



# WALK THIS WAY

8 study guides  
in Ephesians

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## Introduction to these study guides

Sometimes being a Christian can seem pretty ordinary. That's why the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is such a great part of the Bible. When we read Ephesians, our eyes are opened to the awe-inspiring dimensions of what God has done for us in Christ. It's as if the apostle Paul leads us to the edge of a look-out and stretches out in front of us the enormous view of God's plans for the universe, and where we as Christians fit into these plans. The size and scope of the view just becomes more and more mind-boggling the further we read.

A letter like Ephesians, therefore, tells us that no matter how small a Bible study group is, being a Christian is never insignificant. Being a Christian is *radical*. Being a Christian puts us with Jesus Christ at the very heart of the universe. So hold onto your hats as throughout these eight studies we throw ourselves into some of the most profound parts of the New Testament!

Paul writes this letter from prison, probably in Rome. As readers in the Ephesian region of Asia Minor would know, he had been arrested on the charge of having brought a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28-29; Acts 28:16). Racial or cultural division between Jew and Gentile was a major issue in the Ephesian church (cf. Acts 19:17), and Paul was one of the best qualified writers of antiquity to address both sides intelligently.

It will help discussion in the group if you make the effort to read through the study in advance of the group meeting. If you can't manage this, then at least try to read through the passage beforehand.

These study guides are intended to compliment our Sunday morning teaching series in Ephesians, which will have a particular focus on the concept of 'identity'. Between those talks and these studies we hope you're clearer on the implications of the gospel for you, your church, and your everyday life as a follower of Jesus.



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# STUDY GUIDE 1 - You've got it all

*Ephesians 1:1-14*

## Read Ephesians 1:1-14

1. Focusing on verses 3-14, list the things that God has done for us.

2. Write down what you think is meant by the following words and phrases:

*spiritual blessing* (v. 3)

*heavenly realms* (v. 3)

*predestined* (vv. 4-5, 11)

*in accordance with his pleasure and will* (vv. 5, 11)

*redemption* (v. 7)

*to the praise of his glory* (vv. 12, 14)

3. Why do you think Paul mentions so many blessings in this section rather than concentrating on just a couple? What effect does it have on you when you consider all these blessings together?

## What God has done

In some respects, verse 3 is the summary verse for this intense section of Ephesians. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. No blessing is lacking; no blessing is overlooked; no blessing is held back. Name a spiritual blessing, any spiritual blessing, and if you're a Christian you've got it.

Notice, however, that the phrase is "spiritual *blessing*", not "spiritual *gift*". There is a difference. Paul is not saying that every Christian is equally gifted for every task. In fact, in Ephesians 3 Paul will say quite the opposite. Christians have a great diversity of gifts. But here in 1:3, Paul is talking about something much more important than gifts. Paul is talking about our spiritual status and intimacy with God, and in that respect every Christian has it all. We cannot be any more treasured and important to God than we already are. We are his forgiven children. We call the Creator of this universe our Father. His Spirit lives in us. We have been lavished with the great secrets of life. These are staggering things that God has done for us.

4. Note that the phrase be “in Christ” is used 15 times so what do you think it means to be “in Christ”?

### **How has God blessed us?**

Paul emphasizes that it is only through a relationship with Jesus that we receive these great privileges. The principle is simple; if you don't have Jesus, you don't have the blessings. That's because all these spiritual blessings that Paul mentions come to us through Jesus' work on the cross. One question still remains. Why on earth would God bother to do this for us?

5. What reasons does Paul give for God blessing us so much (vv. 4, 7, 9)?

### **Implications**

*(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group)*

6. 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?

7. Do you believe that God really does work out everything according to his will? When is it hard to believe this?

8. How do you think we should respond to all that God has done for us?

### ***Give thanks and pray***

- ✓ Thank God for lavishing us with his grace and for giving us every spiritual blessing—even at the cost of his own dear Son.
- ✓ Ask God to help you trust that he's generously given you everything you need, even if he hasn't given you everything you want.
- ✓ Ask for the Spirit's help in shaping your priorities and desires around God's purposes.

