



# EPHESIANS

## LEADER GUIDE

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for your willingness to lead the discussion of this wonderful epistle. My purpose in these notes is not to give you all the answers to the questions in the study, but to help you lead the students in discovering the teaching of each passage. In some cases I will suggest follow-up questions to prod the students if they need hints. I will also provide a little help with hard passages. I strongly encourage you to consult the ESV Study Bible as you prepare for leading your discussion. It will often give you more help than I can supply in these brief notes. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions.

# WEEK 1, EPHESIANS 1:1-14

After the students have examined the passage to discover the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, you might briefly reinforce the truth that the whole Trinity is involved in our salvation. The Persons of the Trinity always work together. This realization helps us avoid common misconceptions. For example:

- Some people think that the Father is an angry judge who has to be bought off by the loving Son. (Notice that the Father predestined us in love, vv. 4-5).
- Some people focus only on Christ and pay little attention to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Don't let the group get hung up on predestination. You may have some who will try to turn all the newbies into Calvinists on the spot. You may have some Arminians who will suggest that God chooses those whom He foresees will have faith. Just bring the group back to the text. You might say something like this. "Let's not get hung up on various interpretations of predestination. Let's just list what the text says the Father does."

The last question in the Observe and Interpret section asks the group to look for repeated words and phrases. They should at least come up with these (though there are others):

- "The praise of His glory" (vv. 6, 12, 14). Follow up questions: What does this tell you about God? Why is it important that we praise the glory of God's grace?
- "In Christ," "in Him," "in Whom." If they don't come up with these on their own, you might ask them to count the number of times such phrases occur. Follow up question: Why doesn't God give any spiritual blessings apart from our being in Christ? (Then in succeeding lessons you might point out the "in Christ" passages so that the group begins to latch on to the importance of this phrase.)

The first question in the Apply section asks how this passage reassures anxious believers in Christ that their salvation is secure. Many believers wrestle for a long time with assurance of salvation. You may want to give the group time to express their own anxieties so that they don't feel alone in their struggles. Some in the group may be able to share how God has reassured them. Some of the truths the group might find helpful in this passage are the following:

- If God chose us before the foundation of the world, and if He knew all about our sins before we committed them, then He has no reason to change His mind when we fail.
- Jesus' blood doesn't cover some of our sins. His blood redeems us from all our trespasses.
- The Holy Spirit keeps us in Christ all the way to the final completion of our redemption. We don't have to be afraid of deserting our faith in Christ because He is God's seal on our souls.

At some point in these lessons, students may have questions about the Trinity. I have written a brief tri-fold tract on the Trinity that Pastor Josh or I can supply for your group.

## WEEK 2, EPHESIANS 1:15-22

These are not teaching notes. They are here to help you answer questions that may come up. Try, if possible, to let the students think through the questions. Don't jump in too fast with the "approved" answer.

v. 15 Paul had founded the church, but he had been a prisoner for several years, so he was relieved and thankful to hear that they were still faithfully following Christ.

v. 17 How is the Father the God of Christ (see also John 20:17)? There is perfect equality among the Persons of the Trinity. When the eternal Son of God became a man, He took on the form of a servant, and as a human being, He relates to the Father as we must do (Philippians 2:5-11). So the Father is the God of Jesus the man, but He is not the God of Jesus as God.

v. 18 What is God's "inheritance in the saints"? Two answers have been proposed. Paul may be referring to the inheritance believers receive when their redemption is complete (vv. 11, 14). Another view is that God regards His people as His special inheritance. In the Old Testament, God regarded Israel as His inheritance (Jeremiah 12:7-9).

v. 23 Christ fills all in all. This may mean that Christ fills the whole universe (Jeremiah 23:24) or that He fills the universal church with His presence and power. Either way, it is an indication of His deity.

v.23 Other passages that speak of the church as the body of Christ include Ephesians 4:12-16; Colossians 1:18, 24; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

## WEEK 3, EPHESIANS 2:1-10

v. 3 The word “flesh” is used in two senses. In the first case, “the lusts of the flesh” include all sinful desires, which is further broken down into “desires of the flesh” (physical desires) and “of the mind” (unholy thoughts). The NASB is quite literal here, using “flesh” twice. Other translations may use synonyms for one use of “flesh” or both.

Observe and Interpret, question 3. One tie-in with Ephesians 1 is the repeated use of “grace” in both chapters. Note especially Ephesians 1:6, “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” All of God’s attributes and actions are glorious, but His grace is the brightest beam of His glory. God’s purpose in creation was to have creatures on whom He might “show the surpassing riches of His grace” (2:7). Thus, God’s display of His own glory is not selfish because it involves the greatest self-giving, for the greatest good, to the most unworthy. The group may notice other links between the chapters.

