





A PREACHING AND DISCUSSION SERIES ON EPHESIANS “BLESSED!”

Bible references are taken from the NIV 2011 version, but it is suggested that you refer to other versions as well – particularly the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

This study can be done prior to the Sunday sermon as preparation, or afterwards to reinforce what has already been heard. Some studies may take more than one week if all the questions are completed. Otherwise the group may determine a selection of the questions.

Each week you might start your session by sharing ways in which God has blessed you during the last week.

John West 2012

AN INTRODUCTORY THOUGHT

from the New International Bible Commentary

This letter challenges the pietistic individualism and corresponding weak doctrine of the church that we so often find in evangelicalism. ‘Don’t look at the church,’ we say, ‘Look at Christ!’. Paul, however, expects the outsider to see Christ and God’s unifying purpose for the world precisely in the church. The challenge for a fragmented and ever-dividing Protestantism today could barely be sharper: Ephesians calls us to build bridges not minefields. It is also a challenge for those who promote separate white and black churches, segregated rich, middle-class, and ‘worker’ churches *etc.* Such homogeneous groups may naturally get on better together, but how do they reflect the gospel of reconciliation? Ephesians challenges all of us to find better ways of making our local churches real communities of people whose lives and worship together *as a church* witness to the cosmic unity begun in Christ, and are deeply imbued with his presence.



Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 6:23-24





2 Sept “Blessed with Protection”

Eph 6:10-23

Psa 65:1-8

John 15:1-8

Sentence: Ephesians 6:10-11

Prayer of the Day:

All-powerful God,

We thank you that you are always with us as our strength and our redeemer

As we put on the armour that you have provided

Give us courage to stand against all the powers of darkness that

we may live for you and for your glory,

In the strong Name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Who are the powers that Paul refers to in v12? How is that struggle played out in the lives of Christians?

Is putting on the armour a daily ritual, like getting dressed in the morning, should we be clothed in the armour all the time or could it be both?

What is the purpose of the armour (v13 -14a)? Why do you think Paul refers to the “full” armour? What might it mean to neglect some of it?

Consider what it means in practice to:-

Put on the belt of truth

Put on the breastplate of righteousness

Have feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Take up the shield of faith

Take the helmet of salvation

Take up the sword of the Spirit

v18 What does praying in the Spirit mean?

What sort of prayer is included here?

v19 What sort of prayer does Paul seek for himself?

Reflect on what you have learned and what you have put into practice as a result of reading Ephesians.



1 July “Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing”

Eph 1:1-14

Psa 112

John 16:17-24

Sentence: Ephesians 1:3

Prayer of the Day:

Provider God, who blesses us with every spiritual blessing

We praise you for the gift of your Son

Who died for our sins to make for us a way into your family

Who rose again to pioneer the pathway to heaven

And who lives with you and the Holy Spirit

One God, now and for ever. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Ephesians 1:1-14

v3 What do you think “every spiritual blessing means” and is this your experience?

What do you think it means for those blessings to be “in the heavenly places”?

v4 In what way is being chosen a blessing?

What is the purpose behind that choosing?

How do you understand being “blameless”?

v5 What are the features of earthly adoption that may help us to understand God’s adoption of us?

v6-7 What blessings do you see in these verses?

v8-10 What is the mystery of God’s will? What are the “times” mentioned in v10 and what would you expect to see when the mystery is fulfilled?

v11 What does this verse tell us about the way God works out his plan

v12 What is his plan for us, and how will we know if we are fulfilling it

v13 How were the Ephesians included in God’s plan? v14 What was the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this?

PRAY: Giving thanks to God for the blessings you have read and heard about today.





8 July "Blessed with Power"

Eph 1:15-23

Psa 29

John 20:19-23, 30-31

Sentence: Eph 1:20

Prayer of the Day:

**God of all power, who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead:
 Give to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know the hope to
 which you have called us
 And your immeasurably great power for us who believe,
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord
 Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
 One God, for ever and ever. Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Ephesians 1:15-23

v15 "For this reason" – What reason is Paul referring to, and why does "this reason" prompt Paul to give thanks and remember them in his prayers (v16)

v17-19a List the things that Paul prays for the Ephesians.

