

Ephesians Study 11: Review

Introduction

We want to look back at the studies of the Ephesian church, and review what we have found. This study will also “summarise” the studies, and will provide a useful introductory study and overview for future studies.

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Reflect on How the Ephesian church had become established, grown, encountered problems, and then resolved them. How does this relate to your experience in churches that you have known?

Notes for study 11: Review

We want to look back at the studies of the Ephesian church, and review what we have found. This study will also “summarise” the studies, and will provide a useful introductory study and overview for future studies.

The Ephesian letter is rich in its teaching and doctrine, and provides a key in our understanding of the New Testament churches. We see the Corinthian church in great detail (and it’s not a pretty picture!), but we only see it for a short period of time. In contrast, we see the Ephesian church over a period of more than 40 years, and we can see its growth and development over that time.

The Ephesian letter is written as a “call to faithfulness” to help the brethren focus on God’s purpose for us. The structure of the letter (and hence the derivation of its purpose) perfectly fits with Paul’s warning to the elders (Acts 20:28-31), and subsequently to the other things that we know about the Ephesian church from the other New Testament letters.

Study 1 – Introduction

The letter was written whilst Paul was in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), The most likely time was during his first imprisonment in Rome whilst on house arrest. This puts the timing around 62 or 63 AD, and the Ephesian letter is highly regarded as one of Paul’s “prison epistles” along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

The letter forms one part of a trilogy, along with Colossians and Philemon, that deal with Christ and the church (Ephesians), Christ and us (Colossians), and relationships between brethren (Philemon). The runaway slave Onesimus has come to Paul. He is sent back to Philemon in Colosse along with Tychicus, a native from Ephesus to accompany him. Paul writes the three letters (Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians) and sends them with Tychicus.

Ephesus was a major city in the region called “Asia minor”. With a population of around 200,000 it was the fourth largest city in the world at the time, and was one of “The seven churches of Asia”. The city was famous for its huge theatre with a seating capacity of 50,000 and the Temple of Diana (or Artemis) which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Study 2 – Our Blessings in Christ (Chapter 1)

Paul presents the “bagful of presents” as he writes to the Ephesians describing our blessings from being “In Christ”. The feeling of “I don’t deserve this” when someone gives us a wonderful gift. The feeling of “pinch me am I awake, is this too good to be true?” We are left to draw the conclusion *why would we want to go anywhere else? We are “...blessed...with every spiritual blessing in Christ...”* (1:3 NIV), so we must first be “In Christ”, having obeyed the gospel and immersed (baptised) into him (Gal 3:27) because of our belief (faith) in Jesus as God’s Son and our Saviour.

We are “...*chosen in Him before the creation of the world...*” (1:4). As God’s chosen people, we are holy (set apart) and made blameless – ie we are rightly to be blamed for our sins, but Jesus has taken the blame in our stead, and his blood covers our sins, so that we can become “...*holy and blameless in his sight...*” (1:4 NIV). We do not deserve these blessings, since we were God’s enemies, but “...*His glorious grace ...has been freely given to us in (Christ)...*” (1:6 NIV). Grace is unmerited favour, and we have found favour in God’s sight, even when we did not deserve it. We have redemption through Jesus, “...*In Him we have redemption through his blood...*” (1:7 NIV). Jesus came and paid the price for us, reconciling us back to God, and putting us back into relationship with Him. We have all sinned against God, but through Jesus’ sacrifice we have “...*the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...*” (1:7 NIV).

Our blessings are “...*lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding...*” (1:8 NIV). We do not get some minor prize in a competition, but the major prize – our eternal salvation – and the minor prizes as well!!!

In times past (under the Old Testament), God's plan of salvation was not understood, but it has now been revealed "...*And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ...*" (1:9 NIV). Salvation through the death of Jesus was a "mystery" and one which man would never have thought of. Yet, this was what God always had in mind to do.

