



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Ephesians

Theme: In Him

Overview: Ephesians is known as “the queen of the prison epistles.” In this unit, students will learn what it means to be “in him”: made alive with Christ by God’s great love and grace, rooted in his love, living as children of light, and standing strong in the Lord’s mighty power against the forces of evil.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

The apostle Paul identifies himself as the author (Ephesians 1:1; 3:1). He wrote as “a prisoner for the Lord” (4:1) and an “ambassador in chains” (6:20).

Audience

Paul wrote “to God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1). It was likely a circular letter, meant to be read and passed along among the churches of Asia Minor, not only in Ephesus. Paul had spent about three years ministering in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10; 20:31).

Date

Ephesians is one of Paul’s four prison epistles, along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. It was likely written around AD 60–62, during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, and carried by Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21, 22).

Setting

Ephesus was a major city of the Roman Empire and home to the great temple of Artemis. The church there included both Jewish and Gentile believers, and Paul wrote to show how God’s plan unites all things—and all people—in Christ (Ephesians 1:9, 10; 2:11-22).

Theme

In him. Paul repeatedly uses phrases such as “in Christ” and “in him” to describe the believer’s new life. God “made us alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5), roots and establishes us in love (3:17), calls us to “live as children

of light” (5:8), and makes us “strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (6:10).

Why Study Ephesians?

Ephesians shows believers who they are in Christ and how they are to live. This study calls Christians to give thanks for God’s great love and mercy, to approach God with freedom and confidence, to live as wise children of light, and to stand strong in the Lord’s power against the forces of evil.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Ephesians 2:1-10

WEEK 2: Ephesians 3:8-21

WEEK 3: Ephesians 5:1-15

WEEK 4: Ephesians 6:10-20

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Give thanks for God's great love, rich in mercy making us alive with Christ.**

STUDY: Ephesians

THEME: In Him

LESSON TEXT: Ephesians 2:1-10

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 6:1-11; Ephesians 1:13-23

ALIVE IN HIM

BY MARK SCOTT

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are known as “the prison epistles” because they were written from prison (either Caesarea or Rome, Acts 24–26 or 28). Ephesians is known as “the queen of the prison epistles.” It was written by Paul as a circular letter, meant to be read and distributed among churches in the Asia Minor area and not restricted to Ephesus alone. We know much about this church (Acts 18–20; Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation 2:1–7). In these next three months we will learn from three of these four epistles.

On this weekend Christians will participate in activities to memorialize and honor those who died in service to their country. But by the great love of God, Christians actually overcome death. “In him” (a phrase that appears numerous times in Ephesians) believers are “made alive.”

Culture of Death*Ephesians 2:1–3*

The above heading comes from *Between Two Trees*, a new book by Shane Wood. Sin makes us embrace a culture of death. This is the theme of verses 1–3. Whenever we fail to trust the goodness of God (Genesis 3:6, 7) and disobey him, we kill ourselves spiritually (Romans 5:12). And that sin is not singular. It is ongoing and plural (*transgressions and sins*). In Greek these first three verses combine to form one sentence. There is just one ugly phrase after another and a downward spiral of depravity.

Transgressions (crossing a line) and *sins* (missing a mark) make us follow the ways (age) of the world. This worldliness is generated by the devil since the world lies in his power (1 John 5:19). He inspires an evil spirit who works in people who disobey God. We continue to live in this culture of death because we desire to gratify the *cravings* (passions) of our flesh. At the end of this downward spiral, we are immature children deserving God’s wrath.

Alive in Us*Ephesians 2:4–9*

The above phrase is found in the lyrics of “Alive” by Hillsong. With Jesus, death always yields to life. In one of the great contrasting phrases of the New Testament, Paul wrote, “But God.” There is death . . . “But God.” When God entered the camp of death, death had to flee (Luke 7:14; Mark 5:41; John 11:43; 1 Corinthians 15:55–57). God’s great love, his rich mercy, and his amazing grace made life possible again for those sold out to a culture of death.

The three great qualities of God drove his three great actions. God’s *love* (benevolent goodwill toward another), God’s *mercy* (loving kindness for when we feel helpless), and God’s *grace* (unearned, undeserved favor) resulted in our being *made alive* by Christ, *raised up* with Christ, and made to *sit* with Christ. These three great actions speak of our salvation. Saved people are resurrected people (made alive), exalted people (raised), and royal people (made to sit or enthroned). While believers await ultimate resurrection and exaltation, these actions are actually realized in this world. Christians live in the *heavenly realms* already (literally “heavenlies,” meaning the spiritual realm that is transcendent and imminent).