## **STUDY GUIDE 2 – Paul at prayer**

### *Ephesians 1:15-23*

It's always fascinating to watch a master craftsman at work—to see a sculptor create a thing of beauty out of a shapeless block. And in way, that's what we're doing in this next section of Ephesians. Paul is a master craftsman of prayer. More of Paul's prayers have been preserved in the Scriptures than of any other New Testament writer. Listening in on Paul's prayers can help us to pray better, because they reflect a passion, a clarity of thought and a Christ-centeredness that is often lacking in our own prayers.

In Ephesians we have now reached one of Paul's prayers, which, although addressed to the church in Ephesus, was possibly a circular letter from Paul designed to be passed around lots of churches. This is simply the copy that was sent to the Ephesian church.

If that is the case, what we have in 1:15-23 is the sort of prayer that Paul would pray for all Christians! If Paul were here today, these would probably be the sorts of things he would pray for you.

### **Read Ephesians 1:15-16**

1. What is the reason for Paul's prayer?

2. What impression do you get from these verses about Paul's commitment to prayer?

3. What is the first thing that Paul does in his prayer? Why?

### **Paul's motive for prayer**

With his opening phrase ("For this reason..."), Paul clearly links his prayer to what he has already written about in verses 3-14. The wonderful truths that we discovered in our last study prompt Paul to pray. Paul is so excited about the Ephesians being blessed with every spiritual blessing (v. 3) that he wants to thank God for his generosity!

Paul's example is instructive. Often our prayers resemble cosmic shopping lists as we ask God to help us through numerous problems. But if our prayers are always preoccupied with these issues it may be that we need to learn a lesson from Paul. Maybe we don't fully understand how much God has already done for us in Christ. God has already been so generous in blessing us with every spiritual blessing that our prayers should be overflowing with thanksgiving.

### **Read Ephesians 1:17-23**

4. What does Paul ask God for in verses 17-19? What three reasons does Paul give for asking for this (vv. 18-20)?

5. Why do you think Paul wants the Ephesians to know and experience God's power? (Compare 3:16-17)

### **Paul's prayer requests**

Paul's prayer is an intense one. He is basically asking God to help the Ephesians to grow in their understanding of what God has done for them in Christ. God's purpose for all of creation is that it be united in Christ, and by his sheer mercy alone God has shaped history so as to save us in Christ.

Paul's prayer is a good one for us to imitate. We ought to fill our prayers with requests for God to enlighten us so that we might come to understand and appreciate all that he has done for us in Christ. And when God answers that sort of prayer, and we start to comprehend the dimensions of what we have in Christ, life can never be the same again. When we understand the incomparably great power of what God has done for us, we are lifted out of our small-mindedness and our spiritual apathy. It puts our earthly cares and desires into perspective.

God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. That should revolutionize our lives. At the very least it should fill our prayers.

### **Implications**

6. Have a quick look at some of the other prayers of Paul (e.g. Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). What new things do you discover about the way Paul prays?

7. Think back over your prayers for the past few days/weeks. What has been your motive to pray? What have you prayed about? How do your prayers compare with that of Paul's in Ephesians 1?

### ***Give thanks and pray***

Use Paul's prayer in Ephesians as a model and pray the same sorts of things for Christians you know.

# STUDY GUIDE 3 – From rags to riches

## *Ephesians 2*

People love rags-to-riches stories. Our hearts warm when we hear about someone who starts out with nothing but through hard work and determination beats the odds, grabs an opportunity and makes a success of things. The person who builds up a business from scratch, or who starts as a waiter and ends up owning a chain of restaurants—we love those sorts of stories because they capture our imagination and our aspirations.

In chapter 1 of Ephesians, Paul speaks about the biggest rags-to-riches story. He paints a massive picture of God's plans for the universe, and our place in those plans. We discovered how we as Christians have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. In Ephesians 2, Paul continues to explain the grandeur of our salvation by describing what we used to be *before* we had every spiritual blessing. It is a rags-to-riches story like no other.

### Read Ephesians 2:1-10

These verses can be divided into three main sections.

#### 1. “You were...”

(a) How does Paul describe the Ephesians before they became Christians (v. 1)?

