



Ephesians CG Guide

General introduction to Ephesians, from our sermon booklets:

When we take the time to stop and think deeply about life, many people feel that ultimately life has little meaning or significance. We work hours in the office, we save money, we spend money. Every day is the same. One day we will die. It all seems so insignificant and meaningless.

If that is how we feel, the New Testament book of Ephesians will arrest our sense of futility and open our eyes to an altogether different reality. It is quite different from many of Paul's other letters. Usually Paul writes to a specific church to help them sort out their problems, which may or not feel relevant to us. Ephesians, however, is a much more general letter without specific details, sent to multiple churches in the same area, with Paul's encouraging message for all of them.

And what is Paul's message? Paul pulls back the curtain to show us what is going on in the spiritual realm. In it we see that God has an amazing plan for the whole of creation: a plan in which we have an important role, and a plan that gives meaning to our entire lives.

In the first three chapters, Paul shows us God's great plan and how far it has already progressed. Its scope and depth will blow our minds. Then in chapters 4-6 he explains how Christians can and should live in the light of this great plan. It will give us a high view of the church as God's new community and touch on so many areas of our life, showing how God's great purpose for the whole world shapes the way we live life today.

In a world where we often lack purpose and are not sure how we fit in, Ephesians speaks Gospel hope and cosmic purpose into our lives both as individual Christians and as a Christian community together.



Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul's opening passage, after his greeting (v1-2) is one long sentence in Greek. The language is extravagant as he tries to blow our minds with God's amazing spiritual blessings as part of his plan for the whole creation. If we feel small and insignificant, this should lift our hearts in worship and praise and make us want to get on board with what God is doing.

There is too much detail in these verses to explain everything. I don't think that's Paul's point. In general there seems to be a time progression, starting before the foundation of the world (v4-6), leading to the coming of Christ who died for us and revealed God's greater plan (v7-10) and then God working in our life now (v11-13) until the time comes for our final redemption (v14). Three key points to take away:

- **What:** the scope is huge, from before creation to the end of time, involving all things in creation, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible.
- **How:** everything is 'in Christ' or 'through Christ'. All these blessings are in him, and without him we have nothing.
- **Why:** to the praise of his glory (v6, 12, 14). It is not for our sake but for God's glory.

The passage should overwhelm us, and lift our eyes to something much greater than ourselves. The questions mainly try to do that, make us look more closely at the plan so we are more humbled and amazed.

For leading: be judicious in your time. You don't need to ask every question. Think what questions are best, and make sure you spend time responding in praise and prayer.

Questions

1. We're starting a new series on Ephesians. From your personal history or own bible reading, anything special or meaningful you want to share about this book?

Icebreaker at the start of a new series. Ephesians is a well-known book and a favourite of many people, so nice to share.



2. This is a mind-blowing passage. What are the big points emphasised? Anything that you don't understand or have questions about?

See above - God's plan for all creation, through Christ, for his glory.

People may have questions about e.g. predestination. You can talk about it for a few moments, or maybe write down those questions for later, but then focus more on the bigger things we do understand.

3. What does God - Father, Son & Spirit - do in this plan, and what do we do? How should that impact us as we think about God's plan?

God does everything. He is the one who chose, predestined, adopted, redeemed, sealed, etc. The only thing we do is hearing and believing (v13), and in the past, trespassing (v7). Seeing God's initiative and how little we do - just hearing and receiving - should:

- ***make us humble and grateful.*** We do so little, and we don't even deserve it.
- ***give us great confidence.*** God's plan depends on God. It does not depend on us in any way. And therefore, it will not fail but will happen.

4. How do we see the centrality of Christ in this passage? As John the Baptist said, "He must increase, I must decrease". How does this passage do that for you?

Two ways. On the one hand, every spiritual blessing is in and through Christ. There is nothing we have without him. And on the other hand, all of God's plan is centred on Christ, with God uniting the whole creation together under Christ. I guess many of us focus on only one of those, or neither. But it's both, and Jesus is greater and more important than we think. And ultimately, we are not the centre of God's plan, it is focussed on Christ and for God's glory.



5. If you ask people what the gospel is, people often say something like “Jesus died for my sin”. In what way is God’s plan greater than that? How does it challenge us?

We often think very individually - my sin, me & Jesus. God’s plan is cosmic. It runs from before the beginning of time to the end of eternity and involves the whole creation. It should humble us that we are quite small and insignificant, and yet lift us up that God chose us to be part of this.

6. Many Christians see ‘blessing’ as mainly material. I am blessed when I have a new job, new car, great spouse, etc. And if I don’t have these, I’m not blessed. How does this passage challenge and encourage us?

This passage is about our spiritual blessings, not material ones. Each of us is far more blessed than we can imagine. Who cares about a new car when you can have a new relationship with God? It should humble and amaze us. Of course, the problem is that these are invisible. We don’t see them, so we forget about them. We should stop and think about what we have in Christ.

7. How does Paul want us to respond to what he writes? What will that look like day-to-day?

A few responses. On one hand, in v3 just praise! We should be overwhelmed, humbled and amazed at what God is doing. And of course, this is such a great plan we want to give our lives to it, with thankful hearts for being included in Christ.

And of course, be in Christ and stay connected to him. True for Christians but worth pointing out if you have non-Christians in your group. Every blessing is in Christ, not outside of him.



