

The background is a collage of vintage, slightly faded photographs. Visible images include a person's face in the top left, a person lying down in the top center, a person in a white dress in the top right, a gift with a red and white striped bow in the middle left, two people sitting on the ground in the middle right, a person's face in the bottom left, a person in a white shirt in the bottom center, and a person in a plaid shirt in the bottom right. A large, semi-transparent yellow rectangle is centered over the collage, containing the text.

WE ARE!

Ephesians & the Church

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INTRODUCTION

Who are we as individual followers of Christ? And as the gathered Church? As individuals, we are new creations, adopted sons and daughters. As the Church we form a 'new society' in the world. How does this shape our identity? What code of conduct do we live by? How do we mature in our new lives, especially in the face of spiritual warfare?

Big questions, defining questions. And while buildings will always vary, the Church is not confined to four walls. The Church of Jesus Christ is people, His people, coming from every race and nation who love Him and are committed to serving Him.

The Church began at Pentecost (Acts 2), in Jerusalem, and a match was struck, through the Church, the fire of the Holy Spirit spread rapidly out of Judea, fanned by persecution, it spread into the whole world.

In the planting of new churches, one man stands out as an undeniable giant – Paul. He became one of the greatest of church planters, especially in the Gentile cities of his time. One of the most prominent of those churches was the church at Ephesus, which was planted in 53 AD and became a great, shining beacon to the world.

This letter to the Ephesians wasn't written to challenge heresy or to confront any specific problem. Instead, it's one of

encouragement, '...in it Paul describes the nature and appearance of the Church and he challenges believers to function as the living body of Christ on earth.' What does this mean for our identity?

Paul had been specially commissioned to work among the Gentiles, but he had no time for a divided Church. Hence his stress in this letter on God's plan to bring people from every nation and background together in Christ (1V10). As Christians, all are on equal terms. All are one, in Christ, and this 'oneness' has to be demonstrated in personal relationships and Christian behaviour.

We are Sons and Daughters. We are a people on a mission. We are the Body of Christ. We are the Bride. We are Soldiers for Christ.

This will be a valuable series for both those who are exploring Jesus for the first time and wondering what true Christianity is all about; and for believers who are striving to be legitimate disciples of Christ.

The teachings of this letter are central to who we are at NPAC as we begin a new phase in our church life with the casting of Vision 2020; as we strive for new growth, vision, and mission, this series will remind us of who we are, what we should do, and how God wants to use us to be 'the hope of the world'!

WHO ARE THE EPHESIANS?

The city of Ephesus was a major port at the mouth of the river Cayster in the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey). The river, now, is silted up and the archaeological remains are some way from the sea.

It had originally been a Greek city, and one of its major cults was the worship of Artemis, the goddess of fertility. She was also the goddess of the hunt, of wild creatures and childbirth. The great temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Antipater of Sidon, who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders, said of it: *'I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.'*

In the hellenistic period Ephesus had formed part of the Attalid kingdom which was bequeathed to Rome in 133 BC, and it later became the centre of the province of Asia.

The city itself was built on the slopes of mounts Koressos and Pion. The site today is dominated by the massive theatre with looks out towards the ancient harbour and the sea. It was enlarged by the Emperor Claudius, and it could hold 24,000 people. It was to this theatre that an angry mob dragged two of Paul's companions, when the silversmiths created a riot over the loss of trade in images of Artemis, caused by Paul's preaching and many conversions (Acts 19V23–2V1).

Paul spent two years in Ephesus, teaching first in the synagogue, then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus – and the Good News went out from there to the whole province (the same province this letter is addressed to).

This letter differs considerably from Paul's other letters. There are none of the usual personal greetings, strange considering his long time with them. Nor does Ephesians deal with particular problems or news. Even the words 'at Ephesus' (1V1) are missing from earlier manuscripts. And it seems to be more of a sermon than a letter (like Hebrews or 1 John), focussing on the character of the Christ's Church. So it seems likely that Ephesians began as a 'circular' letter, written to a group of churches in that province. The 'seven churches' of Revelation 1V11 were in this general area, so too was the church at Colossae.

The fact that Paul wrote as a prisoner (probably under house-arrest in Rome in the 60s) links this letter with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon – other 'letters from prison'. Of the three, Ephesians is closest in thought to Colossians.