Our sanctification (setting apart, or making us saints) is assured, and God has guaranteed it with a seal "...*Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...*" (1:13-14 NIV). The Holy Spirit is the seal, whom we receive when we are immersed into Him (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit identifies us as God's children, and is the guarantee (or down payment or assurance) of our eternal salvation "...*until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory...*" (1:14 NIV). The seal was not limited to the first century, but is given to all of God's purchased people until He comes again.

Thanksgiving for the Brethren

Whilst Paul was intimately involved with the Ephesian church, it was around 5 years since he had been there, and he prays for them "...*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*"¹⁸ *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,*¹⁹ *and his incomparably great power for us who believe...*" (1:17-19 NIV). His prayer is to better understand God's wisdom and revelation, and probably for receiving the miraculous spiritual gifts. Whilst we do not have the miraculous gifts today, by understanding of God's revelation, we *know God better*, and understand *his incomparably great power for us who believe*.

God's Power Revealed

God's power "...*is like the working of his mighty strength,*"²⁰ *which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...*" (1:19-20 NIV). God's power is total, and "...*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come...*" (1:21 NIV). Paul puts superlative upon superlative to describe God's complete and total power, and then adds "*and every title that can be given*". Whilst the Old Covenant was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24), Jesus is now in the position of authority "...*and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...*" (1:22 NIV). The church was always God's eternal purpose. It "...*is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way...*" (1:23 NIV).

Study 3 – A Life and Death Situation (Chapter 2)

As a "visitor" to a country, we don't belong there. It is not our home. We have basic human rights, but not the same rights that we would have at home. As a part of the Roman Empire, the people of the city enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship, and they would immediately have understood Paul's message. The key message is Citizenship – it's about *belonging*.

He begins with *life and death* – "...*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...*" (2:1 NIV). He has (of course) in mind spiritual death. We are challenged to look back at life before becoming Christians, "...*in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...*" (2:2 NIV). We only have to look around at the behaviour (generally) of those in the world, and remember that we used to be like them. We can all identify with what Paul says "...*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts...*" (2:3 NIV). The first point concludes with the statement "...*We were by nature children of wrath, just as the others...*" (2:3 NKJV). The picture is one of hopelessness, and we need to remember that we were once like that ourselves.

Fortunately, that is not the end of the matter “...*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved...*” (2:4-5 NIV). The contrast is very stark. We were dead in sins, but have been made alive again – and in precisely the same way, Jesus was physically dead and was also made alive again. Paul describes the new birth in Romans 6:1-14. We died to sin (and to our former lives as sinners), were buried with Christ in baptism, and have arisen as a new creature (a sinless person) in God’s sight. The same thing that happened to Jesus physically (death, burial, resurrection) also happens to us spiritually (we die to sin, are buried in baptism, and rise to walk in newness of life). “...*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...*” (2:6 NIV). Following His 40 days on earth Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God in the heavenly places. We also have the same assurance – after our baptism we are raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4) – and then with our “short time” on earth, we will be physically raised from the dead to be with Him forever more with the Father in the heavenly realms!

Saved by God’s Grace

We were totally unable to help ourselves out of the situation, and it was only because of God’s intervention – by His grace (or unmerited favour) that we received the blessings. “...*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...*” (3:8 NIV). God has provided the *means* of salvation, and we are only able to receive that salvation through our faith, and our response (obedience) to that faith. In case we might have any ideas about deserving salvation, Paul reminds us “...*not by works, so that no one can boast...*” (2:9 NIV).

Jesus showed His faithfulness by His obedience when He came to save us (Php 2:5-11), and we model ourselves after His example “...*we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do...*” (2:10 NIV). It requires us to “walk” – to make progress – in our christian lives.

Aliens and Citizens

The Jews regarded themselves as God’s set-apart people, and the Gentiles (those uncircumcised) as having *no part* as God’s people. In times past, we were alienated from God, just as the Gentiles were. The people of Ephesus enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship, and they would have immediately understood Paul’s message of citizenship and aliens. He specifically addresses the Gentiles “...*remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world...*” (2:12 NIV). As a “visitor” to a country, we don’t belong there. It is not our home. We have basic human rights, but not those that we would have at home.

