

8 Studies on Ephesians

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Notes

1. In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: The Message of Ephesians by John R. W. Stott, Paul for Everyone the Prison Letters Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon by Tom Wright, Ephesians by Francis Foulkes (Tyndale Commentary), the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet Walk this Way by Bryson Smith, the Matthias Media Pathway Bible guide He is Our Peace by David Jackman, Living with the Underworld by Peter Bolt and the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition. Throughout the studies I've added paragraphs from these books to help people better understand the Biblical text.

Ed O'Connor (December 2012)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians differs considerably from his other letters. There are none of the usual personal greetings, although Paul had spent some years in Ephesus and had many friends there (see on Acts 19). Nor does Ephesians deal with particular problems or news. Even the words 'at Ephesus' (1:1) are missing from some of the early manuscripts. So it seems likely that Ephesians began as a circular letter written to a group of churches in what is now western Turkey, of which Ephesus itself was the most important. John's 'seven churches' (Revelation 1:11, see map above) were in this general area, as was the church at Colossae.

From the Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition, p 604.

1. What do you understand by the term “in Christ”?

2. Read Eph 1.
What does Paul say about being “in Christ?”

4. Read Rom 6:3-10.
What does this tell us about being “in Christ”?

5. Sum up what it means to be “in Christ”?

Another way of expressing what it means to be “in Christ” is by using the term “identity”. Your identity, if you are a believer, is who you are in Christ. Your identity in Christ is a son and heir of God, blessed with every spiritual blessing and we live, not according to the flesh (our old identity) but according to the Spirit (our new identity).

To finish

6. How would you answer the question, how is your relationship going with God?

Study 2, Eph 2, “finding yourself”

Getting started

Have you heard the term “finding yourself”? I first heard the term in the 70s when singers and musicians used the term. I was a fan of Cat Stevens and he wrote a lot of songs about finding yourself e.g. “Miles from Nowhere”, “On the Road to Find Out” and “Father and Son”.

(Father) It's not time to make a change,
Just relax, take it easy.
You're still young, that's your fault,
There's so much you have to know.
Find a girl, settle down,
If you want you can marry.
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy.

I was once like you are now, and I know that it's not easy,
To be calm when you've found something going on.
But take your time, think a lot,
Why, think of everything you've got.
For you will still be here tomorrow, but your dreams may not.

(Son) How can I try to explain, when I do he turns away again.
It's always been the same, same old story.
From the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen.
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away.
I know I have to go.

(Father) It's not time to make a change,
Just sit down, take it slowly.
You're still young, that's your fault,
There's so much you have to go through.
Find a girl, settle down,
If you want you can marry.
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy.
(Son – away, away, away, I know I have to make this decision alone – no.)

(Son) All the times that I cried, keeping all the things I knew inside,
It's hard, but it's harder to ignore it.
If they were right, I'd agree, but it's them they know not me.
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away.
I know I have to go.
(Father – stay, stay, stay, why must you go and make this decision alone?)

1. (a) What does it mean to find yourself?

(b) What did you find?

Bible

2. Read Eph 2.

In Eph 2 “in Christ” is also expressed as “in him” or “with him” or “with Christ” or “through him” but each time it means the same thing so if we get what “in Christ” means we get the whole thing. “In Christ” or its equivalent is mentioned 9 times in Eph 2 and 11 times in Eph 1 so it is a pretty important concept. “In Christ” has a lot to do with “finding yourself”.

3. Read Eph 2:1-5.

What does it mean to be “made alive in Christ” (v5, see also Rom 6:3-11)?

4. Read Eph 2:6-7.

What does it mean when it says we were “raised up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”?

5. Read Eph 2:7 again.

What does this tell us about being “in Christ”?

6. Read Eph 2:10.

(a) What does this tell us about being “in Christ” (see also 2 Cor 5:17)?

(b) Verse 10 says we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Give some examples of “good works”.

7. Read Eph 2:11-18. These verses are about what we once were but, in this study, I’d like to focus on what we are now and what we can be. From these verses what do we now have, if we are “in Christ”?

8. Read Eph 2:19-22.
What do we have “in him”?

To finish

To summarise, what we have looked at in Eph 2 tells us that to be “in Christ” we

- are included in Jesus’ death
- are included in Jesus’ resurrection
- are involved in an unseen spiritual reality
- are a new creation
- have access to the Father
- are joined together in a building where God lives in his Spirit.