Believers who have been made alive in Christ become “exhibit A” of the incomparable riches of his grace. As trophies of grace (a word that appears three times in this passage) believers are the best representation of God’s resurrection power to a watching world. This process of being made alive is *by grace . . . through faith*. Verses 8–10 are some of the most telling salvific verses in the New Testament. Every person who became a disciple in the book of Acts did so through this formula. “Grace” is God providing salvation. “Faith” is us appropriating salvation. While we do cast a vote in our salvation (through our acceptance), God is clearly the genesis and senior partner of that saving experience. Paul makes this abundantly clear by reminding us that it is *not from ourselves*. The salvation “grace through faith plan” is from God. Any boasting has to be directed heavenward.

Practice Resurrection*Ephesians 2:10*

The above heading comes from the title of a commentary on Ephesians by Eugene Peterson. Saved people have moved from their cemetery of death to an Easter parade. This new life is demonstrated in good works. Christians can do “life works” because they have, by virtue of their salvation, become God’s *handiwork* (the English word “poem” comes from this Greek word).

On this Memorial Day weekend we might remember Abraham Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address. The speech was delivered at a cemetery, but the main metaphor in the address was conception. And when there is a conception there is life. Give thanks for God’s love that made us alive.

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GOD'S HANDIWORK

BY DAVID FAUST

The longer I live, the more I understand Job's lament that "man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Sadness flares up regularly, and I encounter a lot of it in my daily work. After more than 40 years in the ministry, I am accustomed to walking through seasons of grief with families who lose loved ones, but as I write this column, I'm in the midst of an unusually rough patch. This week a long-time minister friend of mine died, another friend lost his wife in a tragic accident, and a family close to us experienced the death of their 20-year-old grandson after a long, heroic bout with cancer. Yesterday I visited two elderly friends who are under hospice care and expect to die any day. In such times my emotions grow tired and my mind ponders questions common to us all: "God, why do you allow so much suffering? Why don't you spare us from all this pain and sorrow?"

Yet, even when sadness bombards my soul, the shield of faith helps me "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). Denying God's existence and love wouldn't make anything better. Without God, life's hardships wouldn't be lighter or easier to explain. With God there is hope.

Even while we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is at work through family members who, despite their tears, surround their dying loved ones with prayers, songs, pleasant memories, and words of respect and honor. God is at work through the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit and the reassuring promises of Scripture. God is at work through the compassionate care of the church, and through kind and skillful hospital employees, hospice nurses, chaplains, and funeral directors.

God was at work when his own beloved Son suffered the anguish of Gethsemane and the misery of Calvary. He was at work when Jesus arose on the third day, victorious over sin and death. Today, God remains at

work through the gospel message, reversing our spiritual demise and making us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5, 6). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (v. 8).

God is at work in us. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (v. 10). The word translated "handiwork" in this verse is the Greek *poiema* from which we derive our word "poem." It means a masterpiece, something artfully produced like a fine statue, a well-designed building, or a beautiful painting or song. The ancient historian Herodotus used *poiema* to describe the work of a craftsman constructing a crown. In the Greek translation of Psalm 143:5, *poiema* refers to God's remarkable works of creation and redemption.

In the process of creating something beautiful, an artist makes a mess. There will be some sawdust, paint splatters, or granite chips on the floor. Why should we be surprised if it's a messy process for us to become God's handiwork? Without the Lord, we would have the mess without any hope of seeing the finished product, but as believers "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). Even on the days when sadness flares up like sparks from a fire, God is at work.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What things did you have to stop or start when you acknowledged Christ as Lord of your life?
- What attitude and behavior changes have you seen in others who have accepted Jesus?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

1. Paul described Satan as “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work” (v. 2) who manipulates and actively inspires the sinful nature of those who are disobedient (nonbelievers). Looking around, seeing the world at large, what evidence do you see of this truth? What unbridled sinful desires, lusts, and cravings do you see portrayed in entertainment, politics, celebrities, media, business, or popular music?
2. In verse three, Paul made a clear delineation between “them” (nonbelievers) and “us” (believers in Jesus). At one point, we accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Before that, we were children of God’s wrath. Ephesians 1:13, 14 contains three basic steps of our conversion: we heard, we believed, and we were marked. Share your personal conversion story with the group. Did it follow this same pattern? Why or why not?

(If you are reading this and have not accepted Christ and been baptized, please make plans to speak with someone you trust spiritually.)

Read Ephesians 2:4-7

3. Think about when you followed the ways of this world before committing your life to Jesus. Hell-bent and dead in your transgressions, what were some things you stopped embracing from that culture of death in which you used to live? List what you began doing as a result of God’s mercy, grace, and kindness.
4. This passage tells us what God did for us through Jesus Christ. What are some of your favorite phrases in this section of Scripture? Why do they speak to your soul the way they do?