Ephesians 1:15-23

The second passage has two clear sections (it could have been done in two sermons):

- In 15-19 Paul gives thanks and prays for the Ephesians. This is not just to teach us to pray but also gives us an idea of his priorities for us. And that is, that we know God and his plan better, particularly our great hope, how precious we are to God and his great power. That is why he has been explaining so much about God's plan. We need to know it!
- In 20-23 Paul explains a key part of God's plan as an example, namely the exaltation of Christ, when God raised him from the grave to sit at his right hand above everything. It shows God's power, as he puts the whole creation under Jesus' feet. It shows his care as Jesus is a gift to us, ruling the universe for the good of his church. And it shows our great hope in being part of Christ and sharing in his rule. And of course it is a key part of God's plan. If everything is to be united under Christ (1:10) then putting Christ above all is a major step already fulfilled.

The second section is very much a mind-blowing passage like last week, that is hard to just imagine. So no problem if your group members feel excited but confused at the end. And also no need to do every question, just see what people want to talk about.

Questions

15-19

1. Icebreaker: you are going through your prayer list. What kind of things do you usually pray for people? Or in CG?

Icebreaker but helpful. We usually pray about health, jobs, relationships etc.

2. Summarise what Paul prays for the Ephesians. Why might this be an important thing to pray for? How does it compare with what we pray for people?

Knowing God and his plan (particularly our hope, God's care and God's power). Knowledge seems just academic but some things are life changing. If we truly knew God and what he is doing and will do we can build our life on him.



In a way our prayers are very centred on material things and in a way very me-centred. We pray because we want God to get behind our plans. Instead, we should pray we would be so transformed that we get behind God's plans.

3. Why does Paul pray this, rather than just tell them? How would it show in our life and routines whether we really believe this?

It is not just any knowing. It is spiritual knowledge, with the eyes of our heart. It is not something we can do ourselves but something God needs to give (otherwise there wouldn't be so many non-Christian bible scholars!). So the question is how much we pray this. Do we open the Bible and start reading or pray God would open our eyes? Do we pray when we meet with someone and want to share? Do we really pray at the start of CG that God would do a miracle or is it just a formality we don't really believe?

20-23

4. We focus a lot on the cross as a church but don't make as much of Jesus being exalted. What has struck you from the passage/sermon?

A good time to share - it's not a topic we focus on a lot.

5. How did you used to feel about Jesus being king of everything? How do you feel now about God's love and care behind it?

This is a great surprise: Jesus as king over everything is a gift. We like Jesus as Saviour but maybe don't like much that he is also Lord. Or it makes him scary and unapproachable. Hopefully if we grasp that it is a gift, that the one who loves us so passionately now rules the universe for our good should be so reassuring and heartwarming.

6. What fears do we have about the world and the future? How does this passage address those?

This is the implication. If our bridegroom is on the throne then everything is under control and happening for our good. So we don't need to fear. Good to share.

Of course this is something that raises questions as well. If Jesus is in control, why is there so much suffering and evil? We have to admit that we can't see the big picture and lack omniscience. We just have to trust Jesus knows what he is doing. The



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alternative is that Jesus can't control the world - not something we can live by I think.

7. Remember the stick figure drawing. How do you feel about what this passage implies about our future? In what situation do you need to remember this?

We are the body of Christ, so if creation is under Christ's feet we are over it as well. We will share in Christ's reign, as a new humanity after Adam & Eve fell. This should give our lives so much meaning and make us humbly grateful. Maybe especially when we feel like Ecclesiastes, that our life and work are meaningless. Remember who you are in Christ.

8. What would be the biggest change in your life if you truly grasped this passage? What would you most like prayer for?

Just a summary. We've discussed lots of different applications, ways in which this passage challenges and encourages us. Prayer that we would really believe this and be changed by it is key. Hopefully that is what people bring up.



Ephesians 2:1-10

This is a really famous gospel passage as Paul describes how amazing grace is.

1-3 **What we are like by nature:** dead. A depressing list of how terrible our condition was.

4-7 **What God did:** in his love he made us alive and raised us with Christ, showing his grace

8-10 **Conclusion:** by grace you have been saved, clearly there is nothing we contribute. Even our good works are prepared by God and don't earn anything.

Nothing difficult, just rejoicing in God's incredible grace to us in Christ. Feel free to do any appropriate question in breakout groups so that more people have a chance to share.

Questions

1-3

1. Paul describes our natural state in many colourful ways. Which of his many descriptions strikes you and convicts you the most?

Lots of aspects of our condition. Dead in our trespasses and sins. Following the world, following Satan, following our flesh, following the desires of our bodies, of our minds. Objects of wrath. Just sharing which description of us strikes us the most.

2. Many people who are not Christians are wonderful people. Do you believe what this passage says about them? How do you reconcile these two?

People will have this question. V.1-3 is so depressing, but many people don't seem that bad. How do we reconcile this? I guess there is the external and internal, what is going on in our heart. Externally people may look nice, but deep down, deeper than we can see, things look different, and it's our heart that matters. And doing good is also about our motivation. We can do good things but for selfish reasons (e.g. to make us feel good about ourselves, or to put people in our debt). Or even when we decide for ourselves that something is good and then do it, we are implicitly



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rebelling against God and his standards by setting up our own standards and following ourselves rather than him. We are much more sinful than we realise.

You may even have non-Christians present who are wonderful people. Would be good to be clear that this is what the Bible says and to take that seriously, that sin goes much deeper and is not just external.