Discuss what is meant by, "the Spirit of Revelation", "the eyes of your heart", "the hope to which he has called you" and "the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people"

v19-23 What is the "power for us who believe" like? How does that make you feel?

What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

v20 What does it mean for Jesus to have that dominion *in the present age*?

v22 Discuss the significance of Jesus being head of everything *for the church*.

v23 How is the church the "fullness of him" and what does it mean for him to fill everything in every way?

PRAY: A prayer based on 1:16-19a. What difference would expect to see when this prayer is answered?



6:1-4 What do these verses have to teach us about parenting, and what do they teach children? How far should honouring parents be taken...
If the parents are not Christians and hamper the Christian development of their child?

If the parents are abusive?

If older parents are manipulative and demanding of their older (even married) children?

What does 'honouring' mean in these contexts?

6:4-9 The Bible is sometimes criticised for being pro-slavery (or at least neutral to it). It must be remembered that slavery was entrenched in the culture of Paul's day and that the slaves themselves often relied on being a servant or slave for their living. Those who have watched TV series such as "Upstairs, downstairs" know that servants were still widely employed in the early 20th century. Although these later servants had more rights, the divide suggested in the title, between upper and lower classes is usually considered to be a quite inappropriate way for human beings to consider each other, especially in Australian society.

We are, in fact, all called to be servants, to the gospel (Ephesians 3:7), each other (5:21) and to God (2 Corinthians 6:3-10). Jesus affirms that although a master, he came to serve, rather than be served. This is a long way from encouraging or giving people permission to own others and look down on them (Matthew 20:25-28) (1 Timothy 1:10 where slave-trading is condemned). Servant-hood is a Christian virtue, but it is meaningless unless it is done voluntarily .

In this context we may say that Paul's priority was not the abolition of slavery across the Roman Empire. We may imagine that even if he had seen it from our twenty-first century perspective, he would have had the same success of abolishing it as he would have dismantling the Roman Empire. What Paul did was to major on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which in its turn would have the effect of modifying behaviour in the short term, and revolutionising societies that embraced it in the longer term.

(For further study see also: Titus 2:9, Philemon, Philippians 2:6-8).

In the light of Paul's priorities, what are his instructions to both slaves and masters, and what is the underlying aim in their following the instructions?





26 Aug "Blessed for Sound Relationships"

Eph 5:21-6:9 Psa 103:6-14 John 13:1-16

Sentence: Eph 5:21

Prayer of the Day:

**Loving God,
Whose Son, Jesus Christ, humbled himself,
And came to this earth, not to be served, but to serve
in laying down his life for the world:
Help us to live as servants to you and to one another
with all humility and love,
through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9

Verse 21 is usually placed at the end of vv8-20 as another general command. Others feel it stands as the beginning of vv20-32 and beyond, introducing a section on relationships...

Husbands and wives and Christ and the Church (5:22-32).

Children and parents (6:1-4)

Slaves and Masters/God (6:4-9)

5:22-32 Fifty years ago, no-one would have any problems with this passage. Husbands ruled the home, in name at least. Today we find it much more problematic and the passage is often explained away as a cultural approach to marriage, which we have now progressed beyond. Others seek to reinterpret or understand it against a background which repudiates the idea of submission. If we are still to take these verses seriously, and in the light of verse 20, how might a wife to submit to her husband? (NB It does not tell husbands to dominate their wives).

A husband's headship is likened to Christ's relationship to the church. What does that relationship have to teach husbands?

In what way is the unity of husband and wife supposed to point to Christ and the Church?

What difference could it make to marriages if these verses were applied? Do these verses have anything to teach us about de-facto, polygamous or homosexual relationships?



