Ephesians: Building a Community in Christ

Introducing Ephesians

The American Christian tendency is to emphasize individual salvation without moving on to the equal importance of the saved community. We emphasize the “good news” of a new life but rarely discuss the good news of a new society.

Reading Ephesians brings correction to that problem. You can’t read it and conclude that the gospel is only about the individual. Ephesians describes God’s eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society which stands out in bright relief against the somber background of the old world.

This concept is artfully and concisely stated in the chorus to the song “The Church.”

I haven’t come for only you
But for my people to pursue
You cannot care for Me
With no regard for Her
If you love Me, you will love the Church

In your small group, discuss this statement: “If you love Me (Jesus), you will love the Church.”

What does the artist (and Scripture for that matter) mean by “the Church?”
What other substitutes do we tend to put into this sentence instead of “the Church?” I.E., “If you me, you will love _________.”
For your discussion, I have found that we typically fill this blank with things the church does.

About the Ephesians
In v. 1, Paul describes his readers as “saints” because they belong to God; they are “the faithful” or “believers” because they have trusted Christ; and they have two homes, for they reside equally “in Ephesus” and “in Christ Jesus.”

Originally a Greek colony, Ephesus was now (at Paul’s writing) the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a busy commercial port. It was also the headquarters of the cult of the goddess Diana (Artemis) whose temple, after being destroyed in the middle of the fourth century B.C., had gradually been rebuilt to become of the seven wonders of the world.

A Big-Picture Outline of Ephesians

The new life which God has given us in Christ (1:1 – 2:10)
The new society which God has created through Christ (2:11 – 3:21)
The new standards which God expects of his new society (4:1 – 5:21)
The new relationships into which God has brought us: harmony in the home and hostility to the devil (5:21 – 6:24).

The whole letter is an impressive combination of Christian doctrine, duty, faith, and life: what God has done in Christ and what we must be and do as a result.
Study One: A Life of Spiritual Blessing

Ephesians 1:1-14

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
Eph 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
Eph 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love
Eph 1:5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
Eph 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,
Eph 1:8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight
Eph 1:9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ
Eph 1:10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
Eph 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
Eph 1:12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.
Eph 1:13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
Eph 1:14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In your small group, discuss this question:

How does being a part of a Christian community help you to see God at work?

We are told in v. 3 that we are blessed with “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” In your small group:

Carefully list each of these blessings listed in vv. 4-8.
Reflect on these blessings. Discuss in your group what contributions you see each person of the Trinity giving (note: though the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name only in vv. 13-14, his activity is presumed throughout).
Discuss how these blessings relate to the past (v. 4), the present (v. 7), and the future (v. 10).

From John Stott: Mark well the statement “He chose us in him.” He put the pronouns together for a reason. GOD put US and CHRIST together in his mind. GOD determined to make US (who did not yet exist) his own children through the redeeming work of CHRIST (which had not yet taken place).

Discuss this in your small group: How are you affected by the fact that God had a plan for you before the world was created?
In your group, take a closer look at v. 10.

What is the purpose of God for the future?
What do you think it will mean to have all these things under the head of Christ?

From John Stott: At this point it may be wise to pause a moment and consider how much all of us need to develop Paul’s broad perspective. Paul was a prisoner in Rome while writing this: under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier. Though his wrist was chained and his body confined, his heart and mind inhabited eternity. He peered back “before the creation of the world” (v. 4) and on to the fullness of time (v. 10), and grasped hold of what “we have” now (v. 7) and ought to be now (v. 4) in light of these two eternities.

How blinded is our vision in comparison with Paul’s! Easily and naturally we slip into a preoccupation with our own petty little affairs. But we need to see time in the light of eternity and our present privileges and obligations in the light of our past election and future perfection. Then, if we shared Paul’s perspective, we would also share his praise. Life would become worship, and we would bless God constantly for having blessed us so richly in Christ.

In your groups, read 1:11-14 (printed below for convenience).

Eph 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
Eph 1:12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.
Eph 1:13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
Eph 1:14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In your small groups, discuss the following.

What purpose of God do these verses describe?
Describe the Holy Spirit and his role in fulfilling the purpose God described in these verses?
Look closely at vv. 5-6 and v. 12 and v. 14, taking note of the phrase “to the praise of his glory.”
What does this tell you about why God created you?
What does it mean to live “to the praise of his glory”?

For personal reflection:

How does your life need to change so that you are living to the praise of God’s glory?
How can you influence your Christian community to life for God’s glory?
Study Two: A Life of Prayer

Ephesians 1:15-23

After reflecting on the fact that believers have “every spiritual blessing” in Jesus Christ, it makes sense that Paul would then reflect and act on prayer … being CONNECTED to those blessings.
Opening Question

In what ways do we struggle to maintain a consistent prayer life?