Being aliens is contrasted with citizenship – not of an earthly country, but of the commonwealth of God (the church). “...*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...*” (2:13 NIV). The contrast is plain and stark – why would we want to go back to being aliens? Through Jesus we were brought into God’s kingdom, and it doesn’t matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles “...*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*” (2:14 NIV). The Law of Moses divided the Jews and the Gentiles, and it was abolished at the cross. “...*by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...*” (2:15 NIV). Through Jesus’ sacrifice, God has made a “*new man*” out of the two – there is no longer a distinction made between Jews and Gentiles – *for we are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Gal 3:28).

The Old Testament (with the Law of Moses as the central pillar) was always intended to be transitional. It was only there to bring mankind to the point of maturity to understand the sacrifice of Christ. Through it, we can understand what it is to have a relationship with God, and what it

means to obey and serve Him. But, God's eternal purpose was to reconcile man to Himself through Jesus' sacrifice, and to have the church – His called out body of people – as His shining glory – whether they are Jews or Gentiles. "...and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility..." (2:16 NIV).

Through Jesus, and His sacrifice, we have been brought together as God's children, and citizens of His kingdom (the church). "...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household..." (2:19 NIV). We enjoy the rights of citizenship, and we are not excluded from its benefits. The blessed position we enjoy as Christians is contrasted to our hopeless and destitute position outside of Christ. Why would we want to go back there?

Study 4 – The Church is God's Eternal Purpose (Chapter 3)

God had a plan to bring His people back to Him from before He created the world. Yet that plan took some time to unveil. This was not because of a lack of His power, but because man needed to learn and understand about God, His nature, and the state of Man. God put in place the "temporary arrangements" through the Law of Moses – which was to be our tutor *to bring us to Christ* Gal 3:24.

The Church is God's Eternal Purpose

The name of God (YHWH) was so holy to the Jews that they would not even say the name, and took an "arms length" approach to Him. In direct contrast we now have "boldness" and "access with confidence" to Him.

God's revelation was given to Paul "...In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ..." (3:4 NIV). Specifically, the mystery is that the Gentiles would have a part in God's plan in the same way as the Jews. This was "...not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets..." (3:5 NIV). To remove any doubt, Paul spells out what the mystery is "...This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus..." (3:6 NIV). In the *one body* – the church – both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled together in Christ.

If Satan had understood God's eternal plan and purpose, he would never have had Jesus put to death. He thought that he had won the war by putting Jesus to death. However, God knew that that very act would result in the achievement of His eternal purpose. "...His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord..." (3:10-11 NIV). God demonstrates His handiwork by *His manifold wisdom*, and the members of the church declare God to the world. God achieved His plan and purpose, despite the efforts of Satan to intervene (Mt 16:18).

Paul describes Christ's love in four dimensions. Of course – we can only think in three dimensions – and this illustrates the point, that God's power exceeds our ability to comprehend it. "...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." (3:18 NIV). This requires us to first be rooted and grounded in love. "...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God..." (3:19 NIV). We might think that attaining knowledge – knowing God – is our aim. But Paul spells out for us that we don't know God at all if we don't have love – since God is love! (1 Jn 4:8). Only then we *may be filled with the fullness of God*, and attain the full maturity and knowledge that God would have us to do. God's eternal purpose was to reconcile man back to God through the church – not as Jews or Gentiles – but as christians, His pride possession! Why would we want to go anywhere else?

Study 5 – United in Christ (Chapter 4)

Paul calls us to “make the big changes” in our lives as Christians. To “*put off the former ways*” and “*put on the new man*” in Christ. It is about who we are as God’s people. It is practical Christianity.

The church is God’s eternal purpose to reconcile all of mankind (both Jews and Gentiles) to Himself. Paul gives the Ephesians a strong call to unity. “...*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received...*” (4:1 NIV). We must live our lives in a manner that represents Christ, and shows Him as we live our lives by His example.