Because it's not a very personal letter, there are few clues to the situation in the churches, but it seems that Gentile Christians dominated and that they may have looked down on their Jewish fellow Christians a possible reason for Paul's emphasis on unity.

The letter to the Ephesians in Revelation 2 calls the Ephesian Christians to return to the love for Christ they showed when they first heard the Gospel. 1 Timothy was also written and sent to Ephesus, where Timothy, Paul's disciple, was acting leader of the church.

AUTHORSHIP

Strangely enough, even though *Ephesians* introduces itself as a letter from Paul, 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God' (1V1), and then, in the third chapter, the author again refers to himself as Paul (3V1). Significant debate has continued since the 19th Century, with some questioning the validity of who authored it, preferring the notion that it was one of Paul's disciples.

Those who question the authorship, though, have quite a lot to explain: they have the weight of tradition against them; the fact that the vocabulary and style of writing in *Ephesians* are so reflective of Paul's other epistles; the author's vaulted claim of apostleship, which, being held in highest regard, was thoroughly scrutinised; and on top of that, the content of the letter furthers Paul's theology beyond what it had been.

F.F Bruce says, 'If the Epistle to the Ephesians was not written directly by Paul, but by one of his disciples in the apostle's name, then it's author was the greatest Paulinist of all time.'

Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes the letter as 'the divinest composition of man – the quintessence of Paulinism.'

What does this mean? He's basically saying that it can't be anyone other than Paul because it's more advanced than anything he's done before.

Stott also has this view point, quoting F.F Bruce, 'The man who could write Ephesians must have been the apostle's equal, if not his superior, in mental stature and spiritual insight, of such a second Paul, early Christian history has no knowledge.'

At this point, it's probably safe to stand with tradition and accept the greater likelihood that it was indeed the apostle Paul who authored this letter.

TRENDING TOPICS

#newsociety

#unity

#identity

#conduct

#churchlife

#spiritualwarfare

#maturity

The focus of Ephesians is on what God did through the historical work of Jesus Christ and what He does today through the power of the Holy Spirit in order to build His **#newsociety** in the midst of the old.

More than that it speaks to who we are 'in Christ', that we have **#unity** with Christ and each other through faith. And that, in being 'in Christ' we are to demonstrate plainly that we have a new **#identity**, and visibly, by our **#conduct**, a new life He has called us to.

The message of the church as God's new society is of particular importance, and so highlights the necessity of healthy **#churchlife** over and above the popular idea of individualistic, personal faith. Today, more than ever, we need to catch the Biblical vision of the Church.

Ephesians also has a lot to say about **#spiritualwarfare**, and the reality of an unseen battle for our souls raging on behind a cosmic curtain, and how as Christians we must push on towards a full **#maturity** in Christ in order to survive as new creations amidst that war until the final day.

FURTHER READING

Biblical Theology:

A.E McGrath

Christian Theology, An Introduction

Blackwell Publishing, United Kingdom

T.D Alexander (et al)

The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology

Intervarsity Press, England

The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), Tyndale House Pub. 1991..

John Stott, Ephesians: God's New Society

InterVarsity Press, 1979.

F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians, Pickering & Inglis Ltd. 1977.

Steve Motyer, Discovering Ephesians, Crossway, 1999.

Peter T. O'Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, Apollos, 1999

Pat and David Alexander (Ed), The Lion Handbook to the Bible, Lion Books, Fourth Edition, 2009

Vaughn Roberts, God's Big Picture, InterVarsity Press, 2002

Christian Living:

Michelle Anthony, Spiritual Parenting: An Awakening for Today's Families, David C. Cook New edition June 2010.

Mark Driscoll, Who do you Think you Are?, Thomas Nelson, January 2013.

Timothy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage, Hodder November 2011.

Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation, Crossway 2nd, ed. May 2010.

J.I. Packer, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, IVP Academic November 1991.

John Piper, Battling Unbelief: Defeating Sin with Superior Pleasure, Multnomah Books 2009.