## WEEK 4, EPHESIANS 2:11-3:13

If the students give quick, shallow answers to the observation questions, prod them to look again. Ask them to explain what their observations mean.

The theme of this section is the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church of Christ. The application at the end draws attention to the gospel as the great principle on which unity must be based in the church today. When the gospel becomes secondary to other issues (political, personal, or practical) disharmony results. This theme will recur throughout the epistle.

Extra Question. If you have time, you might ask how the angels learn more about the wisdom of God through the church. This is an opinion/discussion question.

Extra Observation: “Eternal purpose” in 3:11 ties in with God’s purpose in 1:9-11. All of God’s plans and purposes were fixed from eternity past. He doesn’t have to make anything up on the fly.

Apply Question 3—How do the prayer principles relate to unity in the church? I don’t have one definite answer in mind. Let them think. Paul brings prayer up twice in this section, so in his mind there is some relevance to the topic at hand. Here are a couple of thoughts, but the group may have other insights.

- There are not two ways of access to God: one for Jews and another for Gentiles. All must come to God in the same way. The same is true for us today. When we start thinking we are superior to other Christians, we may assume God listens to us more than to them. None of us is worthy to be heard apart from our union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. God listens to Calvinists and Arminians. He listens to people who sing hymns and people who sing Christian country-western. He even listens to Democrats and Republicans who love Jesus. If God listens to all these other believers, maybe I should too.
- People whose confidence rests only in Christ (3:12) are less apt to be arrogant toward others.

## WEEK 5, EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Regarding the flow chart (question 1)—I don't expect them all to get it "right." This is an exercise to push them to think more carefully through the text. So don't correct them if they seem miss some of the connections between different parts of the prayer. However, for your own study, it is clear in Greek (though not necessarily in English) that there are three main petitions. Each petition has other phrases related to it.

- First petition: "That he would grant you... to be strengthened with power through His Spirit" (v. 16 through the first part of v. 17)
- Second petition: —"That you... may be able to comprehend... and know the love of Christ" (the second part of v. 17 through the first part of v. 19)
- Third petition: "That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (the end of v. 19)

Dimensions of Christ's love—Paul may not have anything specific in mind regarding these dimensions. It is more important that the students think about this than that they come up with the best response. Here is one suitable expansion of this part of the prayer.

- Breadth—to all nations, kinds, and classes of people (Revelation 7:9)
- Length—from eternity past to eternity future (Jeremiah 31:3)
- Height—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3)
- Depth—God reaches down, down, down to save us (Ephesians 4:9)

Encourage your group to read the short essay, "My Heart Christ's Home" by Robert Boyd Munger. You might read it in advance. It is included as an appendix at the end of our eleven studies on Ephesians.

## WEEK 6, EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Note on 4:8-9 to be used only if someone asks what “descended into the lower parts of the earth” means. Don’t get hung up on this. Some suggest that Jesus descended to the realm of the dead to bring Old Testament saints to heaven. There is no evidence for this. It is a medieval Catholic addition to Scripture. Here is a simple summary of the passage: Christ descended from heaven to earth (= the “lower parts”) in His incarnation. His resurrection was a victory over Satan and the demons who are represented as captives in a triumphal procession with Christ at the head. The gifts Christ won by His victory are gifted leaders for the church (vv. 11-12).

The Apostle Paul is concerned with unity in the local church. He doesn’t address questions related to denominational unity because denominations did not exist in his day. He certainly doesn’t envision one world-wide organizational union of all local churches. If those issues come up, you might suggest that we can only have unity with other groups if we are unified doctrinally (v. 14), but that we should always deal kindly and in love with genuine believers in other traditions (vv. 2, 15).

## WEEK 7, EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Notes on vv. 22, 24 “old self” and “new self.”

- The “old self” (v. 22) and the “new self” (v. 24)—NASB, ESV, NIV—are literally the “old man” and the “new man” (KJV). The “old self” and “new self” are not the so-called “old nature” and the so-called “new nature”—terms which are never found in the Greek New Testament.
- The “old self” is our old identity in Adam before we were saved. The “new self” is our new identity in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14) because the Holy Spirit has come to indwell us. We were in Adam, “the first man.” Now we are in Christ, “the second man” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45-47).
- The “old self”—or old identity—has been laid aside; the “new self”—or new identity—has been put on (Colossians 3:9-10). Since these are past events they must have occurred at conversion. This is confirmed by Romans 6:6, “our old self was crucified with Him [Christ].” We are not what we once were.
- In Ephesians and in Colossians we do not see the “old self” fighting with the “new self.” Rather, we see the Christian choosing to live in the old way or the new way. There is nothing in the New Testament about the so-called “old nature” fighting with the so-called “new nature.” That kind of language takes the Holy Spirit out of the picture. The struggle within believers is between Holy Spirit and the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17).