We must have a bonded relationship with our brethren. Christianity is about developing the same kind of relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we have with Him. “...*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love...*” (4:2 NIV). We need to remember that we all totally depend on God’s grace. We are all in the same basket! This hints at the problems in the Ephesian church, as Paul directs them to make an effort to put unity in place. “...*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...*” (4:3 NIV). The *bond* that we have should lead us to peace with each other.

We are called to unity through the seven “*ones*” – a call for “complete unity”. In the church there are no longer Jews or Gentiles (or Proselytes) but we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

With a proper understanding of “why we are here” in the church, and of God’s plan and His revelation through Jesus, we are called to unity with the rest of our family who are walking along the same journey. Unity requires:

- *Submission*. Jesus calls us to the role of *servants*.
- *Understanding*. We need to help one another on our journey. We need to *listen* to others and *show* our understanding to them.
- *Sharing* with one another. We need to learn to *share* the things that we have, and also share our time (helping one another).
- *Communication*. We can communicate best when we get together often, and in informal associations.

Whilst the church is a corporate body, it is made up of individuals. We must not forget that we are only who and what we are because of God’s grace. As a direct outworking we receive differing measures of blessings from God. “...*This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men”...*” (4:8 NIV). The spiritual gifts, have been given in different measures to different people. They are complimentary, and together combine to make up a complete (or at least partially complete) revelation from God.

Not everyone has the same gift, and we all need to use our gifts (talents) in our special place to serve the Lord. The gifts are given so that the church might become self supporting and sustaining “...*to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...*” (4:12-13 NIV).

The church is structured towards self-sustainability: (The gifts are given) *so that* God’s people might be prepared for service. Why? *So that* the body might be built up (encouraged, edified, or strengthened). Why? *Until we all reach unity* in the faith. How far must we go? *And become mature*. How mature do we have to get? *To attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. The gifts are essential to help us grow to maturity.

Reaching Maturity

We need to reach spiritual maturity like Christ “...*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming...*” (4:14 NIV). Spiritual maturity means having

a solid ground of teaching, not being – *blown here and there by every wind of teaching*. By contrast, the mature christian knows what he believes, and *why he believes it*. But maturity is not just about doctrine – it’s about how we live our lives with mature relationships “...*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ...*” (4:15 NIV). Paul specifically has in mind how things work together in the church “...*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work...*” (4:16 NIV). The church is a self-sustaining body that *builds itself up in love*, but it relies on all of the members working together – *every supporting ligament* – to achieve completeness.

As christians, we have put off our old man of sin, been born again, called into a renewed relationship with God, and we need to demonstrate that pattern of living on our lives. “...*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking...*” (4:17 NIV). This is not optional – *I insist on it* – we must not live our lives the way the rest of the world does. “...*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts...*” (4:18 NIV). Such a lifestyle is incompatible with christianity, and if we practice these things, we separate ourselves from Him, and have hardened our hearts towards Him. Having become christians, why would we want to go back to such a lifestyle? “...*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.*”²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;*²³ *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;*²⁴ *and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness...*” (4:21-24 NIV). This can be summed up in the simple statement, that having become christians, we need to live a life like Jesus, and leave behind the worldly ways. The two are as incompatible as night and day.

The traits of the christian life are also exhibited in our speech “...*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...*” (4:29 NIV). On the one hand, it is about using wholesome language (not the kind of filthy language that we hear on the street, and now (sadly) almost constantly on the TV and in the movies). It is not only “bad words”, but also not using “bad thoughts” in telling off-colour stories. In direct contrast, we are exhorted to use our speech to encourage others, and to build others up - *to the benefit of those who listen*.

The final message is “...*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*”³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you...*” (4:31-32 NIV). The ultimate motive is for us to remember that we are forgiven by God, and therefore we must forgive others with compassion.

Study 6 – War & Peace

Paul uses the Roman Soldier as a visual example to the Ephesians, and describes the Armour of God as both a defensive and an offensive weapon. The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground. We will face trials and tribulations, but we will learn and grow from them. We get caught in the cross-fire of the war between Satan and God. Satan uses us as pawns, tempts us with “the sins of the flesh” to draw us away from God, and as a consequence takes away our eternal security. Satan uses our temptations as his tools.

