

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction to our studies in Ephesians 2

During November we will be working through Ephesians chapter 2 on Sunday mornings. We studied Ephesians 1 earlier in 2015 and you can listen again to those sermons on the website (<http://bec.uk.net/resources/sermons/app/series/ephesians-1/page/1>). Over the five Sundays in November we will work through this incredible chapter where Paul explains to us how God, in his grace, has not only reconciled us to himself but also to one another. As a church this is a vital chapter for us to grapple with as it lays the theological foundations for what it means to be the people of God.

To help us apply the great truths of this chapter we are going to study Ephesians 2 in our small groups alongside Ken's sermons on Sunday mornings. The purpose of our studies will not be to rehash or critique Ken's sermons but to help us better apply what God is saying to us in Ephesians. As group leaders you will want to take these notes and questions and adapt them in light of Ken's sermons.

These studies in Ephesians 2 should hopefully reinforce and underpin many of the practical ideas that will have emerged from using 'Six Steps to Loving Your Church.' In many ways Ephesians 2 should provide the theological foundations for much of what 'Six Steps' was encouraging us to do as a church. Don't worry if there is overlap or repetition between that course and Ephesians 2. It is no bad thing to be reminded of the same things.

If you are looking for other books and commentaries to help you prepare then I would recommend the following;

Ephesians for you by Richard Coekin (<https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/ephesians-for-you>)

The Message of Ephesians by John Stott (Bible Speaks Today - <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/the-message-of-ephesians>)

The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians by Peter O'Brien (<https://www.10ofthose.com/products/614/the-letter-to-the-ephesians/>)

The first two by Coekin and Stott are great resources designed for Bible study leaders and preachers. The commentary by O'Brien is more advanced and expensive but provides greater technical detail.

Context

- **1:1-14 - To the Praise of his glorious Grace**
 - In the opening section of chapter 1 Paul began with what Richard Coekin describes as “an explosion of praise.” The focus of this praise is God and his grace (see 1:3, 1:6, 1:14.)
 - Having praised God’s grace “that he lavished on us” Paul now returns to God’s grace in ch2 to show us exactly how God’s grace is central to our salvation (2:5, 2:7 - notice how the phrase “the riches of his grace is repeated from 1:6”, 2:8.)
 - God’s grace is one of the key themes running through the entire letter (see for example 1:2 , 3:2, 3:7, 4:7, 4:24.)

- **1:15-22 - Christ risen, ascended and exalted**
 - In the second part of chapter 1 Paul told the Ephesians what is prayer was for them. He prayed that they would know God better and know the hope and power that is theirs in and through Christ. He sketched out how the power that raised and exalted Christ from the grave is now at work in them (1:19-22).
 - Now in 2:1-6 Paul explains how God has raised believers from spiritual death to life with Christ. We were dead (v1, v5) but now we are alive in Christ (v5), raised with Christ (v6), and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (v6.) Here is the power of God at work in the individual’s life as God raises them from spiritual death to life in Christ and exalting them with Christ as well! As Stott says “the sequence of thought is clear: ‘Jesus Christ was dead, but God raised and exalted him. And you also were dead, but God raised and exalted you with Christ.’”

- **1:10—> 2:1-22 - To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ**
 - In many ways 1:10 provides a summary of the God’s great masterplan for the universe - “... to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” This is God’s plan for the universe and chapter 2 shows us how this is being demonstrated in the local church.
 - First in 2:1-10 Paul shows us how God is reconciling and uniting us to Christ. Then in 2:11-22 he is showing us how we are being reconciled in Christ to one another. He takes the great division of Jews and Gentiles and shows how even this great hostility is being brought to peace and unity through the cross of Christ.
 - As we study chapter 2 we need to read it in the context of 1:10.

- **Romans 1-3 —> 2:1-5**
 - In Ephesians 2:1-5 Paul sketches out for us the bleak reality of humanity without Christ and then against such a black backdrop he paints the glorious riches of the grace of God to us in Christ. In this way Ephesians 2:1-5 acts as a shortened summary of Romans 1-3. The main difference is that in Romans 1-3 Paul unpacks the dark predicament of humanity in greater detail.

Structure and Content

• The Big Contrast

- V4 acts as a great pivot in these verses. In v1-3 Paul explains how everyone is by nature spiritually dead without Christ. Only once we have seen how terrible our plight is are we ready to be introduced the God's grace which comes in 2:4-10. Paul twice in chapter 2 Paul pivots from 'what we were' to 'what we are' by using of "But" (see v4 and v13.)
- Stott is worth quoting here;
"Paul first plumbs the depths of pessimism about man, and then rises to the heights of optimism about God. It is this combination of pessimism and optimism, of despair and faith, which constitutes the refreshing realism of the Bible. For what Paul does in this passage is to paint a vivid contrast between what man is by nature and what he can become by grace"

• 2:1-3 - We were Dead by Nature

• v1 - "... you were dead in your transgressions and sin"

- My guess is that Ephesians 2 is a very familiar passage for most of us therefore it is worth taking the time to think about what some of the key terms actually mean.
- **Dead**
 - Obviously Paul does not mean that we were physically dead (though Christ was in 1:20.) The sense here is that we were spiritually dead. We were spiritually dead because we were "seperated from the life of God" (4:18.) True life is found in God and we were alienated from him because of our transgressions and sin (more on them below) and so we were spiritually dead.
 - It is worth dwelling on this idea of being dead. Without Jesus Christ we are spiritual corpses and corpses can't do anything. They can't move, they can't hunger, they're dead! Without Jesus Christ we are spiritually lifeless. We are incapable of being hungry for God or moving towards God or searching for him because we're spiritually dead. When was the last time you saw a corpse moving or doing anything for that matter?
 - Here's a great quote from John Stott that helps us as we look at the world around us;

"So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living. To affirm this paradox is to become aware of the basic tragedy of fallen human existence. It is that people who were created by God and for God should now be living without God. Indeed, that was our condition until the Good Shepherd found us."

• Transgressions and sins

- We often think that these words are interchangeable and yet they emphasise slightly different things.
 - To transgress or trespass is to cross a boundary or deviate from a path.
 - To sin is to fall short or to miss the mark.
 - *"Together the two words cover the positive and negative, or active and passive, aspects of human wrongdoing, that is to say, our sins of commission and of omission. Before God we are both rebels and failures."* (Stott)

- **v2-3 - “the ways of this world... the ruler of the kingdom of the air... the cravings of our flesh...”**
 - In these verse we see that without Christ we are held captive by what Coekin describes as a “Trinity of Tyrants... [who] ensure that sinners cannot escape from their spiritual death.” These three tyrants are the world, the devil and the flesh. Again we may be familiar with these three tyrants but it is worth pausing to consider each in turn.
 - **The ways of this world World** - This means “*the cultural worldview of our sinful human race*” (Coekin.) We were incapable of thinking and therefore living differently from the world around us. As Phillips says “*We drifted along the stream of this world’s ideas of living.*” As Coekin puts it “*We can’t think outside this box any more than a jellyfish can think outside of the ocean.*”
 - **The Devil** - The ruler of the kingdom of the air may seem a confusing phrase which will we consider more fully under ‘**Tricky Bits.**’ For now as we consider the whole of v2 we can be clear that this figure is the Devil. We cannot deny the reality of Satan even if it brings mockery from our ‘enlightened’ society. The Bible affirms that he is real and he is active in every unbeliever tempting them to believe lies about God and his word.
 - **The cravings of the flesh** - This is not just our physical flesh but our whole human nature. We need to recognise that not all cravings are wrong and sinful. God created us with good cravings for sex, food and relationships etc. What we need to realise is that because of the fall our cravings are corrupted by sin. It is when our cravings become sinful and counter to God’s will that we have a problem. As non-Christians we were held captive by our sinful desires of the flesh.
- **v1-3 “As for you... All of us also lived among them...”**
 - In v1-2 Paul is addressing his Gentile readers in Ephesus stating that they were dead in their sins. But before the Ephesians start to feel picked on Paul shows that Jews such as himself are in exactly the same boat - “*All of us also...*” (v3.)
 - The human predicament is the same, we are all by nature dead in our sins and transgressions held captive by the world, the flesh and the devil.
- **v3 - “we were by nature deserving wrath”**
 - The consequence of all of this is spelt out for us in v3. We were by nature deserving of God’s wrath. By ‘God’s wrath’ we don’t mean that he loses his temper like us. Instead ‘God’s wrath’ refers to his settled, righteous hatred of evil. Paul wants us to feel the full force and terror of where we were - we were dead and we deserved God’s wrath! Only when we truly feel this darkness are we ready for the good news that’s coming...
- **2:4-10 - But now... We are Alive by Grace**
 - **What has God done?**
 - **Made us alive (v5)** - What a contrast with v1 where we were dead! Now we are alive! What is more God didn’t wait for us to begin to revive ourselves. He made us alive “*even when we were dead in transgressions.*”
 - **Saved us (v5 and v8)** - Twice Paul tells us that God has saved us by grace (more on grace below.) Remember it was not just that we were spiritually dead, we were also deserving of God’s wrath, yet now God has saved us.
 - **Raised us up (v6)** - Here the parallel with Jesus in 1:19-22 really begins to become clear. God has not only made us alive with Jesus but he has also raised us with Christ and...

