

Ephesians

A Bible Study Guide

For the Church in Cholsey

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Ephesians – The Church of Christ growing to maturity

This study was born out of a desire to help the congregation of the church in Cholsey to develop a vision for the church, and indeed for any church. Working out what the vision should be for a church congregation depends of course on the context and the particular call of God. He has plans for good and not for evil (Jeremiah 29:11) for every individual believer and for each church. This follows from the blessings each individual has in Christ and the fact that every church is the body of Christ in a particular location or environment.

It is suggested that this study is carried out continuously over twelve weeks if possible. It is therefore suitable for the autumn season. These notes are designed for individual study and for group discussion and application.

Please do not necessarily attempt to answer all the questions in a given study. The leader should identify those questions which would be most helpful for the group, and limit the number of questions and topics studied.

Some of the questions towards the end of each study can be used by individuals during the week after the group study is completed.

The twelve studies are as follows:

1. Ephesians 1:1-14. Count your blessings
2. Ephesians 1:15-23. God's dynamite
3. Ephesians 2:1-10. Saved by grace for good works
4. Ephesians 2:11-22. Breaking down barriers
5. Ephesians 3:1-13. The mystery of salvation revealed
6. Ephesians 3:14-21. Filled with all the fullness of God
7. Ephesians 4:1-6. Unity in the body of Christ
8. Ephesians 4:7-16. Becoming mature Christians
9. Ephesians 4:17-5:2. Living a transformed life
10. Ephesians 5:3-5:21. Living in the light
11. Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Submitting to one another
12. Ephesians 6:10-23. Standing firm in conflict

It is recommended that another (concluding) meeting be held for all those participating in the study, at which the various experiences and insights arising out of the different study groups be brought together, and a common way forward is allowed to emerge

The following notes in this booklet are for members of a home or house group. There is a second book containing notes for the leader(s).

1. Ephesians 1:1-14. Count your blessings

Theme: Acknowledging and appropriating the blessings of God

Talkabout: 'Count your blessings, name them one by one'. The popular hymn of long ago urges us to enumerate the ways in which we have been blessed in our daily lives by God. List the blessings that you are aware God has blessed you with. Identify the two blessings you would put top of your list, and share these with your neighbour. Discuss them and agree on a blessing that you have in common. Then share your conclusion with the group. Write down the conclusions of the group.

Investigate: Read Ephesians 1:1-14.

Comment: The Apostle Paul talks about specific environments: this earth, the kingdom of the air, heaven and earth, the heavens, the universe and the heavenly realms. He thought differently to us about the structure of the universe. For him, this world is dark and is covered by the kingdom of the air which is under the control of the spirit at work in the disobedient. Heaven and earth complement each other, while the heavenly realms are completely other than this world (which does not mean they are beyond the edge of the universe!). It appears that the heavenly realms existed before the world was created. Both this world and the heavenly realms include forces of evil as well as good. It is in the heavenly realms God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. What God has done for us in Christ has cosmic significance.

Investigate: What is Paul's intention in writing this letter (or epistle)?

- The form of the first part of the letter is a prayer. Can you think of the reason why Paul adopted this way of writing?

List the (six) blessings God has given us; see Ephesians 1:4, 5, 7, 9-10, 11, 13-14

- How have we experienced these blessings in our lives?
- What is the scope of God's purpose in history? See Ephesians 1:10
- In whom is this purpose fulfilled?
- What is the goal of God's purpose? See Ephesians 1:12
- Can you trace some of the things God has done in history (in more recent times as well biblical times) to work towards achieving this purpose?

Apply: What God has done is 'to the praise of His glory'; see Ephesians 1:12, 14

This implies that the blessings God gives us should be obvious to others as we live out our Christian discipleship.

- Discuss the implications of these blessings as they affect each one of us.
- Why is there such a gulf between what God has promised to give us and our experience of them in our daily lives?
- How therefore can we make these blessings more real and transparent in us?

Investigate: God has redeemed us; see Ephesians 1:7-8

- What part in this process has been done by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit separately?
- Why did God choose us? See Ephesians 1:4
- Does it matter that we have only believed in Christ 2000 years after his death and resurrection?

Apply: What should be our response to what God has done for us?

- What new light does this throw on the promises made in our baptism? (These are: to reject the devil and all rebellion against God, to renounce the deceit and corruption of evil, to repent of the sins that separate us from God and Neighbour, to turn to Christ as Saviour, to submit to Christ as Lord, to come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life).