It is not **people** (flesh and blood) we are fighting against - our enemies are not some brother in the church who offends us, nor our neighbour, nor someone at work - but rather Satan and his cohorts. Our enemy is spiritual, and we need spiritual weapons “...*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places]...*” (6:2 NIV). We face three enemies:

- *First Enemy – The World* The World is opposed to God. We are to be “in the world, but not of the world”

- *Second Enemy – The Flesh* is the inner self that draws us away from God. We must be in control of our actions, and not allow ourselves to be overcome by our fleshly desires. We need to keep our eyes on heaven and the prize that awaits us there.
- *Third Enemy – Satan* The devil is at work in the world, controlling the events affecting God’s people. Satan uses us as instruments of the battle. We become his pawns. On the other hand, God regards us as “His workmanship” “created in Christ Jesus” “citizens of His Kingdom”. Satan is looking at ways that he can hurt God, by turning us away from Him. Satan doesn’t care about us and will use every trick that he can find to deceive us into thinking that God doesn’t care about us either!

Spiritual warfare is intertwined through the letter. We are led to things that are happening beyond our sphere of experience and comprehension. The battle goes on in ways that we can’t understand, we are assured that God is in control, with Jesus in the position of power and authority. He is not under Satan’s control, but *far above* any other authority. Jesus achieved victory over death, and declared that victory to Satan. Even though Satan is still fighting, the victory of Christ is evident, and he knows that he cannot win, and in fact has already been defeated. He is now fighting to get as much back as he can.

We fight from a position of power. We cannot lie down and do nothing, but we must stand for God and do His will. The war is spiritual, not physical (although in the first century, it was both!). Some Expressions (Evidence) of the Battle:

- Satan had Jesus put to death to try to stop God appointing Jesus as the Messiah
- Satan tried to stop the church from prospering
- Satan now tries to distract us with worldly thoughts, ideas, and practices

We need to remember that we are not fighting *for* victory, we are fighting *from* a position of victory. Victory came when Jesus rose from the dead, and rose to rule over his enemies. Satan cannot take away the victory from us, and from God. Only we can give it to Satan if we decide to stop standing on God’s side in the battle.

Satan has (limited) power over the world, and it is nothing compared to God’s awesome power “...*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen...*” (3:20-21 NIV).

In contrast to the war, Jesus came to bring peace – and made peace by reconciling us to God. The peace that Jesus was born to provide was not the cessation of war. It was not to put an end to abuse and unkind ways humans treat each other. It was not to bring world peace among nations. Now through Jesus, God has made available true peace – peace with God. Jesus is indeed the Prince of Peace to reconcile men to God.

Study 7 – Walking as God’s People (Chapter 5)

The Roman and Greek cultures stand in direct contrast to how we ought to live now as God’s people and “our former ways” or “the ways of the world”. If Christianity does not result in changes in our lives, then we have either missed the point, or we have not grasped the message.

We must bring our lives under control, and not practice things which are the antithesis (opposite) of what it means to be a christian. “...*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people...*” (5:3 NIV).

Although christianity is not a rule-based system, Paul gives us what is essentially a list of “do’s and don’ts” that describes the behaviour that we ought to exhibit as christians “...*Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.* ⁵ *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* ⁶ *Let no one deceive you with empty*

words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them..." (5:4-7 NIV). The practices are "worldly" and describes the way we might have lived outside of Christ – although that is not to say that we did *all* of these things – but we can certainly relate to *some* of them. Paul calls us to faithfulness and to righteous living. If we are God's people, why would we live as children of Satan? We need to make the *big changes* in our lives, and "put the old man to death". Our call is to live our lives the way Christ lived "...Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is..." (5:15-17 NIV).

The next group of instructions get practical and specific "...Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit..." (5:18 NIV), and "...Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (5:19-20 NIV).

