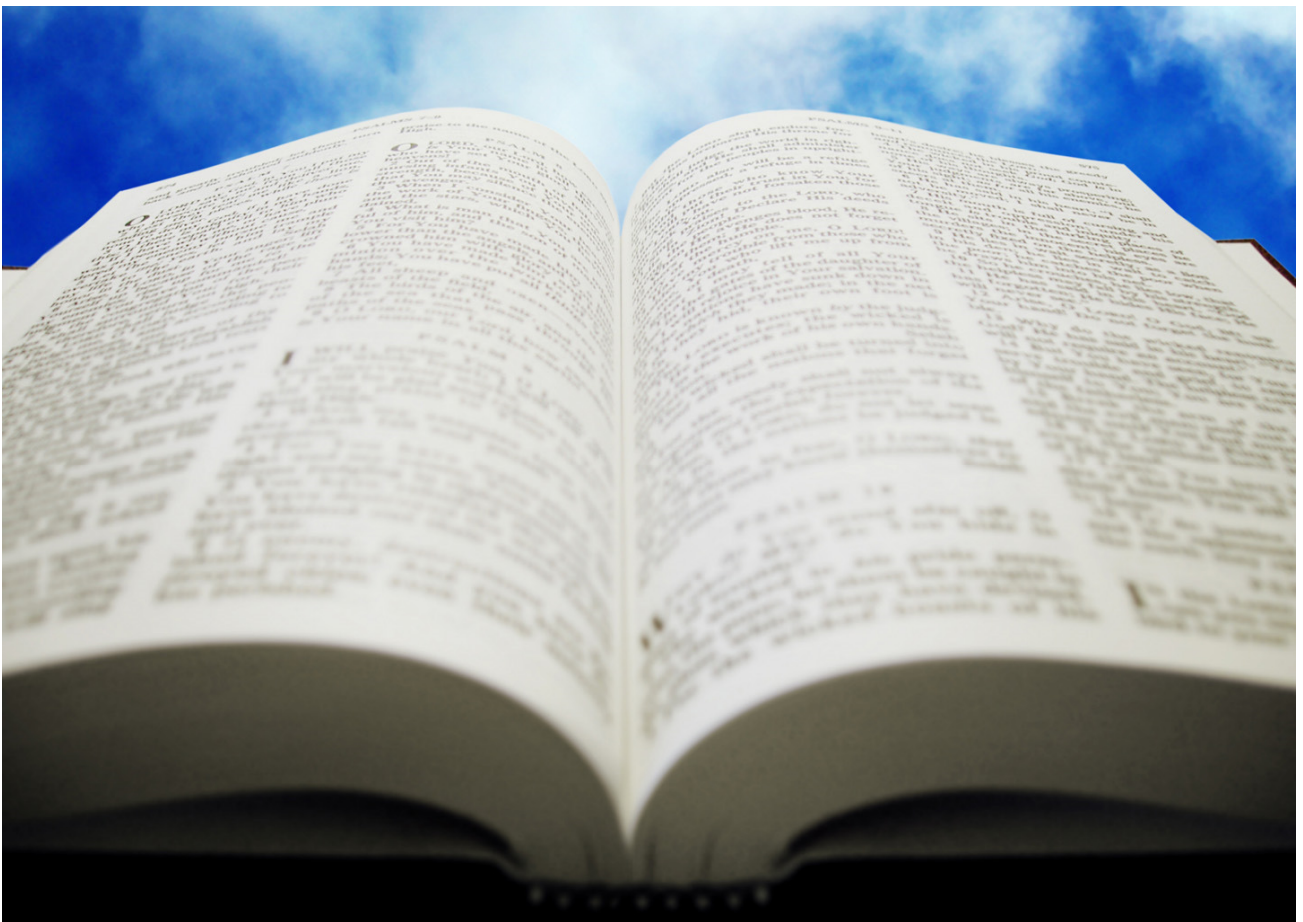


Ephesians

God's Vision For Our Church



A BIBLE STUDY



How to the get best value out of these studies...

Welcome to a new series of New Testament studies focused on the book of Ephesians.

If you're using these Guides in a Small Group, it is vital that you have done preparatory work *before* you get to your meeting. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but to the other members of your group.

If you're doing these studies individually, make sure you let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you've finished (or even before) to let them know how your life is being changed by God's Word.

If you're after good commentaries or resources to complement your looking into the Bible, speak to your Small Group Leader or one of the staff, and we'll be as helpful as possible. Most people aren't going to spend lots of money on theological works, so we're constantly on the look out for quality titles that will result in money well spent.

Always surround your time looking into God's Word with **prayer**, asking God to change your heart and life so that you – with God's people – might become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Setting of the Book of Ephesians

(Notes provided courtesy of Dr Alasdair Livingston who attends the 10am Gathering at Trinity City).