What does it mean for us to be marked with a seal of the promised Holy Spirit?

- What does the Holy Spirit guarantee?
- Why are we dependent on a guarantee?

Vision point: What contributes to a vision of Cholsey Church from this study?
Each of us is richly blessed. How can we express our thanks to God for this?

Getting personal:

What blessing listed in Ephesians 1 is new to you, or which you now understand in greater depth?

Pray: That God will help you to know more about the blessings He gives you, and that you will take action to make these blessings real in your lives.

Explore more: Read Matthew 5.1-12

This passage describes the blessings of God on those who are blessed.

- Who are those who are blessed?
- How are they blessed?
- How can we imitate them?

2. Ephesians 1:15-23. God's dynamite

The theme: Knowing God and His power in us

Recap: In the first study we explored the tremendous blessings that God has given us. God has achieved so much for us through his only Son Jesus Christ. He is pre-eminent in everything, and all things in heaven and earth will be brought together in him. But what does that mean for us?

Talkabout: God exhibited his power (which has the same root in Greek as 'dynamite') by raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him to the highest place.

- Consider how Prime Ministers of the British Government rise to their position. What are some of the many factors influencing the rise of a Prime Minister?
- Contrast the rise of the present Prime Minister with the exaltation of Jesus. What is the nature of the power of God that was needed to exalt Jesus to the highest position of all?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

Paul is moved to pray for the Ephesian Christians.

- What are the two characteristics of Paul's prayer life?
- What does it mean to pray without ceasing? How can this be done?
- Why is the giving of thanks so important?

Apply: How can we help those in other countries who are poor, who are probably being persecuted for putting Jesus first in their lives, and who love each other?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 1:18-19

Identify the three themes introduced by Paul in Ephesians 1:18-19.

Paul keeps on asking the glorious Father to give to his hearers the gift of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; for what purpose?

- What is the 'hope to which he has called us'? See Ephesians 1: 18
- What is the nature of the inheritance that Paul refers to?
- In what sense is the inheritance glorious?
- What is the great power that we have access to?
- How and when should we use this power?

We conclude the Lord's Prayer with the words '*For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen*' (in the modern form).

- Why are these words added to the versions in the Gospels?
- What do they convey to you about God when you use them in prayer?

Investigate: God shows the nature of his power in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

- What four specific acts using his power did God do through Jesus? See Ephesians 1:20, 20, 22, 22
- What is the nature of the Church? See Ephesians 1:22
- What is the extent of God's power made available to us?

Vision Point: We need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and with fire. We need to ask Jesus to do this in us.

Getting personal: We need to experience the power of God and to recognize our membership of Christ's body, the Church.

- How can we do this in practice?

Pray: That Jesus will return and come again soon (even today!).

Explore more: The Early Church believed that Jesus would return very soon. The imminent second coming of Jesus is a key belief for some groups of Christians; for example, the Catholic Apostolics in The Netherlands and Germany. They live their lives each day with a conscious awareness that Christ is returning imminently.

- What effects do you think this belief has on daily life?

3. Ephesians 2:1-10: Saved by grace for good works

Theme: The grace of God

Recap: In the first two studies we explored the blessings that God has given us in Christ, who gave himself for us that we might be reconciled to the Father. But do we have to contribute to our salvation?

Talkabout: Explore how we experience 'grace' in dance, athletics, modelling clothes, etc.

- What do we mean by 'grace' in this context?
- How does God's 'grace' towards us depend on His nature?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Paul highlights at least three actions that God has done in the past on our behalf, and one action in the future

- What are they? See Ephesians 2:5, 6, 6, 7
- Why were we unable to take action to help ourselves?
- What does it mean for us to be 'dead in our transgressions'?

Paul states twice that *'it is by grace that you (we) have been saved'*.

- What does Paul mean by 'grace'?
- How does faith complement grace? See Ephesians 2:8
- What about the works of service we do for God?
- In other words, what part do we play in our salvation?

Investigate: God raised Jesus and made us alive with him, and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ. We have been re-created (or born again) in Christ; see John 3:1-8.

- Consider the power that God exhibits when one person turns from being caught up in the things of this world to faith in Jesus.
- What is the intention of the Christian life?
- How can we realize this intention in our daily lives?

Apply: We are God's workmanship, created for good works, which God has prepared beforehand for us to do.