(b) What does it mean to be “following the ways of this world” (vv. 2-3)?

#### 2. “But now you are...”

(a) How does Paul describe the Ephesians *after* they became Christians?

(b) In verse 6, Paul writes in the past tense: the Ephesians are *already* seated with Jesus in the ‘heavenly realms’. Does this make sense? How?

#### 3. “Because...”

How has this transformation from spiritual rags to riches taken place? And what should be our response?

## Making peace with God

In verses 1-3 Paul describes the desperate situation of not knowing Christ. It is a picture of death, slavery and condemnation. Paul then goes on to systematically show how each of these things is reversed in Christ.

Whereas we *were* dead in sin and trespass, now we have become alive (v. 5). Whereas we *were* enslaved and held captive by evil forces, now we sit on thrones alongside Jesus (v. 6). Whereas we *were* condemned, now we have been saved from condemnation (vv. 4-5).

Paul keeps the most unbelievable thing for last. This rags-to-riches story is like no other you'll hear. Most rags-to-riches stories revolve around someone succeeding because of his or her own hard work and determination. But (there's that word again) the amazing message of the gospel is that we are taken from spiritual rags to riches *for free*. We contribute nothing. It is not our efforts that achieve it; it is God's efforts through Jesus. It is a free gift out of God's sheer mercy and love and grace (vv. 8-10).

And there's even more to be said. In verses 11-22, Paul gives another perspective on our spiritual rags-to-riches story. This time he is not so much concerned with our reconciliation with God as with our reconciliation *with each other*.

### Read Ephesians 2:11-22

We can examine these under the same headings as the previous verses, but focusing on their earthly relationships.

#### 4. "You were..."

How does Paul describe the Ephesians before they knew Christ?

#### 5. "But now you are..."

How does Paul describe what the Ephesians are now?

#### 6. "Because..."

How has this transformation happened in the life of the Ephesians? What do you think verses 14-15 mean?

## Reconciliation with each other

Paul lived in a world where there were only two categories of humanity: Jew and Gentile. Between these two existed great hostility stemming from the Jews' identity as God's people. God had indeed promised Abraham that his descendants would be God's people; but over time, national Israel had become very arrogant about this and forgotten that originally Israel had been chosen to be a light to *all the nations*. God wanted the Jews to be a blessing to the Gentiles, but instead the privilege of being God's people became twisted into self-righteous national pride. The Jews looked down with contempt upon the Gentiles; and the Gentiles in turn despised the Jews as obnoxious and self-important people.

Against that background of hostility, Paul describes how Jesus Christ has demolished the barrier between Jew and Gentile. In verse 15, he describes how Jesus has torn down the wall between Jew and Gentile by abolishing the law with its commandments and regulations. The commandments and ordinances are no longer relevant. Because of the cross, both Jew and Gentile can now call on the name of Jesus and be saved. They are now on equal footing. The wall of hostility is down.

Jesus also builds something new to replace the old wall of hostility. Jesus has built an entirely new humanity, a new society based on equality before God (vv. 15-18).

This perspective opens up a whole new way of looking at things. The struggling little Bible study group we go to, the small prayer meeting we attend, the local church we go along to—they can all seem so small-scale and unexciting and full of the strangest people. Yet they are—you are—part of God's new humanity, God's family!

## Implications

*(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group)*

7. What are some of the solutions that people suggest to fix the world's problems? What solution do you think Paul would suggest?

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

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

## Give thanks and pray

- ✓ Thank God for his rich mercy, his great love, his gift of salvation and new life.
- ✓ Ask God to keep you humble, always boasting in what God has done and never taking any credit for your salvation.
- ✓ Think about anyone you may find difficult to get along with, or with whom you may be out of relationship. Pray for wisdom for those people and for yourself and ask God to help you to be gracious. Ask him to restore any relationships that may need restoring.

## **STUDY GUIDE 4 – Profile of an apostle**

### *Ephesians 3*

James Baker, former United States Secretary of State, once said that his job was one of the most glamorous and important jobs in the world. He travelled the globe, meeting the most important people and resolving issues that affected all humanity. Once, as he drove through town he saw an old man walking on his own and recognized him as a past Secretary of State. James Baker realized then that if he continued to look to his job for his identity and fulfilment, then one day he'd be like that lone figure walking the street. Instead, Baker went on to anchor his identity in Jesus.