READING PLAN & SERIES OUTLINE

PRE-READING	TEXT	DATE OF TOPIC	SERMON TITLE
April 6-11	Ephesians 1V1-23	April 12	<i>We Are Valued Sons & Daughters</i>
April 13-18	Ephesians 2V1-22	April 19	<i>We Are Made Alive & Reconciled</i>
April 20-25	Ephesians 3V1-21	April 26	<i>We Are Strengthened for a Mission</i>
April 27-May 2	Ephesians 4V1-16	May 3	<i>We Are One Body</i>
May 3-9	Ephesians 4V17-32	May 10	<i>We Are New</i>
May 11-16	Ephesians 5V1-21	May 17	<i>We Are Loved, Light & Joyful</i>
May 18-23	Ephesians 5V22-33	May 24	<i>We Are the Bride</i>
May 25-30	Ephesians 6V1-4	May 31	<i>We Are Family & Obedient</i>
June 1-6	Ephesians 6V5-9	June 7	<i>We Are Servant-hearted</i>
June 8-13	Ephesians 6V10-24	June 14	<i>We Are Soldiers</i>



○ *Rome*

○ *Philippi*

Athens

○ *Corinth*

○ *Ephesus*

Mediterranean Sea

○ *Caesarea*

○ *Jerusalem*

— MAP OF ASIA MINOR —

1. We Are Valued Sons & Daughters | Eph. 1V1-23

TRENDING

#identity #newsociety #unity

THE BIG IDEA

As Christians we are a part of a new society. We are adopted children of God. We have been given a second chance at life and an opportunity to make the most of it!

KEY TEACHING POINTS

We must know our identity 'in Christ' and as creatures made 'in God's image.'

We are highly valued and blessed to be sons and daughters of God and this should govern our entire worldview.

FOR DISCUSSION

When introducing yourself to a stranger, how do you describe yourself?

*Do you understand why the idea of 'being made in God's image' is such a central theme for Christians?
What are some of the implications of this?*

What kinds of blessings are we promised as God's children?

NOTES:

2. We Are Made Alive & Reconciled | Eph. 1V1-22

TRENDING

#identity #newsociety #unity

THE BIG IDEA

The penalty of sin is death. We were dead, but through Christ's work on the cross - defeating sin and death - we are made alive 'in Him' when we put our trust in Him.

Sin divided us, not only from God, but from each other. Now we stand united with God and open to love one another in a way never possible before..

KEY TEACHING POINTS

It's only through Christ that we can be saved from the penalty we deserve for our sin.

We are given a new society to be a part of - the church which is united with God and through love for one another.

FOR DISCUSSION

We aren't saved merely for our own benefit. We are called to serve Christ and build up His Church. How are you involving yourself in this?

"Christians must get used to the idea that they are created, designed and manufactured for service by God 'in Christ'". What do you think of this description of a Christian?

NOTES:

3. We Are Strengthened for a Mission | Eph. 3V1-21

TRENDING

#churchlife #maturity

THE BIG IDEA

God has a mission for us to achieve while we are still on this earth. But the good news is that He doesn't leave us alone for it. He provides us with the strength we need to fulfil it.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

As Paul prayer for the Ephesians , he lets them see that inner strength is their most vital need. The same is true for us.

FOR DISCUSSION

Paul calls himself 'a servant of the gospel' (v.7). Should all Christians be servants of the gospel, or is that a special calling? What role do you think you have?

Some parts of the church worldwide are called to face suffering more than others. What can we do to express our fellowship with them in Christ?

NOTES:

4. We Are One Body | Eph. 4V1-16

TRENDING

#unity #churchlife #identity #newsociety

THE BIG IDEA

Church members should strive to bring about the unity God wants. Unity doesn't just happen. We must work at it.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

The Church must be one, because God is One.

The calling we explore here isn't individual but corporate - 'to all who believe'. We are to be one.

The unity of the Church is not undermined by its diversity.

FOR DISCUSSION

Are you being equipped 'for works of service'? How effective is NPAC at fulfilling the vision of verse 12?

What could these 'works of service' be for you and for NPAC?

Make a list of the marks of a mature church. How does our own church stack up? What could be done to encourage growth?

NOTES:

5. We Are New | Eph. 4V17-32

TRENDING

#newsociety #identity

THE BIG IDEA

People should be able to see the difference between believers and those who don't follow Christ by the way we live. Living the Christian life is a process of leaving behind the old and embracing the new.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

Before we became Christians, our chief problem was the corruption of our minds. Now that we are Christians, our chief need is the restoration of our minds.

A renewed mind leads to transformed speech. Paul describes some difficult but vital areas where Christians must be different.