(By the way, this view of human nature has big implications. It's not the point of ch.2 but in ch.5 Paul will come back to the stark difference between people by nature and by grace and say clearly "do not be partners with them" (5:7). This has implications for who a Christian should marry etc. Be aware and be sensitive)

4-7

3. What things did God do for us? In what ways is this more amazing than we could imagine?

We should grasp how amazing these verses are. We were children of wrath, and deservedly so. Instead of pouring out his wrath on us God made us alive. And not just alive, raised us up. Not just raised us up, seated us in heavenly places. And not just in any way, but with Christ. And not so we could pay him back, but to show us in the coming ages the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness. It is such an incredible contrast.

4. We may live in Hong Kong, but where are we spiritually? How do you feel about this? What are some implications in light of 1:20-23?

We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, so our position is likewise far above all rule & authority, power and dominion. No one can touch us, we are totally secure. This is very reassuring - no need to fear - but also so gracious. We are not on probation, nothing we need to do, God has put us there and that's it, all done.

8-10

5. We are not saved by good works. Yet what things do we sometimes think contribute to it? How does Paul address these?

The passage helpfully addresses quite a few.

- *Some people say we're not that bad. V.1-3 should put that to bed - we're dead, not barely alive.*



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- Some people point to our faith (“I’m saved because I believe, whereas someone else is not saved because they don’t believe – so it’s my faith that makes the difference”). But faith is a gift from God, so it doesn’t contribute (v8).
- Some people point to the good things we do after trusting Christ. But v10 says they are God’s work in us and he has prepared them already. It’s his work, not ours, and not something we can earn something with.

6. How can we see in our life that we are partly trusting in ourselves in the ways of question 5? How would you use this passage to speak to each other on this?

Good to see this in practice. E.g. if we are very aware of our good works now – proud if it goes well, depressed if we have a rough day – or desperate to make sure our faith is in good condition, we may not feel the freedom of grace, that our faith and our good works are a gift.

7. Paul’s conclusion is that “by grace you have been saved”. How has this passage made you appreciate grace in a new way? How will it change life on Monday?

Just sharing. The big point is that grace is more amazing than you think, and hopefully the sermon and study has given us plenty of evidence for that.

Hopefully come Monday it will give us so much joy and delight that nothing can take that away, that whatever happens we trust the God who loved us so much, and feel secure enough in his love to fully live for him.

Suggestions for Prayer

- Praise God for his amazing grace that is far richer than we could ever imagine.
- Pray we would delight in God’s mercy, even when life is not going our way.
- Pray we would be on guard against boasting, thinking we contribute to our salvation.
- Pray we would walk in the good works God has prepared for us.



Ephesians 2:11-22

Another great passage about what God has done as part of his plan. Same structure as last week.

- V11-12, **what we were like**: Gentiles were separated from God and his people
- V13-18, **what God did**: through the cross he created a new united humanity of both Jews and Gentiles, by abolishing the law
- V19-22, **result**: Gentiles fully included, part of God's family and temple

The difference with last week is that 1) this passage is focussed on the cross, not our spiritual exaltation and 2) the result is more horizontal. I.e. the big thing here is not just that we are back with God, but that we are back with each other. So focus on that in the study.

NB Two notes:

- *Kevin ended his sermon with the church now as God's 'billboard' where people can see his glory. However, this will be covered in more detail in 3:1-13. Hence, I'm not doing any questions on it in this study but will save that for the next set.*
- *The next prayer meeting is 6 October, so no CG next week. But as there is no service on 9 October due to the leaders' retreat, and hence no sermon to discuss, I suggest you discuss the 2 October sermon in your CG's 13-15 October, and will provide questions.*

Questions

Intro

1. We see Jews vs Gentiles in the NT and it doesn't mean much to us. What would be a good example of a similar hostile division among humanity these days?

Just an icebreaker. Maybe you've seen Jews in their suits, with their funny hats and hair, and it's hard to believe these are God's chosen people and the rest of the world are not. Jews & Gentiles doesn't mean the same to us. But we can think of Arab vs Israeli, Russian vs Ukraine, Korean vs Japanese, etc. Real division among humanity.



11-12

2. Would you agree with Paul's view of your past in V.11-12? What does he emphasise? What hope of change would you have had?

As with v.1-3, just taking in how depressing life was before we met Jesus. The main one is exclusion - as Gentiles we were excluded from everything to do with God, and there was no hope of change, nothing we could do to improve it.

13-18

3. How can Jesus' cross be the means to bring unity between Jews and Gentiles? How do we see that worked out in our own relationships?

More than any other passage in Ephesians, this passage is about the cross, in 13, 14, 16. It makes peace and kills hostility (15, 16). The key is the connection between vertical and horizontal. Rather than one group being God's people and one group excluded, with the law as wall in between, through the cross both groups are reconciled to God (16). The fact that both groups needed reconciling - no one is by ourselves one of God's people - makes us equal. In practice, this means we can see each other through the cross. It's not that one of us is righteous and the other isn't, instead we both needed Jesus to die for us.

4. Though we don't have a Jew/Gentile division in church, what might be possible divisions in Watermark? How should we apply this passage to them?

Trying to make it real - even though we're all Gentiles doesn't mean we're all together. There's cultural differences, socio-economic differences, ethnicity etc. Very sad if we are not united due to those. We should see that none of these things make us righteous. The only way to be accepted by God is if we are reconciled through the cross of Christ.

19-22

5. The result of what God did is v.19-22. Paul uses various metaphors, what do they communicate? Which one is the most stunning for you personally, and why?

"The hope to which he has called you" is amazing here. We are fellow citizens of the kingdom, members of God's family, God's temple/dwelling place built on Christ, in which the Spirit lives... It all speaks of privilege and intimacy. For Gentiles who could come nowhere near the living God it is incredible.



6. How excited are you about the horizontal dimension here? Being united into one new humanity with people totally different from you? How does it affect going to church?