The Passage

Eph 1:15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,
Eph 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,
Eph 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
Eph 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
Eph 1:19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might
Eph 1:20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
Eph 1:21 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 one to come.
Eph 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
Eph 1:23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Generally speaking, how would you describe the TONE of these verses?

What is it that is motivating Paul to pray for the Ephesians?

Make a list of the requests that he makes for them in this prayer.

Did you notice that even though Paul is immensely grateful for the Ephesians, this does not mean he is totally satisfied with them? His prayer request is not that they receive a new or “second” blessing, but that they may appreciate to the fullest possible extend the blessings they have already received. V. 18 … “that you may KNOW.”

What this reveals is that growth in KNOWLEDGE, specifically personal knowledge of God Himself, is indispensable to growth in holiness.

Why would the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” in v. 17 help the Ephesians to know God better?
What does it mean to “know” God?

In biblical usage, the heart is the whole inward self, comprising mind as well as emotion. What do you think it means to have “the eyes of your heart … enlightened?”

God’s inheritance points to the end of our lives … to that final inheritance of which the Holy Spirit is the guarantee (v. 14). Based on what you know from the New Testament, describe this glorious inheritance.

Look again through v. 19-22. Describe God’s incomparably great power in these verses.

Why is the resurrection and ascension such a vivid demonstration of divine power? What would it look like to see that power at work in the church today?

For you to consider on your own:

- In what ways would you like to know God better?
- What difference would it make in your life if your eyes were more opened to the hope of God’s call?
- The church is central to God’s plan (vv. 22-23). What role does the church play in your life?

Study Three: A Resurrection Life

Ephesians 2:1-10

Opening Question:

What do you think life would be like for you if you had not become a Christian?
Recall the three basic points of Paul’s prayer that we looked at last week:

Inward eyes might be enlightened by the Holy Spirit
In order to know the implications of God’s call on them.
To know the wealth of his inheritance which awaits them in heaven
To know the surpassing greatness of his power which is available to them in the meantime.

This power has been demonstrated first and foremost in the resurrection of Jesus and the exaltation of him over all powers of evil.

But this power is further demonstrated in His raising and exalting US in Christ, delivering us from evil.

Given this, let’s read out loud our passage. What is this whole paragraph REALLY about?

Eph 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins
Eph 2:2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
Eph 2:3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
Eph 2:6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
Eph 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
Eph 2:9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

VV. 2:1-3

What were the Ephesians like before the met Christ?

What does “dead” mean?

What symptoms of being “dead in transgressions and sins” do you see in those you know who are not Christians?

Before Jesus set us free, we were subject to oppressive influences from both within AND without. To what forces are non-Christians enslaved (vv. 2-3)? How have you seen these forces at work?
What does it mean to be objects of God’s wrath?

Vv. 2:4-10

In contrast to vv. 1-3, what three things has God done for us?

What do we learn about God’s desires for us from these particular verses?

What does it mean to be “made alive with Christ”?

What are the implications of being “raised up with Christ,” of being seated with him “in the heavenly realms”?

Why does Paul go out of his way to make it crystal clear that salvation is by grace, not our works or human effort?

How does Paul move from our salvation from “it” to being intimately personal in v. 10?

Based on what you have seen in this passage, how would you explain what salvation is?

For you to consider on your own …

How does this passage help you to point others away from yourself and toward God?

What hinders you from doing the good works God prepared for you to do?

Study Four: A New Humanity

Ephesians 2:11-22
Opening Question:

Compile a list of hostilities between groups of people in our world.

Eph 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—
Eph 2:12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Trace the spiritual biography of the Gentiles in the above passage.

Jews and Gentiles were strong enemies. As far as most Jews were concerned, Gentiles were essentially created by God to fuel the fires of hell. As far as the Jews were concerned, God’s love was exclusive for Israel. Given this, what do you think it would be like to be a Gentile in this pre-Christian condition described in the passage above?

What individual Christians or groups of Christians are you separated from (b/c of theological, cultural, denominational, racial, or economic differences)?

Eph 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility
Eph 2:15 by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,
Eph 2:16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.
Eph 2:17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.
Eph 2:18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

According to the verses above, how did Jesus bring Jews and Gentiles together?

What is the significance of the fact of v. 17?

Discuss the meaning of v. 18.

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
Eph 2:20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
Eph 2:21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
Eph 2:22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
According to the passage above, what is the final outcome of Christ’s destroying the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile?