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

5. What is grace? In Greek, the word is *charis* and it refers to God’s free and unmerited favor. “It is by grace you have been saved.” Since Paul wrote this phrase word for word twice in three sentences (vv. 5 and 8), it’s clearly an important concept. What does this line mean and what does it mean to you personally? How have you been made alive with Christ?
6. Check out Romans 6:1, 2, 11-13. When it comes to grace, what role does God play and what role do we play?
7. In verse 10, the word *handiwork* in the original Greek is likened both literally and figuratively to fabric, a cloth produced by knitting or weaving threads together. In the tapestry of the kingdom, what masterpiece is God weaving in your life using the gifts and talents you’ve been given?

Conclude your group time in prayer, giving thanks for God’s great love, his amazing grace and tender mercy, and his life-giving Son.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Approach God with
freedom and confidence
in the power of Christ
rooted in love.**

STUDY: Ephesians

THEME: In Him

LESSON TEXT: Ephesians 3:8-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 8:1-15

ROOTED IN HIM

BY MARK SCOTT

The discipleship program “Rooted” originated in Africa and is growing in popularity among American churches. The prison epistles (our study through the bulk of the summer months) stress what it is like to be rooted in Christ (Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 2:6, 7). It is especially important that we are rooted in the plan of God to save the world through Christ. That is the message of Ephesians.

Up to this point in the epistle, Paul has stressed the blessings we have in Christ (1:3-14), the power we have by virtue of his lordship (vv. 15-23), the salvation that is available to us (2:1-10), and the unity we have in Jesus (vv. 11-22). In chapter three Paul marked out his place and the church’s place in God’s plan (3:1-13). Paul ended the first three chapters with a magnificent prayer (vv. 14-21).

Revealed Secret*Ephesians 3:8-13*

Mystery is a key word in Ephesians (and Colossians). The English word makes us think of “mysterious,” but that is not what the word meant in the Bible. *Mystery* meant something that you might not have known unless it had been revealed, thus “revealed secret.” God revealed his mystery (plan; called *eternal purpose* in 3:11) to Paul and Paul wrote about it to the Ephesians. Other New Testament apostles and prophets helped Paul reveal the secrets of God (v. 5). In Colossians the mystery of God is Jesus himself (1:26, 27), but in Ephesians the mystery of God is the unity in Christ between Jews and Gentiles (3:6).

Paul was amazed to think that God would use him to reveal this mystery. His humility caused him to say of himself, “I am less than the least.” Paul viewed his privilege as a special grace. This two-fold stewardship of God’s grace caused Paul to *preach* (evangelize) to the Gentiles and to *make plain* (bring to light) the revealed plan of God, which had been *hidden* (untraceable) in the past but had been revealed to the saints of Paul’s day.

The missionary nature of Paul’s ministry worked itself out primarily in the church. God’s people were intended to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the universe (*rulers and authorities* refer to entities beyond the physical realm of this world—these exist in the heavenly realms). The plan of God is uniquely found in Christ. Placing faith in him allowed the believers to experience *freedom and confidence*. And even though Paul was a prisoner (3:1), he did not want the Ephesians

to be *discouraged* (lose heart) about his *sufferings* (tribulations or pressures). The revealed secret of God was to unite all things in Christ (1:9, 10).

Powerful Prayer*Ephesians 3:14-21*

Paul often broke out in prayer and doxology in his writings (Romans 1:25; 8:37-39; 11:34-36). This text is no exception. After taking three chapters to lay out the plan of God to unite all things in Christ, Paul went to his knees. This is the second prayer in Ephesians (see 1:15-23). It is hard to improve on the loftiness of this prayer. The request in the prayer is long and involved (verses 14-19 make up one sentence in the Greek New Testament). The doxology to the prayer is one of the most beautiful in all of the epistles.

Since Paul had been talking about the unity between Jews and Gentiles, he began the prayer with that same united purpose. The good Father in Heaven is the one who brings all people together. Essentially Paul’s request is two-fold: 1) that God would *strengthen* (strengthen to the point of being able to resist things) the Ephesians with power through his Spirit and 2) that God would help the Ephesians to *grasp* (lay hold of or seize; maybe even “understand”) God’s love. The strength comes from the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer, and the love comes in a thorough and immense way from Christ himself. The dimensions (width, length, height, and depth) of love are complete ways of speaking about being filled up with the fullness of Christ. Power from on high and love from Jesus keep saints rooted in God.

The prayer ends with a stunning doxology (see Hebrews 13:20, 21; Jude 24, 25). Paul acknowledged that God was very much able to answer the prayer because he can do *immeasurably* (above and beyond) more than believers could ask or imagine. God can do this because he has power, and that power indwells the believers. The prayer (and the first half of Ephesians) ended with glory being ascribed to God now and for eternity. (The theme of the 2010 NACC was “Beyond.”) If we stay rooted and established in him, he will take us beyond.