To whom or to what do you anchor your identity? What are the things that make you important? What are the things that you would use to define your life? In Ephesians 3 we get an intriguing insight into how the apostle Paul thought about himself.

The chapter opens with a phrase that Paul has already used in the letter: "For this reason..." Paul used it back in 1:15, where, after giving this big cosmic picture of how we have received every spiritual blessing in Christ, he exploded with gratitude as he explained how he prayed for the Ephesians in the light of those great spiritual truths. A similar thing is happening in Ephesians 3:1. After writing about how we have been reconciled to both God and each other through Christ, Paul's emotions pour out on to the page as he again explains how these truths lead him to pray for the Ephesians.

### **Read Ephesians 3:1-13**

1. List as many things as you can concerning the "mystery" which Paul writes about in these verses.

2. What are the ways in which Paul describes himself in these verses?

3. In what sense are Paul's sufferings the "glory" of the Ephesians (v. 13)?

### **How Paul portrays himself**

In some respects, verses 2-13 are almost an aside to Paul's main train of thought. It's as if mentioning being a prisoner (v. 1) and maybe also the Gentiles (v. 1) jogs Paul's mind to go off and talk about his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. In verse 14, however, Paul returns to his original thought as he continues, "For this reason...". But whether these verses are an aside or not, they give us a powerful insight into Paul. They show us how Paul is totally captivated by the greatness of Jesus Christ and the immense importance of the gospel. Paul doesn't describe himself in terms of his own talent or family background. He doesn't get his identity and significance from income or academic record. Paul thinks about himself in terms of Jesus Christ. Jesus and the gospel dominate his thinking and lifestyle and self-expression.

## Read Ephesians 3:14-21

5. What does Paul pray for the Ephesians?

6. What does it mean to be “rooted and established in love” (v. 17)?

### How Paul prays for others

After discovering that Paul thinks about himself in terms of Jesus Christ, it is no surprise that when praying for the Ephesians he asks that they would know Jesus better (vv. 17-19). This is testimony to how much Paul is captivated by the gospel. The rags-to-riches story of chapter 2 is not simply a pleasing idea for Paul. It is a profound life-changing event. When Paul talks about himself, he talks about Jesus. When Paul prays, he asks that others would better understand Jesus, and that Jesus would live in their hearts and shape their lives.

Does the gospel dominate us the way it does Paul? It should! We were dead in our sins but now in Christ we have been made alive. When you see life in those terms, there is nothing more important than knowing Jesus and making him known.

### Implications

*(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group)*

7. What things do we use to give meaning and significance to our lives?

8. What things in life distract us from the true importance of Jesus Christ and the gospel?

9. How can we help each other “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ”?

### Give thanks and pray

- ✓ Thank God for revealing to Paul and to us the mystery of Christ, and for bringing in the Gentiles as fellow heirs of God’s promises. (Those of us who are not Jewish should be especially thankful!)
- ✓ Thank God for mercifully giving us access to him through faith in Christ Jesus.
- ✓ Think of some Christians you know and pray for them the way Paul does for the Ephesians.



Our unity in Christ should smother any differences we share like a blanket smothers a fire. We are God's new society. We are a humanity characterized not by a wall of hostility and division, but by unity and peace (see study 3). But Paul doesn't end here. Yes, we have unity, but we're not all clones. Yes, there is only one faith, but our unity doesn't equal uniformity. There *are* differences between Christians, and this too is part of God's kindness to us.

### **Read Ephesians 4:7-13**

4. What's the difference between spiritual blessings and spiritual gifts?

5. Paul mentions several specific gifts in verse 11. Why do you think he does that?

6. Who is to do the "works of service" (v. 12)? Is this the way we usually think about church?

### **Our diversity**

Look around your church and you'll find that there are no two Christians the same. We are all different, and Paul says that's exciting! Since we are all different, we all need each other.

