



Paul the Apostle · c. AD 60–62 · New Testament · Epistle

Ephesians

The church as the body of Christ — identity, unity, and the armor of God

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

— Ephesians 2:8

CONTENTS OF THIS STUDY PACK

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|---|
| 01 | Visual Overview Infographic
A panoramic lens on six chapters of Ephesians. | 02 | Chapter-by-Chapter Narrative Arc
Blessing, Identity, Unity, Walk, Household, Armor. |
| 03 | Key Themes & Theological Insights
Grace, New Humanity, Body of Christ, Spiritual Warfare. | 04 | Symbolism & Imagery
Armor of God, Body, Temple, Mystery, Fullness. |
| 05 | Small Group Discussion Guide
Eight questions with guided prompts and note space. | 06 | Key Characters
Paul, Tychicus, and the Ephesian church — portraits. |
| 07 | Practical Application
Living as the new humanity in everyday life today. | | |

EPHESIANS

Paul's Letter from Prison

KEY VERSE

*For it is by
grace
you have
been saved,
through
faith—*

EPHESIANS 2:8

CH. 1



BELT OF TRUTH

CH. 2



BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

CH. 3



GOSPEL OF PEACE SHOES

CH. 4



SHIELD OF FAITH

CH. 5

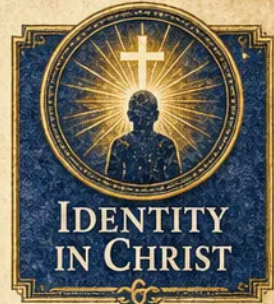


HELMET OF SALVATION

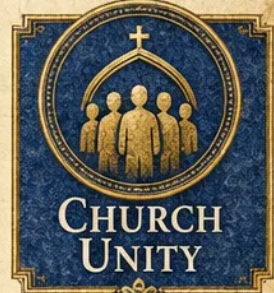
CH. 6



SWORD OF THE SPIRIT



IDENTITY IN CHRIST



CHURCH UNITY



SPIRITUAL WARFARE



GRACE ALONE



Visual overview of Ephesians — identity in Christ, unity in the body, and the armor of God.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Ephesians is Paul's most comprehensive statement of the gospel and its implications for the church. Written from prison in Rome (c. AD 60–62), it is addressed to the church in Ephesus — one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the ancient world. The letter moves in two great movements: chapters 1–3 (who you are in Christ) and chapters 4–6 (how to live as who you are). The theological foundation is staggering: before the creation of the world, God chose his people in Christ, adopted them as sons and daughters, and lavished his grace on them. The practical outworking is equally demanding: live worthy of this calling, in unity, in holiness, in love, and in the full armor of God.

SECTION 1

Ephesians 1 EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN CHRIST



1:1–14

The great doxology: a single sentence in Greek (vv. 3–14) praising the Trinitarian work of salvation. The Father chooses and adopts (vv. 4–6), the Son redeems and reveals (vv. 7–12), the Spirit seals and guarantees (vv. 13–14). Every spiritual blessing is already given to believers “in the heavenly realms.”

1:15–23

Paul's first prayer: that the Ephesians would know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of God's power — the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him above every ruler and authority.

SECTION 2

Ephesians 2 FROM DEATH TO LIFE — THE NEW HUMANITY



2:1–10

The before-and-after of salvation: dead in transgressions → made alive with Christ → seated with him in the heavenly realms. The most concise statement of grace in the Bible: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (v. 8).

2:11–22

The cosmic reconciliation: Jews and Gentiles, once separated by the “dividing wall of hostility,” are now one new humanity in Christ. The cross abolishes the barrier. Together they are being built into a holy temple in which God dwells by his Spirit.

SECTION 3

Ephesians 3 THE MYSTERY REVEALED — THE CHURCH AS COSMIC DISPLAY



3:1–13

Paul reveals the “mystery” hidden for ages: that Gentiles are co-heirs, members of one body, sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus. The church is not an afterthought — it is the means by which God makes known his manifold wisdom to “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”

3:14–21

Paul's second prayer: that the Ephesians would be strengthened with power through the Spirit, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, and that they would grasp “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” The doxology: “to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”

SECTION 4

Ephesians 4 WALK WORTHY — UNITY AND MATURITY IN THE BODY



4:1–16 The pivot from theology to practice: “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Seven unities (one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God). The gifts of Christ to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers — for building up the body to maturity.

4:17–32 The old self vs. the new self: put off falsehood, anger, theft, unwholesome talk, bitterness, and malice. Put on truthfulness, honest work, grace-filled speech, kindness, and forgiveness. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

SECTION 5

Ephesians 5–6 HOUSEHOLD CODE AND THE ARMOR OF GOD



5:1–33 Walk in love (imitating God), walk in light (exposing darkness), walk in wisdom (making the most of every opportunity). The household code: wives and husbands (the marriage as a picture of Christ and the church), a relationship of mutual self-giving love.