- **Seated us in the heavenly realms (v6)** - Not only have we been raised with Christ but we are also seated with him in the heavenly realms (see Tricky Bits for more on this.) This means that as Christians we have 2 homes. As 1:1 puts it the Ephesians are “God’s holy people *IN* Ephesus...” but also “the faithful *IN* Christ Jesus.” We’re citizens both of Doncaster and of heaven because wherever Jesus is there we are also.
- **How has God done it?**
 - **“...With Christ”** - Read v4-10 and notice how many times the phrase “with Christ” or “in Christ” is used. I can count 5, how many can you count? Paul is making it clear that everything that God has done for us (making us alive, saving us, raising us and seating us in the heavenly realm) is all through Christ. Without Jesus we’d still be dead corpses, but with Christ we’re raised, saved, seated and alive!
- **Why has God done it?**
 - **“God’s love, mercy, kindness and grace”** - Paul wants us to be absolutely clear on why he has raised us from death to life. It is all because of God and his love for us (v4), his rich mercy (v4), his kindness (v7) and crucially his grace (v5, 7, 8.) We didn’t do anything to deserve this, again how could we, we were spiritual corpses? We could do nothing to merit anything but wrath from God.
 - **“To show the incomparable riches of his grace” (v7)** Here again there is a link between chapters 1 and 2. In 1:19-20 Paul told us that God raised Christ from the dead to show “the immeasurable greatness of his power.” Now in 2:7 Paul tells us that God raised us to show “the incomparable riches of his grace.” Stott uses the examples of a painter and a surgeon. The masterpiece displays the skill of the painter and the surgery displays the skill of the surgeon. Like a great masterpiece causes people to marvel at the artist so God’s people should cause people to marvel at the grace of our God who has raised dead people deserving his wrath to life!
- **Why is God’s grace so incomparably rich? (v8-10)**
 - That’s the question that is posed by v7 and so just in case we haven’t quite grasped why God’s grace is so amazing Paul now makes it clear in v8-10 by using several negatives.
 - **Not from yourselves - it is the gift of God (v8)** - Our faith and indeed our entire salvation come from God! It’s all from him. Look back over v1-7 and look at what we’ve contributed... “our transgressions and sins” in v1 - that’s it! Our salvation and life and status in Christ is all a gift, graciously given by God to be received by faith with empty hands.
 - **Not by works, so that no one can boast (v9)** - What salvation deserving good works could a corpse do? None! So God has not saved us because of any good things we might have done. When we see what we were really like without Jesus we realise that there’s no room for boasting.
 - **So is there no place for good works in the Christian life?** No, but they come after salvation and not before as v10 makes clear. We’re not saved by good works but we’re saved for good works! And yet even these come from God because God has prepared them in advance for us to do. Here we see that from first to last the Christian life is from God.

Tricky Bits

- **What does “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” mean? (v2)**
 - O’Brien helps us with this one when he says *“According to the ancient world-view, the air formed the intermediate sphere between earth and heaven. It was the dwelling place of evil spirits... The kingdom of the air, then, is another way of indicating the heavenly realm, which, according to Ephesians 6:12, is the abode of those principalities and powers, the world-rulers of this darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness, against which the people of Christ wage war.”*
- **What is “the heavenly realm”? (v6)**
 - This is a phrase that appears several times in Ephesians (see 1:3, 1:20-21, 3:10, 6:12.) It is the spiritual realm where Satan and his forces (6:12) as well as God exists. It is also the arena in which we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3.) It is also where Christ now reigns supreme (1:20-21) and where God shows off his wisdom by displaying the church to his beaten foes (3:10.)

Big Idea

We were dead **by nature**, *but now* we are alive **by grace**.

Some Suggested Applications

- 1. Have an honest view of ourselves and other people**
 - None of us like to think of ourselves as spiritually dead and deserving of God’s wrath. If we’ve been Christians for a long time it can be easy to forget just what we were like and to assume that we could do something to save ourselves. We will only celebrate God’s grace when we see the depths from which he has saved us.
 - Similarly we need to let this passage shape how we see the world around us. People without Christ are spiritually dead and deserve God’s wrath. They may seem alive and decent but we need to listen to what God’s word has to say.
- 2. Eliminate all pride in ourselves and celebrate God’s grace to us**
 - Only as we see that salvation is entirely from God will we be freed from boasting and celebrate God’s grace. The more we see how wretched and hopeless we were without Christ, the more we will be captivated by God’s grace to us.
- 3. Transform even the most mundane things we do into worship and service of God**
 - v10 shows us that our good works play no part in saving us. Instead God saves us to do the good works that he has prepared for us to do. This should revolutionise how we think about our day-to-day lives and the seemingly mundane things we do. God is directing our lives and presenting us with all sorts of opportunities to serve him.

A Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

- 1. This study is all about the radical transformation that being united to Jesus brings. To get us started, can you think of other examples of radical transformation? What changed and who was responsible?**

This starter question is designed to be a simple way to get people thinking and talking. There are no right or wrong answers so everyone should be able to get involved without fear of giving "the wrong answer." We want to think about who was responsible for the change and therefore who deserved the credit for the change. This will set up the rest of the study where we see that God deserves all the credit for the radical change that has occurred in Christians. We've contributed nothing but our sin and transgressions so we've got nothing to boast about.

Digging into v1-3

- 2. What were we all like without Jesus?**

Here we want the group to pick out the different words and phrases used to describe what we were all like. This is a simple observation question - tell the group to just say what they see even if they don't understand some of the terms. Crucially we were;

- *Dead - spiritually not physically (this may need explaining)*
- *Followed the ways of the world (again this might want unpacking)*
- *Satan was at work in us*
- *Gratifying the cravings of our flesh (again you might need to unpack this.)*
- *We all deserved God's wrath*

Applying v1-3

- 3. How do these verses help us to understand ourselves and our society?**

For those of us who have been Christians a long time these verses remind us exactly what we were like without Jesus. We were spiritual corpses just going with the flow of society. We deserved God's wrath and there was absolutely nothing that we could do to change that! These verses really do paint a bleak picture of us and our society and this is really important because without the bleakness of v1-3 we'll not really appreciate the amazing light of v4-10.

Digging into v4-10

- 4. What has God done for us through Jesus?**

Again this is an observation question where we are encouraging the group to pull out all the different things that are mentioned. Once they have done this you may want to get them to summarise the transformation that has taken place;

- *Death —> Life*
- *Saved*
- *Raised up*
- *seated in the heavenly realms*
- *Prepared good works for us to do*
- *All of this is with/in Christ*

- 5. Why would God do this for people like us who deserve his wrath?**

In a sense this is probably the crucial question. When we see just what we were like in v1-3 it is all the more amazing that God who intervenes to save us and give us life. Help the group to draw out the different reasons why God has acted;

- *Because of his great love for us*
- *God is rich in mercy*

- *his grace (x3)*
- *his kindness*
- *So that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace (this may need unpacking. In particular you might want to think about why it is right for God to use us to show off his grace?)*

Applying v4-10

6. In what ways do you find boasting slipping into your Christian life?

We have seen that the radical transformation in us is all down to God. We're his handiwork. Even the good works that we now do as Christians have been prepared for us by God. There really is no room for boasting and yet secretly we can boast/take pride in who we are or what we've done as Christians. It's good for us as a group to acknowledge and confess that. Studying this passage should show us how ridiculous it is for us to boast.

7. How does this passage squash such boasting and cause us to celebrate God's grace?

This question flows out of the previous question. Paul wants us to praise God for his grace (see chapter 1). Take the time as a group to ponder God's grace afresh. This might be a familiar passage and the concept of God's grace may be very familiar to us but let's not lose the wonder of God's grace to us. The radical transformation that has been brought about in us is all due to God's grace!

8. Think of some of the boring and mundane things you will do this week. How could v10 transform your attitude to these things?

v10 helps us to see that everything we do has meaning and purpose because God prepares good works for us to do. This means that even mundane things like cooking, washing-up, the school run, filing, dog walking are opportunities to serve God as part of our worship and thanks to him for his grace!

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 2:11-13

Context

- **God's plan "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." (1:10)**
 - 1:10 provides us with a summary of God's big plan for the universe. For this to happen we need to not only be united to God but also to one another. Paul has address the first part of this in 2:1-10 as he has explained how God has raised us from death to life by uniting us with Christ. Now in 2:11-22 he will explain how through Christ we are reconciled not only to God but also to each other as God brings unity where previously there was division.
- **Parallels between 2:1-10 and 2:11-22**
 - The basic structure of the 2 main parts of chapter 2 are similar. In both sections Paul starts by reminding us of what we were like without Christ (2:1-3 and 2:11-12.) Having done this he then shows us the transformation that has been brought about through our unity with Christ (2:4-10 and 2:13-18). In both cases he uses the word 'But' as a hinge turning from what we were to what we are (see (2:4 "But because..." and 2:13 "But now...")
- **The 'Far off' being brought near in Isaiah 49:6 and 57:19**
 - In our short little section for this study Paul shows us where we were as Gentiles (summed up by the phrase "far away" in v13) and where we now are as Christians ("brought near by the blood of Christ.") In v14-22 Paul will expand on how God has brought us near and why he would do such a thing for people like us.
 - For now it is important to notice that v13 draws on Old Testament verses from Isaiah 49:6 and 57:19. In Isaiah 49 God is addressing his servant saying that it will be too small a thing for his servant to "bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also may you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Here we see that it had always been God's intention to bring salvation to all nations and to gather in not only Jews but Gentiles as well.
 - Similarly in 47:19 God says that peace will be cleared both "to those far and near."
- **The historical context of the division between Jews and Gentiles**
 - It is hard to fully grasp the hostility and division that there was between Jews and Gentiles. William Barclay helps us to begin to feel what the relationship was like;

"The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made ... It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death."