Just as an orchestra only reaches a rich harmony through a range of different instruments, a Christian group can only find a rich unity through all its members contributing in their own different ways. Some of us are good musicians; some have an eye for detail and are good at administration and coordinating activities; others have personal skills that relax people and put them at ease; some people are good at explaining and teaching things. That's why Paul stresses that we are *all* to be doing the work of ministry (v. 12). We meet with other Christians to do the work of ministry to enhance our corporate unity and to encourage each other in our Christian maturity.

### **Read Ephesians 4:14-16**

7. What roles do truth and love have in building maturity? What happens if either one of these is lacking?

8. What do you think it means to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (v. 15)?

## **Our maturity**

Paul closes this section by giving us an exciting picture of what a mature church looks like. It is a fellowship of people who speak the truth in love. People use their gifts to serve each other rather than to win praise and gratify themselves. People have a unity grounded in truth and not sentimentality. People are stable and firm, not rushing from one Christian fashion to the next.

A church like that would be a joy to be part of! But a church like that will only ever happen if we build others up in love (v. 16).

## **Implications**

*(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group)*

**9.** Why is it that so often our differences tend to divide churches rather than enhance churches?

**10.** Paul has said a lot about unity in these verses. What role, if any, do you think exists for denominations?

**11.** What contemporary warnings are there for us in verse 14?

**12.** Are there any needs in your church that you think you could help fill? How might you go about that?

## **Give thanks and pray**

- ✓ Thank God for the unity he has created amongst his people, and pray that Christians all over the world would walk in a manner worthy of their calling, eager to maintain their unity in the Spirit.
- ✓ Thank God for the diversity he has created amongst his people, and pray that Christians all over the world would be willing to do the work of ministry in whatever situation and capacity they are able to.
- ✓ Thank God for the specific gifts he has given you. Ask him to help you not to be jealous of the gifts he has given others; ask him to show you ways you can use your gifts to do the work of ministry.
- ✓ Pray for our church, that we'd be mature and loving, where people use their gifts to serve one another.

## **STUDY GUIDE 6 – Walk this way**

*Ephesians 4:17-5:21*

One of the exciting things about Ephesians is the way it describes the grandeur of what happens when we follow Jesus Christ. In Christ we become a new person. We have gone from spiritual rags to spiritual riches. We become members of God's new society. The Holy Spirit himself lives within us.

In this study we will consider Ephesians 4:17-5:21. Paul continues to expand on what type of lifestyle is worthy of the calling we have received. Now the focus falls onto personal godliness.

Paul uses four everyday experiences to describe a Christian:

- getting dressed
- being part of a family
- night and day
- drinking too much wine.

Paul uses each of these to illustrate what our new life in Christ should be like.

In this first section Paul says that changing our lifestyle is like changing our clothes. You take off some things and you put on other things.

We were prisoners of sin. We used to live ('walk' ESV) in the ways of the world. We were spiritually dead and enslaved, but God freed us (2:1-7). We should therefore put on a new lifestyle and new standards of behaviour that are appropriate to our new status. But it's important to see that putting on the new lifestyle does not *make* us one of God's people. God first frees us, through Jesus, and then in response the appropriate thing to do is to walk differently—to live a new lifestyle.

### **Read Ephesians 4:17-31**

1. How did we come to know ('learn') Christ?

2. What effect should this 'learning' have on the way we should live?

3. List things that Paul says we should discard and what we should replace them with.

In 5:1, Paul leaves the image of putting things off and on, and moves on to the image of having a family likeness. In Christ we are one of God's children, and so we should share the family likeness.

### **Read Ephesians 4:32-5:7**

4. What does it mean to “walk in love” or “live a life of love”? How did Jesus exemplify it?

5. In what sense is an immoral, impure or covetous person an idolater (v. 5)?

The third image Paul uses to describe our new life in Christ is the image of light and darkness. Walking in the dark is quite a different experience to walking in the hard, clear light of day. A lifestyle of ‘darkness’ is one that is shameful and needs to be hidden, but a lifestyle of ‘light’ abounds in goodness and righteousness. It has nothing to hide and is happy to be seen by all. In other words, there ought to be no actions, motives or secret fantasies that we’d prefer others not to know about.