9. (a) Do you think that being “in Christ” has anything to do with finding yourself?

(b) Does being “in Christ” wipe out any of the old stuff you found when you found yourself?

(c) What are the practical implications of finding yourself in Christ?

Study 3, Eph 3, Power

Getting started

1. What are the different sorts of power we need in our lives?
2. If someone were to ask you to read a certain section in the Bible and then explain it, what would you need to know about that section of the Bible in order to understand and explain it?

Bible

3. To properly understand Eph 3 we need to understand the **structure** of the passage as well as other things like the genre or literary type, the meaning of the words and the context. As you read Eph 3 look out for pointers to the structure of the passage.

Read Eph 3.

What did you notice about the structure of the passage?

4. Paul breaks off after v1 and writes about something else.
Where does Paul get back to the idea he began in v1?
5. Paul gives us the reason for his actions before he actually does it.
(a) What does he do?

(b) What is his reason for doing it?

6. Before we look at what Paul prays for, we will look at the sidetrack (vv 2-13) for which Paul breaks his line of thought. (a) What is the mystery in vv 2-6?

(b) Why does Paul call it a mystery?

7. Read vv 7-13.

(a) What do we learn about Paul in these verses?

(b) What are the guarantees, in the present, of the certain future fulfilment of God's purposes (vv 10-12)?

8. Verse 14 begins the bit about what Paul is going to do "for this reason" which is to pray for them. What Paul prays for has something to do with the "power" question that we did at the beginning of this study.

Read vv 14-19.

(a) What does Paul pray for?

(b) What sort of power does Paul pray for?

Are they 2 different types of power or is v18 elaborating on the power mentioned in v16?

(c) Did we mention that sort of power in question 1? Why/why not?

9. (a) Why would the Ephesians need to grasp the love of Christ?

(b) Why would we need to grasp the love of Christ?

10. To look at the idea of the fullness of God (v19) we need to start the sentence (according to the NIV) in v17 with "And I pray that you . . ." What does it mean to be filled with the fullness of God? Is it possible?

To finish

11. Read vv 20-21.

(a) What encouragement do we get from these verses?

(b) How do we glorify the Father?

Study 4, Eph 4:1-16, Church**Getting started**

1. Briefly describe your church journey.

2. What makes a good church good?

Bible

3. Read Eph 4:1-6.
 - (a) What is the “calling” you have received?

 - (b) What is Paul’s main point in these verses?

 - (c)
 - (i) How would Paul’s readers have kept the unity of the Spirit?

 - (ii) How do we keep the unity of the Spirit?

4. Read Eph 4:7-13.
 - (a) What is our goal according to these verses?

(b) Compare this to when you started your church journey (question 1). Since then how have you been equipped, built up or changed?

5. Read Eph 4:14-16.

(a) What pictures does Paul use to describe a maturing church?

(b) What other pictures does the Bible use to describe the church?

(c) (i) Using these pictures or some other picture, what model best describes your church?

(ii) Why did you pick that picture/model?

To finish

6. What roles do truth (v15) and love (vv 15-16) have in building maturity?

5. The first question was about what we think about. I wonder how much we think about what we say before we say it. Most of vv 25-32 is about things we express with words. If we divide vv 25-32 (leaving out v 28) into the topics of:

truth v25

anger vv 26 & 31

building others up v29

kindness, compassion and forgiveness v32

(a) Which of these do you think **most** about before saying something? Why?

(b) Which of these do you think **least** about before saying something? Why?

(c) How can we do better to handle the things we think least about before speaking?

To finish

6. How does Eph 5:1-2 sum up the whole passage?

Study 6, Eph 5:3-21, Walking**Getting started**

1. Some have suggested that evangelical preaching today puts too much emphasis on sin.
(a) Do you agree or disagree? Why/why not?

(b) What other area could be given justifiable emphasis?

Bible

2. Read Eph 5:3-14.
(a) Is Paul describing his readers' past or present?

(b) How are they to live now (see also Eph 5:1-2)?

(c) How does this apply to us?