Structure

- **Remember where you were... (v11-12)**

- **Remember** - Twice in just 3 verses we are told to “Remember.” Here is the big thing that Paul wants us to do! We are to remember where we were as Gentiles. Paul doesn’t just want us to remember that we were non-Christians, he wants us to remember that we were Gentile Non-Christians. Being Gentile non-Christians meant six things that Paul mentions in v11-13.

1. **Separate from Christ** - This is obviously true of all non-believers but we need to remember that Paul is speaking to us as “Gentiles.” As Gentile non-believers we were separate from Christ in a different way to Jewish people. Christ was the Jewish Messiah, the King of Israel. As Gentile non-believers there was no sense in which Christ was our king and so we had no right to any of the blessings that come from living under his rule.
2. **Excluded from Citizenship in Israel** - As Gentiles it wasn’t just that we didn’t have Jewish passports. To be a citizen of Israel came with incredible privileges. As Gentiles we had no right to know God, we didn’t have his perfect ethical law, similarly we had no access to God through the temple. Gentiles were only allowed into the outer court of the temple and could not enter further in on pain of death.
3. **Foreigners to the Covenants of the Promise** - It is important to notice that it says “covenants” not just “covenant.” As Richard Coekin says’

“God made one marvellous gospel promise to Abraham, that he and his descendants would enjoy the blessings of God’s Kingdom (Genesis 12:1-3), which was amplified periodically by covenant arrangements revealed progressively throughout the history of God’s people.”

For example; to Moses God promised that those who kept his law would be blessed (Exodus 19:5-6.) To Phinehas God promised that there would always be a priest to mediate between God and his people (Numbers 25:10-13.) Then to David he promised that one of David’s descendants would reign over God’s kingdom for ever (2 Samuel 7:11-16). Then to Jeremiah God promised a new covenant whereby God’s people’s sins would be forgiven, they’d know him and be enabled to serve and obey him (Jeremiah 31:31-34.) All of these covenant promises are Jesus’ by right because he alone perfectly kept the covenant stipulations that God laid down. We can benefit in the blessings of the covenants of promise only through Christ who now shares the blessings that are his by right with us Gentiles who deserve nothing by right.

4. **Without Hope** - All that we have said so far means that as Gentiles we had no hope. That doesn’t mean that as Gentiles we didn’t have hopes and aspirations. It just meant that we had no hope in the face of death. We had no hope of being reconciled to God. We had no hope of being free from the curse. We had no hope of once again enjoying God’s blessing!
5. **Without God** - Again, many gentiles had gods but they did not know the one true God. Although he had revealed himself by general revelation in creation they had no true knowledge of him. We were cut off from him and had no

relationship with him and therefore ultimately we had no meaning or purpose in life. Though we desperately tried to fill that void with idols such attempts were futile.

6. Far Away - In v13 Paul summarises where we were as Gentiles with this simple phrase - "Far away." We were not only far away from God's people but also far away from God! Not just in some geographical or social sense but spiritually. Hendrickson sums up our state as Gentile non-believers by saying we were "*Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless.*" This is what Paul wants us to remember. He doesn't want us to lose sight of this because if we lose sight of where we were then our appreciation and delight at where we now are in Christ will grow dim.

• ... **So that you will love where you are now in Christ! (v13)**

- **Brought Near** - At this stage in v13 this phrase may seem a bit mysterious, to whom have we been brought near? As we read on into v14-18 we see that not only have Gentiles been brought near to God (v16-18) but we have also been brought near to Jewish believers. Now Gentile believers and Jewish believers are one new humanity! More of that next time. For now the amazing news is that those of us who were rightly far away have been brought near. We're no longer hopeless foreigners, we're citizens of God's kingdom will all the blessings, privileges and hope that this brings!
- **In Christ Jesus** - This phrase signifies the personal union that we now experience as Christians. It is through being in Christ that we are reconciled to God. We have been brought near to God in Christ. Here in a phrase is what happens at conversion - we're in Christ and so we're brought near to God.
- **By the blood of Christ** - Christ has died for our sins which alienated us from God. The reason we can be brought near is that Christ died for us on the cross. While we were still far off, Christ died for us so that we might be included in him and brought to God. The cross makes the reconciliation that we experience at conversion possible.

Tricky Bits

- **What does Paul mean by 'uncircumcised' and 'the circumcised'? Why does he point out that circumcision is done in the body by human hands?**
 - Circumcision was the symbol God gave to Israel that they were his covenant people. It symbolised how they were to be cut off from sin. The mark of circumcision was supposed to remind them that as God's covenant people they were meant to be a blessing to the nations. Israel had taken circumcision as a badge of honour that distinguished them as the chosen people from the Gentiles who were outside God's people.
 - In v11 Paul is therefore talking as a religious Jew would have spoken, boasting that he carried the mark of belonging to God's covenant people and looking down on the gentile who didn't. Before his conversion this is exactly how Paul would have thought of himself and Gentiles but not any more.
 - In becoming a Christian Paul had come to recognise that having the outward/physical mark of circumcision was of no value in and of itself without the inner spiritual circumcision of the heart that was only possible by the Spirit.
 - The big point in these verses is that Paul wants to make is to remind Gentile believers of how they were far away from God and his people. In v11 when he comments that circumcision is just done by human hands in the flesh he is taking a moment just to

make a secondary point which is that the circumcision that his fellow Jews boasted in was not as big a deal as they thought. It was only a physical sign that needed to be accompanied with an inner spiritual reality that was now open to both Jews and Gentiles.

Big Idea

- **Remember where you were so that you will love where you are now in Christ!**

Suggested Applications

- **Remember where you were ... and given thanks**
 - *If studying this passage doesn't cause us to praise God for what he has done for us then something has gone wrong. The key to studying this passage with a group is to really help them to feel the utter hopelessness of where we were without Christ. If we do this then we will want to rejoice and praise him for his mercy to us in Christ!*
- **Remember where they are... and do all you can for them**
 - *What was true of us is still true of so many around us. Again if this passage doesn't drive us to our neighbors to weep and pray for those without Christ then something has gone wrong.*
- **Think about what this means for church**
 - As Gentiles we are not part of God's people by rights. We're not Christians by birth. We were far off and only the blood of Christ could bring us near. This should humble us and make us those who are quick to reach out and welcome those who are separate from Christ and hopeless just as we were.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

- 1. Think of the recent Refugee Crisis. How do the images that we have seen make us feel? What words would you use to describe those people and their situation?**

The reason for starting like this is that when we see the refugees we see people who are homeless and helpless. They are foreigners with no hope and so they are a powerful picture of who we were without Christ. By spending some time thinking of them it should set up our study.

Digging into the Passage

- 2. Paul says that as Gentiles we were far off.**

- 1. What did this mean?**
- 2. Why was it so bad?**

These questions should ease us into the passage. Some of the phrases in v11-12 may need some helpful explanation but hopefully everyone should be able to understand the broad sense of what Paul is saying.

- 3. What does Christ do for us when we become Christians?**

- 1. What does it mean for us to have been brought near?**

Here the aim is for us to see that not only have we been brought near to God, we've also been brought near to a diverse group of people that now make up the people of God.

Applying the Passage

- 4. How does this passage make us feel, pray and act for those we know who aren't Christians?**

A vital application of this passage is to pray for those we know and love who are still far off. Make sure you leave enough time to share the names of people who are particularly on our hearts and to pray for them. It would also be good to talk practically and encourage one another to be reaching out appropriately to these people.

- 5. How does this passage make us want to praise God for what he has done for us in Christ?**

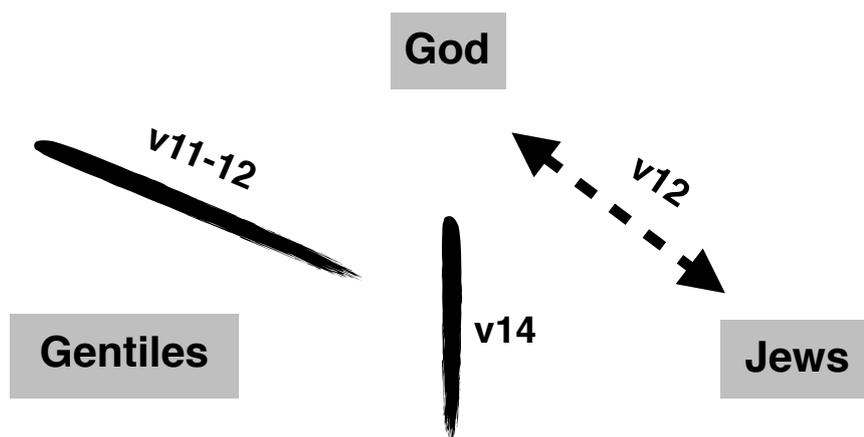
Again it would be good to spend time praising God for what he has done for us in Christ. This might be incredibly familiar to us but it should still warm our hearts and cause us great joy - we were far off but we've been brought near! Hallelujah!