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DON'T LOVE LIGHTLY

BY DAVID FAUST

I'll never forget the first time I told Candy that I loved her. I was 20 years old and she was 19. We were sitting side by side in my rust-colored, rust-covered Plymouth in the parking lot of a fine dining establishment called Donut Land.

Mustering up my courage, I looked her in the eyes and said, "I love you." Candy looked back at me and said . . . nothing. That's right: nothing! She was speechless, and I was embarrassed. The date ended awkwardly, and I returned to my college dorm wondering if I had made an enormous blunder.

After being married nearly 44 years, today I have no doubt about Candy's love for me. I realize now why she remained silent when I first professed my love for her. It wasn't because she didn't love me. It was because she took love very seriously. She viewed love as a major commitment, so she refused to say it lightly. When she finally stated her love for me, she meant it—and over the years she has shown it over and over again through countless words and sacrificial acts.

God's Pure Love

Love is an action word—a verb more than a noun. Love commits, gives, sacrifices, and pursues the best interests of others. Selfishness takes, controls, manipulates, and uses others' bodies and emotions for personal gratification. Christians don't love perfectly, but we must take love seriously. Jesus calls love the distinguishing mark of his followers (John 13:35). Paul considers it "the greatest of these" (1 Corinthians 13:13) and the first among the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). John insists, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

In Ephesians chapter three, Paul makes several points about God's pure love.

It stretches beyond normal measurements. How "wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (v. 18)? Wide enough to encompass every ethnic group, every age group, every individual on earth. Long enough to extend throughout human history and cover each of us from conception till death and beyond. High enough to fill the throne-room of Heaven. Deep enough to lift us up when we hit bottom.

It stretches beyond our full comprehension. In an ironic turn of phrase, Paul challenges us "to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (v. 19). How can we know something that surpasses knowledge? God's love is beyond our full comprehension, but we can keep learning more about it and keep digging our roots deeper into it. Pursuing God's love is like hiking up a mountain. It's strenuous at times, and the path takes dangerous dips and turns, but the view grows more beautiful the higher we climb.

It is within our grasp. Paul insists that we can know and be filled with God's pure love. When that happens, the Lord will accomplish in us "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (vv. 20, 21).

Two thousand years ago on a hill called Calvary, the Lord Jesus made an unselfish, costly personal investment in our well-being—the ultimate gift of love. Today, the risen Christ calls us to die to selfishness and devote ourselves without reservation to serving God and others. That's what it means to take love seriously.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- In high school, were you part of a certain social group? What cliques or divisions were you aware of as a teenager? Are you aware of different closed communities now?
- Let's talk plants for a moment. Weakly established root systems produce sickly, poorly producing plants. Burgeoning, prolific root systems produce plants that last through the stresses of the seasons to yield a great harvest. What are some elements of a healthy, deep, spiritual root system?

Read Ephesians 3:8-16

1. Consider people groups that are fundamentally different than you—ones you may have thought were too far from God to ever be accepted by him. Think about immigrants (language and cultural barriers), prostitutes, people in the LGBT community, people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol, or those with different belief systems. What would it look like to minister to people like these?
2. Prior to his conversion, Paul approved of killing and destroying anyone or anything outside of his "clique" (anyone or anything that challenged his understanding of Jewish law). Following his conversion, Paul regarded himself not only as a servant of the gospel of Christ, but as one called to preach to those he formerly disdained, the Gentiles. What would it be like to minister to people you previously refused to eat with, touch, or speak to?
3. Mark Scott noted that the word *mystery* in verse 9 refers to the unity in Christ between Jews and Gentiles (see Ephesians 3:6). Do you see division or a lack of unity among believers within your own congregation or within the church as a whole (perhaps based on economics, race, background, politics, education, or age)? Discuss why you think this exists and what your group could do to be a catalyst for unification and restoration between these divisions.
4. Jesus' suffering and passion are our glory. His death, like a kernel of wheat, took root and bore incredible fruit—the church. Paul explained in verse 13 that his sufferings were for the church's glory. What suffering have you experienced or witnessed someone endure so that a person far from Jesus could know him as Lord and Savior? Talk about this together as a group.

Read Ephesians 3:16-21

5. Being "rooted" means to go down deeply, spread widely, be established firmly, and to be immovable. What are three practices or disciplines that have helped root you in your faith?
6. Discuss your answers as a group. What discipline or practice will you put into place this week to grow deeper in your faith?

(Dr. Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* is a great resource for further ideas.)