- What are the works that you have been called by God to do?
- Consider the work of God in creation. Why are the works that a Christian performs for God 'good' works?
- In what does their goodness consist?
- Note that even these works are due to God's grace at work in us, so we have no grounds for boasting

Getting personal: Look back on your life before knowing Jesus and afterwards (if you can). What changes did you experience?

- Share with the group in 3 minutes how you became a Christian or how you have arrived at your present beliefs.

Pray: That each of us may do those good works that God has prepared us for us to do. Remember that we do not influence God's favour by what we do: it is all of God's grace. Thank God for all the blessings that you have and all that you are called to do in Christ.

Explore more: Compare Ephesians and Colossians.

- What proportion do you estimate of Colossians is used by Paul in Ephesians?

It is interesting that if the portions of Ephesians that are similar to Colossians are removed there remain seven units in Ephesians that are complete in themselves and distinctive. These units are: Ephesians 1:3-14, 2:1-10, 3:14-21, 4:1-16, 5:8-14, 5:23-32, 6:10-27. They were probably prepared to instruct believers, and encourage them on towards maturity as Christians.

- How did Jesus know what to do as the Son of his heavenly Father?
- Look at Jesus' baptism and his time in the wilderness before the start of his ministry.
- Look at Luke 1:1-13. Consider also Mark 1:35.

4. Ephesians 2:11-22. Breaking down barriers

Theme: Breaking down barriers and becoming the dwelling place of God

Recap: In the first three studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and they are all of God's grace. But the blessings are surely for God's people the Jews and not the Gentiles?

Talkabout: Recall what happened with the downfall of the Berlin Wall (the Iron Curtain) on 9 November 1989 and the demise of Communism.

- What were the consequences for the German people?
- List other places where there is a wall between one nation and another (Israel-Palestine, North Korea – South Korea, etc).
- What about the divisions in UK politics raised by the EU referendum result? How far reaching are the changes that have occurred, or is it 'business as usual'.

Investigate: Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

The prejudice that separated Gentile from Jew pointed to a deeper, religious problem.

- What was the condition of the Gentiles?
- Does what Paul say in Ephesians 2:11 about the attitude of Jews to Gentiles have any bearing on a Christian approach to racial prejudice?
- What is the root of prejudice?

Apply: What are the factors that separate people from each other today?

- How can Christ's reconciling action be brought to bear on them?
- How would you explain the nature of reconciliation to a neighbour who knew little about Christ or the Bible?

Investigate: What did we as Gentiles, experience when we were separated from God?

- What separated us from Him?
- What was our position before Christ?

Originally, being far off, we have now been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- Christ not only brings peace: he *is* our peace.
- What had to go and what had to be abolished?
- What was the purpose of the Law of Moses?
- How was it fulfilled?

The moral demands of the Mosaic Law were made more demanding and far reaching by Jesus; see Matthew 5:17-end.

- What is the 'law of Christ'?
- Do we become Jews when we put our faith in Jesus or do we become something new (which has not existed before) and greater?
- What is God's purpose in breaking down the divisions between groups of people?
- How is the Church described here? What is it built upon?
- What is its ultimate purpose?

Apply: The church seems to be in decline in Europe - there are more Christians in China than in all the countries of Europe.

- What can we as the Church of England do about this?

- How can the Church get more involved in politics and national debates?
- What moral and social issues of today should we get involved in?

Vision point: Do we see ourselves as part of the larger church?

Getting personal: The interpretation of Christian faith has caused number of major divisions in the Church: Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed. Jesus prayed that we should be one; see John 17:20-26.

- What are the benefits of having no major divisions between the churches?
- What can we do to pull down those divisions that continue to exist?

Pray: Pray for the church in our country and in Europe, that God will bring about renewal, if not revival, of faith in the living God

Explore more: Jesus is the Door (John 10:7-10), and '*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*' (John 14:6). There is a potential exclusivity in Jesus being the only way to the Father.

- How can you reconcile this with Paul's desire to save all he can reach?

Paul uses the terms 'building', 'household' and 'temple' to describe the Church.

- What is Paul implying by these terms?

5. Ephesians 3:1-13. The mystery of salvation revealed

Theme: Making known our salvation from God

Recap: In the first four studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and they are all of God's grace. The amazing thing that Ephesians teaches us that all the blessings and promises of God to the Children of Israel are now for the Gentiles also. Peace between Jews and Gentiles was achieved through the blood of Christ on the cross. But how did Paul know about God's intentions and plans? And what is the church?