Small Group Leaders Notes Ephesians 2:14-18

Context

• *Ephesians*

- **1:10** - Here is a key verse for understanding Ephesians. God's plan is to unite everything under Christ. History is not circular, it is linear and it is heading to this climax. In Ephesians 2:14-18 we see how God is uniting everything on earth (Jew and Gentile being the greatest division) under Christ.
- **2:11-13** - We can summarise how things were between Jews and Gentiles and Gentiles and God without Christ by using **Diagram 1** (all three diagrams are taken from Graham Boynton's book *God's New Community* p25, 27 and 29.)
 - Jews and God - Before Christ the Jews did have something of a special relationship with God. In v12 Paul talks about "citizenship in Israel" and how the Jews as God's people had the covenants of promise.
 - Gentiles and God - The big point of v11-12 is that Gentiles do not have a relationship with God. There was a barrier separating them from God because they were "excluded from citizenship in Israel."
 - Gentiles and Jews - Now in v14 Paul shows us that there was a great social divide between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean dogs and if a Jewish Son married a Gentile then his family would not only disown him, they would hold his funeral! He was literally dead to them. No wonder Paul talks of "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." It is only as we appreciate these divides that we will then appreciate what Christ has achieved at the cross in reconciling people to God and to each other.



(Diagram 1 - Relationship before Christ)

• *Genesis 11:1-9*

- The theme of division between people is found throughout the Bible. Ever since Genesis 3 there has been division between people and God (Genesis 3:23-24) and between people (Genesis 3:7, 12, 16.) This is seen vividly in Genesis 11 where people band together to build a great tower "that reaches to the heavens, so that we will make a name for ourselves." They are seeking to put themselves in God's place

and so God acts in judgment to confuse their language and scatter them across the earth. In the light of Genesis 11 we see that the division we experience in the world today is ultimately a result of human sin and God's righteous judgment. The good news is that Christ has borne the judgment we deserve to bring peace and unity.

- **Isaiah 52:7**

- Isaiah says "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation..." We rightly apply this verse to those involved in evangelism and world mission and yet in light of Ephesians 2:17 it applies first and foremost to Christ who came and preached peace to both Jew and Gentile in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

- **Revelation 7:9-10**

- In Revelation we get a picture of what it will be like when God unites all things in heaven and on earth under Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10.) Here we see a great multitude from every corner of the globe united together in worshipping God. Here is where history is heading, indeed here is where the church, our church is heading! This is God's plan, his desire for his people. The question is the extent to which our church reflects something of this diversity and unity now?

Structure

As always it is worth looking out for the connecting words such as "for" "by" "thus". These help us to understand what Christ has done, why he has done it and how he has done it. Why not write out the passage and underline or highlight these words. Similarly notice how Christ is the subject of all the sentences in this passage. To help you see what Christ has done I have gathered the different things under 2 headings; The Destructive work of Christ and the Constructive work of Christ.

- **Title - "For he himself is our peace" (v14)**

- This phrase stands as a summary and a title for this small section. Notice how the theme of peace runs throughout the verses and is mentioned in v14, 15, 17 (x2).
- The word "For" reminds us that whilst this is a new study for us it is closely related to what we saw in the last study. In v13 we were told that in Christ Jesus Gentiles who were far away had been brought near by the blood of Christ. Now in v14 we get the explanation and the reason for this. We have been brought near because Christ is our peace, he's made the two groups one and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility that was between Jew and Gentile.
- As we will see in the following verses Jesus not only brings peace between different groups of people, he also brings peace with God (See v15-16 and diagrams 2 and 3.)
- Notice too that Christ is "our peace". Christ doesn't just bring peace or proclaim peace - he is peace. He's the Prince of Peace from Isaiah 9:6.) We only have peace with God and each other in him.

- **The Destructive work of Christ**

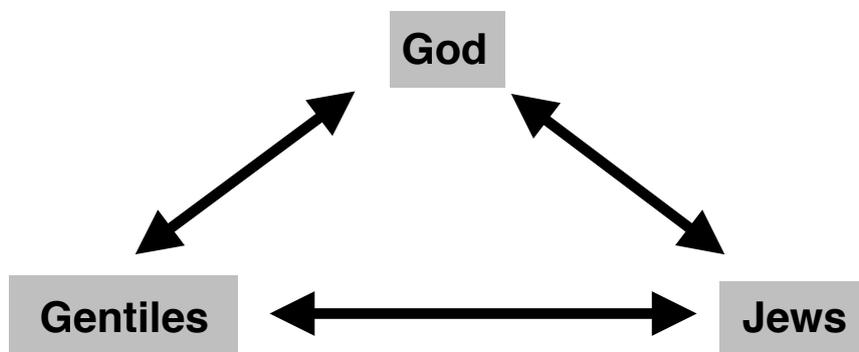
- **"Destroyed the Barrier..." (v14)**

- The picture Paul draws for us is of Jews and Gentiles divided by a wall or a fence (see Diagram 1.) The question is whether this refers to the literal dividing wall in the Jerusalem temple or to the social division between Jews and Gentiles or

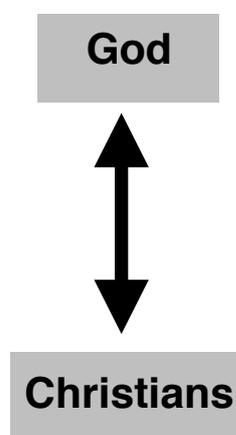
whether it refers to the law which is mentioned in the following phrase in v15. See the **Tricky Bits** below for a discussion on this.

- However we understand this picture the message is clear - Jesus has destroyed the barrier - all that separated Jew and Gentile has been brought down by Christ! Before all things on earth can be united under Christ the things that divide them need to be removed and that is what Christ has done.
- *“By setting aside in his flesh the law...” (v15)*
 - The phrase “by setting aside” could be translated “by abolishing”. Again this is potentially tricky to understand because in Matthew 5:17 Jesus says that “I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. Again see the **Tricky Bits** for how we reconcile these two verses.
- *“... Put to death their hostility” (v16)*
 - At the cross Jesus not only killed the hostility between warring people, he also killed the hostility between us and God. At the cross Jesus breaks down/kills all the barriers that we saw in Diagram 1.
- **The Constructive work of Christ**
 - *“Made the two groups one...” (v14)*
 - Jesus doesn’t just pull down the barriers between us and then leave it up to us to come together. Instead having pulled down the divide between Jew and Gentile he then positively makes us 1.
 - *“If Jews spoke of humanity being divided into Jews and Gentiles, then Paul makes a threefold division: Jews, Greeks (i.e., Gentiles), and the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). Later Christians were to speak of themselves as a third race or new race neither Jewish nor Gentile.” (O’Brien)*
 - *“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace” (v15)*
 - At the centre of our passage in v15-16 Paul makes Jesus’ purpose explicit. Jesus went to the cross so that he might create a new humanity and unite this new humanity to God. This means that the cross has not just achieved Diagram 2 but has actually gone further to accomplish Diagram 3.
 - This is important because it means that Gentiles do not have to become Jews nor do Jews have to become Gentiles. This is not unity by conformity or by assimilation. This is unity by integration. The church was not to be Jewish or Gentile, it was to be Christian, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-cultural. No group is being asked to conform to another group. Instead all are to become something new in Christ - Christian. This identity as Christian (in Christ) transcends all other identities. In our applications we need to explore this further for what this means for our church - all of us are called upon to leave behind our previous identities to embrace our new identity in Christ. There is no sense of “them” joining “us” or “us” joining “them.”
 - Graham Beynon uses the illustration of the British and Irish lions in Rugby. For most of the time the Welsh, English, Scottish and Irish players are enemies fighting (sometimes literally) against each other. Yet once every four years they take off their old shirts (English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish) and put on their new shirt (The Lions.) The former identity (English) is now secondary to their identity as the Lions. It is not that the Scottish, Welsh and Irish players all have to play for England and put on English shirts. Instead they all leave behind their old shirts to wear the one new shirt.

- *“Nothing less than a new creation, an entirely new entity, was needed to transcend the deep rift between the two. It was effected through Christ’s death, and the result is not an amalgam of the best elements of the two, but a ‘new person’ who transcends them both. The new humanity is not achieved by transforming Gentiles into Jews, or vice versa.”* O’Brien
- *“Reconcile both of them to God through the cross...”* (v16)
 - Now we see that Jews as well as Gentiles needed to be reconciled to God (that is why in Diagram 1 the arrow is only a dotted line whereas in the other diagrams it is solid.) There isn’t one way to God for Gentiles and a different way for Jews. Jesus is the only way for everyone. There’s 1 door, 1 path up the mountain etc.
- *“He came and preached peace...”* (v17)
 - This further emphasises how both Jew and Gentile can only have peace with God through Jesus. The reason for this is made clear in v18 (notice the “for”.) Whoever we are there is only one way to have access to the Father and that is through the Son and by the Spirit.
 - The Trinitarian allusion in v18 is significant when we consider what Paul is saying about the church in these verses. Father, Son and Spirit are 1, they are perfectly united and yet distinct. The Father, is not the Son, nor is he the Spirit etc. God the Trinity is a perfect Unity in Diversity. He is not Unity in Sameness/Conformity. As the church God’s people are to reflect God’s Unity in Diversity. Jews are not to force Gentiles to become Jews, nor are Gentiles to force Jews to become Gentiles. In each case that would be unity by conformity whereas what Jesus has achieved at the cross is a unity in diversity as Jew and Gentile become Christian.



