming them into a "dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:22).

We will see that this new life in Christ is what charts our course forward as a church.

In an effort to wield "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17) we are going to memorise scripture together this term—in particular, the crystal-clear explanation of the gospel in Ephesians 2:1-10. Even (or perhaps especially) if you're not normally someone who memorises scripture, we encourage you to attempt this valuable spiritual discipline and reap the benefits from being "made new in the attitude of your minds" (Eph 4:23).

The elders are praying this term that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph 1:18-19).

With love in Christ,

Mark

But because of his great love
for us, God, who is rich in
mercy, made us alive with
Christ even when we were
dead in transgressions—it is
by grace you have been
saved.

EPHESIANS 2:4-5

Background

TO THE LETTER

DATE OF WRITING

Paul mentions his chains and imprisonment three times in this book (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Therefore, many scholars believe the date of this book to be 62 A.D. when Paul was in Rome (Acts 28). During this same period, Paul also wrote Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. These four epistles are now commonly referred to as the “prison epistles.”

AUDIENCE

While the letter is called “Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians”, it is best understood that the letter was not solely intended for the church in Ephesus. It was written more like a general letter that would have been circulated throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) that existed around Ephesus. This is because the words “in Ephesus” are absent from some of the earliest and best manuscripts. This makes sense since there is no personal greeting anywhere within the letter –which is different from Paul’s other letters. The letter has most likely become associated with Ephesus due to it being the largest and most influential church in the region at the time of its writing.

SETTING

Ephesus was an important city in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Paul would have been familiar with the area due to the three years he spent there during his third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23-21:17). Ephesus was the third-largest city in the Roman empire with a population estimated around 250,000. It was a harbour city and the largest commerce centre in the west.



Prior to Christianity reaching the city, it was well-known for pagan worship. It was deeply entrenched in the worship of Artemis (Diana according to the Romans). The temple itself was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People worshiped this false god, seeing it as a goddess of fertility, magic, and astrology. Its commerce was deeply tied and connected to idol worship, and as Christianity's influence spread, it quickly upset the cities culture and economy and caused riots (Acts 19). We find out elsewhere (in 1 Timothy 1:4, 7) as Timothy pastors the church, it faces false teachers who were interested in endless myths but not necessarily sound biblical teaching.

Scripture Memorisation

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Tips for Memorisation

MEMORISE WITH OTHERS

Whether it's your spouse, kids, friends or home group, having other people to practice with is a great motivation to memorisation.

USE NOTE CARDS

Write the verses down and take them with you throughout the day so that you can glance at them when you've got a few spare moments.

LISTEN TO AN AUDIO BIBLE

Some people are more auditory learners, so listen to the relevant verses from your favourite audio Bible on repeat.

CREATE MNEMONIC REMINDERS

Write the first letter of each word in the verse. When you need a hint, look at the letters instead of the full verse.

PAIR YOUR MEMORISATION WITH AN ACTION

Some find that a repetitive action (e.g. shuffling a deck of cards) helps you to concentrate.

VISUALISE THE VERSES

Draw illustrations or symbols which remind you of the words.

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, FEEL, AND APPLY

Resist the urge to see simple memory as the goal. Learning the text by heart is secondary; taking the text to heart is primary. Don't memorize mindlessly, but engage the text, its meaning, and not only its implications for your life, but what effects it should have on your heart.

PRAY

Ask God to help you recall his Word, but also use your prayer times as opportunities to exercise what you're memorising, and see and feel it from a fresh angle as you turn it Godward.

Home Group - Week One

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

1. What is the greatest view you have ever seen?

READ EPHESIANS 1:1-2

2. The writer, readers and greeting are all related to Jesus Christ. What is the connection to Jesus in each case, and why do you think Paul draws attention to it (v1-2)?

READ EPHESIANS 1:3-14

3. "In the heavenly realms" is an unusual phrase (v3), indicating the nature of our spiritual blessings in Christ. What do you think it means? Compare with other uses of the phrase in this letter (1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12).

4. Is there any one spiritual blessing that impresses you more than the rest? If so, which one and why?

5. What role has Jesus had in our receiving spiritual blessings?

6. What are some possible reasons why God would bless us so much? What reasons does Paul give for God blessing us so much (v4, 7, 9)

7. If we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, why is it that we so often feel discontent in our lives? How do these verses help us?