Marriage Illustrates Christ and the Church

Paul discusses the relationship between Christ and the church, and also our relationship with our fellow brethren. He begins with husbands and wives "...Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything..." (5:22-24 NIV). This does not mean that the husband is to "control" the wife as a slave. In fact, it puts a great deal of responsibility on the husband to ensure that he treats his wife with due regard, and proper respect. "...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (5:25 NIV). If husbands have the same kind of selfless and total (*agape*) love for their lives that Christ has for the church, then the submission of the wife to their husbands should not be a problem. It will result in the most intimate, strong, and honourable of loving relationships.

The prime example is how Christ loved the church – the bride of Christ – so that He might redeem it as His called out body of people "...to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless..." (5:26-27 NIV).

Paul spells out the purpose of the discussion "...This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church..." (5:32 NIV). Whilst these things might be quite plain and clear to us, this was not so in the first century. The Jews thought that the Jewish religion (and not the church) was God's eternal plan. Paul reminds us that the church was always God's plan for man, and the Jewish religion was just a step along the way. Christianity is a practical religion – with real outcomes as we develop relationships with each other. Those relationships are deepest between a husband and wife. "...However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband..." (5:33 NIV).

Study 8 – Stand and Fight the Battle (Chapter 6)

We face similar apostasy attacks today, just like the Ephesian church in the first century. Satan's most successful attacks against the church usually come from the inside, often from leaders within the church (Acts 20:30). Paul tells us about our tools for the battle, and how to prepare ourselves. Apostasy is coming. The message is: "hang in there".

Paul gives some practical instructions to everyone, whether children, parents, husbands, wives, slaves, or masters. The instruction to children is to obey their parents *in the Lord*. This is to be Christ-like in our instruction (from parents), and in our submission and obedience (as children), rather than setting limits for obedience. The parent-child relationship is not a one-way street, and there are equally obligations on the parents as there are to the children. Parents have the

responsibility to bring their children up to respect God (in the training and instruction of the Lord), whilst children have the responsibility to mould themselves to their parent's instruction.

Similar instructions follow to *masters and slaves*, however the direct application can be made to employers and employees. "...*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ...*" (6:5 NIV). As Christians, we should show proper respect to our employers just as we would serve the Lord. We need to be honest in our working relationships, and remember that God watches over us. We are His representatives on earth, and we need to let Him shine through in our lives as we go about our secular work. The second instructions are for those in positions of authority "...*And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him...*" (6:9 NIV). Masters and slaves (and employers and employees) are all on an equal footing in the church. There is no subordinate hierarchy – we are all brothers and sisters – and all have God as our Father.

Prepare for the Battle

We are warned to ensure that we do not fall into Satan's snare. But, the temptations will come, and we must be strong in the face of them "...*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power...*" (6:10 NIV). The war was won at Calvary, and we fight *from* victory, but we need to ensure that we don't get torn away by Satan. "...*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes...*" (6:11 NIV). Like the well-equipped Roman soldier, we must prepare ourselves. But the battle is spiritual, not physical, and Paul tells us about the tools and protection that we need to fight the battle. "...*Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand...*" (6:13 NIV). The armour comes in two groups of three:

- Truth, Righteousness, The Gospel;
- Faith, Salvation, The Word of God.

"...*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...*" (6:14 NIV). The girdle was the one item to which other items were attached – **truth holds the other parts of the armour together!** Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life...." **Jesus is the truth.** Jesus holds all of our armour together!

"...*with the breastplate of righteousness in place...*" (6:14 NIV). The breastplate protected the heart. Our spiritual lives are dead if our hearts are not right with God! Paul reminds us in Romans that "...*there is none righteous, no not one...*" – except Jesus! **He is our breastplate,** and protects our heart.

"...*and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace...*" (6:15 NIV). The Roman Army's footwear was one of the greatest reasons it was so powerful. We are to wear armour that will help us in our **walk** with God, and also help us **stand our ground!** Having our feet fitted with the readiness of the Gospel, means standing on our relationship with Jesus!