(Diagram 2 - Relationship after Christ)



(Diagram 3 - True Relationship after Christ)

Tricky Bits

• What is the barrier? (v14)

- Stott identifies this barrier as symbolising the Gentile alienation from God and Jews. Stott says that;

“This announcement which Paul makes of the breaking down of the wall by Jesus Christ is extremely remarkable. For literally and historically speaking, the wall was not broken down until the Roman legions entered Jerusalem in ad 70. So it was still standing, still surrounding the temple, and still excluding the Gentiles, while Paul was writing this letter. But though materially it remained, spiritually it had already been destroyed in ad 30 or so, when Jesus died on the cross. As Armitage Robinson put it, ‘It still stood: but it was already antiquated, obsolete, out of date, so far as its spiritual meaning went. The sign still stood: but the thing signified was broken down.’”

- In response to this suggestion O’Brien questions whether the Gentile readers of Ephesus would have recognised such an allusion. He argues that the barrier really refers to the Mosaic Law. He argues this because he sees the two phrases “has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,” and “by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations” as running parallel to each other. He argues that the law “separated Jews from Gentiles both religiously and sociologically, and caused deep-seated hostility. The enmity which was caused by the Jews separateness was often accompanied by a sense of superiority on their part.”
- As usual I wouldn’t get too bogged down in this. All I would say is that how you understand the first part of v15 (see our next Tricky Bit) will shape how you understand this issue in v14.

• In what sense did Jesus set aside the law?” (v15)

- As mentioned earlier Jesus said that he hadn’t come to abolish the law and yet here is Paul saying that Jesus has set aside/abolished the law. How are we to understand this?
- Lots has been written on this but Stott seems the most helpful. He makes the point that Jesus and Paul are referring to the law in two different senses.

“In the Sermon on the Mount the context shows that Jesus was referring to the moral law. He was teaching the difference between Pharisaic righteousness and Christian righteousness, and urging that Christian righteousness involves a deep and radical obedience to the law. Paul’s primary reference here, however, seems to be to the ceremonial law and to what neb calls ‘its rules and regulations’, that is, to circumcision (the main physical distinction between Jews and Gentiles, verse 11), the material sacrifices, the dietary regulations and the rules about ritual ‘cleanness’ and ‘uncleanness’ which governed social relationships.”

- O’Brien argues something slightly different. He argues that the Law was associated closely with the Sinai Covenant that God had with Israel. O’Brien therefore argues that Jesus abolished the law in the sense of replacing the Sinai Covenant with the New Covenant that God makes through Christ with both Jew and Gentile.
- Whichever way you go focus on the big point of the passage which comes in v15 - “his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity...”

- ***How did Jesus preach peace to the Ephesians? (v17)***

- Jesus didn't go to Ephesus so in what sense can Paul say that "He came and preached to you who were far away"?
- Paul can say this in the sense that through his Spirit empowered Apostle (Paul), Christ had come and preached to them. As Jesus sends his Apostles out on mission he tells them "surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." As the gospel of reconciliation in Christ is faithfully proclaimed by his people there is a sense in which it is Christ who is speaking to people through his people by his Spirit.

Big Idea

In Christ enemies are united to each other and to God!

Suggested Application

- **Diversity in the church is not an optional extra, it was Jesus' purpose at the cross. Does BEC reflect the social, ethnic, economic, educational and class diversity of Bessacarr and Doncaster?**
 - Jesus' purpose in going to the cross was to create in himself one new humanity where all the old divisions and barriers are no more! What is more history is heading to the day when a great multitude from every people, tribe, language and nation will gather around the throne. In the light of these two great events of history our local church should be made up of a diverse group of people reflecting the diversity of people found in our town and community. It would be worth thinking about whether or not BEC reflects the diversity of Bessacarr. You can find a some of the 2011 census data online (<http://bessacarr-and-cantley.localstats.co.uk/census-demographics/england/yorkshire-and-the-humber/doncaster/bessacarr-and-cantley>) and you might like to compare this picture of Bessacarr and BEC.
- **What are the big divisions in our church? How are we to understand them in light of this passage? How can we be better at living out and expressing the unity that we have in Christ?**
 - The issue of Jew/Gentile division is not an issue for BEC yet we need to remember that God is uniting all things in heaven and earth under Christ. This means that the church is to be a place where all previous barriers and divisions are brought down. Historically British society has been divided along class lines, do we see something of this in BEC? Are there divisions between young and old? Families and those without families? Spend some time thinking about how we as a church can practically do a better job of expressing our unity and our new identity in Christ. Being Christian now trumps all the other labels that we had.
- **Unity by assimilation (making people become like us if they want to be part of our church) will always be easier and more comfortable than what Paul is talking about here. In what ways do we expect people who join BEC to adapt to our predominately white, British, middle class culture and way of doing church? Do we inadvertently give off this impression? If so, how?**
 - Think back to the British Lions Rugby illustration from before. Do we expect people from different cultures and backgrounds to put on our shirt? Think about how someone who doesn't speak English would feel at one of our services? Do we expect people to behave or dress like us in order to belong to BEC?

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Questions

1. What do you think are some of the big divisions in our society today?

This starter question is designed to get people thinking and talking around the idea of division and hostility. We often hear of how our society is divided along social, ethnic, religious, and class lines. Talking about some of these will help us to begin to see the relevance of what Christ is doing in creating in himself one new humanity.

Digging into the Passage

2. What was the relationship between Jews, Gentiles and God like before Christ?

This question recaps what we saw last time in v11-13. If you want you could ask the group to have a go at drawing the relationship along the lines of the diagrams above. You could give them the attached Template (see below) and ask them to have a go at completing it based on v11-14. However you do it you want the group to see that there was division between Jew and Gentile and between God and Gentile. Don't get too bogged down over the exact relationship between God and Jew, at this point it is not Paul's focus.

3. What is the relationship between Jews, Gentiles and God like now in Christ?

Here you are encouraging the group to see both the destructive work of Christ and the constructive work of Christ (see the notes above.) Again you might like to do this by use of diagrams. You could give them the same template below and ask them to redraw the diagram showing the difference that Christ makes. You could then show them diagrams 2 and 3 above to help them see how Jew and Gentile are actually now a new humanity/ group called Christian.

4. How has Christ achieved all of this?

Here we want to draw out that Christ has achieved this by his death at the cross (v16.) It is not just that Jesus gives us peace - he is our peace and he has come to all proclaiming a message of peace with one another and with God that is only possible in him! Don't get too bogged down about how he abolishes the law instead focus on the fact that it is only through the cross that true unity can be found.

You might like to think about all the different ways that humans try to bring down barriers and create unity. You might like to think about how and why these ultimately will not work? Think about why it is that only Christ can bring true and lasting unity.

Applying the Passage

5. Based on these verses, what sort of church does Jesus want BEC to be? What would this look like?

Jesus wants BEC to be a church where all sorts of different people from different cultures and backgrounds come together in unity in him. This isn't to be a unity where the majority force the minority to conform and become like the majority. Instead it is one where our identity as Christians trump all our other labels and identities. Spend some time as a group thinking about what this would be like whilst recognising that we will never experience this perfect unity until we're in the new creation.

6. In what ways does BEC reflect the social, ethnic and educational diversity of Doncaster? In what ways do we not reflect this diversity? How can we be better at welcoming and including those who are not like us?

This might be a tough question to discuss and it isn't designed to encourage moaning or smugness. Instead hopefully it is a change for us to honestly and humbly talk about an important and yet often taboo subject. How you lead the discussion at this point will be really key. We want to do so sensitively whilst continuing to keep people coming back to the passage.

7. Are there any noticeable divisions within BEC? Practically how could we be better at living out our unity in Christ?

As with the previous question this may be a tough question to answer. Again it is also not meant to be an opportunity for people to moan. Instead try and steer the conversation towards the positive things that each of us can do to better live out our unity.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 2:19-22

Context

- ***Ephesians 1:10***
 - As we keep saying this is a key verse for understanding the letter of Ephesians and particularly chapter 2. God's plan is to unite all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Each local church is to be a foretaste and advert for this as all sorts of different people are brought together in unity in Christ.
- ***Ephesians 2:11-18***
 - Our passage comes as the climax of chapter 2. Note how v19 begins with the word "Consequently." Paul has shown us how Jew and Gentile are now reconciled to one another and to God through Christ. All Christians have access to God through the Christ by the one Spirit. In v19-22 Paul now wants his Gentile readers to be clear on what that means for them.
- ***Ephesians 3:1-21***
 - Although 2:19-22 is the climax of ch2 we shouldn't think that Paul has moved on to something completely different at the start of ch3. Remember that the chapter divisions and the titles in our Bibles are not original. When Paul wrote Ephesians there was no break between 2:22 and 3:1. Notice how 3:1 begins with "For this reason..." Paul wants us to see that what he is going to pray for the Ephesians in chapter 3 (see v14-21) flows out of what he has said about them in chapter 2. It is because they are now fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit that Paul prays that "out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith..." (3:16-17)
- ***The Dwelling of God***
 - Paul picks up the image of the temple as the dwelling place of God so it is important to remember the progression of this through the Bible story. When God chose Israel he dwelling amongst them was symbolised by the tabernacle and then the grand temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel's and then Herod's. God had promised that he would dwell with his people and where sacrifices would be made. Ultimately this promise was fulfilled not in a building but in a person - the God man, Jesus Christ. In Christ God tabernacled/dwelt among us (John 1:14) and on the cross he offered the ultimate sacrifice for sins in his body (John 1:36.) Now united by faith with Christ, and filled by his Spirit God's people both individually and corporately are God's dwelling place. We will explore this further below.