7. Luke 8:1-15 contains the well-known Parable of the Sower, where Jesus taught about seed (the Word of God) being sown in different kinds of soil. Verse 13 explains how those who represent rocky soil "have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." Discuss together what part love plays in establishing and growing a believer's faith, allowing God to dwell in their heart. Is it found in the soil or the plant or both?
8. Paul prayed that God's people "may have power . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (vv. 17, 18). Discuss what you think Paul meant when he described God's love as wide, long, high, and deep. How can we demonstrate this kind of love to the watching world and to one another?

Conclude your group time in prayer, asking God for confidence and boldness to encourage one another as you take the gospel to your community and to the world.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Live as children of light
seeking what pleases
the Lord as wise not
unwise ones.**

STUDY: Ephesians

THEME: In Him

LESSON TEXT: Ephesians 5:1-15

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 12:1-21

LIVING IN HIM

BY MARK SCOTT

Charles Caleb Colton is credited as having said, “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery” (though others said similar things dating back as far as the time of Marcus Aurelius). There is an appropriate plagiarism when it comes to Jesus. Paul told the Ephesians to “follow God’s example.” This expression comes from a verb that means “to mimic.” Copying Jesus is commanded and commended.

These lessons from Ephesians are all centered “in him” (i.e., Christ). Believers put their faith in him and are rooted in him. In the more practical sections of Ephesians (chapters 5 and 6) Christians are called to “live in him.” This life is expressed in being united (4:1-7), using spiritual gifts for ministry (vv. 7-16), and putting on the characteristics of the new self (vv. 17-32). In this section Paul called the Ephesians to live in love, live in light, and live in wisdom. The word *live* is actually the word *walk*, which is a metaphor for the Christian experience.

Walk in Love*Ephesians 5:1-7*

People *dearly loved* (beloved) by God should be able to live a life of love. Jesus set the example. He *loved* (the action of the verb is viewed as completed) us and gave (i.e., handed over) himself for us (John 10:11, 17, 18; Hebrews 9:14). This giving of Jesus had great continuity with an Old Testament *offering* or *sacrifice*. Christians are called to love sacrificially.

There is nothing impure in this life of love (Ephesians 5:3, 5). It could never be confused with any love beyond God’s beneficial boundaries. Paul discussed this love in terms of sexual expression. Christian love is never *sexually immoral* (the Greek word is where we get our English word *pornography*). Neither is it *impure* (unclean). Next Paul mentioned *greed*. That could refer to the desire for more money, but the context seems to indicate that the greed relates to sexual addiction. This triad of evil is never appropriate for God’s people. Sex is not what one has. Sex is what one is. Sex can easily become an idol. People who habitually give themselves to this are idol worshipers and will not inherit God’s ultimate kingdom.

A life of love also puts a constraint on our words (verses 4 and 6). Believers are not to speak with *obscenity* (indecent or improper speech). Neither should believers speak with *foolish* (moronic) words or *coarse joking* (witty language that scoffs at others) kinds of speech. A person who walks in love should instead speak with *thanksgiving* (the Greek word is where we get our English word *eucharist*). People can be *deceived* (seduced into error or misled) with *empty* (vain) words. After all, we are our

words (Matthew 12:33-37). Paul reminded the Ephesians that God’s wrath was reserved for people who cannot control their glands or words. Intimate fellowship (*partners*) with people like this can cause God’s people not to walk in love.

Walk in Light*Ephesians 5:8-14*

God is light (1 John 1:5). That is probably more than a metaphor, but Paul described Christians in the same way. Formerly the believers were *darkness* and lived in that darkness (moral evil). But, by virtue of their conversion to Christ, they are light and are called to live in the *light* (moral excellence). Light is all over these verses (occurring five times in the short paragraph). Paul described the fruit of light and marked out the mission of light.

The fruit of light is a triad of virtues. Light produces *goodness* (inner and pure goodness), *righteousness* (conformity to God’s standards and justice), and *truth* (genuineness and realness). The believer who produces this fruit will find out what *pleases* (tests to be approved) the Lord. In contrast to the fruit of light is the secret nature of the disobedient (John 3:20, 21).

There is a mission for those who walk in the light. They are called to *expose* (shame, disgrace, prove wrong, or convict) the deeds of the disobedient. While this must be done in love (previous section), it must be done. Otherwise we treat the unbelievers cruelly. Walking in the light just lights up everything. It awakens people who have been dulled to a culture of death. Drawing on language from Isaiah 60:1, Paul called the Ephesians to wake up from their spiritual darkness and walk in this moral excellence.

Walk in Wisdom*Ephesians 5:15*

“Walking in wisdom” in the Bible refers to applying God’s revelation to live skillfully. In the verses that follow our printed text, wise walking showed up in using time wisely, being full of the Holy Spirit, singing joy into people’s lives, giving thanks for everything, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Copy God in love, light, and wisdom.