15 July "Blessed with Life Unity and Peace with God"

Eph 2:1-22 Psa 34:11-18 John 5:19-27

Sentence: Eph 2:8-9

Prayer of the Day:

**Loving God, who draws us to yourself through the death of our
Lord Jesus Christ,
As we thank you for the offer of forgiveness and peace with you,
Help us not to glory in our own works, but to trust in your free
gift of grace;
That we may sit with your Son, in glory
Where you reign, one God for ever and ever . Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Ephesians 2:1-22

v1-3 What does it mean to be 'dead' in the context of these verses. What are the consequences of this way of life?

v4-5 What do these verses tell us about the nature of God? When have you experienced God's love, mercy and grace?

v5 What does being "alive" with Christ mean for you?

v6 seems to indicate that we are already raised and seated with Christ. What do you think that means? v7 Why has he done this?

v8-9 If you ask a person, "If you were to stand before God and he asked you, 'Why should I allow you in to heaven?' What would you say?" The answer will often boil down to, "You should let me in because of the good things I have done." How might asking them to read this verse help them to understand the truth?

v10 What do we learn about God's purposes for us in this verse. What might "created in Christ Jesus" mean?

v11-12 What was the sign of being "in" or "out" as far as people's relationship to God was concerned. What did it mean to be on the outside?

v13-15a What has made the difference? What has God done to bring us near? What is the *dividing wall of hostility*? What did it mean for Christ to "set aside the law and its commands"? Are the commandments no longer relevant to us?

v16-17 What was the purpose of the breaking down of the barriers and what difference should that knowledge make to our attitudes and behaviours?

v18 How do you think the Spirit brings about our mutual access to God?
 v19-20 What are the consequences? What foundation have the apostles and prophets provided for the "household" of God?
 v20-22 What is the significance of Christ Jesus being the "chief cornerstone" and of the Christian community (Jews and Gentiles in Christ) being described as a "holy temple in the Lord"
 What evidence have you seen of the Christian community being a "dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit?"

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT...

If circumcision is no longer the sign of who belongs to God, is there a new sign now?
 In Galatians, Paul criticises the Christian community there for being influenced by a group who were insisting on circumcision as a sign of belonging to God. What "signs" do people sometimes think are the necessary extras these days? How would you answer people who think that way?



19 Aug "Blessed to live in The Light"

Eph 5:1-20

Psa 119:97-106

John 8:1-12

Sentence: Ephesians 5:1-2

Prayer of the Day:

**Holy God,
 Cleanse us from all impurity
 and empower us to live as your children,
 Walking in the light of Our Lord, Jesus Christ,
 with all wisdom to understanding
 and doing your will, now and for ever. Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 5:1-20

v1-2 in what major ways are we to imitate God and Christ?

v3-5 What are some of the things to be avoided?

Does this passage mean that if you are greedy you won't go to heaven? if not, what does it mean? How is greed idolatry?

In general terms what guidelines would you give to someone who asked what constitutes greed, obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, especially since the definition seems to change with each generation.

v6 In the light of his verse, are we too easy on ourselves when it comes to greed?

v6-14 Discuss the characteristics of light and darkness when it comes to Christian living.

These verses have a lot to do with the sort of company Christians keep (see v7). Does this mean we should separate ourselves from the people described in vv1-7, and have nothing to do with them?

V15 What sort of opportunities do you think Paul might be thinking of, in the light of evil days?

V17 The antidote to foolishness appears to be understanding the Lord's will. How might we do that?
 (Romans 12:1-2, Eph 1:17, 4:22-24)

V18-20 Comment on the contrast between drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit, singing and giving thanks to the Father in everything. Why do you think Paul adds, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"?





12 Aug “Blessed with a New Way to Live”

Eph 4:17-32

Psa 1

John 17:6-18

Sentence: Ephesians 4:32

Prayer of the Day:

Lord of Life

Teach us your ways

That we may put away those things which displease you

And live in newness of life

Renewed in our minds

To imitate you in true righteousness and holiness

Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 4:17-32

v17-19 What do these verses tell us of the way that sin desensitises us towards God?

v20-24 What does it mean to put off the "old self" and how do we put on the new self? See Romans 6:6 and 12:1-2

v25-32 What are some of the evidences of a renewed self that Paul outlines here. Do you have experience of the practical benefits of applying this advice?

v30 In the context of this passage what do you think it means to grieve the Holy Spirit?