6:1–9 Children and parents, slaves and masters — all relationships transformed by the gospel. The principle: whatever you do, do it as to the Lord, not to human masters.

6:10–24 The Armor of God: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit. The armor is not for individual combat but for the whole community standing together. Paul closes with a request for prayer and the benediction of peace and grace.

KEY THEMES

Ephesians is the most architecturally structured of Paul's letters — each theme building on the last, from the cosmic purposes of God to the daily choices of the believer.

01 IDENTITY IN CHRIST



01

The phrase “in Christ” (or “in him”) appears over 30 times in Ephesians — it is the letter’s most fundamental category. Before the foundation of the world, believers were **chosen** in Christ (1:4), **adopted** through him (1:5), **redeemed** by his blood (1:7), and **sealed** with his Spirit (1:13). This identity is not earned or maintained by performance — it is given, secured, and guaranteed by the Trinitarian God. The entire ethical section of Ephesians (chapters 4–6) flows from this identity: “Live as who you already are.”

MODERN APPLICATION

Many Christians live as if their identity is determined by their performance, their past, or others’ opinions. Ephesians 1 insists that your deepest identity is what God has declared you to be in Christ. Which aspect of your identity in Christ — chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed — do you most need to internalize today?

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” — Ephesians 1:4

02 GRACE ALONE



02

Ephesians 2:1–10 is the most compact and complete statement of the doctrine of **grace** in the New Testament. The starting point is stark: we were “dead in transgressions and sins” (2:1) — not sick, not struggling, but dead. Dead people cannot contribute to their own resurrection. The initiative is entirely God’s: “But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ” (2:4–5). Salvation is a gift, not a reward. The purpose of good works is not to earn salvation but to fulfill the purpose for which we were created (2:10).

MODERN APPLICATION

The doctrine of grace is not just a theological position — it is the foundation of a transformed life. When we truly believe we are loved not because of what we do but because of what Christ has done, it frees us from both pride and despair. Where are you currently trying to earn what has already been given?

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” — Ephesians 2:8

03 THE CHURCH AS THE NEW HUMANITY

03



Ephesians 2:11–22 is one of the most radical passages in the New Testament: the cross does not just reconcile individuals to God — it creates a new community. The “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles — the deepest ethnic and religious divide of the ancient world — is abolished in Christ. The result is “one new humanity” (2:15). This new community is not just a social club but a cosmic statement: the church is the means by which God makes known his manifold wisdom to “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (3:10).

MODERN APPLICATION

Every time the church lives in genuine unity across human divides — ethnic, economic, generational — it declares something to the watching universe about the power of the gospel. What specific division in your church or community is the gospel calling you to bridge?

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” — Ephesians 2:14

04 SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND THE ARMOR OF GOD

04



Ephesians 6:10–18 is the most detailed description of spiritual warfare in the New Testament. The armor Paul describes is the armor of a Roman soldier — familiar to his readers. But the crucial insight is grammatical: every “you” in the passage is plural. The armor is not for individual combat but for the whole community standing together. Spiritual warfare in Ephesians is not a private struggle but a communal one — we stand together or we fall alone.

MODERN APPLICATION

The armor of God is most effective when worn in community. Which piece of the armor — truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, prayer — do you most need to strengthen right now? And who in your community is standing with you?

“Finally, 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.” — Ephesians 6:10–11

SYMBOLISM & IMAGERY

Ephesians draws on some of the most powerful architectural and military images in the ancient world — each one illuminating a different dimension of the church’s identity and calling.



THE BODY OF CHRIST

SYMBOL 01

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The image of a body as a political or social unit was common in the Greco-Roman world — the “body politic” metaphor was used to describe the relationship between citizens and the state. Paul transforms this image: the church is not a political body but an organic one, with Christ as the head and each believer as a member with a specific function.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

The body metaphor in Ephesians emphasizes both unity and diversity. Each member is needed; no one is dispensable. The body grows as each part does its work. The head provides direction, nourishment, and life. The body metaphor is Paul’s answer to both individualism and uniformity.



THE TEMPLE

SYMBOL 02

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The **Jerusalem Temple** had a literal “dividing wall” that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts where Jews worshipped. Inscriptions warned Gentiles that crossing the barrier was punishable by death. This physical wall was the architectural embodiment of the ethnic and religious divide Paul describes in Ephesians 2:14.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Paul declares that Christ has abolished the dividing wall and that the church — Jews and Gentiles together — is now being built into “a holy temple in the Lord”. Jesus is the **cornerstone**; the apostles and prophets are the foundation; each believer is a living stone. The church is the **new temple** — the place where God now dwells by his Spirit.



THE MYSTERY (MYST■RION)

SYMBOL 03

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the ancient world, “mystery” referred to secret knowledge revealed only to initiates of **mystery cults** — like the Artemis cult centered in Ephesus. These mysteries were deliberately hidden from outsiders. Paul uses the word to describe something that was once hidden but is now fully revealed — the opposite of a secret.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

The “mystery” in Ephesians is the inclusion of Gentiles as co-heirs with Israel in the body of Christ. This was not a new plan — it was hidden in God from eternity but is now disclosed through the gospel. Paul’s use of “mystery” is a deliberate contrast with the Ephesian mystery cults: God’s secret is not for the elite few but for all peoples.