8. What is God's ultimate plan for his creation (v10)?

9. If Christ is at the centre of God's plans for everything, is he at the centre of yours? How should your priorities be shaped by Ephesians 1:3-14?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Thank God the Father for his wonderful cosmic plan of redemption, and the Lord Jesus for enabling it to happen through his sacrificial obedience to the cross.

Pray for yourself and the church that you may understand the privilege of being caught up in God's eternal plan and that such clear vision will motivate all your choices and priorities.

Sermon Notes - Week One

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

Home Group - Week Two

EPHESIANS 1:15-2:10

1. Do you have a favourite “rags to riches” story?

READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23

2. What does Paul’s prayer teach us about how we can come to know God better (v17-18a)?

3. Paul wants his readers to know three aspects of God’s grace in Christ (v18b-19a)? What are they and what difference will they make in his readers’ lives?

4. Are there things in your life at the moment that would be helped by a clearer understanding of “the riches of his glorious inheritance”? How would this clearer understanding help?

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

5. Verses 1-3 describe the default nature of human beings and our standing before God. Do you find this description of all those outside of Christ easy or difficult to believe?

6. What is the reason for the great change introduced in verse 4?

7. How is the work of Jesus explained (v5-6) and how does it solve our predicament described in v1-3?

8. From these verses, how would you respond to someone who says that their good works contribute to their salvation? How would you respond to someone who says that their faith contributes to their salvation?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Pray Paul's prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and for enlightened hearts, to know him better and to experience the hope and power that are found in him alone.

Give God the glory and praise that he deserves for accomplishing our salvation from beginning to end.

Sermon Notes - Week Two

EPHESIANS 1:15-2:10

Home Group - Week Three

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

1. Where do you see conflict between different groups in Australia? What solutions have been suggested and how successful are they?

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22

2. What is the picture Paul is trying to paint in v12 of the state of humanity before God?

3. What has now been done for us Gentiles, and how? (v13)

4. How has Jesus' death abolished the law with its commands and regulations (v15a)? What is the implication for Jews and Gentiles who were previously alienated (v15b-16)?

5. Verse 18 shows that each person of the Trinity is involved in our experience of peace and access. How does that work?

6. What do we learn about the foundation of Christ's new community in v19-20?

7. What walls of hostility do we sometimes build between each other? How does the cross abolish these?

8. What implications do verses 21-22 have for the way we treat each other?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Thank God for his great purpose that the church should demonstrate the unity which will be fully accomplished when all things are united under Christ's feet in eternity.

Ask God to help you, individually and as a group, to live out these realities more and more in specific situations where there is division.

Sermon Notes - Week Three

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

Home Group - Week Four

EPHESIANS 3:1-21

1. Tell your group about a movie or book with a plot twist you never saw coming.

READ EPHESIANS 3:1-13

2. How does Paul describe the gospel message (v3), and why (v5)?

3. What is the “mystery” about (v4, 6)?

4. How do people come to understand the mystery of the gospel (v4-5, 8-10)?
Through whom and by what means?

5. Why has God, through the gospel, created the church? (v10-11)?

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21

6. Try to express Paul's main request in verse 16 in your own words.

7. What does Paul hope for as the outcome of his prayer (v17-19)?

8. What encouragements to keep praying are contained in the doxology of verses 20-21?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Thank God for those of his children who spoke the mystery of the gospel to you.

Pray that we would be a family characterised by love, and that our unity would be a witness to the watching world.

Sermon Notes - Week Four

EPHESIANS 3:1-21

Home Group - Week Five

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

1. What advice would you give to someone who asks how they can grow as a Christian?

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-6

2. Summarise our responsibility to one another, outlined in these verses.

3. List all the reasons or factors that generate unity (v4-6). In light of the previous chapters, why do you think Paul is so concerned about this issue?

4. What do you think this unity ought to look like at WBC/CVBC? Give specifics.

READ EPHESIANS 4:7-16

5. In verses 7-13, we see that unity does not equal uniformity. What gifts has God given his people, and for what purpose?
6. How do verses 11-13 help us to answer someone who says, "I just go to church to be fed. I'm not interested in serving."
7. In verses 14-16, what different illustrations does Paul use to depict a mature church? What do these illustrations mean?
8. What are some practical ways you can "speak the truth in love" to other members of the church:
- on Sundays?
 - during the rest of the week?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Ask God to show you areas where you need to work hard both to maintain the unity he has already given, and also to reach the unity he wants for us in Christ.

Pray for opportunities to perform works of service and to speak the truth in love, in order to build up the church.