Structure

In these verses Paul employs four images of the church which each bring out something different. John Stott identifies them as God's Kingdom (v19a), God's Family (v19b) and God's Temple (v20-22) and we will use this to consider these verses.

• We are now Citizens in God's Kingdom (v19a)

- Back in 2:12 Paul told us that without Christ, we (Gentiles) were excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise. Yet now because of what Christ has done (v14-18) we're no longer foreigners we're citizens of God's Kingdom. We were homeless but now we have a home.
- As Richard Coekin puts it *"we're not illegal immigrants dodging the border guards, but "fellow citizens" of heaven, enjoying an eternal freedom to remain, passports stamped with the King's blood..."*. We're now primarily citizens of heaven but for now we're travelling away from home in foreign lands. As Paul puts it in 1:1 we're "God's holy people in Ephesus/Doncaster, the faithful IN Christ Jesus."
- It is important to be clear about what we mean when we talk of God's Kingdom. Under the New Covenant God's Kingdom is a particular geographical place or nation. Instead God's Kingdom *"is God himself ruling his people, and bestowing upon them all the privileges and responsibilities which his rule implies. To this new international God-ruled community, which had replaced the Old Testament national theocracy, Gentiles and Jews belonged on equal terms"* (Stott.)

• We are now Members of God's Family (v19b)

- It's incredible to think that we are now citizens in God's Kingdom but as v19 goes on we realise that it's even better than that. In Christ Jew and Gentile are now God's family. Through Christ's death we've been adopted into God's family. By the Holy Spirit we call God Father. We're brothers and sisters of Christ with whom he has shared his inheritance of the new creation.
- This means that the people in our local church are our family and Jesus is clear that belonging to our spiritual family trumps our earthly family. "We no longer derive our family identity, security and guidance primarily from our earthly families." (Coekin.) Jesus challenges us to put our relationship with him and his people above our earthly families (Luke 14:25.)
- As church is family they should be gatherings where we love and care for one another regardless of our background or earthly families. Many of us will have difficult experiences of family. Maybe we come from broken families where there is lots of fighting. Maybe we long for a family of our own and yet we are alone. Maybe our families have grown up and moved away and we're now alone. Whoever we are and whatever our earthly families have been like church is to be a real and genuine family where we love and care for one another. Church is to be a place where get a foretaste of the perfect unity and love that we'll experience with Christ and his people in the new creation. Church isn't just meant to carry the label of "family" it is meant to be family!

• We are now God's Temple (v20-22)

- The imagery shifts from Kingdom and Family to Temple. It is not only that we now have a home in God's kingdom... we're actually a home for God!
- As with all buildings the foundations are key and so that is where Paul starts. We will explore what is meant by Prophets and Prophecy below in the Tricky Bit but for now we need to be clear on the big point. The teaching of the Apostles and Prophets is the gospel of Christ-crucified therefore "Every church must be founded on Christ's gospel in scripture or it's not a true church and not part of the heavenly church. There can be

no new foundation. The foundation is finished.” (Coekin.) In Matthew 16 Jesus says that he will build his church on the rock of Peter’s (an Apostle) testimony that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God.

- As Richard Coekin says this means that the foundation of the church is finished. So the church today is to be built on the same foundation that the church has always been built upon. Just because everything around us is changing doesn’t mean that we are free to change the foundations of the church. We are not at liberty to build the church on different foundations that would be more culturally acceptable in our society. It’s God’s building so he gets to say what the foundations are.
- Christ is the cornerstone of the church in the sense that like the cornerstone he holds everything together. As Stott says *“As a building depends for both its cohesion and its development on being tied securely to its cornerstone, so Christ the cornerstone is indispensable to the church’s unity and growth. Unless it is constantly and securely related to Christ, the church’s unity will disintegrate and its growth either stop or run wild.”*
- Indeed from Ephesians 2 we have to say that if a church moves away from the foundation of the gospel then it ceases to be a church. It might call itself a church but it is no longer what God calls a church!
- The church is a Holy Temple for God. He is “not tied to holy buildings but holy people” (Stott.) God dwells in his people by his Spirit and all this is done in Christ/ the Lord. Again we see the Trinity coming through clearly as Paul explains the mystery of the unity of the church.
- God dwells in his people both individually and corporately. What is more because God is Holy he is slowly transforming and “refurbishing his home in our hearts and churches, to suit his holy character, by his Spirit through his word” (Coekin.) There is then a process going on as we are being made Holy and “Only after the creation of the new heaven and the new earth will the voice from the throne declare with emphatic finality: ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.’” (Stott.)
- In summary of these verses let me quote Richard Coekin at length;

“Every local church - however unimpressive the people, however painful the music, however tatty the building - is a spiritually beautiful expression of the glorious church of God in heaven. In fact, each is intended to prepare God’s people for that vast and spectacular multicultural festival that is the heavenly church. Each one demonstrates in the heavenly realms the awesome power and victory of God over evil powers to accomplish his eternal plan to bring everything together under Christ through his reconciling death. So next time you attend your church, however ordinary the people may seem, however unimpressive the building may look, remember the three glorious spiritual dimensions of your church: you’re welcomed into the precious family of God, so love those people deeply; you’re being built upon the foundation of Scripture, so listen to the teaching carefully; and you’re being constructed as a dwelling of the Spirit of God, so be holy in the way you behave. Your local church is a gathering of a new humanity, the temple of the living God, the only “local building” that will last for ever, and a wonder in the heavenly realms. Enjoy it!”

Tricky Bit

• **Who are the Prophets in v20?**

- The issue of prophets and prophecy in the New Testament and the church today is a topic of much debate and one that I don't want to get into here. I also don't think it would be a helpful debate in your groups. What I want us to do is to understand who Paul is referring to in v20 when he speaks of Prophets. Remember that we are studying Ephesians 2:19-22 rather than having a discussion on prophecy.
- Broadly speaking there are 3 possible explanations for what Paul means by Prophets in this verse;
 1. Old Testament Prophets
 2. Foundational New Testament Prophets who are no longer present in the church
 3. Ongoing Prophets who are still present in the church today.
- On the whole I think that #2 is the best understanding for this verse and I will try to explain why I think that...
- If Paul were referring to Old Testament Prophets then the order in which he refers to the Apostles and Prophets seems strange. If he were referring to the Old Testament Prophets then you would expect them to come first and yet he puts the Apostles first. This is also true in 3:5 and 4:11 where Apostles and Prophets are also mentioned.
- Another reason why I do not think he is referring to Old Testament Prophets comes from 3:5 where Paul says that "the mystery of Christ, *which was not made known to people in other generations* has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." In this verse Paul seems to clearly equate the Prophets with the Apostles as present in the early church in Paul's day in contrast to people in other generations (i.e. Old Testament prophets.)
- Having established that Paul is not speaking about Old Testament prophets here in Ephesians 2:20, we begin to see that Paul is referring to a group of Prophets who along with the Apostles "bore witness to Christ "and whose teaching was derived from revelation (3:5) and was foundational" (Stott).
- The debate comes when we ask whether these prophets are still present and active in the church today?
- For what it is worth I believe that these foundational prophets are not present in the church today but that is not to say that prophecy does not go on in the church today.
- Let me explain. I think that in 2:20 Paul is referring to unique foundational Prophets who along with the Apostles were active in the early church because of the other references to Apostles and Prophets in Ephesians. In both 3:5 and 4:11 there is a sense in which the work of the Apostles and Prophets was to lay down the gospel and Christian teaching as we now have it in the New Testament. Once this foundation was laid these offices were no longer required and thus we do not have Apostles and Prophets today. Instead we have evangelists, pastors and teachers (4:11) who continually preach and teach the apostolic gospel, building up the church through every generation by teaching what was revealed by the Spirit to God's Holy Apostles and Prophets (3:5) and thus the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (2:20.)
- That is not to say that prophecy cannot occur today, we just need to be clear on what we mean by prophecy. Scripture is complete and sufficient so there cannot be prophecy today that is put on a par with apostolic scripture. As I understand prophecy today it is where a Christian has God-given insight and understanding of scripture that points people to Jesus from the Bible. In Acts 2 Peter quotes Joel 2 where it says that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all God's people and that they will prophecy. Peter says that this is being fulfilled there on Pentecost and he then goes on to

preach a sermon that points people to Christ from scripture. In that sense Peter was prophesying.

- As I say, there is much debate amongst Bible believing Christians over the exact nature of prophecy. What we can be clear on is that in 2:20 Paul is not referring to the Old Testament Prophets. We can also be clear that the foundational teaching of the Apostles and Prophets was the gospel of Christ-crucified (3:5.) As a group leader I would be very keen to avoid getting into a big debate about prophecy today. Whilst that would be an appropriate discussion if we were studying 1 Corinthians 14 it is not appropriate here. Keep the focus on the foundational role of the Apostles and Prophets and keep the studying moving.

Big Idea

To be part of a church is amazing because in Christ we've been welcomed into God's Kingdom, adopted into his family and we're being built into his temple! Wow!