How are the apostles and the prophets the foundation?

Why is Jesus considered the chief cornerstone of this building?

For Personal Application …

How does this passage encourage you about your relationship with God? With others?

How do you take for granted being near to God?

What role do you think you have in removing barriers/resolving conflict?
Ephesians 3:1-13

A New Ministry

To get things going: Describe a situation in which you felt called to do something.

1. Read the entire passage (printed above). Make a list of everything that we learn about Paul in this passage.

2. Remember that Paul is in prison writing this letter. In v. 1, he calls himself a “prisoner for (of) Christ.” Why would he consider himself a prisoner of Christ when he was in reality a prisoner of Nero?

3. Look closely at vv. 2-3 and vv. 7-8. What two privileges has God given Paul graciously?
4. V. 6 – What is the MYSTERY?

- The Greek word “mystery” means something differently than it does in English. In English, it means something like a “closely guarded secret.” In Greek, it means something that once was closely guarded but is now open. It is a truth that is beyond human discovery, but is revealed by God and so now belongs openly to the whole church.

5. How does Paul describe himself in v. 8? How does Paul’s self-description encourage you in the ways you are serving God?

   a. Do you see what the unexpected part of the “mystery” is?
   b. What is God’s intent for his church?

7. Why do you think that God would want his wisdom made know to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms?

The major lesson I want you to see in this passage is the CENTRALITY of the church. This is consistent with Jesus’ teaching on his disciples … the CHURCH … being “salt and light,” and no one else. The tendency of some (maybe some of us!) is to construct a Christianity which consists entirely of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ and has virtually nothing to do with the church. Others make grudging concession to the need for church membership, but add that they have given up the ecclesiastical institution is hopeless. Every church in every place at every time is in need of reform and renewal. But we need to beware lest we despite the church of God and are blind to his work in history.

For Personal Application:

1. What is your attitude toward the church, and how might it need to change?
Ephesians 3:14-21

A New Confidence

To get things going … What have you learned from a Christian whose background is different from yours? Be sure to consider those who are different in terms of age, denomination, ethnicity, gender, social status, etc.

Second, let’s make a list of prayer requests.

Diving In

1. Let’s make a list of Paul’s prayer requests in vv. 14-19. What are the repeated themes that stand out?

2. Paul begins this passage with “For this reason.” What’s the reason for Paul’s prayer and its specific content?

3. How is God characterized in vv. 14-15? How does our own understanding of God impact how we approach him in our own prayers? How do our prayers speak to how we view God?

4. The dimensions of Christ’s love are to be comprehended “together with all the saints.” Why is this emphasized? Is it possible to know Jesus apart from other Christians? What is the nature of the relationship between the individual Christian and the Church?

5. What effect would it have on the church if the prayer that we could all grasp the love of Christ were answered?

6. In vv. 20-21, Paul’s great benediction, how is God’s power demonstrated? How accurately does this benediction communicate your own perception and expectation of God?

7. How does this prayer demonstrate the centrality of the church in God’s plan for the world?

For Personal Application

1. How freely and confidently do you pray/approach God?

2. In what current situation or relationship do you have the opportunity to learn from other Christians?

3. How would you like to grow in the way that you pray for your church?
Ephesians 4:1-16

Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
Eph 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
Eph 4:3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—
Eph 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
Eph 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
Eph 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.
Eph 4:8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”
Eph 4:9 ( In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?
Eph 4:10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,
Eph 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
Eph 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
Eph 4:14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
Eph 4:16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Sooner or later, one has to move from studying the content of the gospel in our everyday lives. After three chapters of theology and principles, Paul moves into the practical outpouring of that theology in the lives of believers and the church.

To get things going ....

What is the difference between unity and uniformity? Make two lists of examples.
Read VV. 1-6 …

1. What does Paul beg the Ephesians to do?

2. Because God’s people are called to be ONE people, they must manifest their unity. Define each characteristic Paul gives in v. 2
   
   a. Humbleness
   
   b. Gentleness
   
   c. Patience
   
   d. Forbearance
   
   e. Love

Quote from John Stott: “If instead of maneuvering for the respect of others (which is pride) we give them our respect by recognizing their God-given worth (which is humility), we shall be promoting harmony in God’s new society (the church).”

3. How would following the instructions in v. 2 contribute to the unity of the church?

4. In vv. 4-6 Paul repeats the word “one” 7 times, 3 of which are a reference to the Trinity. How does unity of our God relate unity of Christians?