Comment on "sealed for the day of redemption."

v32 What is the impetus for forgiving others? When is it hardest to forgive? What are the results of unforgiveness? When have you seen forgiveness make a difference?

Philip Yancey’s book, “What’s so Amazing About Grace” has moving and inspiring examples of the grace of forgiveness at work.



22 July “Blessed with Understanding of The Mystery”

Eph 3:1-13

Psa 111

John 16:5-16

Sentence: Eph 3:12 “In Christ Jesus we have access...”

Prayer of the Day:

Welcoming God, who has opened the door for us to become heirs to eternal life

Give us such insight that we may make known your wisdom to the powers both seen and unseen,

So that your glory may be seen in all the earth

Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 3:1-13

v1-5 Paul writes about a mystery which has been revealed to him, for them, the Ephesians and others. How has this mystery been made known?

v6 What is the mystery? Can you see how this mystery has been revealed even in the Old Testament? (Genesis 12:1-2 for example). What is the "promise in Jesus Christ"?

v7-9 What do these verses reveal about Paul?

v9-11 What does this reveal about God's purposes? What is God's vehicle for making the mystery known, who is it to be revealed to and what does that mean for this church - for you? How should we carry out the task?

v12 How does all of this mean that we can approach God with confidence? What does that mean in practice?

v13 How might the Ephesians have been discouraged by Paul's sufferings and how could his sufferings be their glory?

More Mystery References...

Romans 16:25-27

1 Corinthians 15:50-54

Ephesians 1:7-10

Colossians 1:24-28, 2:2-3, 4:3-4

1 Timothy 3:16

Revelation 10:7





29 July "Blessed with the Love of Christ"

Eph 3:14-21

Psa 36:5-12

John 15:9-15

Sentence: Ephesians 3:18-19

Prayer of the Day:

**Loving God,
 Strengthen us in our inner being with power, through your Spirit
 That Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith,
 So that we may be grounded in your love,
 to know the breadth and height and depth of the love of your Son
 and filled with all your fullness.
 through The Saviour, who died for us,
 and has risen to live with you
 and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 3:14-21

v14 "For this reason" Paul kneels before the Father. Look back to determine what the reason is.

v15 What is the significance for earthly families that they derive their name from the Father?

v16 Paul kneels to pray. What does he pray for the Ephesians? What is our "inner being"?

v17 What is the purpose of this strengthening?

v17-19 What other power does Paul pray for and what is its purpose?

What difference would you expect to see in a congregation if they understood how much God loves them and were filled with all the fullness of God?

Have you known people who were filled like that?

v20 How should this verse give us confidence in our Christian living?

Use Paul's prayer as a prayer for your group, for your parish and for your Diocese.



5 August "Blessed with Unity"

Eph 4:1-16

Psa 133

John 17:20-23

Sentence: Ephesians 4:4-5

Prayer of the Day:

**Gracious God,
 As one body in Christ
 Enable us to lead a life worthy of your calling
 With all humility and gentleness, with patience
 As we bear with one another in love,
 Maintaining the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace
 Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

Ephesians 4:1-16

v1 In his exhortations why do you think Paul mentions being a "prisoner for the Lord".

What is the calling they have received?

v2-3 What is Paul urging them to do?

v4-6 What is the basis of the unity Paul writes about?

v7 Paul begins to expand on the theme of unity by going on to talk about the diversity of "grace" or gifts given to Christians, apportioned by Christ. In what way might the word "apportioned" be significant?

v8-10 Paul inserts a quote from Psalm 68:18 expanding on the work of Christ which has made it possible for these gifts to be distributed. What was the purpose of Jesus' descent and ascent and how might this relate to Jesus apportioning grace ?

v11 How might you expect these gifts to be manifest in a Christian community?

v12-13 What are the gifts for, to what end? What is "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"?

v14-16 What will be the results of growing to that sort of maturity?

What do you think it means to speak the truth in love?

What does v16 tell us about our obligation to use our gifts?

Other "gifts" passages

1 Corinthians 12—14

Romans 12:3-8