Talkabout: Our understanding of the scope of who God is and what he is about is so limited. Yet according to Paul the Church has a cosmic witness.

- Consider the rise of the IT corporations including MicroSoft, Apple, Google and Facebook. What are their perceived objectives?

The church has a far bigger and greater purpose than any of these mega corporations. Paul is seeking to prepare the Church for the challenge of other philosophies bidding for people's allegiance. In order to communicate the gospel effectively he takes on the vocabulary of these philosophies. In other words, Paul is always open to new ways of understanding and explaining the person and work of Christ.

- How far do you think the Church should go today in using the vocabulary and marketing techniques of our contemporaries?
- What does this mean for the way in which we share the gospel?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 3:1-13.

Paul talks about the 'mystery' of the gospel.

- What does Paul mean by this 'mystery'?
- How is the mystery understood?
- What should be done with the mystery? (Should it remain secret? Should we protect it?)
- What part do we play in our own reconciliation with God?
- How is reconciliation with God actually accomplished?

Paul learned about the Gospel and the 'mystery' by 'revelation'.

- Why did he call it a mystery?
- What does the principle 'of those who are given much, much will be expected' imply for us as Christians in this context?

Consider the nature of the Church from Paul's point of view in this passage

- Why does the Church not exist as an end in itself?
- What does Paul see as his task?
- What does he see as the church's task?

Apply: Paul felt he had an enormous responsibility to proclaim the mystery of the salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

- How do we go about proclaiming the gospel to the heavens and the cosmos?

Vision point: What part should we play in proclaiming the gospel to the nations and beyond?

Getting personal: Do you see yourself as a citizen of Heaven, the Kingdom of God?

- If so, what difference does this make to your daily life?

Through the cross believers are made alive and the principalities are disarmed.

- How are these effects of reconciliation mirrored in the Church?

In the light of Paul's concept of mission for the Church, how should we view personal acts of self-assertiveness and petty individualism?

Pray: For Israel that her people will recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and for the church and its responsibility to share the promises of God with the nations, particularly that we should be set free from our enemies

Explore more: Israel was to proclaim God to the nations; see Isaiah 60. We are to do the same, because of the Great Commission; see Matthew 28:18.

- Explore the implications of this for our church community.
- Little Fishes is an excellent way of getting alongside mums and children. What other initiatives can you think of that the Church in Cholsey can take?

6. Ephesians 3:14-21. Filled with all the fullness of God

Theme; Reflecting on the riches of the Father, the love of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit

Recap: In the first five studies we explored the blessings that God has given to us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, such that the Gentiles are now also accepted by God. They come together in a new entity, namely the church, Christ Jesus being its cornerstone. But what part is due to the riches and power of the Father and the love of Christ?

Talkabout: Every family in heaven and on earth derives its name from the Father. This assures us of his grace at work in our lives.

- What about people who do not reside in loving families?
- How can we as a church help them know that they also are included?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

Reflection and prayer were part of Paul's life.

- What does the designation of God as 'Father' mean for Paul in the context of the mystery?
- Link Paul's prayer here to his prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19. What is Paul praying for in both cases?
- What new element does Paul introduce in his prayer?
- Why is it difficult to attain true knowledge of God without the experience of love in the fellowship of the Church? See Ephesians 3.17-19
- What does being '*rooted and grounded (or established) in love*' mean in practice?
- How does experiential knowledge of the love of Christ lead us to being filled '*to the measure of all the fullness of God*'?

Apply: How often do we give thanks for our fellow Christians, and seek to encourage them to love each other?

- Can we achieve faith in Christ without love for God? If not, why not?
- What part do our fellow Christians play in enabling us to know the love of Christ?

Vision point: What are your dreams for our Christian community in Cholsey?

Getting personal: Read together the parable of the Lost Son and the Generous Father and the Son with Attitude; see Luke 15:11-32.

- With whom do you identify yourself?
- What do we learn about our heavenly Father's love for us?
- What is the place of human understanding in relation to the blessings that Paul asks God for us?
- Are our expectations of God too small (cf. 'Is your God too small?' J B Phillips)? See Ephesians 3.20
- If so, what should we do about them?

Pray: For Christians to love one another more.

Explore more: 1 John 3:11-20.