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CONFRONTING OUR HIDDEN IDOLATRIES

BY DAVID FAUST

The first of the Ten Commandments states, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Idolatry isn’t just wrong, it’s irrational. Jeremiah mocked those who chopped down a tree, shaped the wood with a chisel, adorned it with silver and gold, secured it with nails so it wouldn’t topple over, then bowed and prayed to an object their own hands had made (Jeremiah 10:3-5). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alone deserve our worship.

Idolatry damages the soul. Surely we would never engage in it. Yet, when John wrote a letter encouraging Christians to persevere in God’s truth and love, he found it necessary to include this warning: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). And when Paul told the Ephesian Christians, “such a person is an idolater” (Ephesians 5:5), he was not talking about worshipers who build altars to honor Baal. He was warning about three spiritual hazards that still war against our souls today: immorality, impurity, and greed.

An Unhealthy Lust for More

In 2019 it sounds incredibly counter-cultural (and some might say, unrealistic) to suggest that among us “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity” (v. 3). Without “obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking” (v. 4), a lot of locker room talk, TV shows, and social media posts would disappear. Admittedly, my own tongue slips now and then. I need God’s help to keep my thoughts and words pure. But in light of these clear verses of Scripture, I can’t shrug my shoulders and give up the fight for purity of heart and speech. It bothers me that profanity has become so commonplace. We should never get comfortable with taking the Lord’s name in vain. In our conversations online and in person, we should not denigrate women, drag men’s minds into the gutter, or express hatred for others.

When it comes to sexual immorality, haven’t we seen enough damage caused by pornography addiction, affairs, sexual abuse, and STDs? And no matter how much lawmakers and lobbyists try to normalize same-sex marriage, the practice doesn’t square with Jesus’ insistence that from the beginning God intended marriage to be for “male and female” (Matthew 19:4-6). With the Holy Spirit’s help, we need to encourage strong marriages, welcome healthy accountability, practice self-control, provide wise counsel for the emotionally wounded, humbly confess our sins and weaknesses, devote ourselves to prayer, push back against immorality and impurity, and support one another in the pursuit of holiness.

And what about greed? The Bible labels covetousness another form of idolatry (Exodus 20:17; Colossians 3:5), so why do we tolerate this sin in our hearts? Jesus said not to store up treasures on earth, but you wouldn’t know that from the way his followers keep accumulating more things we don’t really need to stuff into our houses and garages. It’s fine to enjoy God’s blessings. He “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). But an unhealthy lust for more keeps us from enjoying the greater blessings of being “rich in good deeds . . . generous and willing to share” (v. 18).

Bow down before a graven image? Never! But let’s also guard our hearts against idolatries that threaten to divert our love away from the one true God.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Recall a time when someone you know acted in an unwise or foolish way. Without dishonoring anyone involved, what happened as a result of those actions? What was the collateral damage to others?
- Name someone you know (or knew) whose character you would like to emulate. Why do you feel this way about that person?

Read Ephesians 5:1, 2

1. How can we live as imitators of God? Describe what you think an imitator of God looks like.
2. Sacrifice is always thinking less about yourself and more about the interests of others. In Romans 12:1, Paul talks about offering our bodies as living sacrifices. Discuss what living a life of sacrifice looks like. Why does God's Word say it is an act of spiritual worship? Do you find this sacrificial life to be difficult or simple? Why?
3. Romans 12:1-21 lists a variety of practical ways for us to be imitators of God and live a life of love (i.e., renewing your mind; being sincere in your love). Skim each paragraph and talk about the ways we can imitate Jesus. If it helps, make a list on a whiteboard or in your Bible. What difficulties do you or others face in walking out these specific examples in your everyday life?
4. Challenge yourself in the upcoming week to work on at least one of these examples. Midweek, report on your progress to your group leader or another participant.

Read Ephesians 5:3-10

5. What lies in deep darkness eventually manifests itself. Hidden desires often lead to shameful disobedience. Immorality, impurity, and greed start as dark, tiny seeds and can eventually grow into the giant weeds of obscenity, sexual misconduct, coarse joking, and foolish talk. Discuss why "there must not be even a hint" (Ephesians 5:3) of these in the lives of believers, especially Christian leaders.
6. As a dearly loved child of God, what do verses 6-8 mean to you? Share your perspective with the members of your group.
7. This section of Scripture contains some positive things believers are supposed to do as children of light. List them and discuss: What is the key to being childlike and finding what pleases the Lord? How does childlikeness correlate to being an imitator of God?

Read Ephesians 5:11-15

8. Paul talks about light and darkness, about fruitfulness and fruitlessness. Discuss the spiritual implications and parallels of these contrasting images. Think about your personal relationship with Jesus and share with your group an example of when you received direction or prompting from the Holy Spirit that produced spiritual fruit.
9. In verse 15, Paul exhorts us to be very careful about the way we live since the days are evil. We're to be wise (discerning, sound, and insightful) rather than unwise (thoughtless, insensitive, and ignorant). Revisit Romans 12:21. Consider together what it means to make the most of every opportunity. How does being wise help us overcome evil?