"...*In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one...*" (6:16 NIV) Faith enables us to deflect Satan's attacks against us. They come in the form of evil and hateful thoughts, doubts, burning desires towards sinful actions. We need to "quench them" lest they light a fire within us and cause us to disobey God. We must always walk by our faith in God, and in Jesus as His Son! **Jesus protects us from all the attacks of Satan!**

"...*Take the helmet of salvation...*" (6:17 NIV). The Roman Soldier wore a helmet to protect his head. The greatest battlefield is the one in our minds and the area that the enemy wants to attack the most. The Hebrew name Joshua (Yeshua) means "Salvation". "Jesus" is a variant of that name. **Jesus Christ is Salvation!!** Paul says: *wear Jesus Christ in your minds for protection.*

“...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...” (6:17 NIV) This is the only offensive weapon that the Christian has. *“...For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart...”* (HEB 4:12 NIV). John introduces Jesus, and proclaims... ***Jesus is the Word of God!*** (Jn 1:1)

“...And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints...” (6:18 NIV) These pieces of armour are undergirded with ***PRAYER***. The Battle is The Lord's. Too often we think that ***we*** are the ones who have the Power. We need to commit ourselves to God, and ask for His help in dealing with the battle!

Paul recognises his own dependency on God, and requests prayers from the Ephesians *“...Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should...”* (6:19-20 NIV). We can all relate to Paul's feelings as he faces some trepidation in presenting the gospel.

Study 9 – Letters to Timothy

Timothy had been left in Ephesus to sort out the dissenting elders, and to set the disorderly church in order. The first letter gives him instruction on how to address the situation (and the apostolic authority to do what needed to be done). In the second letter, Timothy is still having problems bringing the disorderly elders into control. So, we can “piece together” what is happening (has happened) in the church during the five years after we last saw it in the Ephesian letter.

We see that some of the elders in the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:30) did not have pure motives *“...some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk...”* (1:1:6 NKJV). They ought to be leaders with knowledge and experience, but they are not competent to teach *“...desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm...”* (1:1:7 NKJV).

Timothy is empowered to fulfil his mission in direct contrast to some of the leaders in Ephesus who had *“...rejected their good consciences, and because of that they had made shipwreck of the faith...”* (1:1:19). Two of them are *Hymenaeus* and *Alexander* had already disciplined by Paul whilst he was in Ephesus *“...whom I delivered to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme...”* (1:1:20 NKJV). However, it appears that they refused to leave, as Timothy now has to deal with them, and he has to do so again in the second letter. Paul writes *“...hoping to come shortly, but if I am delayed, I am writing to you so that you might know how to conduct yourself in the church, which is God's household...”* (my paraphrase of 1:3:14-15).

Paul had prophesied that a falling away would come, and would be led by some of them (Acts 20:30), and it is coming to fruition *“...Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith...”* (1:4:1 NKJV). Rather than being led by the Spirit, they were being deceived by spirits. *“...following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons...”* (1:4:1 NIV). They knew what they were doing was wrong, but they had become so engrossed in the practice that it no longer pricked their consciences *“...speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...”* (1:4:2 NKJV). They denied what they were doing, and lied about it. In addition, they were making commandments for which they had no authority *“...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created...”* (1:4:3 NKJV). The falling away included fables and godless myths *“...Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly...”* (1:4:7 NIV). In contrast to the false teachers, and despite his youth, Timothy was instructed to *“...Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity...”* (1:4:12 NKJV). He was to lead by example, and not just by what he said!

Once the practice of the unfaithful elders had been established, they were to be dealt with publicly, so that they would become an example to the other elders. “...*Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear...*” (1:5:20 NKJV). Those who would not listen to the instruction were not to be compromised with. “...*If anyone teaches other wise, and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness...*” (1:6:3 NKJV). They were to be withdrawn from “...*from such withdraw yourself...*” (1:6:5 NKJV).