- Reflect on the evidence that we love God.
- Can others tell that you are God's child?
- Explore in turn the 'width and length and height and depth' of the love of Christ.

- Why does Paul pray that the Ephesians may have the strength to comprehend the love of Christ with 'all the saints'?
- What is the power at work within us? See Ephesians 1:19

7. Ephesians 4:1-6. Unity in the Body of Christ

Theme: Living a life worthy of our calling

Recap: In the first six studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. Bringing Jew and Gentile together is a form of unity. Ephesians has unity in the church at its heart. But how can unity be brought about in the church congregations and in the Church as a whole?

Talkabout: Consider different activities in society: MPs in Parliament, footballers in the premier League, teachers in schools, etc.

- How are these people expected to behave, and why?
- What are the hopes of those responsible for these activities?

Investigate: Ephesians 4:1-6.

A primary theme of Paul in Ephesians is that all things are moving towards a unity. The Church is a pledge of that ultimate and perfect unity that God will achieve. It is imperative that this is reflected in the lives of those in the church.

- Why does Paul introduce himself here as a prisoner of the Lord?

He urges the Ephesian Christians to live a life worthy of their calling.

- What is their calling?
- What makes the life they live 'worthy'?
- What are the four qualities of life that Paul regards as important for each Christian?
- Also, as we have seen in chapter 3 and will see in chapter 6, the Church is the means by which God confronts those hostile powers that oppose unity.
- How can we work towards unity within our church congregation and other neighbouring churches?
- How can unity be maintained? (This unity is within the Cholsey Church community as well as between Church of England churches in the Deanery and Diocese, and between Anglican and churches in other denominations)
- What are the overall purposes of the ministry of the church?
- What is the goal of the church's journey?

We speak about 'confession', in this case, not of sin, but of who God is and what he has done.

- See Deuteronomy 6:4. List the things that Paul says are one.
- How do they work out in the life of the Church and of the individual Christian?

Apply: The stress in an organization on ethical behavior is normally because such behavior has been violated in the past. No person is perfect in and of themselves.

- How should we deal with failure (sin) in the lives of members of the church?

Vision point: How should we relate to other churches in our diocese and churches of other denominations?

Getting personal: The relationships that we have with other Christians

- To what extent do you regard Christians in other denominations as your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Check up on the progress of the CAP project and joint youth work involving Ridgeway Community Church, Wallingford Baptist Church and St Mary's working closely together.

- How can the churches in the Wallingford area work even better with each other while maintaining our distinctive styles of worship and emphases on community life?

Pray: for your brothers and sisters in Christ in other churches who you know or have some contact with.

Explore more: Read John 17:20-26

Jesus prayed to his Father for his first disciples and for all who believe in him through their word.

- What does Jesus desire for those who believe in him? See John 17:21, 21, 23, 24, 26
- For what reason does Jesus want us to be in the Father and the Son?
- How are we to relate the world?

8. Ephesians 4:7-16: Becoming mature in Christ

Theme: Growing to maturity in the body of Christ

Recap: In the first seven studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. The potential unity between Jew and Gentile and within the church is important. We share in one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. But how is this achieved in practice?

Talkabout: Spend 5 minutes identifying and writing down up to three spiritual gifts that you believe you have been given. Get together with two other people you know well and trust, and share with them what you have written down. Ask them to confirm or amend the list of your gifts as they see them in you.

Investigate: Ephesians 4:7-16.

- Why does God provide the offices of Apostles, prophets etc?

Look at the definitions of these offices.

Apostle: 1. somebody who had physically seen the risen Christ, and had been called by Jesus to establish the Church.

2. Someone sent by the church at large to minister to local churches.

Prophet: People of inspired utterance for the church.

1. The canonical prophets of the Old Testament.

2. Local prophets in local churches.

Some theologians suggest that because the early church did not have the New Testament the prophets provided insight to what God was saying and that when the New Testament had been finalized they lost their purpose.

Do you agree with this?

Evangelist: called by the Lord to evangelise those who do not know Him

Pastor: to nurture and feed the flock with spiritual food and to see they are protected from spiritual danger

Teacher: to help people understand theological and Christian truths.

Apply: Explore these or alternative definitions agreed by the group.

- What are 'works of ministry'?
- Who are responsible in our church for preparing all of us for works of ministry today?
- What does this mean for St Mary's?
- How can we work this out?