THE ARMOR OF GOD

SYMBOL 04

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul’s description of the armor in Ephesians 6:14–17 closely matches the equipment of a **Roman legionary**: the belt, breastplate, sandals, shield, helmet, and sword. As a prisoner in Rome, Paul had daily contact with Roman soldiers — their equipment was a constant visual reality.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Paul’s armor imagery draws heavily from Isaiah, where God himself wears righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet. The armor Paul describes is not human equipment but **divine attributes** — we do not forge our own armor; we put on God’s. The armor is also communal: the Roman legionary fought in formation, not alone. The plural “you” throughout the passage calls the whole church to stand together.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

These 8 questions are designed for a 60–90 minute small group session. Begin with the icebreaker, then work through observation, interpretation, and application questions. Close with the prayer prompt.

ICEBREAKER

If you had to describe your identity in three words — not your job, family role, or nationality, but who you fundamentally are — what would they be? How do those words compare to how God describes you in Ephesians 1?

01

OBSERVATION

Read Ephesians 1:3–14 aloud. Notice the three stanzas, each ending with “to the praise of his glory.” What does the Father do? What does the Son do? What does the Spirit do? What does this Trinitarian structure tell us about the nature of salvation?

Leader’s Note:

The Father chooses and adopts (vv. 4–6), the Son redeems and reveals (vv. 7–12), the Spirit seals and guarantees (vv. 13–14). Salvation is a Trinitarian project from beginning to end.

02

OBSERVATION

Ephesians 2:1–10 moves from “dead” (v. 1) to “alive” (v. 5) to “seated in the heavenly realms” (v. 6). Trace this movement. What does it mean that believers are already seated with Christ? How should this present reality affect how we face today’s challenges?

03

INTERPRETATION

Paul says the church makes known “the manifold wisdom of God” to “rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (3:10). What does it mean that the church is a cosmic display of God’s wisdom? How does this change the way you think about the importance of your local church?

Leader’s Note:

The church is not just a human institution for mutual support — it is a cosmic announcement. Every time the church lives in genuine unity across human divides, it declares something to the watching universe about the power of the gospel.

04

INTERPRETATION

The Armor of God passage (6:10–18) uses plural “you” throughout — it is addressed to the whole community, not just individuals. How does this change your understanding of spiritual warfare? What does it look like to “stand firm” together as a community rather than just as individuals?

05

APPLICATION

Paul lists seven unities in 4:4–6 (one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God). Yet the church is visibly divided. What is one specific thing you could do this week to actively pursue unity — with someone in your church you find difficult, or across a divide in the broader church?

06

APPLICATION

Ephesians 4:29 says: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.” Reflect on your conversations this past week. What would it look like to apply this standard to your words — at home, at work, online?

07

PRAYER PROMPT

Close by reading Paul’s second prayer (Ephesians 3:14–19) together. Then have each person complete this sentence: “The dimension of Christ’s love I most need to grasp right now is _____ because _____.” Pray for one another using Paul’s words, inserting each person’s name: “I pray that [Name] may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”

08

KEY CHARACTERS

Paul

The apostle who writes from prison in Rome, yet whose letter is filled with the language of blessing, riches, and heavenly realms. His imprisonment is not a contradiction of his message but its embodiment:



Tychicus

Paul's trusted messenger who carried this letter to the Ephesians (6:21–22). He is described as “a dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord.” Tychicus represents the network of co-workers who made



The Ephesian Church

Founded by Paul during his third missionary journey (Acts 19), the Ephesian church was located in one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the ancient world — home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven



PRACTICAL APPLICATION — LIVING IT OUT TODAY



Know Who You Are in Christ

Ephesians 1 lists over a dozen things God has done for you in Christ. This week, read Ephesians 1:3–14 each morning and choose one truth to meditate on throughout the day. Let your identity be shaped by what God says about you, not by what your circumstances or critics say.



Pursue Unity Actively

Ephesians 4:3 commands us to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” Unity is not passive — it requires effort. Identify one relationship in your church community that needs repair or investment. Take one concrete step toward reconciliation or connection this week.



Put On the Armor Daily

The armor of God is not automatic — it must be “put on” (6:11). Use Ephesians 6:14–18 as a daily prayer framework: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, and prayer. Pray through each piece of armor each morning, asking God to equip you for the day's spiritual challenges.

EPHESIANS

STUDY JOURNAL

DATE: _____



1 MY IDENTITY IN CHRIST



2 ARMOR OF GOD REFLECTION



3 PRAYER FOCUS



4 KEY VERSE

Ephesians 2:8



5 APPLICATION



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...e, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in th

— Ephesians 3:20–21