About the history

Jesus and Paul lived in an unstable world. Jesus was born in Judea in the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, and Paul died (probably) in Rome in the reign of Nero. Judea was a small boundary province at the eastern end of the Roman Empire. The reign of Augustus, 27 BC-AD 14, could be called the empire's Golden Age. His territories stretched from Spain, Portugal, and France in the west to Syria and Judea in the east. It included all Europe south of the Danube, Asia Minor (now Turkey), and, in Africa, the whole north coast as far as modern Morocco. His legions guarded the frontiers, legates and senators ruled the territories with reasonable fairness, trade flourished, and most of the population were glad to be part of the *pax Romana*.

Every Roman prince (before Augustus, they did not call themselves Emperor) had to deal with a well-educated aristocracy which aspired to power in its own right, and supplied the powerful Senate. Generals sent to guard the territories fancied themselves as princes; so did the more ambitious senators. Augustus managed to balance these competing powers, but when he died in AD 14 his successor, Tiberius, with a less commanding personality, was less adroit.

There were external dangers, too, at both ends of the empire. At the borders of Syria and Judea were Arabs and Nabateans (of Petra fame), and further north war-like Parthia, with Armenia a buffer state ruled by a client king; a far bigger nation than the present tiny republic. In the west was Mauretania, (where modern Morocco is, not where modern Mauritania is). It was the home of restless Moor and Berber peoples and, as were all the North African provinces, the seat of raids from desert tribes. In AD 41, when Claudius was Emperor and Saul was in Cilicia, Claudius had to mount a campaign to pacify it.

It suited the Romans to grant religious freedom to Judea (as to other provinces) in return for their tolerance of an occupying army, but the accommodation was an uneasy one, especially when Romans did offensive things like bringing images, abhorrent to Jews, into Jerusalem. Rome needed Judea as a buffer against the Arabs, and the Jews needed Rome to stabilise the region.

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Asia Minor, the scene of most of Paul's first missionary journey and parts of his second and third, was a patch-work of Roman provinces and partly or wholly autonomous regions. Asia (SW Turkey), Galatia in central Turkey, and Cilicia in the west, bordering Syria, were the main Roman provinces. More were added in the combined life-times of Jesus and Paul.

Ephesus was a flourishing Greek city, the capital of Asia. It had a famous temple dedicated to Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt. The temple's magnificence earned it a place in the selection of Seven Wonders of the World made by one Antipater in the fourth century BC. It was a sea-port, an important trade link between Rome and Cilicia and thence to the eastern provinces. Paul paid it a brief visit on the way home from his second Missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21), and spent three years there on his third (Acts 19).

About the author.

Even people who know little or nothing else about the Bible, speak of "Damascus-road" experiences, meaning sudden inspirations or changes of mind. In Saul's case it was a revelation of the risen Christ, causing a total change of allegiance and life-style (Acts 9:1-31). His own assessment of his pre-conversion character and status is found in Philippians 3:1-7 — a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, blameless, a zealous Pharisee.

Born in Tarsus in Cilicia, he was a Roman citizen — a privilege which stood him in good stead on several dangerous occasions. He was a highly educated citizen from a well-to-do family, fluent in Greek and Hebrew, a pupil of the leading rabbinic teacher of his time (Acts 22:3). He became aware that God had chosen him to take the gospel to peoples he had previously despised: the Gentiles.

About the letter

Scholarly opinion puts Ephesians in a group of letters (the others being Colossians, Philippians and Philemon) written from Rome in Paul's first imprisonment there, "two whole years in his own hired house" (Acts 28: 30) with a soldier to guard him. Those years are AD 61 and 62. The letter shares a firm doctrinal basis with other Pauline letters, especially Colossians, with which it shares many verbal sequences word for word. It differs from all the other letters in making no references to individuals, either in the place where it was written or in the place where it was sent.

In fact there is some doubt about its original destination, for the earliest manuscripts do not have the words "in Ephesus" in 1: 1.

The letter expresses Paul's well-developed doctrine of the grace of God, conferred on believers apart from good works, brought to the church "in Christ". So succinct, yet complete a summary is it that some scholars think it the work of someone other than Paul after his death: a sort of anthology of his works, stripped of local and temporal references. With much greater authority it can be seen as a letter designed as Paul's own final expression of the distinctive Christian truths by a senior apostle — almost like a papal encyclical — for a wider audience than a single church community, perhaps all the churches in Asia.