In question 5, most people are struck by the vertical dimension - God's temple, God's family etc. But actually this passage's focus is on the horizontal just as much. We're stones in the temple together with wildly different people. We're family with former enemies. Is this something we think about? Something we're excited about? It determines whether we're excited about church or not. And it means we're not just coming for ourselves and our experience but for each other, and we'll look out for others and delight in the community there. More on this next week...

7. Paul summarised God's plan in 1:10 - to unite all things in Christ. How does 2:11-22 fit with that? Why is it so significant?

God's plan is about uniting everything under Christ. So today's passage about him uniting Jews & Gentiles under Christ fits right in. God is really fulfilling his plan - Christ as head over all (1:20-23), people brought under Christ (2:1-10) and united with one another (2:11-22). All the key elements are there - God's plan is more than a plan, it's really happening in the world right now.

Prayer points

- Praise God that when we were “without hope and without God” he brought us near. Praise him for the privilege and intimacy of being his family and dwelling place.
- Pray we would be excited about church and everything God is doing there - diverse people being united together under Christ.
- Pray we would work hard at pursuing unity in practice, remembering the cross.



Ephesians 3:1-13

This passage seems like a little aside where Paul talks about his ministry, but actually it's quite important. Chapter 3 is the link between what God has already done and what we should now do. God's plan has been achieved in Christ but now it is made known, first through Paul and now through the church.

The three sermon points show the three steps in this making known

- **For us** - God made it known to Paul (3:1-7)
- **To us** - Paul preached the gospel, creating the church (3:8-9)
- **Through us** - The church now reveals the gospel (3:10-12)

The reason the church reveals God's plan is because it is a visible part of God's plan. Diverse people united under Christ is something supernatural that God is doing in the world.

Questions

1. If you ask people why they come to church on Sunday, what kind of reasons would they give?

Icebreaker that lays the groundwork for God's purpose for the church here. Maybe because they like the worship, they want to see their friends, they want to hear the sermon.... Quite consumeristic usually. It's about what the church offers rather than what the church is.

2. Why did God 'hide' his plan for the Gentiles until Christ came? What difference should this make to our understanding of and joy in the gospel?

Given his focus on the church, Paul emphasises the equality between Jew and Gentile, and how Gentiles have full access to God now, building on last week. This used to be hidden but has now been revealed after Jesus died and rose. This matters because we can see how we Gentiles have access: only through Christ. God hasn't lowered his standards, rather he has met his standards for us through his Son. And hence it magnifies his grace and our inability, and should fill us with joy and thankfulness.



3. Imagine if God did not reveal the gospel. Why is it so important that he did? How does this make us feel about evangelism?

We usually focus on the cross and what Jesus achieved there. We just take it for granted that the good news has spread. But unless God actually chose messengers, gave them the gospel and sent them out Jesus' work would have been in vain. We just take it for granted and this passage should make us so thankful. And if that has touched our hearts, we should want to play our part in spreading the good news.

4. Try to explain 3:10 in your own words. How does “the church make known God’s manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities” and beyond?

This is one of the key verses of the book and the main point of the sermon. The church is where God’s plan to unite everything in Christ (1:10) is visible in the world, and this demonstrates God’s victorious plan to the spiritual powers (6:12) and the wider world. The church is “the tip of the iceberg”.

5. How important did you think our unity and community was before this sermon? And us living different lives in the world? How have your views changed?

Hopefully challenging our thoughts from question 1. Our life together as a church is a supernatural work that Jesus has achieved and it shows God’s glory to the world. It is far more important than we think, not just nice and helpful but an important part of God’s plan. Same for our godly lives that stick out in the world - it shows the work God has done in us.

6. “Don’t look at the church, look at Jesus”, Christians sometimes say when unbelievers point to sin in the church. What do you think of this statement given this passage?

Christians are still sinful, so we ask people to judge the gospel by Jesus’ perfect life, not by our lack of perfection. There is definitely truth to this, if people don’t understand that Christians are still sinful. At the same time, people will judge the gospel by the church, and this passage says that is right - the church should be something you can point to to show the reality of God. The church should be different from the world in its unity, love and good works, and that shows it is a supernatural institution, not just a human social club. It is evidence of the gospel. Which of course is why damage to this witness is such a disaster.



7. How do you feel about having this great responsibility? How does it encourage us when we consider our normal life? How is it challenging?

See how people feel, though they should definitely feel daunted about what God wants them to do. And that will nicely set up Sunday's sermon when we look at Paul's prayer in 3:14-21. But it is encouraging that God has a purpose for our lives and for our life together. Life is not meaningless.

Ideas for prayer

- Praise God for revealing the gospel and bringing it to us, or we couldn't be saved. Pray we would share it faithfully.
- Pray Watermark would be a bit of heaven on earth as we strive to live in love and unity under Christ together, and would glorify God through it.
- Pray we would make every effort to maintain our unity and deal with conflict, and so stand against Satan's attacks.



Ephesians 3:14-21

This second prayer of Paul is the 'hinge' of the book. The first half of the book is about what God has done, chapters 4-6 is about how we should display this in the church and in our lives. It's a daunting task so in between is a prayer for God to change us and make us the church he wants us to be.

The prayer in 16-19 looks complicated. It is basically three steps as follows:

- *That... God may grant you to be strengthened... in your inner being (16-17a)*
- *That you... may have strength... to know the love of Christ (17b-19a)*
- *That you may be filled [to] all the fullness of God (19b, 'with' is not a good translation - compare with 4:13 (same Greek construction). NIV has "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God")*

So it is a prayer for us to grow spiritually, which happens as we know Christ's love more, and that requires the Spirit's work in us.