Close in prayer using the following as a guide: "Lord, though we live a dark and fallen world, show us how to live as children of light, seeking to know your good, pleasing, and perfect will."

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Stand strong in the power of the Lord against the forces of evil.**

STUDY: Ephesians

THEME: In Him

LESSON TEXT: Ephesians 6:10-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Samuel 17:32-51; Philippians 4:13

STRONG IN HIM

BY MARK SCOTT

The scholar Oscar Cullmann distinguished Good Friday from the Second Coming with an analogy. He likened Calvary to D-Day and the Second Coming to V-Day. D-Day was a decisive battle in WWII when the allied forces stormed Normandy, France. That battle was the beginning of the end for Hitler's forces. But the war was not over that day. There would be many skirmishes until victory could be secured. That is not unlike our text today. On Calvary's hill, Jesus had already won the decisive battle with sin, death, and the devil. But the final victory had not yet been secured. Today Christians live in the tension of the now (saved and sanctified) and the not yet (new Heaven and new earth).

Following the church section (4:1-16), the ethical section (4:17-5:21), and the household section (5:22-6:9) of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the apostle taught about how to wage war against the defanged dragon. The final section deals with spiritual warfare and the skirmishes against our defeated enemy.

Find Strength*Ephesians 6:10*

If believers win against Satan it will be because they found wherein their strength lies. The phrase "*Be strong*" means "to be clothed with." The same words translate the first phrase of 6:11, "*Put on*." Christians must be clothed with strength from God to put up a valiant fight with the accuser of the brethren. Two significant prepositional phrases locate where this strength is found: "in the Lord" and "in his mighty power." Too many times followers of Jesus try to fight the enemy in the power of the flesh instead of in God's power. Even Jesus himself knew better than this (Matthew 4:1-11).

Know the Enemy*Ephesians 6:11, 12*

Paul called Christians to stand against the devil's *schemes* (i.e., methods) by putting on the armor of God. Paul developed the particulars of this in later verses. In these verses Paul reminded believers that our *struggle* (this is the only time in the New Testament where this word occurs) is unique. The enemy is not neighbors, government, or the church down the street. Those are small potatoes. The enemy exists in the heavenly realms—not *flesh and blood* (human). The enemy is unseen and spiritual in nature. The enemy works through a four-fold force: *rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil*. Do we know the enemy's "methods"? Do we know his "mind" (2 Corinthians 2:11)?

Get Dressed*Ephesians 6:13-17*

If we are to be successful in fighting the enemy, we must avail ourselves of the armor that God provides. Paul used a different expression for *put on* this time. The phrase means "take up." Christians are to take up their armor to *stand* (i.e., to the point of resistance) "when" the day of evil comes.

Paul might have been looking through the door of his Roman house prison (Acts 28), watching the Roman soldier who was guarding him, when he wrote these words. Perhaps he compared the pieces of armor of that Roman soldier to the experience of spiritual warfare for believers. He connected six pieces of armor with six qualities of the Christian life. *Truth* was like the soldier's belt. A belt holds a person together. *Righteousness* was like the breastplate. God's standards protect the heart. *Peace* was compared to the soldier's shoes. They equipped the soldier to evangelize (see Romans 10:15). *Faith* was like the shield. The shield (often made of leather and immersed in water before battle so as to douse flaming arrows from the enemy) could protect the entire life. *Salvation* was like the helmet. The mind of Christ had to be protected for thinking through God's deliverance. Finally, the *Word of God* was likened to the sword of the Spirit. The only offensive weapon of the armor was what the believers used in battle. Putting on those six qualities each day will ensure victory.

Pray Like Crazy*Ephesians 6:18-20*

Since prayer was not mentioned as part of the six pieces of armor, Paul drew down on it in closing. Christians are to *pray in the Spirit*. Kenneth Taylor had this right by translating it, "Ask God for anything within the Holy Spirit's wishes" (*Living Bible*). Christians are to *pray on all occasions* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Christians are to use different types of prayers. Christians are to pray by interceding for the saints. Christians are to pray for church leaders—Paul even requested prayer for himself. Christians are to pray for boldness (translated, *fearlessly*) so that the revealed secret of God (gospel) will be made known.

The battle is won but skirmishes remain. May we be like Winston Churchill when he said, "There is nothing more exhilarating than being shot at without success."

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WORRIER OR WARRIOR?

BY DAVID FAUST

In the battle for truth, are you in or out? Will you faint, or will you fight? When the Lord calls you to action, will you dive in or bail out?