But it is not, in time, the last of Paul's letters: I and II Timothy and Titus come later. They are quite different in character, however; they are instructions and exhortations to well-loved friends heading churches in Ephesus (I Timothy 1: 3) and Crete (Titus 1: 5). They imply that, after release from his first imprisonment, Paul was again arrested and imprisoned. How he met his end nobody knows, but tradition has it that he was beheaded by servants of the dissolute emperor Nero in about AD 67.

1 How Sweet it is!

Ephesians 1:1-14

Getting Started

Today most businesses and organisations have a vision or mission statement. The aim is to capture, in just a sentence or two, what the company is on about.

Spend a few minutes (individually or as a group) coming up with a vision statement that captures what we should be on about as a church.

Digging in the text (Ephesians 1:1-1-14)

1. After introducing himself and his credentials in Ephesians 1:1 Paul says (verse 2) 'Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. What are 'Grace' and 'Peace'? How does God give them to us?
2. Verse 3 is a central summary statement for these first 14 verses. What does it mean to be 'blessed in the heavenly realms'? What is a 'spiritual blessing in Christ'?
3. Read through verses 4-14 and list all the ways in which we are blessed in Christ.

2 Predestined before I was Created?

During this series in Ephesians we will digress occasionally onto topical/theological issues that are raised in this letter. For example in chapters 4-6 we will think about being filled with the Spirit (Chapter 5); submission and marriage (Chapter 5); unity (Chapter 4); and spiritual warfare (Chapter 6).

In Ephesians 1 the issue of God's sovereignty is raised squarely for consideration. Although for Paul the Apostle this is raised as a matter for celebration, for many believers and unbelievers today it is an issue that creates strong debate.

In this study the aim is to wrestle with what the Bible says in Ephesians and elsewhere on this topic.

Getting Started

Using the diagram below, contrast the world views of an atheist and a Christian on the various listed topics.

	Atheist	Christian
Creation		
Suffering		
Sickness		
'Free Will'		
God		
Evil		
Love		

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Getting into the Text(s)

1. Take a look at Ephesians 1:1-14 and list all the things it says about God's sovereignty.

2. Stepping back from Ephesians 1, what does the Bible say about God's sovereignty with respect to:
 - Creation
 - Genesis 1:1
 - Psalm 33:6
 - Revelation 4:11

 - Revelation
 - 1 Corinthians 1:21
 - 2 Corinthians 4:6

 - Salvation
 - 1 Peter 1:18-20
 - John 6:44
 - Ephesians 2:8

3. How do God's sovereignty and human responsibility interact? If God is sovereign over everything, are we just puppets? Is God somehow limited in his sovereignty, creating the scope for us to make 'real' choices?

Take a look at the following:

- a. Genesis 45:4-8 and Genesis 50:19-20

- b. Isaiah 45: 1-5
- c. Philippians 2:12-13
- d. John 11:49-52
- e. John 19:10-11

Based on the above, how would you respond to the following propositions:

- i. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are never mutually exclusive or restrictive.

Yes / No

- ii. The Bible doesn't shy away from the idea of God's control even over events that are evil (eg the cross.)

Yes / No

- ii. God is responsible for people being saved, and people are fully accountable for their sin.

Yes / No

- ii. God's sovereignty is not limited by our sin.

Yes / No

4. God's sovereignty and election

The Bible consistently and without embarrassment refers to God's election of the nation of Israel and individuals. A good example of this occurs in the summary statement in Acts 13:48 where we are told "all who were appointed for eternal life believed".

You might like to check out the following verses along the same lines:

Ephesians 1:4-5

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Revelation 13:7-8

1 Peter 2:9

John 6:37-40

5. This raises a question about whether God's complete sovereignty can be compatible with human responsibility. Check out Acts 4:23-29 and discuss how this passage holds the two in tension.
[If you would like to read more on 'Compatibilism' check out Carson — "The Difficult Doctrine Of The Love Of God" pages 58-61]

Working through some implications

6. Having looked at Ephesians 1, what would you say to someone who said:
"Predestination in Ephesians 1 is just another way of talking about God's foreknowledge of those who would choose him."
"If it is all preordained by God, then there is no point in doing anything, as God will override and do what he has planned anyway!"

3 How to Pray

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ephesians 3:14-21

Getting Started

Spend some time reflecting on your pattern for prayer.

- How often do you pray?

- What tends to dominate your prayers?

- What circumstances / events spur you to pray

Taking a closer look at the text

1. Compare and contrast the prayers of Paul in chapters 1 and 3. Summarise the key points below

Ephesians 1:15-23	Ephesians 3:14-21

- How are they similar?

 - What distinguishes one from the other?
2. What is the 'reason' Paul is praying in Ephesians 1? What reason does Paul give in 3:14?