The doxology ("word of praise") in 20-21 then gives us confidence in this (note the power in us and the glory, as before). God is fully able to grow us as well as willing to do so, after all it's for his glory.

Still, any questions about a complicated passage please ask. The study is again generally focussed on the mind-blowing aspects of what Paul says, rather than practical "what should I do" which will be the next half of the series.

Questions

1. Have you ever been given a really daunting, public responsibility you were not sure you could fulfil? How did you feel? How did it go?

Icebreaker to set the tone. E.g. maybe you had to organise a huge party at work, and you were so concerned that you'd mess up and everyone would blame you for it.



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2. Imagine Paul going straight from 3:10 to 4:1. How would you feel reading it? Why does Paul include this prayer here?

We should feel similarly daunted. God wants to show his glory to the world - seen and unseen - through us. So go live a worthy life! No way can we do this, unless God helps us. Hence the prayer, a huge sigh of relief.

3. What is your spiritual ambition or goal in life? How does it compare with Paul's goal in 3:19 and 4:13? How does it challenge you? How do you feel about his description?

Paul uses such elevated descriptions. Being filled to the fullness of God. Attaining the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It sounds very grand to become everything God means for us to be. Compared to that, our ambitions are usually just "stay a Christian for the rest of my life" plus succeeding at work, finding the right partner etc. It should challenge us how low we usually set the bar. Yet also we should be humbled at the privilege of us growing so much as Paul describes here (though of course we will never reach it fully).

4. Why is knowing Christ's love the key to spiritual growth? Can you give an example of how knowing Christ's love will change how we live, ideally personal?

Our goal is to grow to the fullness of God/Christ, so no wonder that reaching this involves knowing Christ and so becoming like him. Particularly, if God is love, knowing his love is what makes us grow. Even on a human level, you can see this. Children from loving stable families tend to be more mature and loving than those from broken homes where love was absent.

You can give lots of examples possible, e.g. if Jesus loves us we won't be anxious, knowing how Jesus forgave us, we can forgive others, etc. Paul himself will do this in e.g. 4:32, 5:2, 5:25.

5. Of course we need to pray, but what else can we practically do to know Christ's love more?

As we'll see in 4:11-16, we know Christ's love through the gospel. So key to growing is time spent reflecting on the gospel, in our devotions, on Sundays, in CG, as we speak to each other informally etc. We know this yet we have to keep hearing it.



6. Think of an area of your life where you're struggling. Say 3:20 to each other about this (e.g. patience - "God is able to make you, Johnny, far more abundantly patient than you could ask or think, according to his power at work within you, for his glory"). How do you feel saying or hearing this? What would you do if you really believed this?

The last verses should give us confidence that God can and will change us. Maybe this is a good way for us to take that in. If we struggle with sin or think we can never change, saying or hearing these words should feel awkward. We don't really believe them. Is God really able to change? His authoritative, inerrant word says yes, and if we believe it we will confidently seek to live differently.

7. How does Paul's prayer compare to ours in his priorities and principles? How could his prayer shape our own prayers this week? Who are people you could pray for?

One big application would be to pray! Prayer for God's work in us, for spiritual growth, for knowing Christ's love better. Like a few weeks ago with 1:15-23, not sure if we pray for the same kind of things that Paul prays for. So here is an opportunity to adjust. Perhaps memorise the prayer together and pray it every day for your group together. Pray it for WM, other churches in HK, etc.

Ideas for Prayer

- Pray 3:16-19 for your group and for Watermark :-)
- Praise God using 3:20-21 :-)
- Pray we would have confidence in God's power to change us and so make spiritual growth a priority in our busy lives



Ephesians 4:1-16

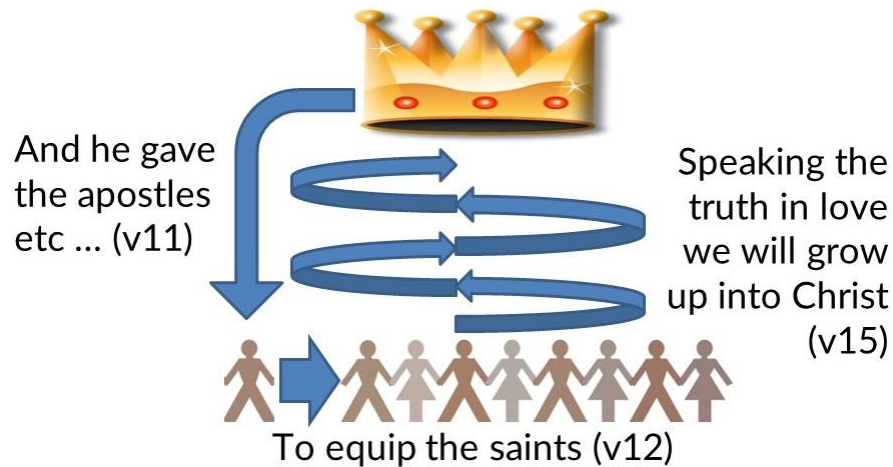
We have arrived at the 2nd half of Ephesians, with the main call of v.1: living a life worthy of our calling. Not to earn anything, but because God has graciously included us in his plan and wants to display his glory through us. Given how God's plan is to unite all things in Christ, the main way Paul highlights that is a worthy life is unity (v.2-6), which from Paul's language is not easy but involves humility, patience and bearing with one another, difficult for sinners like us.