### **Read Ephesians 5:8-14**

6. What are some “fruitless deeds of darkness” (v. 11)? What do you think Paul means by telling us to “expose” them?

7. How can we find out what pleases the Lord (v. 10)?

In his fourth and final image, Paul outlines the new influences that should direct our new life. The image he uses is the way alcohol affects us. Just as too much wine can affect our thinking and cause us to do things we might not normally do, Christians should let the Holy Spirit affect our thinking and cause us to do things we might not normally do. Someone who is drunk ‘walks’ like a fool—stumbling, staggering, and unable to speak properly. This is not how we should walk, says Paul.

### **Read Ephesians 5:15-21**

This is not obvious in every Bible translation, but verses 19-21 are actually all one sentence that outlines four characteristics of being filled with the Spirit - Singing spiritual songs; Communicating from the heart to God; Thanking God; Willingly serving others.

8. To what extent are these characteristics of our lives?

9. What do you think Paul means in verse 16?

### **Be who you are!**

We've looked at a big section of Ephesians in this study. It is easy to get lost in all the specifics and details, but the big thought is very straightforward. Do our lifestyles reflect that we are new people in Christ?

We are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, knowing that through his Spirit God continues his good work in us. We are to live with a real excitement knowing that holiness is what we were chosen for all along (1:4). We are to put on our new clothes, show the family likeness, live in the light and be filled with the Spirit. We are to be who we are in Christ.



### **Implications**

10. Is there any one verse that stands out from this study's reading for you? Why?

### ***Give thanks and pray***

- ✓ Thank God for freeing us through Jesus' death, and for softening our hearts and giving us understanding of his mercy.
- ✓ Choose one or two aspects of your "old self" that you find particularly difficult to put off, and ask God to help you by his Spirit to put those things off. (Pray privately about these things if you're not comfortable mentioning them to others.)

## **STUDY GUIDE 7 – After you!**

*Ephesians 5:21-6:9*

If you were to rate parts of the Bible according to their popularity, the part of Ephesians we are about to study would probably be close to the bottom of the list. These verses talk about wives submitting to their husbands as the head of the family, children obeying their parents, and slaves fearing their masters. This section of the Bible is often seen as old fashioned, out of date and irrelevant to modern society.

It's a tragedy when people overlook this wonderful part of the Bible, because tucked away in these verses are some of the most exhilarating and fulfilling truths of the Bible.

### **The principle of submission**

The section we are looking at in this study is 5:21-6:9. These verses talk about husband-wife relationships, parent-child relationships and slave-master relationships. At first glance it would seem to be a fairly diverse passage, but the overarching principle is found in 5:21: "...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ".

In our last study, we discovered that this principle of submission was one of the characteristics of being filled with the Spirit. Having stated that truth in 5:21, Paul now launches into a long section in which he describes how submitting to others will work out in different situations. In other words, this whole section is about how submission transforms the roles we have and the tasks we do in life.

When we understand Paul's logic in this way it actually raises the stakes about what is said in these verses. Submission in our different relationships is not an archaic attitude that is now out of fashion. It is actually one of the ways in which we identify ourselves as being Spirit-filled people.

### **Read Ephesians 5:22-33**

1. How should wives relate to their husbands?

2. How should husbands treat their wives? What goals should a husband have?

3. According to Paul's teaching here . . .

(a) How should Christians relate to Christ? How does this help wives understand their role in their marriage?

(b) How does Christ relate to his church? How does this help husbands understand their role their role in their marriage?

## The practice of submission

Before we can properly see the beauty of this section of Ephesians we need to clear away some dead wood. We need to expose some common ideas that are mistaken, and which only serve to confuse the issue . . .

### Truth #1: Different role does not mean different importance

Many people think that having a different role in a situation means that you also have a different importance. We are all ranked in the social pecking order in which a doctor is more important than a garbage collector and a solicitor is more important than a street sweeper. This way of thinking is completely foreign to God. Back in Ephesians 1-2, Paul has explained the way God thinks. We are all sinners who have been forgiven in Christ. We may not be identical, but we are equal in value.

