

## Ephesians: God's New Family

Date	Weekly Theme	
January 7	Ephesians 1	<i>All things belong to God,</i>
January 14	Ephesians 2	<i>Radical Grace- People made for a purpose</i>
January 21	Ephesians 3	<i>The Servant Family</i>
January 28	Ephesians 4:1-24	<i>Family Unity</i>
February 4	Ephesians 4:25-6:9	<i>Living a new life</i>
February 11	Ephesians 6:10-24	<i>Family Armor</i>

### Small Group Time

Take time to greet each other, share names if necessary, and share your highs, lows, and prayer concerns. Then take time to pray for one another.

Address the following questions:

*What do you know about the book of Ephesians?*

*What do you believe, did Christ truly come to redeem, or save, or bring back under his authority?*

### Processing the Questions - Overview

#### The "Author"

- Ephesians is purported to be written by the Apostle Paul.
  - Paul was one of the earliest converts to Christianity.
  - He was a Pharisee of high discipline. His persecution of the early Christian church before his own conversion is unparalleled. The guy was zealous.
  - He worked for about 12 years before he penned his first letter, I Corinthians. This happened around 50 CE.
  - He helped form several communities in Christ throughout the Mediterranean.
  - He worked with a team of people. We know of 14 for sure, but some estimates rank the team as high as 40 men and women.

### Why a Letter?

- A letter, for almost every culture, is a very real way to make an absent person present.
- It communicates feelings and thoughts.
- Paul, about 12 years into his ministry, began writing *epistles* (letters) to certain groups.
  - Some were private. (Philemon)
  - Others were corporate. (I & 2 Corinthians)
    - These were meant to be read out loud to a gathering so everyone could hear. Hmmm...sounds familiar.
  - Some were general, which is what we may have here with Ephesians.
    - These were called *circular* letters. In the heading, a blank would appear where the church's name would go. So, if the letter were circulated around from church to church, it could be customized to fit each particular church. "Greetings to the Church at ----."
- We give credit, in Sunday School formats, for Paul's authorship of 13 (or 14 if you grew up where I did) letters.
  - Organized by letters to churches first, then those written to individuals
  - These letters are arranged in terms of length beginning with Romans and ending with Titus. (It is common belief today that Paul did not pen Hebrews). Some scholars have determined that Ephesians is actually a few words longer than Galatians and the order of the two reversed. (Not chronological)
  - The truth is Paul maybe wrote seven of these books by himself.
    - Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.
    - What happened? The thesis is that, after Paul's death, his team with which he worked continued to write letters in his name.
      - BUT THAT'S PLAGIARISM! Not so...not in this ancient culture. In this ancient culture, the practice of writing in someone's name was called: *pseudopigrapha*. (Literally, "false writing.")
      - This practice of writing a letter under someone else's name offered credibility and authority where one would usually not get any. Paul's name carried great weight. His team continued to write to lift up and encourage the communities that he had helped form, or who knew of him well.
    - This practice was discovered after the Enlightenment with its scientific and rational mindset that was brought to everything.
      - Why do apples fall from trees?
      - Why are we noticing stylistic and theological differences within the same bodies of work by the same authors?
        - Aha! Different authors, different styles, different theologies!
      - **5 factors** are commonly understood as the measure of authenticity – Structure (Blessing and Thanksgiving), Vocabulary (words used, length of sentences, terms), Theology, Situation of the letter, and Writing Style.
    - Our analytical eyes caught the differences in Ephesians.
      - Ephesians is a captivity letter, which meant it was written during one of Paul's many imprisonments.
      - But it doesn't bear the tone that his other captivity letters do.

## Winter Bible Study 2015

- It could have been written underneath Paul's supervision but by one of his team members.
- 30% of Colossians is contained in Ephesians. Colossians may have been a template for Ephesians.

### Letters Attributed to Paul

Undisputed Letters	Deutero-Pauline Letters	Captivity Letters	Pastoral Letters
Romans	2 Thessalonians	Ephesians	1 Timothy
1 Corinthians	Ephesians	Philippians	2 Timothy
2 Corinthians	Colossians	Colossians	Titus
Galatians	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	
Philippians	2 Timothy	Philemon	
1 Thessalonians	Titus		
Philemon			

### Chronology of Paul's Life

Event	Earliest Date	Latest Date
Conversion	32	36
Initial time in Arabia and Damascus	32-35	36-39
First visit to Jerusalem	35	39
Interim years in Cilicia and Syria	35-45	40-45
Private meeting with church leaders	45	46
First missionary journey	46-48	46-49
Apostolic Council	48	49
Second missionary journey	49-51	50-52
Third missionary journey	52-57	54-58
Arrested in Jerusalem	57	58
Prisoner in Caesarea	57-59	58-60
Voyage to Rome	59-60	60-61
Prisoner in Rome	60-62	61-63
Death	62	67