Investigate: Unity is needed in the light of the diversity of persons and gifts.

- Why is there such a diversity of people and gifts?
- Ultimately believers will come from every nation language and tribe.
- The diversity will be truly amazing. How does the unity Paul is seeking come about?

Apply: What contribution can we make to the achievement of unity?

- Can the Christian be a spectator of life?

Investigate: What is the maturity that Paul talks of?

- Reflect again on how this will be maintained.

- Actually the church will have at any instant of time people with a range of maturity, though the church as a whole may achieve a maturity in which all individuals are moving towards maturity.

Investigate: Church members should speak the truth in love.

- What does this mean in practice?

To speak the truth may mean saying some challenging things, which may strain relationships.

- But should the church be the place where such things can be raised, even if anger is provoked or people become angry for their own reasons?

Vision point: Let us take risks with people we find daunting or difficult to approach. Let us also stand firm and be willing to listen when people challenge or question what we have done or are doing.

Getting personal: Do you change your mind often about matters of belief?

- If you do, you should endeavour to identify key aspects of faith that you know are important to you, and which you are unlikely to change.
- Use these truths as a base for building up a larger way in which God is working in your life and the lives of others

Pray: for each other and for the right use of the gifts Christ has given us

Explore more: Read Psalm 27

'The Lord is my light and salvation – whom shall I fear?' The psalmist can stand firm no matter what the opposition. He knows what he would prefer to do, that is, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. He gladly submits to God, and waits for him to act.

- What makes it difficult to wait for the Lord?
- What things might help when waiting?
- Are we content to wait for the Lord to act in our lives?

Read Philippians 1.

Our attitude to living before God should be the same as that of Jesus Christ – he submitted to his Father's will; he shared in our humanity; he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death on a cross; therefore God has exalted him to the highest place, with the name above every name (read Isaiah 45:22, 23); every knee will bow to him, and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

- How can we appropriate this attitude for ourselves?

9. Ephesians 4:17-5:2: Living a transformed life

Theme: living a transformed life

Recap: In the first eight studies we explored the blessings that God has given to us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. It is God's purpose that Jew and Gentile become one community by both being reconciled to God through the cross. But how do we work towards the maturity in Christ of each member?

Talkabout: Describe the characteristics of the lives led by the Gentiles apart from God. Discuss what is meant like the phrases: 'darkened in their understanding', 'the ignorance that is in them', 'hardness of their hearts', 'lost all sensitivity', 'given themselves over to sensuality, and 'a continual lust for more'.

Investigate: Read Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Paul is identifying what a life worthy of the Lord is all about. Describe what you should not do, and the things you should do; see Ephesians 4:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 5:1, 2

Paul uses the idea of dressing and undressing to convey certain truths.

- What do the phrases 'put off' and 'put on' convey to you?
- What do we put off and what do we put on?
- How can/should we be renewed in the 'attitude of our minds'?
- What is the 'new self' created to be like?
- Why should we speak truthfully to each other?
- How can we not let the sun go down on our anger?
- What is Paul's counter to stealing?
- What should characterise the conversations between us?
- How can we 'grieve' the Holy Spirit?
- The activities in Ephesians 4:31 should obviously not be pursued in the life that Christians share. Instead, what should we have at the heart of our relationships with each other?
- It is imperative that we forgive each other as God in Christ has forgiven us
- What does it mean to imitate God?

Apply: Using scripture to order our lives

- How should we use these verses to order our own church life?
- How should we be taught?
- How should we make decision on what to focus on as a church community?

Vision Point: We need to ask God that he will help us be innovative in finding ways to share the good news of Jesus with all the people we come in contact with.

Getting personal: Together with the other members of your group, discuss how the way in which we express our anger as individuals reveals different levels of Christian maturity? (Please note, you should not be comparing yourself with other people here. It is more important to see if you are making progress/changing in the way you deal with your anger).

- Why should we forgive one another?
- Think of occasions when Jesus was angry.
- How is it possible to be angry and not sin?

Pray: that we may learn to express the truth in the context of love, being kind and compassionate to one another, and forgiving each other.

Explore more: Read Matthew 5:13-7:23.

- Select one subject/topic and read it prayerfully, asking God to lead you into his truth.

10. Ephesians 5:3-5:21: Living as Children of Light

Theme: Living in the light

Recap: In the first nine studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. It is God's purpose that Jew and Gentile become one community by both being reconciled to God through the cross. We are to live radically different lives from the Gentiles as we have been taught in Christ, careful in what we say and do, not grieving the Holy Spirit, and forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven us. But what does it mean to be in the light rather than darkness?