### Truth #2: Submission does not mean inferiority

Most of us are so preoccupied with standing up for personal rights these days that we feel if we ever forego our rights to someone, the other person is therefore more important than us. Why else would you submit to someone else unless you *had to* because he or she was more important than you? The reverse is also true—if ever we are in authority over someone else, we tend to think that it says something about how very important and superior we are.

Again, God thinks in a radically different way. Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured by servanthood. Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve. Jesus submitted to his Father's will, and died our death on the cross, even though he is the one to whom all creation will bend the knee (see study 1). His greatness and authority was seen in the way he laid down his life for his people.

This relates to marriage. It is God's design that marriage works best when a husband and wife have different roles. God intends that the husband lead the household into all that's good and godly, and that the wife gladly support and encourage his leadership (vv. 22-23). Left to our own sinful nature these roles can quickly degenerate into chauvinism, feminism, selfishness and arguing. But when a couple is living under the influence of the Spirit and mutually serving one another, these roles complement each other. The husband takes the lead, but not in an overbearing or selfish way. Like Christ dying for his church, his sole concern is to love his wife, and lay down his life for her. The wife follows this lead and supports her husband in it. She gladly submits, as she does to Christ—not in menial servitude and oppressed silence, but in love and respect and unity. The marriage grows to joyous levels of intimacy and strength.

### Read Ephesians 6:1-4

4. What reasons are given for children obeying parents?

5. Paul specifically mentions fathers in verse 4. Do you think it's equally valid to apply the verse to mothers? Why/why not?

## Read Ephesians 6:5-9

6. How should their relationship with Christ affect the behaviour of (a) slaves towards masters, and (b) masters towards slaves?

## The pleasure of submission

It's a shame that submission is so misunderstood and unpopular, because the biblical pattern of relationships is a source of incredible pleasure, fulfilment and contentment. When we start to live out our life's role in godly submission and love, we experience more joy than we can imagine.

A family in which parents and children are committed to one another, such that the children obey their parents and the parents care for the children in tenderness without exasperating them—this is the sort of family that anyone would envy. A marriage in which a husband expresses his leadership in the home by laying down his life for his wife, and in which a wife gladly and lovingly submits to this leadership—this is a relationship more intimate and secure than romantic Hollywood movies can begin to imagine. Even a master-slave relationship would be a joy to be in when both master and slave work out their respective roles with the welfare of the other in mind.

Submission is not old-fashioned. It is a desperately needed ingredient in our modern world. Submission is not a sign of inferiority or weakness. It's a sign of being filled with the Spirit.

## Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

7. What current attitudes tend to work against a wife and husband relating to each other in a godly way?

8. What are some examples of how parents can exasperate their children?

9. What relevance does the teaching about masters and slaves have to our modern work environment?

## Give thanks and pray

- ✓ Thank God for being a God who shows no partiality (6:9). Thank him for loving every person equally, regardless of gender, race and station in life. Ask God to help you love people like that.
- ✓ Thank God that Jesus submitted to his Father's will in dying for us.
- ✓ 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)—that you would work to obey God in each role.

## STUDY GUIDE 8 – Living in a war zone

*Ephesians 6:10-24*

For many people 'the devil' is a bit of a joke—just an imaginary guy in a red suit holding a pitchfork. A few years back, *The Bulletin* magazine ran an article entitled 'Consumer's Guide to Hell'. The article surveyed people's beliefs in the supernatural, and of all those surveyed only one-third of those who believed in heaven also believed in the devil. As a famous Hollywood movie said, "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

At the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the apostle wants to make sure that his readers are under no illusions about the reality and seriousness of the forces of evil. Paul wants his readers to understand that being a Christian is not a life of leisure. It is not even just hard work. To be a Christian is to be at war! What's worse, it is a dirty war where there seem to be no rules. It is a subversive war where apparently little things can ultimately bring us down.

### Read Ephesians 6:10-13

1. Why do you think Paul closes his letter with this warning (v. 12)?

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

3. What are some of the "the devil's schemes"?

### Taking Satan too seriously

At one extreme, some people don't take Satan seriously enough; at the other, many Christians take him far *too* seriously. Many churches become too preoccupied with Satan and mistakenly believe that he has more power than he does.