This is background for the leader, but it is too complicated for your group discussion. I give it just in case the students bring up one of the common errors associated with old nature/new nature terminology. If they do, just take them back to the text and say, “Let’s focus on the characteristics of the old self and new self.” Common errors include:

- Framing victory in the Christian life in terms of an old nature/new nature struggle and thus minimizing the role of the Holy Spirit.
- Insisting that since the old nature is dead, our responsibility is to reckon (i.e. make believe) that it is unresponsive to sin, just as a dead dog is unresponsive to a swift kick. This is based on a misunderstanding of Romans 6:6-11.

Follow-up question for # 3 (Observe and Interpret). “How can you put on the new self.... How do you live out what you are.” If they have trouble with this, you might suggest that they list the main verbs in verses 20-32.

Parallel passages for Ephesians 4:30. Grieving God, or the Holy Spirit (Psalm 78: 40; Isaiah 63:10).

## WEEK 8, EPHESIANS 5:1-14

v. 2 “Fragrant offering”/ “fragrant aroma.” In the Old Testament the smoke going up from an animal burnt on the altar was viewed as a pleasing aroma to God (Exodus 29:18, 25). It wasn’t as if God enjoyed that particular smell. It was the offering itself that pleased Him, and symbolically the offering was ascending up into the heavens where God has His throne. As Christ’s offering of Himself was a fragrant aroma to God, so our lives are to be the fragrance of Christ in the world (2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

vv. 3-5 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Galatians 5:19-21 also indicate that a life characterized by gross sin is incompatible with any hope of heaven. However, the worst sinner can be washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus.

vv. 2, and 8-14 God is Love (1 John 4:8); God is Light (1 John 1:5-7).

## WEEK 9, EPHESIANS 5:15-21

Introduction to the Observe and Interpret section.

Because the filling of the Spirit has been so frequently misunderstood, this week’s study will be more directive than most of the studies are. On the day of Pentecost, the Lord Jesus did three different things that should not be confused. Believers–

- Were baptized in the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). [The preposition may be translated “in,” “with,” or “by.” I prefer “in” because it more closely parallels water baptism. We are immersed “in” the water. We are immersed “in” the Spirit. Our English translations choose “with” because the translators don’t want to take sides in the immersion/sprinkling controversy.]
- Were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:5).
- Spoke in tongues (Acts 2:5)

It is important that students not think these all describe the same event or experience. The best book on baptism, fullness and gifts of the Spirit is a short, easy-to-read paperback by John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*.

An additional passage—If there is time

In Galatians 5:16, the apostle commands us to walk in the Spirit. Like the command to be filled with the Spirit, “walk in the Spirit” tells us to surrender to the Spirit’s control and direction. What happens when people do not walk in the Spirit (vv. 19-21)? What does the Spirit produce when we do walk in step with Him (vv. 22-23)?

## WEEK 10, EPHESIANS 5:21-6:9

I chose not to focus this lesson on marriage or to have separate lessons on raising children or on work, but rather to stress the general principle of submission. Even husbands are called to submit to the needs of their wives as Jesus, who is Lord over all, submitted to death on a cross in order to save His people. The discussion in your group may end up going in several different directions, which is fine.

## WEEK 11, EPHESIANS 6:10-24

Sometimes students get so wrapped up in what each piece of armor does for a Roman soldier, that they miss the big picture: we are involved in a spiritual battle against real persons who are evil beyond our imagination. Evil is not an impersonal force or an influence. All evil is a twisting of God's good creation. The devil and his demons are twisted, distorted angels. While we should not depersonalize the devil, neither should we look for a demon behind every bush. That leads either to paranoia or to indiscriminate, unwise "power encounters" with demons. There is no command or suggestion in Scripture to figure out the name of every demon tormenting a person or a city or a country before we cast it out. Just pray in Jesus name for the defeat of whoever or whatever is attacking you.

When I feel unrelenting pressure toward sin or any of the dreadful Ds (despair, desolation, despondency, discouragement, depression, and dejection), I ask my Father to send away any demons lurking about and to fill me with His Spirit "because greater is He that is in [me] than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Note the "he" pronouns.





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