5. V. 3 is a call for continuous, diligent activity in keeping unity. Why would Paul need to urge the Ephesian believers to make every effort to keep the unity just before making such a strong statement about the body being one in v. 4?

Read vv. 7-16 …

6. How does Paul make it clear that unity does not mean uniformity?

7. What do we learn about the giver of spiritual gifts in vv. 9-10?

8. What do we learn about the purpose of spiritual gifts in vv. 12-16?

9. What does Paul mean by building up the body of Christ in vv. 13-16?

10. Look closely at vv. 15-16. The church grows in Christ by “speaking the truth in love.” Share any experiences in which this has or has not been the case?
Ephesians 4:17-31 --- Purity in the Church

Eph 4:17  Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.
Eph 4:18  They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.
Eph 4:19  They have become calloused and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.
Eph 4:20  But that is not the way you learned Christ!—
Eph 4:21  assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,
Eph 4:22  to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,
Eph 4:23  and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
Eph 4:24  and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
Eph 4:25  Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.
Eph 4:26  Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,
Eph 4:27  and give no opportunity to the devil.
Eph 4:28  Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.
Eph 4:29  Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
Eph 4:30  And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Eph 4:31  Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
Eph 4:32  Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

To get things going ...

- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being most pure), how would you describe the PURITY of the church today?  Explain.

This section of Scripture gives specific instruction about actively cultivating purity in the Christian life.  Holiness is not a condition that we drift into.  We are not passive spectators of a sanctification God works in us.  On the contrary, we have purposefully to “put off” from us all conduct that is incompatible with our new life in Christ, and to “put on” a lifestyle compatible with it.

1. In this passage, how are the pagans described, since Paul is insisting Christians can no longer live like them?
2. Walk through the logical steps of their downward path of evil.

3. Looking at vv. 20-24, let's define the process of “moral education” that Christians experience.

Notice the phrase at the end of v. 21 – “you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Stott notes, “Christ is himself the substance of Christian teaching. When Jesus Christ is at once the subject and the object and the environment of the moral instruction being given, we may have confidence that it is truly Christian. “Truth is in Jesus.”

4. What is the role of the mind in the behavior of the pagans (v. 18) and believers (vv. 20-24).

5. What, then, is the significance of truth and ignorance in living a life of purity? What are YOU doing to renew your mind in Christ?

6. In vv. 25-30, there are four sins to put off and four positive commands. What are they?

7. Look ahead a 4:31 to 5:4. There are two more. What are they?

8. What do ALL of these have in common?

9. What reason is given or implied in each case for the commands?

10. Look more closely at v. 30 – why does Paul introduce the Holy Spirit here?

11. Look back at v. 25 – what would be the affects of obeying these commands upon the body of Christ?

**Application**

- Don’t live like the Americans with their futile thinking.
- Get your mind in order and make honest assessments.
- Be a Christ-learner, ever renewing your mind.
- Die continually to self and its desires.
- Put on Christ along with his truth and love.
Ephesians 5:5-21 – RIGHTEOUSNESS

To Get Things Started ...

How does knowing something for sure change your attitude, actions, perceptions? How does knowing something for sure impact your life?

Eph 5:5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
Eph 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
Eph 5:7 Therefore do not associate with them;

Eph 5:8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light
Eph 5:9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),
Eph 5:10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.
Eph 5:11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.
Eph 5:12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.
Eph 5:13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,
Eph 5:14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Eph 5:15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,
Eph 5:16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
Eph 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Eph 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,
Eph 5:19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart,
Eph 5:20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Eph 5:21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.
1. Zoom in on vv. 5-7. What is the warning that Paul gives? What specifically is the teaching? How does this compare to Jesus’ teaching on lust in the Sermon on the Mount?
   
a. From John Stott: *For those who fall into such sins through weakness, but afterwards repent in shame and humility, there is forgiveness. The immoral personal described here is one who has turned to this way of life without shame or penitence.*

2. Now ... in this context ... what would it mean to be deceived with “empty words?”

3. Why would Paul call immoral, impure or greedy people IDOLATERS? In what areas of our lives are we most tempted toward idolatry?

Vv. 8-14 are essentially an expounding of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5 for Christians to be “salt and light.”

4. Has anyone here been in a situation where your presence (words, actions, etc.) exposed darkness but you were not partaking in darkness (v. 11)?

5. In v. 15, Paul says that we should “be very careful.” We know what someone means when they tell us to “be careful” going on a long drive (or, in the case of a 3-year-old, getting down from a high chair!). But how are we to “be careful” in our Christian life? What does this look like?

6. According to vv. 15-17, what are the characteristics of a wise person? Is age a predictor? Experience? Do any of the Proverbs speak to this?