2nd Timothy

People were engaging in pointless arguments “...*Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers...*” (2:2:14 NKJV). Incorrect applications concerning God’s revelation were being made “...*But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort...*” (2:2:16-17 NKJV). Their arguing was pointless and rather than bringing people closer to God, it was leading to more ungodliness. These men, “...*have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and that they overthrow the faith of some...*” (2:2:18 NKJV). Timothy should not be distracted by the disputes, and those involved could try to turn the situation against him. “...*But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife...*” (2:2:23 NKJV). These people “...*are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women...*” (2:3:6 NIV). They are influencing psychological dominance over their victims, and “...*always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth...*” (2:3:7 NIV).

Timothy must be ready to act, “...*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths...*” (2:4:3-4 NIV). Those causing the problems in the church did not want to listen to the truth, and only heard what they wanted to hear.

Study 10 – The Church in Revelation

We finally see the Ephesian church some 20 years later (around AD 95) through the letters to seven churches of Asia Minor. Jesus knows the specific situation in each of the seven churches. He is walking amongst the churches, and sees what is happening amongst them all. The situation in Ephesus is mixed. On one hand He has praise for them “... *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary...*” (2:2-3 NIV). They were **working** for the Lord. They were not inactive, but were “out there” spreading the gospel. They were **patient**. The Ephesian church had grown and developed. They had some **roots** in the faith. Their faith had been tested, and they had withstood the temptation and **grown** through it. They **could not stand evil people**, and they have **tested** those who were **falsely claiming to be apostles**.

We see here a **discerning** church. They tested the claims that some people made about their authority (as being apostles). They also found some people who on the surface were claiming to be Christians, but underneath they were evil. The Ephesians were able to discern the true from the false and the truly good from the facade of good. They had **not become weary**. They were **fired up for the Lord**, and were **enthusiastic** about the work for the kingdom. They had stick-to-it-ness. They were not going to give up.

Whilst he has commended them for their discernment, he has criticism for them on the other hand “...*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love...*” (2:4 NIV). They had **left their first love**. They had become caught up in the “mechanics” of what they were doing, and to some extent had forgotten **why** they were doing it. Does this sound like some churches you know? They have a real zeal for God, and are enthusiastic for the work. But most of the teaching is on the “mechanics” and not on Jesus. They **love to do things right**, but have **lost their love for**

Jesus who made us right!!! They have a strong focus on the *internal* of the congregation, but have forgotten about the lost who are *outside* of Christ. Jesus said “**GO** into the world and make disciples”. Evangelism (outreach) is just something that they don’t have time to do. Sometimes we just “**lose the plot**”!!! Paul’s instruction to the church at Ephesus was to “...**Remember** the words of the Lord Jesus...” (Acts 20:35), but according to John they had “...**Forgotten** their first love...” (2:5).

In the Ephesian letter, Paul sent out a *call to faithfulness*. They heard the message loud and clear, and had *understood the mechanics*, but *lost sight of the reason* why they were doing these things. They were *faithful to the church*, but were *not faithful to the Lord* as they had lost their first love (for Him).

Further Commendation

Jesus adds a further commendation to them – they hate the abominable practice of sin “...*But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate...*” (2:6 NIV). The implication is that they had worked out a compromise between the pagan practices and Christianity. Jesus said that *he hates their practices*.

Christianity is a practical religion – it is not just about what we believe, it is about what we do and practice, and how we live our lives. God calls us to put our belief into practice “...*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...*” (2:7 NIV). They need to **Heed** the warnings. If they *overcome* (the temptations, practices and false doctrines) then they will receive their reward of being faithful to God. If not, God will count them unfaithful, unworthy, and remove their place as one of His churches (2:5). The term *overcome* is John’s favorite word for martyrdom. Many in Asia Minor would face persecution and death. If they stand faithful to Jesus – even in the face of death – they will receive their eternal reward in paradise with God.

The Ephesian church had heeded the warnings from Timothy, and had responded with faithfulness, but they had become so tied up in trying to do the right thing, that they had left behind their love for the Lord. We must continue to practice what is right, but we must also continue to have our focus on the love of the Lord.