Sermon Notes - Week Five

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Home Group - Week Six

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:21

1. Why do we often find it so difficult to make the connection between the truth we know and the daily lives we lead?

READ EPHESIANS 4:17-32

2. From verses 22-24, identify the three ingredients of change from Gentile living to Christian transformation. What is the key, central requirement (v23), and why is it so important?

3. Ephesians v25-32 works through the three principles of v22-24 with five specific areas of behaviour. Fill in the following table.

	What needs to be "put away"?	What should replace it?	New mindset that motivates/enables
v25			
v26-27			
v28			

v29-30			
v31-32			

READ EPHESIANS 5:1-21

4. If we are in God's family then there ought to be a "family likeness" (v1-2). In verses 3-7, Paul seems to be giving examples of what can stop us being a fragrant offering to God. What things does Paul mention?

5. In the light of 1:23 and 3:19, what do you think Paul's exhortation to be filled with (or 'by') the Spirit means (v18)? Why does he contrast it with being drunk?

6. What is the continuing evidence of us being filled by the Spirit, as individuals and as a church (v19-21)? If you were compiling a list of what it meant to be 'Spirit-filled', is this what you would have written? Why/why not?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Take time to rejoice in God, who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all, and to praise him for the revelation of his glory in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repent of any areas of your behaviour which still align with your "old self" and ask God for the renewing of your mind so that you would desire "to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Sermon Notes - Week Six

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:21

Home Group - Week Seven

EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

1. In our society, relationships in marriage and family life are generally a long way from the principles laid out in the Bible. What are the dominant views in our culture about how husbands and wives, and parents and children, should relate?

READ EPHESIANS 5:21-33

2. Look again at verses 22-24 and work out how the church's relationship with Christ helps us to understand the way Christian wives should relate to their husbands.

3. Similarly, how does the parallel between Christ and the church help us to understand what a Christian husband's love for his wife should be like (v25-27)?

4. What added motivations do verses 28-30 provide for the distinctive love of a Christian husband for his wife?

READ EPHESIANS 6:1-9

5. Why is it right to obey our parents, and how are we to understand the promise (cf. Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16)?

6. Paul was addressing a specific situation of slaves and masters, but the general principles can be applied to work relationships today. Why should employees respect and obey their earthly bosses, and are there exceptions?

7. The patterns of relationships in these verses are radically counter-cultural. What rationale would we give to those who question why we take a passage like this so seriously?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Praise God, not only that he loves, but also that he is love. Thank him for the dynamic of personal, interactive love that is at the heart of the Trinity, in whose life we are called to be participate.

Ask God to fill you with his Spirit and help you to accept and obey his word. Pray about your various roles in life (as wife, husband, parent, child, slave, master) and that you would work to obey God in each role.

Sermon Notes - Week Seven

EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

Home Group - Week Eight

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

1. What situations have you faced when you are more aware of the spiritual battle that Christians are engaged in?

READ EPHESIANS 6:10-24

2. Why do you think the powers of darkness want to wage war on us (Eph 3:10; Col 2:13-15)?

3. Where does our spiritual strength come from, and what are we to do (v10-11)?

4. Paul uses the image of a well-armed Roman soldier to teach us of all the resources God provides for the battle (v14-17). By using the references below, build up your picture of what is involved in putting on this gospel armour.

- Truth (1:13; 4:15, 21, 24-25; 5:9)
- Righteousness (4:24, 5:9)
- Peace (2:14-18, 4:3)
- Faith (1:1, 13, 15, 19; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13)

- Salvation (1:13; 2:5, 8; 5:23)

- The word of God (1:13, 5:26)

5. Some Christians and churches focus a lot on spiritual warfare, where they talk of being on the offensive and destroying strongholds. How does this passage offer a different perspective?

6. Note the repetition of “all” in verse 18. What are the practical implications of Paul’s stress on the totality of prayer in the spiritual warfare?

7. What does Paul pray for himself (v19-20)? What lessons about gospel work can we learn from this emphasis?

8. What is the thing in your life that you think poses the greatest threat to your faith? What steps can you take now to ensure that you will never desert the gospel?

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

Praise God that Christ has already defeated sin, death, and the devil. Thank God for all the privileges and blessings of Christ’s people that you have learned about in Ephesians.

Pray that, by the power of the Spirit, you and your Christian brothers and sisters will continue in Christ to the glory of God the Father.

Sermon Notes - Week Eight

EPHESIANS 6:10-24

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