Talkabout: Typical conversations in pubs and clubs can be characterized by swearing, sexual innuendo, jokes that poke fun at other's mistakes or disadvantages, approval of the pursuit of money to others loss, gambling, tax avoidance, and scams. How can we 'season our conversation with salt'? Should we be careful not to take ourselves too seriously?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 5:3-5:21.

If we have faith in Jesus Christ then Paul regards us as being 'light in the Lord', whereas before knowing Jesus we were 'darkness'.

- How then are we to live?
- What does the fruit of light consist of?
- How can we find out what pleases the Lord?

Read Isaiah 63:7-10.

Darkness produces fruitless deeds. We are to have nothing to do them.

- What are we to do instead?
To be light means that nothing can be hidden.
- How ruthless should we be with things that characterise the darkness of our old life?
- Should we never mention in our conversations with each other things like sex, money, possessions, people, politics etc?
- How does our secular society erode Christian standards?
- What attitudes and actions disrupt the fellowship between Christians?
- What does it mean to live in darkness, and what does it mean to live in the light?
- What are the consequences of living 'in the light'?
- Should we get involved in politics in order to reduce poverty or to curb excesses of drugs, debt, etc?

Apply: Paul warns us to be very careful on how we live.

- What does it mean for us to make the most of every opportunity?
- Why is this needed?
- Foolish and wise are contrasted. What is foolish and what is wise?
- What is 'drunk with wine' contrasted with?
- How does being filled with the Spirit affect our speaking to one another, our making music to the Lord, and our giving thanks to God?

Vision Point: How do we walk in the light? What resources do we have available to do this?

Getting personal: In reading the passage for this study, are you caught up in some of the issues raised? For example, do you delight to tell and listen to jokes or stories with a dubious sexual theme? Or do you use swear words to embellish your conversation?

- How can you correct these trends?
- How can we make God's word to light up our path? See Psalm 119:105
- Jesus said that He is the Light of the World. Is he the light of your world? Read John 8:12.
- Read Ps 119:18, 105. What does it mean for us to walk in the light?

Pray: that many may discover that Jesus is the Light of the World

Explore more: Read 1 John 1:5-2:9.

Walking in the light is a theme that runs through the Apostle John's writings.

- What are the consequences of walking in the light, and of not walking in the light?
- Why do we find it difficult to confess our sins?

11. Ephesians 5:22-6:9: Submitting to one another

Theme: Acknowledging relationships in the Body of Christ

Recap: In the first ten studies we explored the blessings that God has given for us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. It is God's purpose that Jew and Gentile become one community by both being reconciled to God through the cross. We are to live radically different lives from the Gentiles as we have been taught in Christ. We are not to partner those who are immoral or disobedient but to walk in the light and not darkness. We are to make the most of every opportunity, understanding what the Lord's will is. But are we prepared to submit to one another?

Talkabout: The recent EU referendum left the 'leave' campaign people feeling very joyful, while many of the 'remain' campaigners felt devastated. It would have been very easy to have born grudges against the other side, but people put their differences behind them, and on the whole determined to work together. Those who 'triumphed' recognized that they did not have all the answers or information on what would happen after Article 50 of the EU Treaty was implemented, and those 'defeated' and who wanted to remain Europeans found ways of coming to terms with their position. This can be viewed as a good outworking of democracy. In the church therefore we need to find ways of submitting to one another, not to 'lord' it over others, but to seek that submission of one person to another which obliges the person to whom the submission is given to take responsibility, even to their own disadvantage, to seek the very best good for the person who does the submitting. It is important to note that submission does not mean subjection or dejection, or even objection.

- What can we as members of society and church members learn from the respect that people have for Theresa May in her role as Prime Minister with regard to our own appreciation and support of our clergy?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 5:22-6:9.

Reflect on the presuppositions that Paul makes for all Christian relationships.

- Who should submit to whom?
- List the different pairs of people in this passage, and describe how the submission should be put into effect.
- How should a wife regard her husband? How should a husband regard his wife?
- Explore the attitude of Jesus to us as his body, the church.
- What should characterise the relationship between parents and their children?
- What are the implications of the promise of longevity for the individual, the family and for society? How should children be disciplined?
- For what purpose?