For the Christian, Satan has been stripped of his power. All we have to do against the devil is to stand! Don't go looking for him. Don't go asking for a fight. Simply be strong in the Lord, have confidence in what God has done for us and stand firm. As James says, 'resist the devil and he will flee' (Jas 4:7). The only power the devil has is the power we give him when we believe his lies. Just resist him. Be strong and you will triumph. That's because God's children are protected by the armour of God. But what exactly is this armour?

### Read Ephesians 6:13-17

4. List out all the different pieces of the armour of God. What does each represent?

## The armour of God

The first thing to notice about the armour of God is that it is the armour *of God*. God provides it! All we have to do is slip it on and stand firm. The armour, therefore, is not so much something we have to do as something that God provides. We simply have to make use of it.

Understood in that sense, the armour of God is a picture of the gospel. All the pieces of armour mentioned are references to different aspects of the gospel. Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, Spirit; they are all different perspectives of the good news that Christ died for our sins on the cross.

So when Paul says to put on the full armour of God, he is telling us to stand firm in the gospel! Don't desert the gospel. Don't wander from Jesus. Surround yourself in what Jesus Christ has done for you.

In other words, it is the gospel that defeats the devil.

The Bible refers to Satan as a liar, a tempter and an accuser. He tempts people into sin by lying to them, and when we fall for his lies he stands before God and accuses us. The gospel robs him of this power. Satan can accuse us before God until he is blue in the face, but when we are in Christ we are forgiven and reconciled with God. That's why the devil hates the gospel. It cuts his legs from under him, and he will do anything to lure us away from it. Paul is only too aware of this. He warns his readers to stand firm in the gospel.

### Read Ephesians 6:18-24

5. What does it mean to pray "in the Spirit"? How does verse 17 help us understand this phrase? (Think also about what it means to be filled with the Spirit in 5:18.)

6. Why does Paul encourage his readers to keep alert in verse 18? About what does he want them to be alert?

## The power of prayer

The very fact that one of Paul's final requests in the letter is for prayer should alert us to the importance of prayer. When you are in a spiritual battle, it's crazy not to keep in close contact with your spiritual commander-in-chief!

We need to pray. We need to pray for our non-Christian friends and family who are still in their sins and far from God. We need to pray for those who are tricked by the devil's schemes into thinking that the gospel is nonsense. We need to pray that God will release them by revealing the mystery of the gospel.

We need to pray for each other. We need to pray that we might not fall for the devil's schemes ourselves and that nothing would come between the gospel and us. We need to pray that we will stand firm.

## Stand firm

It is a dirty war that the devil wages. We mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that being a Christian is a game. The forces of evil are marshaled against us to try to make us desert the gospel. Lies will come into our heads, suggesting that Jesus is not worth the effort. Doubt and temptations will make us think that reading the Bible and spending time in prayer aren't all that important. We will be tempted to complete this study book, learn a few things, but never actually change our lives!

At the end of this mighty letter, God is calling us to arms. We are in a war. He is saying to us: recognize the subversive acts of the enemy. Identify the temptations that might lead you away from the gospel. Be aware of seemingly innocent things that can start to weaken your faith. Take your stand against everything that might seduce you away from Christianity.

If you don't remember anything else from this study series on Ephesians, remember that through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ you have every spiritual blessing. Therefore, put on the gospel and keep it on. Stand firm!

## **Implications**

*(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group)*

7. What are some of the reasons that people desert the gospel?

8. How can we help each other to "be strong in the Lord" (v. 10)?

9. Ephesians is a very intense letter with many diverse ideas. Among all the things we've discovered throughout these studies, which truth has stuck most in your mind? Why?

## ***Give thanks and pray***

- ✓ Thank God that we can rely on the strength of his might (v. 10) and the protection of his armour.
- ✓ Pray that Christians all over the world will "put on the whole armour of God" and stand firm. Pray this especially for anyone you know who is struggling in their faith at the moment.
- ✓ Pray about the things you noted down in the 'Implications' questions above.

- Soli Deo Gloria -



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