Suggested Areas of Application

- **Living out our Citizenship**
 - As Christians we are now citizens of God's Kingdom and this trumps all other citizenships and identities. Being a citizen of God's Kingdom trumps being a citizen of the United Kingdom. Yet how many of us spend more time focused on our earthly citizenship rather than our heavenly citizenship. So much of our time and energy and money goes into where we live now as if this is our real home when it is not. In what ways do you do this? What would it look like to orientate our lives around our heavenly citizenship and our eternal home? How would our lifestyles change?
- **Welcoming others in just as we were welcomed in**
 - We were foreigners and strangers and yet we've been welcomed into God's kingdom and his church. As a result we should be a church that is always quick to welcome those who are not like us. That isn't to say that we should welcome unrepentant sinful behaviour. Instead it is about making sure that we are not just making disciples of people who are just like us. Jesus has commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations, not just the people socially and geographically closest to us.
- **Being Family together**
 - We love to talk about church as family yet so often it is a poor imitation of what family is supposed to be. Very often people who are single or widowed or the only Christians in their families can feel isolated and ignored in the church family. What would it look like to be a loving, serving, welcoming church family to those who are single, or far from home, or lonely, or from broken homes or those who have experienced abuse in their earthly families? The larger we get the harder it will be for BEC to be family and yet we must be striving to be a community united in sacrificial love, service, support and affection. Family is never just about attending events or being on a rota. It's about doing life together through every season whether it's easy or hard.

- **Becoming Holy together**

- As individual Christians and corporately as the church we are God's temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. Whenever someone moves into a new house they redecorate it to suit them and God is no different. He is Holy and so he is transforming his people to become a suitable Holy dwelling place for him. This should raise the question of whether we are progressing in holiness as individuals but it also raises the question of whether we are progressing in holiness corporately as God's people? Are our relationships as a church family increasingly marked by holiness? Are we increasingly a loving, gentle, bearing and pure church? Remember the tense of v22 - "we are being built" it's an ongoing process that won't finish until we're gathered around the throne. As a result we're always to be pursuing holiness together as God's people. There is always more redecorating to be done!

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

1. Why do so many people (both Christians and non-Christians) have such a negative and pessimistic view of church?

By the end of chapter 2 Paul wants us to see how amazing and wonderful it is to be part of God's church! It's an incredible privilege and blessing and yet so often we view church as a boring chore. We often ask, "Do you have to go to church to be a Christian?" Such a question shows that we haven't really understood how wonderful it is to be part of the church and how terrible it is to not be part of the church. By exploring some of the reasons why we can be so negative about church it should set up a contrast with the blessings of belonging to the church that Paul is about to spell out to us.

Digging into v19

2. According to v19, what changes take place when you become a Christian?

Paul describes the change in 2 ways. We were foreigners but now we are citizens of God's kingdom and we were strangers but now we're part of his household/family. When we remember where we were (v11-12) this really is amazing!

Applying v19

3. We have been made citizens of God's Kingdom. How should this shape our personal lifestyles and the life of our church?

Our eternal citizenship in God's kingdom should trump our temporary citizenship in this world and yet so often we live as if our present homes and circumstances are eternal. How different our lives and priorities would be if we were shaped more by our eternal citizenship and were less concerned about our temporary citizenship.

4. As a church we are now a family. What will it look like for BEC to be a family rather than just a religious organisation?

A religious organisation is about meetings and events we attend, rotas we belong to and duties we perform. In contrast a family is about relationship, it's about loving one another and caring and supporting one another even when it's costly. You could use this time to think about how we can love and serve the different types of people who make up our church; young and old, married unmarried, different social and educational backgrounds etc etc.

Digging into v20-22

5. What is meant to be the foundation of the church and holding it all together?

The gospel and the scriptures as given to us by God through the apostles and prophets are to be the foundation. If we're trying to be the church on anything other than God's word then we're not a church any more!

Applying v20-22

6. BEC has always prided itself on being a Bible believing church. In what ways might we be in danger of changing the foundation?

Generally speaking there are two dangers for churches like ours when it comes to foundations. We can either seek to replace scripture with our intellect and reason or we can seek to replace scripture with church tradition. In our western educated setting the first of these is probably the biggest danger and it can be very subtle. Scripture rather than what we think or feel must always have the final say. Just because our brains, feelings or society tell us something contrary to scripture we must still put scripture first and keep it as

our ultimate authority. This means submitting our thinking, feeling and views of our culture to scripture.

7. According to v22 we're not a finished work yet. What will it look like for us to grow in holiness together?

In some ways the whole of chapters 4-5 unpack this. Look how ch4 begins, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." You could go through 4:1-3 or 4:25-32 which speak particularly about our relationships as a church and draw out what this would look like in your group and in our church.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 3

Context

- **“For this reason...” (2:19-3:1 and 3:14)**
 - The way that Paul starts chapter 3 shows us that this chapter is closely related to the previous chapter. It is because Jews and Gentiles are now united in Christ, fellow citizens and members of God’s household who are being built together to become God’s holy temple (2:19-22) that Paul is now going to pray for them in chapter 3.
- **“The mystery of his will...” (1:9-10)**
 - A big theme in chapter 3 is “the mystery of Christ” (3:4, 6, 9.) This takes us back to 1:9-10 where Paul told us that “[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment - to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” God’s plan for his universe is to unite all things in heaven and on earth under Christ and this is exactly what he is doing in the church as we have seen in chapter 2 and now in chapter 3.
- **The unity of the church (3:6 → ch4)**
 - Following on from the previous theme is the idea of the unity of the church. Paul has already told us that Jew and Gentiles are now united in Christ and he will go on to practically unpack this further in chapter 4. For now it is worth noticing just how corporate the language is in chapter 3.
- **The dimensions of Christ’s love (chs1-2 → 3:18)**
 - In 3:18 Paul will pray that the Ephesians may have power to grasp the dimensions of Christ’s love and he has already shown us something of these dimensions in chapters 1-2. See for example 2:17 (width - both near and far from God,) 1:4-5 (long - it’s an eternal love,) 2:1-7 (high - it’s a love that lifts us up from the grave to exalt us with Christ in the heavenly realms,) 2:13 (depth - it is a deep and sacrificial love.)

Structure

- Key to understanding the structure of this chapter is to notice the repeated phrase “For this reason...” which comes in 3:1 and 3:14. Having explained how Jewish and Gentile Christians are together being built into God’s holy temple Paul is about to pray for them but having described himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...” he feels the need to explain what he means by this and why they should not be discouraged by his suffering (see v13.) The structure of the chapter therefore looks something like this;

v1 - Paul is about to pray for them but breaks off so as to explain why they shouldn’t be discouraged by his suffering for them.

v2-13 - Paul explains his role as a suffering servant of Christ in God’s great plan of salvation.

v14-21 - Paul returns to pray for the Ephesians in light of chapter 2.

Notes

• **v1-13 - Paul's Role in God's Plan**

- ***Don't lose sight of v13*** - There is so much great theology in this section that it could be easy to miss Paul's reason for telling us all of this. V13 is the application of v2-12, Paul wrote these verses so that the Ephesians would not be discouraged by Paul's suffering but would instead see how it fits into God's plan and is actually for their good. As we study these verses we need to keep Paul's purpose in view to help us understand and apply these verses properly.

• ***The Mystery of Christ;***

- *How has it been revealed?* - It has been revealed by revelation (v3) by the Spirit (v4.) This is not something that Paul created or that has evolved over time. The gospel is not something that we have worked out for ourselves. It is something that God had to reveal to us.
- *When was it revealed?* Paul tells us that the mystery was not revealed to previous generations (v5, v9) but has now been revealed to the Apostles and Prophets (more on them in Tricky Bits.) In the Old Testament God had promised that he would bring unity to his broken world (see Genesis 12) but what was hidden was how God was going to do this. It is the 'How' that has now been revealed to the Apostles and Prophets in the gospel.
- *What is it?* - v6 is key here - "through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." In many ways this verses summarises the message of chapter 2. Jew and Gentile Christians now look forward to the same glorious future (heirs together), they are members together of the same body of Christ and all this is guaranteed and equipped by being sharers together of the same Spirit.
- *Why has it been revealed now?* - v10 - God's purpose is to display through the church his amazing multi-faceted wisdom not only to the watching world but to Satan and his forces (more on this in the trick bits.) The church is God's pride and joy, the centre piece of his exhibition on display for everyone to see.
- *So what?* Paul will unpack the implications of v6 in chapter 4 and there is much that we can take from this now as we think about our role in the church and how we view others in the church. The other key applications come in v12-13. We can now have great confidence as we come to God in prayer (which Paul is about to model in v14-21) and we therefore need not be discouraged when we or others are suffering for the gospel. God is achieving his wonderful plan and even the suffering of his servants is part of this plan to build his church and display his glory!

• **v14-21 - Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians because of their Place in God's Plan**

• ***Who does Paul pray to?***

- *"The Father (v14)... .. Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... (v20)"* - Paul prays such a big prayer for the Ephesians because of who he is praying to. He is praying to the Father who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing (1:3). He is the God who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, indeed through chapters 1-2 Paul has shown us that God has indeed already done more than we could ever have imagined.

Knowing who it is that he prays to, Paul prays with confidence and boldness through the access won by Christ (3:12.)