Hence, we need to grow. V7-16 talks about how we as a church can grow to maturity. It is the human side of 3:14-21 - not God's part in spiritual growth but our part. Our side is that we have leaders who speak God's Word to the rest of the church (v11) so that the church is equipped to build each other up (v12) by speaking the gospel in love (v15). If we do this we will reach the unity & maturity of v13 rather than the division and immaturity of v14.

Questions

1. Game time: what are the essential ingredients in 4:11-13, 15-16? Can you make a drawing showing the process in those verses?

Just some fun but getting into the passage, but hopefully will make sure we get this into our heads. Christ gives leaders who equip the congregation with the gospel, who then speak the truth to each other so the whole church grows up into Christ. See attached my attempt. (The leaders also need to grow by the way - hopefully the spiralling arrow covers both)



2. Paul's big call is for unity. How easy is it to maintain this according to v.2-3? What do you feel are obstacles to unity for you personally (from v2 or otherwise)?

Paul thinks it is hard work - overlooking faults, humility, patience, gentleness... 'eager to' in v3 is often translated 'make every effort to'. I.e. it is not easy and automatic! Sharing what struggles we have with this personally.

3. If we find unity easy, what could be the reason for that? (E.g. we're very mature, or rather we're not actually that close, our community is not diverse so no friction, etc...)

Mainly for those who think it's easy - why is that? Just to search our hearts whether our unity is true or just shallow, either due to shallow relationships, people who are very similar to us etc.

4. Compare v13 and v14. In what ways do the two contrast? How do you feel about staying in v14?

So many differences. Immature child vs mature manhood. Plural children vs one mature adult. V13 is stable and secure in the knowledge of the Son of God, the measure of Christ, while v14 is children thrown around by the wind, dangerous. We should really be attracted to v13 and seek to avoid v14, and so motivated to grow.

5. V.11-16 is a great blueprint for what we should be doing as a CG. For each element, what would happen if it were missing? What is your group tempted to miss out?



At a previous church I was part of, we studied Ephesians 4:1-16 every year when our small groups restarted. Speaking the gospel to each other so that we grow together is what we should be doing, good to think about.

CG's can of course go wrong if they forget one of the key elements.

For example:

- **No input from the Word** - a group without gospel input
- **No “speaking the truth in love”** - we hear the gospel but it doesn't work through in our relationships, they remain superficial
- **No community** - if we are not together, but just come for our own growth, again we won't be helping each other

In all these cases there will be no growth, or just individuals growing a bit on their own. Good to think what would be the temptation for your growth? Are you very social and it's easy to leave the gospel aside. Or is your group keen to study but more reluctant to speak openly into each other's lives?

6. How easy do you find it to speak the gospel in love to each other? What do you think are barriers for us? How could we overcome these?

Thinking practically - we want to speak the truth in love but maybe we are too shy in crowds, or we don't really know what to say, or we are afraid of how the person responds... Would be good to think about how to overcome them, given the importance of speaking the gospel for our growth.

7. Go round and share a time you were really helped by someone reminding you of the gospel. What would Watermark be like if we all did this all the time? How do you feel?

Some sharing & encouragement at the end. It should be such a privilege to help each other with the gospel and so causing the church to grow?

Ideas for Prayer

- Praise God for “the hope to which he has called you” and the privilege of displaying his glory. Pray we would all seek to live a life worthy of this.



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- Give thanks for the elders, staff, CG leaders and others who equip the church with God's Word. Pray they would be faithful in using their gifts.
- Pray nothing would stop us speaking the gospel to each other in love, and that WM would grow in unity & maturity as a result.



Ephesians 5:3-21

Paul continues to explain how to live a life worthy of what God has done. This large section, 4:17-6:9, has three parts after a general introduction (4:17-24).

- **4:25-5:2 is about community** (in light of our unity in 2:11-22)
- **5:3-21 is about us and the world** (in light of us being made alive to God in 2:1-10)
- **5:22-6:9 is about authority relationships** (in light of Christ's headship in 1:20-23).

So the contrast between who we are and those around us (whom we were the same as in the past) provides the background to how we should live. We then had three sections:

- **Live differently** (v.3-6) - how our lives should be different from the world, given we know God and the world doesn't
- **Live shinningly** (v.7-14) - God's plan for us to shine in the dark through how we live
- **Live carefully** (v.15-21) - be intentionally gospel-centred to keep going in this world

Questions

1. Anything that struck you from the passage and sermon that you'd like to share?

Icebreaker to get people talking. Feel free to come up with a better one.

2. In what way is covetousness the same as idolatry? And sexual immorality? How is it different from how you've perceived this as a sin in the past?

The sins listed here are different from 4:25-5:2. Those were horizontal, these are more vertical, against God, as idolatry (v5). Not in a physical sense, but as what or who is most important in our heart. Jesus or something else.



With covetousness (greed), the problem is that we want something else more than we want God. In our hearts we think money or possessions gives us more satisfaction than Jesus, and so we make unwise decisions or get bitter when we don't get what we want.. Sexual immorality is the same as we know it's wrong but still choose to do it, because we think it offers more satisfaction, meaning, significance etc than knowing Jesus.

This is important because many people think of sexual immorality primarily as horizontal. And then e.g. a boyfriend and girlfriend sleeping together doesn't seem so serious. It's just two consenting adults, there is no horizontal hurt. But the sin is primarily vertical, to God.

3. Why does Paul think should Christians avoid such idolatrous behaviour? How does Ephesians so far help you with this?

Paul mainly says such behaviour is not "proper among saints". It is very much about who we are and living accordingly. God saved us, made us alive from the dead, made us his - and so our old lifestyle is "out of place". We are different from the world, and so should be our behaviour. Be who you are, don't be who you no longer are.