We no longer officially have slaves in our society.

- Taking this passage as referring to an employer-employee relationship, what can we learn about how employers and employees should behave towards each other in the workplace?

What implications does Paul's teaching have for the social chapter and other legislation such as Sunday trading, etc?

- In what way does work have intrinsic value?
- What place do rewards have in the workplace?

Apply: How should these relationships be worked out in our families and church?

- What does it mean for us personally and in practice to submit to another person?

Vision Point: Submission is very important within the body of Christ. How can we encourage people to submit joyfully to one another? What do we learn about submission within our own church community?

- What safeguards do we have in place to avoid spiritual bullying and abuse in the church community?
- Do we need to appreciate in common the limits on appropriate behavior in personal relationships?

Getting personal: To what extent do you submit to your family members?

Pray: that those who are 'younger' learn from those who are 'older', recognizing that younger and older have little to do with age, and more to do with maturity.

Explore more: Read 1 John 3:16–24.

- Is this love in action?
- How can we better model our lives on Jesus?

12. Ephesians 6:10-23. Standing firm, clothed in the armour of God

Theme: Standing firm in conflict

Recap: In the first eleven studies we explored the blessings that God has given us in Christ, and that they are all of God's grace. Through the cross of Christ the Gentiles are also fellow citizens with God's people, and members of God's household with Christ Jesus as the chief corner-stone. It is God's purpose that Jew and Gentile become one community by both being reconciled to God through the cross. We are to live radically different lives from those without faith, just as we have been taught in Christ. We are not to partner those who are immoral or disobedient but to walk in the light and not in darkness. We are to make the most of every opportunity, understanding what the Lord's will is. We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, particularly in our family and in the servant-master relationship. But how do we face up to conflict with evil?

Talkabout: Too often in the past churches in Europe in particular, have sought to apply force to resolve disputes within the church at large, often on a national basis, such as Spain against Portugal, Catholic France against Protestant England etc, or to drive out the Muslims from Jerusalem as in the Crusades. Jesus discouraged the taking up of arms, but always sought to get us to pray for our enemies, and to love them. However, the resurgence of militant Islam has threatened to destroy our western way of life. Explore why this may be. In what ways can we live at peace with the Muslims in our nation, and with the Muslim nations throughout the world - Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, to name but a few?

Investigate: Read Ephesians 6:10-23.

- Is spiritual conflict inevitable?
- If so, with whom are we contending?
- From what do we draw strength for such a conflict?

Paul was confined in military quarters so he would have been very familiar (as would his hearers) with the armour worn by the typical Roman soldier. He was also familiar with the scriptures; see Isaiah 59:17.

- Interpret the Christian purpose of each part of the soldier's dress that Paul describes.
- Each item has its part to play. What are the meanings of each one?
- Look at verses in the Old Testament which Paul may have considered when referring to the individual's armour:
 - The belt of truth: Isaiah 11:5
 - The breastplate of righteousness: Isaiah 59:17
 - Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace: Isaiah 52.
 - Helmet of salvation: Isaiah 59:17
 - Sword of the Spirit: Revelation 1:16, which is the word of God
- In addition, pray in the Spirit: note and discuss the four 'alls' in v.18 (in some translations three 'alls' and an 'always'!)

The Christian needs extensive exposure to the Word of God and to prayer.

- What does it mean to 'pray in the Spirit'?

What did Paul ask his hearers to do for him?

- Envoys came from all over the world to Rome vested with honours and dignity. Paul too is an envoy. From where? and Why?
- What is the contrast in Paul's mind?

Apply: Using the armour of God

- How would you use each component?

- Your armour can enable us to take the initiative or to stand firm. Which attitude should we adopt??
- What does it mean for us to stand firm?
- For whom should **we** be praying that whenever they open their mouths, they will *“fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel”*?

Vision Point: What do you think God is calling us as a church to be and do?

Getting personal: How should you wear the armour of God?

- How can you make use of the armour?
- How and for who are we to pray?

Pray: That God will not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil

Explore more: Read the last verses of Ephesians. The closing of a letter can be difficult. It is the chance however, for a summarising phrase.

- How would you describe Paul's closing words in this letter?
- Why do you think the exchange of news is important to Paul?
- Jesus taught his disciples 'The Lord's prayer' Matthew 6:9-13.
- Reflect on the key phrases in the prayer and identify verses in Ephesians that correspond to them.