3. Read vv 7-8 again.
Paul contrasts darkness and light. Notice he doesn't say "you are in the light" but "you *are* light".
What does he mean (see also Matt 5:13-16)?

4. Read Eph 5:15-17.
(a) How do you walk wisely?

(b) How can we encourage each other to walk wisely?

5. (a) From Eph 5:18 and Eph 3:19 what does it mean to be filled with (or by) the Spirit?

(b) Why does Paul contrast it with being drunk?

6. Read Eph 5:19-21.
(a) For us, what are the evidences of the ongoing filling by the Spirit?

(b) If you were compiling a list of what it means to be filled by the Spirit, what would you have written?

To finish

7. In this passage who is responsible for us (a) coming to know the truth?

(b) living out that truth in our lives?

8. How does this passage help us advance and not merely be reactive or defensive in our encounters with sin and evil?

Study 7, Eph 5:22-6:9, Cultural context

Getting started

1. What are some aspects of our parent's culture that are different to the culture we experience today? (Culture = the behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic or age group.)

In study 3 I asked the question "If someone were to ask you to read a certain section in the Bible and then explain it, what would you need to know about that section of the Bible in order to understand and explain it?" One thing you would need to know about is the cultural context of the passage. We will look at the cultural context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Bible

2. Before we look at tonight's passage look back over the previous material in Ephesians to see if Paul gives any indications of the culture of the people he is writing to. In particular look at ch 2, the second half of ch 4 and the first half of ch 5.

3. Read Eph 5:22-6:9.
Are there any cultural indications in this passage?

The mention of slaves suggests that some of Paul's readers were fairly well off. Gordon D. Fee gives the following comments on the culture of the time.

Although the early believers lived in other kinds of settings—tenements; shopkeepers, who lived above their shops; etc.—this passage assumes a larger household which included wives, children, and slaves.

By law, the man was the master of his household. Paul writes in a context where the patriarchy was absolute, and sustained by law. Usually, but not always, he required the household to serve his gods. Unlike our understanding of home, such a household was not a place of consumption, but of production; not a private refuge, but often semi-public. His was the only public role, and part of the house often served as a place to do business and was basically open to others. The women, especially daughters, lived in the rear and were not permitted to stray into the public domain of the house for fear of becoming abused or a seductress.

The average age of the man when he married was 30, of the woman, less than 18. The reason for marriage was not "love" in our usual sense, but to bear legitimate children, to keep the family line going; indeed, failure to bear children, especially sons, was often cause for divorce. Moreover, almost all men were promiscuous. As Demosthenes says "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children." Wives, therefore, were often promiscuous as well—although they tried to be more discreet, since their infidelity was considered to be a matter of shame.

The idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage simply did not exist, evidence for which can be seen in meals, which in all cultures serve as the great equalizer. In the Greek world, women scarcely ever joined their husbands and his friends at meals; and if they did, they did not recline at table (only the courtesans did that), but sat on benches at the end. And they were expected to leave after eating, when the conversation took a more public turn.

Indeed, perhaps the most radical thing was that all people who participated in God's new creation also shared a common meal together and thus celebrated their Lord's death until he was to come again—which, as 1 Corinthians 11 makes clear, created considerable tension for the traditional household.

From ch 4 *Gender Issues: Reflections on the Perspective of the Apostle Paul* by Gordon D. Fee in *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community* ed. By Maxine Hancock.

4. Read Eph 5:22-33.
 (a) What is Paul suggesting that is different from the cultural norm?

(b) What is Paul suggesting that is similar to the cultural norm?

Gordon D. Fee makes these comments from the same book:

In the relationships in Eph 5 & 6 three things need to be noted.

First, in the ordinary household the husband, father, and master are all the same person, while the wife, children, and slaves were different persons.

Second, when Paul tells the wives to submit, and children and slaves to obey, he is not offering some new idea, or countering insubordination, he is merely speaking within the culture. But those who are filled with the Spirit and worship Christ as Lord, do so as those serving their true Lord, not an earthly one.

Third—and here is the truly radical moment—both the structure of the passage and the word count (four words to the husband for every one word to the wife) indicate that the emphasis lies with the husband/master/father. And the only thing Paul says to him is repeated three times: "Love your wife." Love (agape) is what rules, and agape, it must be noted emphatically, does not refer either to romance or sex. Rather, it refers to his giving his life in loving service to her for her sake.