Ephesians hopefully has helped with this because it's so amazing who we are. Having seen how we are God's treasured possession, seated with Christ in the heavenly places etc, should really help us say no to idolatry, because we are so thankful and full of praise for God's grace.

Of course there's the warnings as well - see next question.

4. How do you feel about the warnings of v.5-6? How can we best understand them in a way that does not diminish the gospel of grace?

These are serious verses, and they sound like a warning. Judgment will come on the world because of its rejection of God, which includes the greedy, the sexual immoral etc. We should not be deceived about that. But how should we feel this applies to us personally? But this can be tricky and maybe confusing. I'd be tempted to skip them but your group will probably have questions.

Part of Paul's aim is just why we should be different. This behaviour is why judgement is coming into the world. If we belong to God and have been saved from



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this, why keep doing the same behaviour (if you've just been rescued from drowning, why jump back in? But especially v5 seems to be more, and if you have people who feel guilty, how should we understand this? And if there is judgement for sin, how does this fit with us still being saved by grace?)

I think from Ephesians so far we are saved by grace, and our sin doesn't change. God chooses people, makes them alive, seals them with the Spirit and will redeem them one day. They are his treasured possession, his holy temple. We can't undo that by sinning. If God planned to save you, he will. If he didn't, he wouldn't. So the warning is not about our behaviour.

Rather, the solution seems to me that behaviour can show who we are. Hence it's not someone who commits an immoral act who will not inherit the kingdom, but the sexually immoral person. Someone who is defined by their sin, and still part of the world. While if we're defined by Christ, we will be in the kingdom.

So we shouldn't worry that too much sin shuts us out (or be proud that few enough sins keep us in). We should just live as one of God's people and be who we are, which includes staying away from sin. But if we sin consistently without any signs of spiritual life, we should be concerned, are we sure we are one of God's people? That's how continued idolatry and immorality is a warning while not taking away grace, if that makes sense.

5. What does Paul want by using the metaphor of light and darkness? How have you seen this in your own life? How is it encouraging?

Light and darkness is more than a contrast. From an OT background, light shines in the darkness. It brings things into the light, attracts people. E.g. Israel as a light to the nations, Jesus' disciples as "the light of the world" (Matt 5:14) etc. That is Paul's meaning here, as light "exposes the darkness" and makes things visible (v11, 13-14). Our lives are intentionally different from those around us, so that people see the difference and can come to know Christ as we talk about him.

People can share stories, maybe of how they have seen this in others as they were looking into the gospel, or perhaps how this has happened and people have noticed the difference, and maybe even come to Christ as a result. Hopefully encouraging to see that God really uses our lives.



6. What do you find difficult about living as light in the darkness? What does Paul suggest we do to keep going? How can we as a CG help each other in this?

Moving to 15-21. This is about how to live when “the days are evil”. It’s the other side of living in the world, it’s hard, and so we need to be wise, know God’s will and keep ourselves growing in the gospel. (“Be filled with the Spirit” is probably better translated as “keep being filled by the Spirit”. In terms of what this means, it probably refers back to 3:16-19 which also involves the Spirit and being filled. I.e. make sure we keep growing in the gospel). That is how we keep going.

People can share what they find hard, and good to share how we can make sure we all keep our eyes fixed on Jesus in this. CG is a great way to do that.

7. What has God been saying to you personally from tonight? What do you most need prayer for?

Again, general sharing what we’ve been convicted of as a springboard to praying for each other.

Ideas for prayer

- Praise God for bringing us from death to life and saving us out of this doomed world
- Pray we would live for Jesus and there would be no hint of idolatry and immorality among us.
- Pray the Lord would use us as light to shine in this dark world through our changed lives
- Pray for us to keep being filled by the Spirit with the gospel, and not be overcome by the world in these evil days



Ephesians 5:21-6:9

This is a long passage (due to last week's sermon breaking up the series) but it is very much one unit. It has three pairs of home relationships, each with an authority-submission dynamic. In each case the 'follower' party is addressed first. So they have many similarities, though note they are also different (e.g. wives 'submit' / 'respect' while children and slaves 'obey').

Questions

1. What questions/issues do you have as we come to this controversial passage? Please share and maybe we can answer them in due course.

This passage has controversial elements, especially 5:22-33. Sometimes these questions or objections can stand in the way of listening to what God is saying. Hence, it may be good to write down the questions and issues people have at the start. Hopefully they will be answered in the study, maybe you can spend time on them later, or feel free to email Kevin (kevin@watermarkchurch.hk) or Niels (niels@watermarkchurch.hk)

2. Where else have we seen the idea of 'headship' in the book of Ephesians? (Look at 1:20-23, 4:15). Is Jesus' headship a positive or negative thing? Does it result in blessing or oppression? How does this inform the way we read these three sections about 'headship' and 'followership'?

Though it's mentioned in 4:15, the main passage is 1:20-23. God made Jesus head over everything for the church, His body. In the background is also God's big plan of 1:10: where our Bibles talk 'uniting everything in Christ', the Greek literally says 'bringing everything under one head', namely Christ.

What this shows is that headship is a very positive thing. God's plan for the church and even all of creation is for everything to be under the headship of Christ. If we're excited about God's plan we should be excited about Christ's headship. So if we model Christ-like headship in our relationships and homes we are in fact being, again, a billboard or advertisement for God's plan. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (5:22-23), and not just any picture, but to show how wonderful it is to be under the headship of Christ.



