



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH JACKSONVILLE

Walking in Christ: Seven Reasons You Need to Study Ephesians

6.30.2024

Ephesians and its Biblical Context

[Teacher's note: It will be helpful to share some historical context for Ephesians in this introductory lesson. However, we need to be careful to make sure historical context doesn't take up too much time in the lesson. Feel free to edit as is best for your teaching style, but I would recommend keeping this portion on historical context a similar length or shorter.]

The church at Ephesus was full of gentiles. In other words, God's people now included foreign nations. While this concept has become normal to us today, it certainly wasn't for many early Christians. For over a millennium God's chosen people were the descendants of Israel, but now the nations were brought in.

While this development in God's plan was unusual for many Jews, it shouldn't have been surprising. From the very beginning of God's covenant with Abraham, God promised to bless the nations through him. Throughout the Old Testament we see reminders of God's plan to bless the nations. But the time to bring in the nations was finally announced by Jesus in the great commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18b-19a).

And from Pentecost forward, God's river of blessing for the nations burst from the dam and has been consuming the earth ever since. City after city in the ancient world was taken by the storm of God's grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Ephesus was no small example.

We can see the origin story of the church of Ephesus in Acts 19 where the Apostle Paul preached to the Jews and then to the gentiles. People believed! They followed Christ. They burned their magic books and turned away from their idols. The worshippers of Artemis tried to stop it, but the floodgates of the gospel had been opened and no one could stem its flow.

Years later... The gospel has spread to the heart of the empire, Rome itself. And there lies Paul, chained and imprisoned, but not silenced. With his mouth he's preaching to the imperial guard. With his pen, he's writing letters. He writes words of life, words of truth, even the very word of God.

And it is during this time, that he writes a small but profound letter to the people of Ephesus. The words he wrote were timely and needed for the church in Ephesus in that day. But what he may have never imagined was how timely and needed those words are for *this church* and for *this day*.

Why we need to study Ephesians

Ephesians is incredibly relevant to our church and to this class today. And we're going to get into seven reasons we need to study Ephesians. These reasons fit into two main categories: *gospel truth* and *gospel walk*.

- The first half of Ephesians (Chapters 1-3) is largely about *gospel truth*. It's about truths we need to know and need to be reminded of.
- The second half of Ephesians (Chapters 4-6) is largely about *gospel walk*. It's about how we should live in light of the truths we learned in this first half of Ephesians.

Our seven reasons will all fall under these two categories: *gospel truth* and *gospel walk*.

[Teacher's note: In the following list, feel free to insert your own stories or examples. I also included passages for reference, but you will not be able to read all of them while teaching]

The Gospel Truth

1) We need Ephesians in a world confused about Christ.

Ephesians has a huge emphasis on Christ. Many commentators mention how Ephesians has some of the most robust Christology in the whole New Testament. In chapter one we see the phrase "in Christ" over and over again. Ephesians wants us to know Christ!

And this is important for us because our world is ignorant about who Jesus Christ really is. Worse yet, many Christians are ignorant about Christ. For example, many Christians can't even tell you what "Christ" means (can you?). We're called "Christians" but so many don't even know what "Christ" means.

In a world confused about Christ, we need to have a robust theology of Christ. We cannot be ignorant about our savior and Lord. We need to be experts in Christology. We need to know the one we call Lord. We need to know who he is and why he matters. And Ephesians will spell that out for us.

2) We need Ephesians in a world confused about salvation.

Salvation in Jesus Christ is the greatest news in all of history. The problem is that people are consistently get it wrong. What role does grace have to play? How about good works? People consistently accept lies concerning salvation.

We need to champion the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. We need to know what Christ accomplished. We need to know who we are in Christ. We need to know how salvation is applied to us and for what reason we are saved.

And Ephesians will tell you these things. It will tell you who you are in Christ. It will tell you how you are saved and for what purpose you are saved. Few books explain these essential truths about salvation to use as clearly as Ephesians (i.e., Ephesians 2:8-10).

When we learn these truths, when we let these truths take root in our hearts and minds, we will be transformed.

The Gospel Walk

If chapters 1-3 are primarily about *gospel truth*, chapters 4-6 are primarily about gospel walk.

“Walk” is one of the most common commands in the last half of the book of Ephesians. The book of Ephesians builds on the foundation of gospel truths and then tells you how to walk in light of those truths. If the first half of Ephesians teaches us what it means to be “in Christ”, the last half tells us how to “walk” in Christ.

3) We need Ephesians in a world of dying churches.