## The Opening – God’s Mystery at Work – Ephesians 1:1-14

- Let’s take a look at what happens in the first 14 verses.
  - This is basically the opening greeting of the letter.
    - It follows a Jewish prayer formula called the *berakah*.
      - It blesses God.
      - It recounts why it is blessing God.
      - It interjects periodic responses of praise.
  - In this prayer, the “mystery” (1:9) of God’s work is revealed.
    - God is bringing about his kingdom through the redemptive death of his son Jesus.
    - God makes this redemption available to all people as a free gift.
      - 1:10 – in this verse “Paul” states that literally all things in the universe will be brought up through Christ’s death and resurrection.
        - The case for universal salvation.
    - This is an expansion of Romans 8:28-30. ‘We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.’<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.’ (NRSV)
    - Mystery – used six times in Ephesians, not a puzzle that we have to figure out, but something hidden that cannot be figured out – only explained by an “insider.” A divine mystery can only be revealed by God.
    - The first sign of God’s mystery is the realization of the Holy Spirit.
      - We, who are in Christ, are caught up in a spirit of adoption.
      - We, who are in Christ, enjoy the inheritance.
    - Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we enjoy the above, future identity, in the here and now.
      - Right now, we don’t deserve much. Our sin surely doesn’t buy us the rights to the kingdom of heaven.
      - But God does. And God makes that kingdom manifest through the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the power of Christ’s life in us.
      - God sends us the gift of the inheritance from our futures.
    - The promise is that all people will, one day, be in Christ.
    - Let us pray that we will be in that gathering.

**Ephesians 1:15-23**                      *The power of Christ*

- Verse 15: Their reputation precedes them.
  - This is a community of faith that is grounded in Jesus.
  - This community loves the *saints*. Who are the saints? Those called by Jesus to lives of faith and a witness to God’s redemptive purposes.
- Verse 16: How wonderful would it have been for a community of faith to receive a letter like this. “I give thanks for you! And I pray for you to God!”
- Verses 17-19: We don’t come to the life of faith fully baked. We don’t say, “Yes!” to Jesus and then have everything together. Rather, a life of faith is made up of a daily dying and rising. We grow and are shaped by the God of creation who in the course of a life of faith gives us *wisdom and revelation* about what exactly this call to be witnesses is all about. We don’t get it in the beginning, the grandeur of this calling. And we probably don’t get it all in the end. But the ability to see the grandeur of this call to faith grows in us through the workings of the spirit in the life of faith. The spirit matures us.
- It’s also significant to note that Paul prays that his audience will realize just how wonderful and huge this hope is (that we are called into) and just how full of power this Jesus is.
  - The word “church” is never used to refer to the local congregation. It refers to the “universal church.” This church includes all people who have been reconciled with God through Christ.
  - Verses 19-23: Paul prays that the church might know fully the power of God in Jesus, which is no less than the power of the resurrection itself; the animating force of life that heals Jesus’ body and raises him from the dead. And not only this, but raises him and empowers him with all Lordship over...EVERYTHING!
    - To reframe this, we as human beings fear the power of the atom and our ability to destroy the earth ten times over.
    - We fear our neighbors, our schools, and strangers.
    - We fear those far away—those who look different, act different, believe different, and think different.
    - But what Paul is about to say, is that we belong to the one who can bring life in the midst of death.
    - We belong to the maker of the atom, and the maker of the universe.
    - We belong to the one who is outside of time and creation, and yet is immeasurably present and accessible to it.
    - We belong to the Lord of all. And a people who belong like this, have a hope that goes deeper than all others. This hope and access to this power (God’s power of life and of the resurrection) changes how we live our lives.

**Moment for Reflection**

*How does this hope and power change how we live our lives?*

- Jesus is not a private Lord, he is *corporate* Lord. In the Greek, we call him *pantokrator*, all-ruling.
- Jesus is not a private, personal, pocket God to be pulled out and rubbed like a lamp or Buddha's belly when we need to make a wish. Jesus is Lord of ALL!

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*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,*

*Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.*

*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

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**Moment for Reflection**

*What are the implications of Jesus' Lordship for us?*

*Do you act (as Jesus' people) as if you were in the service of a King?  
Why or why not?*

*And if you did, how would your life look different?*

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**Questions and Processing - What kinds of clarification do you need?**

**For Next Week:**

**Read Chapter 2 and consider the following questions**

The author writes, “You were dead...” What do you think he means by this? How could we be dead?

And what do you think the author means by saying in verse 3, “... and we were by nature children of wrath, like everybody else?”

What does it mean for the author to then say that God has “made us alive?” If we were dead, how then are we alive? What does it mean to be alive?

Why has God made us alive? For what purpose?

Why has God made us (as individuals first, and then as God’s people) “alive?”

**Closing Prayer**