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3. In the world, if one person has authority and the other submits, who is the one who benefits? How is this passage different? Look particularly at 6:5-9: What does Paul mean when he tells the masters to “do the same to them”? How is Paul asking the employers to think and act towards those that work for them?

In the world, if someone has authority over another (e.g. employer over employee), it is usually for the benefit of the one in authority: eg. the employee serves the employer. But this passage is very different. The church submits to Christ not for Jesus' benefit, but for her own. Christ's death for the church is not for his own benefit, but for the church's.

It is easy to see this for parents and children. Parents tell their children what to do, e.g. “Don't cross the road without looking”. But it is not for the parents' benefit, but for the children's. If they follow their parents' instructions it will go well with them and they will live long (6:3). Who wouldn't want that?

In this way headship is meant to be a gift of grace, not a privilege to be used for one's own benefit.

4. In what ways does sin distort God's design - for each of the two parties? Where have you seen this play itself out (eg, you home, your workplace)? How have you seen this struggle in your own heart? How does sin - particularly pride - make us self-seeking, for each of the two parties?

We tend to think that only those in 'positions of power' will struggle with pride or be self-seeking: but pride is at work in all of our hearts. It is important to be able to look at our hearts and to ask God to show us where pride and defensiveness are at work.

5. Split into men/women (or parents/children if more appropriate!). How does this passage most challenge you? If this passage offends you, what does it look like to take your offence to God? If you're someone in a position of leadership, how does this challenge you to lead, love and serve like Jesus?

Ideas for Prayer

- It would be a good idea to bring the group to a place of prayer. Don't just pray for personal needs but also for each other in light of this passage.
- Admit your struggles or fears with this passage. Ask God to lead and guide you in what His Word says.



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- Pray for one another's families and work situations: that Christians can be a billboard of his grace, and live out the gospel by walking the way of the cross.



Ephesians 6:10-24

Our final section of Ephesians is on spiritual warfare. We have great spiritual enemies trying to destroy the church and block God's plan. But we can stand firm in Jesus' victory.

It may be helpful to refresh yourself by listening to the sermon again, as it was a week ago and contained quite a bit of theology. In particular, this section is the main NT passage on spiritual warfare so should determine our default view of what this involved. And as we can see, it is the gospel that is what we need: truth, faith, righteousness, salvation, the gospel of peace, the word of God, while nothing about power walking or deliverance ministries etc.

In your prayer meeting last week you may have looked at the passage. If there are any issues that came up, maybe tackle them at an appropriate point.

Questions

1. Before this sermon, when you heard the term "spiritual warfare", what kind of things would come into your mind? What has influenced you?

A bit of sharing at the start. Not sure of people's background, some people may have lots of unhelpful ideas, whereas others never thought about it.

2. In groups, look at the following verses. How does the NT see Satan at work? What is his overall aim? Is this how you usually see these dangers?
 - a. 1 Pet 5:8-9 (with 4:12-16, 19), Rev 2:9-10
 - b. 1 Cor 7:5, James 4:1-7
 - c. 2 Cor 11:13-15, 2 Tim 2:24-26
 - d. 2 Cor 2:5-11, Eph 4:26-27
 - e. Zech 3:1, Rev 12:9-10



The answers are persecution, temptation, false teaching, conflict, accusation. Do it in 4-5 groups (leave out e. if needed as it is hard to find a good reference). Pretty ordinary activities, yet the NT says Satan is behind them.

There's a few more references that are not here. Paul's thorn in the flesh ("a messenger from Satan") in 2 Cor. 12, or Satan hindering Paul's ministry by letting circumstances get in the way 1 Th. 2:18. So sometimes Satan is in charge of bad events that hinder us, like with Job.

3. There are usually two extremes with Satan - to overemphasise him or to neglect him. What would be the consequences of each? Which do you lean to?

Neglect is that we forget there is a war and aren't ready, we don't think anything about the things happening. Overemphasis is that we are obsessed with demons and neglect things like the world and particularly our flesh, or forget that we already have everything in Jesus. Will probably depend on our background.

4. Why is the gospel our armour? For the attacks in q.2, how is the gospel the answer to Satan? Where in your life do you need to apply this at the moment?

The gospel is of course what Jesus has done, and how he has already triumphed. So we don't need to win, we just need to hold on to his victory. And with every attack in q.2, it is the gospel that is the answer. It is the truth against false teaching, our hope amidst persecution, our comfort against accusation, our weapon against temptation, our answer to resolve conflict etc. Good to think how exactly we need this at the moment.

5. Why is prayer so important? What reasons do we sometimes struggle to pray? What does this address?

Prayer is a weapon in a spiritual war. It means we can call on God's might against forces that are too powerful for us. We often feel prayer is ineffective, not doing anything. But seeing that there is a huge spiritual war going on, invisible to us, and that prayer really does something in this, should help us when we feel it is pointless.



6. **REVIEW:** Skim back over Ephesians 1-6 and reflect. Share what has had the most impact on you from the letter? What would you most like prayer for?

It's been such a great book and powerful series, good to review and reflect what we most want to remember and apply to our lives.

Ideas for Prayer (from prayer meeting)

- Pray we would be more aware of the devil's schemes and not underestimate him, while at the same time trusting Jesus' great victory.
- Pray that as a church and as individuals we would stand firm in God's strength and keep believing the gospel against Satan's lies.
- Pray for those you know under spiritual attack or are going through a hard time, for protection, comfort and help.
- Pray we would continue to be changed by God's plan and live it out, to the praise of his glory, as we put Ephesians into practice.