Ephesians tells the church how to live. When someone becomes a believer, they become a part of the people of God. They become a part of the church. And Ephesians tells the church how to live, how to walk in a way that honors him.

All around our country we see sick and weak churches shutting their doors. I knew a doctrinally faithful church denomination whose main denominational service had become helping their churches shut down wisely! In a time when churches are closing and weakening, we need to get stronger. And that’s the vision Ephesians has for churches.

Ephesians has a vision of churches that are growing and are being built up. It has a vision of churches that are mature, healthy, and strong (i.e., Ephesians 4:13-16).

If we just coast with the culture, our future will follow the pattern of churches all over America. We each, individually need to heed the instruction of Ephesians for the church and walk in the way God wants us to as a church.

4) We need Ephesians in a world of division.

Unity is a major focus of application in the book of Ephesians (i.e., Ephesians 4:3-6).

This was a radical feature of the early church—Jews and Gentiles worshipping and fellowshiping together with equal standing before God.

Division has been the norm for human history since the fall. Adam's first son killed the second son and we have been killing each other ever since. We separate into nations, into states, into ethnicities, into all kinds of communities. We get into our community and treat everyone else as outsiders. Even groups that try to fix division apart from Christ often just make things worse.

Being loving and unified is not natural. Even when a Christian walks in through these doors, many of us don't feel a natural inclination to love and welcome them. And that's because of the sin nature in our hearts.

But when Christ saves us and adopts us into his family, he calls us to something the world can't achieve—unity, true and beautiful. If Christ is unifying all things in himself, it only makes sense that we would begin to see that in the church.

How are we going to become a church known for its unity? How are we going to become a class known for its genuine love for one another? God reveals that to us in the book of Ephesians.

5) We need Ephesians in a world of darkness.

Ephesians has much to say about holy living (i.e., Ephesians 4:17-5:15).

When we are in Christ, the holy one, we too should walk in holiness.

All around us people are falling into idolatry and celebrating sin. And so did many of us. But we are called to walk differently. We are called to a new life. We are to put off the old and put on the new. This is easier said than done, but Ephesians points out our sins with laser precision.

As we are surrounded by temptations and allured by the seductions of sin, we need the word of God to slap us out of our stupor and lead us on paths of righteousness for his name's sake. The sins that plagued the world back then plague us still. We need the light Ephesians provides as we try to walk uprightly in a world of darkness.

6) We need Ephesians in a world of relational strife.

The further our culture runs from God, the worse our relationships become.

Marriages are failing and families are suffering. Many are rejecting God's plan for marriage altogether. Children are estranged from parents. Parents don't know how to parent. And we don't know how to work together either. Bosses don't know how to lead, and employees don't respect authority.

Husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant—all of these foundational relationships are redeemed when we are in Christ. Our relationships at work need to be transformed. Our relationships with our families need to be renewed. Our relationship with our spouse can be redeemed for its true purpose, to display the beauty of the love of God and his covenant faithfulness to his bride.

When we are in Christ, our relationships will say something about him. Let's send the right message. Ephesians will show us how (i.e., Ephesians 5:22-6:9).

7) We need Ephesians in a world of weakness.

When we try to walk in righteousness it becomes apparent that we are weak.

It's hard to live in unity. It's hard to put off our old lives and put on new life. It's hard to display the beauty of Christ in our relationships.

We fall under the attacks. We get beat down. And we so easily fail.

But Ephesians shows us that we have incredible power available. We may be weak, but our Lord is not. When we are in Christ, he gives us his armor (i.e. Ephesians 6:10-18). He gives us his weapons. And we can put on his armor and carry his weapons and walk with confidence through the battlefield of this life.

We can be strong in the strength of the Lord. And that's a message we need to hear from Ephesians.

In short, you need the gospel truth and the gospel walk that Ephesians lays out for you. You need to know what it means to be in Christ and how to walk according to his ways. So, I am calling you to commit yourself to this study and be fully engaged.

How to be fully engaged in this Ephesians study

I want to challenge you to commit to getting the most you possibly can out of this study, because you need it. Our class needs it. Our church needs it.

So, I have five levels of commitment I want to challenge you with:

- **Level 1: Be completely here.** Be faithful in attendance. Focus when you're here. Be ready to discuss.
- **Level 2: Follow the Bible reading plan and read the passage for Sunday School ahead of time each week.**
- **Level 3: Reach Ephesians as a whole once every week.**
- **Level 4: Do the workbook study every week.**
- **Level 5: Meet with someone to discuss the passage and do the workbook together.**

Let's commit to this study as a class. And let's see what the Lord does in us and through us.