7. Sticking with vv. 15-17, why is it important to make the most of every opportunity? How does doing so combat the evil days?

8. According to vv. 19-21, what are the beneficial results of being filled with the Holy Spirit?
   
a. From John Stott: *Although the text reads that we are to give thanks ALWAYS and for EVERYTHING, we must press these words literally. We cannot thank God for blatant evil. God’s children learn not to argue with him in their suffering, but to trust him, and indeed thank him for his loving providence by which he can turn even evil to good purposes. But that is praising God for being God; it is not praising him for evil.*

9. Look again at v. 21. Why do you think it would be necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to submit to one another?

For Take Home ...

A thought on what the Pastor is learning about holiness: *the more holy we become, the more aware we are about our own indwelling sin, and the more “comfortable” we become in the presence of unholiness.*
Ephesians 5:21-33

To get things started …

When has it been most difficult for you to submit your will to that of another person?

Text

**Eph 5:21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Eph 5:22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

**Eph 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

**Eph 5:24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**Eph 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

**Eph 5:28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

**Eph 5:29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

**Eph 5:30** because we are members of his body.

**Eph 5:31** “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

**Eph 5:32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

**Eph 5:33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Questions for Discussion

1. Look through the entire passage and underline the words “the church.” What is said about “the church” in those phrases?

2. The model for wives submitting to their husbands is “as to the Lord.” What does it mean to “submit to the Lord?” How does it look daily?

3. What do we learn about how a wife is to regard her husband in vv. 22-24?

4. WHY is the wife supposed to submit to her husband?

5. How do you react to the notion of submitting to someone else?

6. What instructions are given to the husband in vv. 25-33?
7. How has Christ loved the church?

8. In your own words, what is the husband’s goal for his wife in vv. 26-27?

9. What is the significance of a husband and wife becoming one flesh in vv. 31-32?

10. Why do you think it is important for the husband to LOVE his wife? For the wife to RESPECT her husband?

11. Taking in the passage as a whole, how is Christian marriage compared to Christ’s relationship with the church?

12. How do you respond to the fact that the marriage of believers represents to the world Christ’s relationship to the church? How well are Christian marriages doing? How well is yours? Knowing this to be the case, do you want to get married?

13. How does this passage fit with the earlier texts pushing unity in the church?

**Take it Home**

1. What would marriages be like if these instructions were followed?
2. If you are a wife, how can your submission to your husband be more like your submission to Christ?
3. If you are a husband, how can you love your wife more like Christ loved the church?
4. How can the Christian community build and support our marriages?
**Ephesians 6:1-23**

*To get things started ...*

Share some of your favorite parenting/child-rearing/babysitting/class teaching moments.

**Text**

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
Eph 6:2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),
Eph 6:3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”
Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
Eph 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,
Eph 6:6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,
Eph 6:7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,
Eph 6:8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.
Eph 6:9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.
Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his mighty.
Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
Eph 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.
Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
Eph 6:15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.
Eph 6:16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;
Eph 6:17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,
Eph 6:18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
Eph 6:19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,
Eph 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
Eph 6:21 So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.
Eph 6:22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.
Eph 6:23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Eph 6:24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.
1. Moving on from husbands and wives, Paul makes brief but loaded instruction for children, fathers, slaves and masters. Work through these instructions. What is the foundational root of all these instructions?

2. V. 10 urges believers to “be strong.” What is the source and significance of this strength? Why is that important? Have you heard a recent testimony in our congregation about this idea?

3. How aware are we of spiritual warfare?

4. V. 12 is an impressive enemies list, not to be ignored. Do you have any experiences (personal or heard of) where spiritual warfare was clear and powerful?

5. Compare Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 1:19-21 with Ephesians 6:12. How does this relate back to v. 10?

6. VV. 14-18 are famous. Many of you likely have all or part memorized. If strength is found “in the Lord,” it only stands that our armor is of the Lord. Consider the head-to-toe armor and their actual corresponding items.
   
   a. Belt - Truth
   b. Breastplate - Righteousness
   c. Shoes - Gospel
   d. Shield - Faith
   e. Helmet - Salvation
   f. Sword – Word of God

7. Read Isaiah 59:17. Notice that these pieces of armor/weaponry are God’s very own!

8. V. 16 references “flaming darts of the evil one.” In Paul's time, burning arrows were used to destroy wooden shields and other defenses. What does this say about the nature of the “shield of faith?”

9. What is our only offensive weapon in spiritual warfare? Read with Hebrews 4:12.

10. According to vv. 18-20, how does prayer fit into the “armor of God” scheme? How does one pray?