FOR DISCUSSION

Thinking practically, if you were really to be 'made new' what sorts of things in your life still need to be left behind? To a society where minds are corrupt and cannot see the truth (vv.17-19), what is the best strategy for Christian outreach?

How do you usually speak to, or speak about fellow Christians? What are your motives? Just self-expression? Or building them up?

NOTES:

6. We Are Loved, Light & Joyful | Eph. 5V1-21

TRENDING

#newsociety #churchlife #identity #maturity

THE BIG IDEA

As we leave behind the old and embrace the new, our attitudes and actions will change. Knowing we are loved will bring us into the light of God's will and we will embrace the joy we have in trusting in Him.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

Paul contrasts two kinds of love: Christian love and the world's kind of love. We need to be careful not to confuse the two.

Worship is the vital centre of how the Church grows in the Spirit and in wisdom and understanding. The life of the Church needs to be focused on this.

FOR DISCUSSION

How are we to live in a society that follows completely different values from us?

Why doesn't Paul tell the Ephesians to campaign against child prostitution at the temples? When should Christians undertake public/political campaigns and when shouldn't we?

Churches today differ so much in their styles of worship: some use liturgy; some are charismatic; some have ordained leaders; some are loud and others are much more reflective. Do you think that Paul's teaching here favours one style or all of them?

NOTES:

7. We Are the Bride | Eph. 5V22-33

TRENDING

#newsociety #churchlife #identity

THE BIG IDEA

The Church is called 'the bride of Christ'. And as brides submit to their husbands who love and care for them with all of their beings, so the Church should submit everything to Christ who loved us and died for us.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

Marriage is a great mystery and challenge, one that is exemplified in the relationship of Christ and the Church. Paul begins his description of the practice of Christian marriage with some words for the wife. Submit to your husbands, he says, as the Church submits to Christ, it's head. The word 'as' is vital as Paul turns to the husband. He too must pattern his love for his wife on Christ.

FOR DISCUSSION

What level of priority do you think improving marriages should have in the ministry programme of churches? Why? How?

Sometimes the personalities of husbands and wives are such that she definitely 'wears the pants', and in many respects, takes the lead in the relationship. They may both be perfectly happy with this arrangement. Should we tell them that this is against Scripture and that they should try to change?

NOTES:

8. We Are Family & Obedient | Eph. 6V1-4

TRENDING

#churchlife #newsociety #conduct

THE BIG IDEA

Children and parents have a responsibility to each other and we must understand and fulfil these responsibilities.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

Children must obey their parents 'in the Lord': that is, they and their parents must belong together to the Lord Jesus. Parents must bring their children up 'in the training and instruction of the Lord', that is, they must set aside their own ambitions for their children and train them to be what the Lord wants them to be.

FOR DISCUSSION

*What are the particular challenges and obstacles in our society which make it difficult for parents to bring their children up 'in the training and instruction of the Lord'?
Do you see our Church supporting parents in doing this?
What more could be done?*

NOTES:

9. We Are Servant-hearted | Eph. 6V5-9

TRENDING

#churchlife #newsociety #conduct

THE BIG IDEA

As Christians we must develop a servant-hearted attitude. Not only when at work, but also as we seek to put one another first.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

The relationship between slaves and masters is also transformed by Christ, especially when He is shared by masters and slaves together.

FOR DISCUSSION

Slavery is still a big issue in many parts of the world. What forms of modern slavery exist today? What do you think we should be doing about them?

How do you think Paul would speak into the situation today?

NOTES:

10. We Are Soldiers | Eph. 6V10-24

TRENDING

**#churchlife #maturity #newsociety #identity
#spiritualwarfare #conduct**

THE BIG IDEA

We are on a mission. We are in the trenches, behind enemy lines. We are soldiers and need to look to our commander to survive.

KEY TEACHING POINTS

Paul urges us to put on God's armour to protect us in the battle against the forces of evil which want to destroy us and describes the six pieces of armour which will help us 'stand firm' in the fight.

FOR DISCUSSION

*How many of these pieces of armour can we really only put on effectively as a whole Church?
How can we pray effectively for 'all the saints'?
As we study this passage can you discern areas in our Church which are currently under attack and need our prayer and action? What will you do about it?*

NOTES:

five30 | northpineanglican.org.au