 3. What does Paul ask God for in verses 17-18? AND what reason does he give for asking (vv18-19)?

 4. In 1:19 Paul prays they might know God's power. There is a similar prayer for power in 3:16-17. What sort of power is he praying for?

 5. Given Paul identifies himself as a prisoner in 3:1 (probably in Rome), you would expect him to pray is to be released. He doesn't. Why not?

4 But God

Ephesians 2:1-22

Getting Started

Take a moment to share how you became a Christian. What were the significant events, people and convictions that led to this change?

Looking more closely at the text

1. Ephesians 2:1-11 reads like a 'before' and 'after' scenario. List below the contrasts.

Before 'you were' 2:1ff	After 'but now you are' 2:4ff

The second half of the chapter has the same ingredients 'before' and 'after' spread through Ephesians 2:12-21. Again list them below.

Before 'you were' 2:1ff	After 'but now you are' 2:4ff

6. How do verses 15-18 describe the new 'family' that God is constructing?

Working through some implications

7. What about Ephesians 2 would encourage you to share the gospel with non-Christians?
8. In Ephesians 2:6 Paul says 'God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms'. We obviously aren't in heaven (yet), so what does this mean?
9. What barriers can sometimes divide us? How does the cross destroy them?
10. Where do 'good works' fit in, when salvation is a free gift of grace?

5 Action Man Apostle

Ephesians 3:1-21

Getting Started

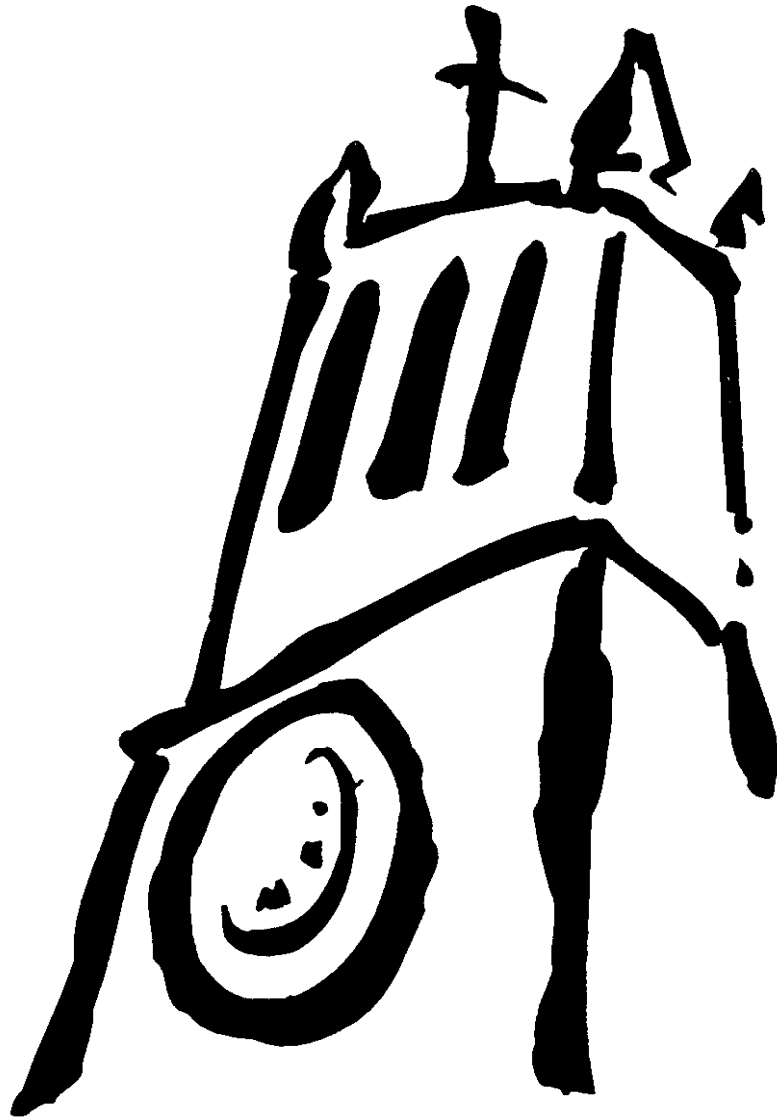
Jot down 5 key things that describe you as a person. They can be your life circumstances, character, background, likes etc. Share them with others in the group.

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Looking more closely at the text

It seems that Paul starts an idea in verse 1 'For this reason' and then digresses until verse 14 where he again says 'For this reason' resuming his train of thought. In the intervening verses we gain insight into what makes Paul 'tick'.

1. How does Paul describe himself in these verses?



Holy Trinity Adelaide
87 North Terrace
Adelaide SA 5000
t: 8213 7300
f: 8212 3611
office@trinity.asn.au
www.trinityadelaide.org.au