The apostle Paul told Timothy, “Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). Are you a worrier or a warrior? If you expect the Christian life to be easy, you haven’t read the New Testament. Near the end of his life, Paul wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). He had battle scars, but no regrets.

He urged, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood . . .” (Ephesians 6:10-12). The daily news focuses on “flesh and blood” stories about the economy, Hollywood celebrities, and political squabbles. Do we recognize that on a deeper level there’s spiritual warfare going on as Satan schemes to deceive God’s people and destroy God’s work?

Fight the Right Way, for the Right Things

We must choose our weapons wisely. “We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with [like prayer, fasting, and the Word of God] are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4).

We must choose our battles wisely. We don’t have time for “quarreling about words,” “godless chatter,” and “foolish and stupid arguments” that merely produce quarrels (2 Timothy 2:14, 16, 23). But make no mistake about it. When it comes to the things that really matter, we will engage in the battle.

We will fight for our children and grandchildren. We will never stop praying for them, loving them, and

guiding them in the ways of the Lord.

We will fight for people who are far from God. We will never become complacent about sharing the good news of Christ.

We will fight for justice. We will protect the unborn and the fatherless, care for widows and the elderly, and serve the hungry, oppressed, and overlooked.

We will defend our faith graciously and persuasively, communicating what we believe (and why) with gentleness and respect.

We will fight for biblical truth. Amid the shifting sands of culture, God and his Word remain our bedrock, constant and unchanging.

We will fight for church unity. We will not allow Satan to divide us or distract us from our mission of helping people take their next steps with Jesus.

We will fight for hope. We won’t give in to cynicism and pessimism. Our hope is secured by the living Christ who rose from the dead and who has gone to prepare a place for us.

If the battle looks overwhelming, take heart. A prophet told God’s people long ago, “This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s’” (2 Chronicles 20:15).

There’s a lot to be concerned about in today’s world. Will you be a worrier, wringing your hands? Or with God’s help, will you be a warrior and join in the fight for what is right?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Military movies like *Unbroken* (2018), *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and *Braveheart* (1995) depict fierce, bloody battles and thrilling acts of courage displayed by soldiers and warriors who stood bravely opposed to their enemy. Share your favorite battle scenes from any movie or book. (*The Hobbit*, anyone?) What makes these stories so epic?
- Did you ever find yourself in a conflict only to realize the enemy wasn't who (or what) you thought it was? Explain.

Read Ephesians 6:10-14a

1. What is the source of your strength in the Lord? Read and discuss Philippians 4:13 in light of this passage.
2. Curiously, this paragraph never mentions the word *victory*. However, there's one word used four times. It means to take a position, to have a (fighting) stance. Thinking about your daily life, where and on what do you take a stand? What have you admired in others who have taken a stand in faith? If there was a battle that ensued, what did that battle look like?
3. The idea of standing on a spiritual battlefield in the face of darkness, demons, and the devil can be frightening. But make no mistake; you can be fully equipped for battle! Without fear, David stood against Goliath. (Read about it in 1 Samuel 17:32-51.) Talk about why David, a young man, was so confident going to battle with only stones and a sling. What skills and experiences had made him battle ready? Explore how people in your group have endured spiritual battles and how their faith grew as a result.

Read Ephesians 6:14b-17

4. Recruits in basic training are given gear they're expected to master and maintain, along with careful expert instruction. In battle, without that training or equipment, they're dead. Christians are given the armor of God—six distinct pieces—as a result of our salvation and obedience. One is offensive, the rest are defensive. What role does each piece play in a believer's life?
5. Two pieces of this armor, faith and the Word of God, are wielded through our choices and obedience—one for protecting, one for attacking. Where is your faith? How about your sword of the Spirit? Are they hanging at your side, or do you have them in hand, mastered and maintained? How can you encourage your fellow Christian soldiers this week to hold them high?

This week, memorize the component parts of the armor of God as you prepare for spiritual battles. (This is a great section of Scripture to use and share as a morning prayer with children and grandchildren, too.)

Read Ephesians 6:18-20

6. What is the correlation between verses 17 and 18? What do these armor items have to do with prayer? What are the weapons of our warfare?
7. You've talked about spiritual battlegrounds and armor. So, how do you fight and win a spiritual battle? Brainstorm what you can do together this week to pray for your church leaders and members, missionaries, and for each member of the group to boldly make a stand so that the gospel of Jesus Christ can be known to a lost and dark world.

Conclude with prayer using the following as a guide: It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves—but by his faithfulness, lovingkindness, and goodness. Father, strengthen our stance in your great and mighty power against the forces of evil in our days. Help us to be alert and to pray for all the saints. Grant us boldness to speak about the good news of Jesus Christ and take territory from the enemy of our souls.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.