One should note especially the regular emphasis on loving his **own** wife. V25 has love your wives; v28 has love your **own wives**; v33 has love your **own wives**. That eliminates the courtesans. His wife is the one who deserves all his love and commitment of loving service. [There is a problem here with some translations, like the NIV, not translating the word "own" as in "own wife". RV and NASB have "own wife".]

It is assumed in this text, of course, that the husband will continue to provide leadership in the household. But such leadership will be radically transformed into caring for the people, not having them around to serve his own self-interests. And that is why Paul goes on to speak of the slaves and the children. In each case, the husband, the master, and the father is the person Paul is after. If he can radicalize the home in light of the cross, the life of the child, of the slave, and of the woman is set into new perspective in the new creation.

5. Taken together, i.e. Paul's instructions to both husbands and wives, what do you see happening in the relationship between a husband and a wife?

6. "To submit" is literally "to arrange under". From the Matthias Media Pathway Bible guide
He is Our Peace by David Jackman p94.

The church's submission to Christ = "Looking to its head for his beneficial rule, living by his norms, experiencing his presence and his love, receiving from him gifts that will enable growth to maturity and responding to him in gratitude and awe."

From Lincoln A.T page 372, as quoted by Peter O'Brien
 (Pillar NT commentary on Ephesians) p 417.

From Eph 5:22 (a) what does it mean to submit to the Lord?

(b) and, therefore, what does it mean for wives to submit to their husbands?

7. Do Paul's instructions to 1st century Ephesians apply to 21st century us? Why/why not?

Gordon D. Fee again:

So where does that put us hermeneutically? I would argue that the structures are ultimately quite immaterial for believers; that is, first-century households can no more serve as models for Christian homes in the twenty-first century, than the Roman Empire with its self-serving, destructive economic policies and its insistence on emperor worship, should serve for contemporary political structures. All structures, ours as well as theirs, are predicated altogether on cultural givens. There simply is no biblical structure for the household.

To finish

8. (a) How do other passages in the Bible tell us how husbands and wives should relate to each other (see Gen 1:26-28, 2:18-25, Gal 3:26-29, Col 3:18-19, 1 Pet 3:1-7)?

(b) Are these passages relevant to 21st century us?

Study 8, Eph 6:10-24, Spiritual warfare

Getting started

1. (a) Do you view your daily life as a cosmic spiritual conflict?

- (b) What is your reaction to this perspective – exaggerated, scary, dispiriting?

Bible

2. Read Eph 6:10-17.
 - (a) What are the bits that make up the armour of God?

 - (b) Can you sum up the armour of God in a couple of words?

 - (c) How do we put on the armour of God?

 - (d) Once we put this armour on, what do we do next (see also James 4:7)?

We don't have to do much because; by Jesus' life, death and resurrection; he has already defeated sin, death and the devil (read Rom 6:3-4). If the devil could bring a charge against us or if he could condemn us then that would be a problem for us but he can't because of Jesus (read Rom 8:33-39) and we are absolutely secure from the devil (read John 10:27-28).

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. Don't seek out exorcism opportunities. 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). In other words, forget the movies about objects being thrown about the room and heads spinning round. 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.

From the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet [Walk this Way](#) by Bryson Smith p 58.

Now, neither Jesus nor Paul would deny that God, the Father of Jesus Christ, was **truly in charge** of this world. There is no 'dualism' in the Bible, with God and the devil being equal and opposite forces arrayed against each other, as suggested by the (rather exciting!) Christian novels of Frank Perretti. God never loses control. This is always his world. But it is a fallen world and God has answered our sin with his judgement. And part of this judgement is to deliver the world over to Satan. . . . God is always in ultimate control and human beings are always firmly under his loving care, but he has permitted the devil an enormous influence. In a real sense, the world has been given (that is, by God) to the devil. He is the one who has led the whole world astray,

(c) What can the devil do?

Jesus said he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). That about sums up what he does. He lies to deceive, and once he has deceived, he kills. Most of us don't really want to be vampires or Satan-worshippers; most of us would prefer to be just ordinary human beings. What has this master of the underworld got to do with us? The answer is that we, too, are deceived in order to be killed.

From Living with the Underworld by Peter Bolt p 67.