- **What does Paul pray for?**

- *Power to make Christ at home in us (v16-17)* - Christ already dwells in the Ephesian Christians by his Spirit but Paul prays that Christ may be more and more at home in them. He is praying that the Ephesians may have the power to renovate and redecorate their lives so that they are a more and more appropriate dwelling for Christ. From 4:17 onwards Paul will list various ways in which we need to renovate and redecorate our lives so that Christ will be more and more at home in us. In effect this is a prayer for the Ephesians continuing sanctification and growth in holiness.
- *Power to grasp the love of Christ for us (v17-19)* - Paul is not just praying that the Ephesians would have a greater intellectual grasp of the love of Christ. He is also praying that they would have a greater experiential grasp of the love of Christ. In effect Paul is praying that the great truths that he has been expounding in the first part of the letter would be applied deeply to the Ephesians hearts and minds. You could say that he wants the Ephesians to grasp and be grasped by the love of Christ.

Tricky Bits

- **Apostles and Prophets (v5)** - There is often much debate about whether Apostles and Prophets were unique to the early church or whether they still exist today.
 - First we need to understand that the New Testament uses the term 'apostle' in two ways.
 - 1st it can be used in a general sense for anyone who has been sent (apostle literally means 'sent one'.) We find an example of this usage in Romans 16:7.
 - 2nd the term apostle can be used more specifically to refer to those men who Jesus commissioned to be his Apostles as witnesses of his resurrection. These were the twelve and Paul.
 - Having seen this distinction we can see that whilst the first group may still exist today the second group cannot because those original apostles have died out. Some people therefore like to distinguish between 'apostles' and 'The Apostles.'
 - As we come to Ephesians 3:5 the question is, 'which type of apostles is Paul referring to?' Here context is key. In 2:20 Paul said that the church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone..." Again in 4:11 he will say that "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers..." From these references it seems that Paul is talking about the Apostles who played a unique foundational role in the establishment of the church.
 - Similarly when it comes to Prophets there is much debate. Without getting into the question of prophets today, it seems that Paul is referring to some sort of unique group of foundational prophets who were present in the early church as the foundations of the church, receiving God's revelation that we now have in the New Testament.
- **Rulers and Authorities in the Heavenly Realms (v10)** Again context is key as Paul makes several references to rulers and authorities and the heavenly realms in Ephesians. When we compare all the references to the heavenly realms (see 1:3, 1:20-21, 2:6, 3:10 and 6:11-12) it becomes clear that the Rulers and Authorities that

Paul is referring to here are not earthly rulers and authorities but rather Satan and his spiritual forces who are in rebellion against God. This raises the question of why God wants to display his wisdom to Satan through the church. A bit of biblical theology helps at this point. When we think back to Genesis 1-3 we see that God created a perfect world of harmony and unity. Satan attempted and succeeded in sowing disharmony and division between men and women and people and God. What we are being told in Ephesians 3 is that through the gospel and in the church, God is bringing harmony and unity under Christ where previously there was Satan's mess of disharmony and division. God therefore wants Satan to see that Satan's plan has failed and God has triumphed and will triumph ultimately and finally at the end of the age.

- **Every family in heaven and on earth derives its name (v15)** There is a bit of debate over exactly what this is referring to but however we interpret this phrase it doesn't affect the content of the prayer.
 - Some translators take the reference to family to be referring to God's family the church (see the 1984 NIV). This would make sense of the reference to heaven and on earth as there is the church gathered around the throne in heaven and the church on earth.
 - Alternatively it could be referring to all the different kinds of families that there are (see the new NIV.) If this is right then Paul is making a broader point that all the different families (not just the church) have their origin in God. The reference to heavenly families is perhaps a bit trickier with this interpretation but O'Brien argues that;

"Every family in heaven points to family groupings and classes of angels (see on 1:21), good and rebellious alike, which owe their origin to God, while every family on earth speaks of family groupings and so of the basic structures of human relationships which owe their existence to him."

Big Ideas

v1-13 - Paul's Role - Making known the mystery of how Jews and Gentiles are now united in Christ

v14-21 - Paul's Prayer - For power to to make Christ more at home in us and for power to grasp more of Christ's love for us

Applications

- **A higher view of the local church** - The local church is God's pride and joy (v10.) He puts the local church on display to as the place where his incredible wisdom is seen most clearly. Through bad or boring experiences of church we can easily have too low a view of the local church. This chapter helps us to see the local church as God sees it.
- **Understanding our role in the local church** - We are all members together of the body of Christ. As Paul will go on to show us in chapter 4 this means that we all have a part to play in building up the local church. We don't just come to be served and built up, we come to serve and to build others up.
- **Changing our view of other people in the local church** - We might be tempted to look down on other people or simply to ignore them and think that church is just about 'me and God.' Ephesians 3 helps us to see that no matter what our backgrounds we are

now “heirs together... members together... and sharers together.” We are equal and united in Christ which means that we each need each other.

- **Changing our prayers for the local church** - So often we can pray very practical prayers based on people’s material needs. Paul urges us to pray big spiritual prayers because we pray to a big God who has already done big things and can do bigger things than we could ever imagine. It is worth thinking about how you pray as a group? When do you pray? What do you pray for? Do you ever pray the sorts of prayers that Paul prays here? Do you just pray about the needs and activities of the church or do we also pray for one another’s spiritual wellbeing and progress. Perhaps after studying this passage you might decide to make some changes.
- **Not being discouraged by suffering but see how God can use it for the good of others** - Remember that in v1-13 Paul is showing them why they shouldn’t be discouraged by their suffering. He wants them to see that this is all part of God’s plan and that amazingly his suffering is actually for their good. This should give us confidence that God is in complete control even when things seem to be going wrong. Everything is going according to God’s plan and he can use even the suffering of his servants for the good of others.

Bible Study

Starter - Talk about the different people/situations/things that your group have prayed for recently. What do our prayers tell us about ourselves? Our relationships with one another? Our view of the church?

If you are like me then a lot of your prayers are about very practical things such as people's physical and material needs. It is right that we pray for these things but Paul prays big spiritual prayers and this chapter helps us to see why.

v1-13

1. What does Paul tell us about himself and his situation? (v1, v7, v13)

Paul's a prisoner for Christ, he's suffering for the sake of the Gentiles and he's a servant of the gospel.

2. How are the Ephesians tempted to feel when they hear what's happening to Paul? (v13)

The Ephesians seem to be discouraged by this news. They probably didn't expect God's apostle to be suffering. How could this be part of God's plan?

3. v2-13 are full of reasons why they shouldn't be discouraged and they centre on the mystery of Christ that Paul was proclaiming.

A. What does Paul say is the mystery of Christ? (v6)

Try to focus on the content of the mystery in v6. This is the mystery that Paul is suffering for. Here we see that the mystery is how God is reconciling Jews and Gentiles not only to one another but also to himself. We see here that we're actively members of Christ's body now, we share the same hope of glory and we're empowered and sealed with the same Spirit. This is great news, no wonder Paul was so keen to proclaim this mystery and suffer in the process.

B. Why should the Ephesians not be discouraged by Paul's suffering?

God's plan is working! Jews and Gentiles are being united together in Christ through the gospel and even when Paul is imprisoned it's actually all part of God's plan.

4. How will v6 and v10 change our attitude to BEC and the other people who make up BEC?

v6 shows us how no matter what our background we are all equal and united in the church. We are all equal in Christ and we all need each other. We are all different parts of the same body and we need each other if we are to be built up and mature in Christ (see chapter 4.)

v10 shows us that the church is God's masterpiece, he puts the church on display for all to see because it's in the local church that God's wisdom is displayed.

v14-21

5. What does Paul pray for in v16-17?

He prays that the Holy Spirit's power would be at work in their inner being (soul) so that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. In effect he is praying that they would have the power to change for Christ so that Christ would really feel at home in them. Paul is praying that they would have the power to renovate their lives so that they really would be a home fit for Christ. We see what this will look like in practice in 4:17 onwards.

6. How have you experienced the Spirit's renovating power in your life?

Here's an opportunity for the group to share ways in which they have seen the Holy Spirit change and sanctify them. Some people might find this too personal, others may feel that they don't have much of a story to tell. As group leaders we want to gently encourage the group to be open with one another. We also want to encourage the group to celebrate and give thanks for any ways (however small) that God has been at work in people's lives.

7. What does Paul pray for in v17-19?

He prays that they would all together (important detail) know more and more of the love of Christ. You may want to review the dimensions of Christ's love from chapters 1-2. We need to make sure that we see why Paul prays this prayer - v19 it's so that we might be mature, filled to the measure of the fulness of God/all that God wants us to be. In other words Paul prays they would know more of Christ's love so that they might grow up to be mature Christians.

8. How can we help one another to know more of the love of Christ?

Again here is an opportunity for the group to share practical things that we can do to help one another grow in Christ's love. You might want to point out from v18 that this is something that we're to do together not just on our own.

9. Why does Paul pray these sorts of prayers for the Ephesians?

1. What does he believe about the church? (3:14)

The reason Paul prays as he does is because he sees that the church is God's holy temple (2:21-22) and that we're heirs together, members together and sharers together and that through the church God's wisdom is displayed. Paul prays the way he does because of how he sees the church. My prayers for the church will very often reflect my view of the church (see back to the starter question.)]

2. What does he believe about God? (3:14-15 and 3:20-21)

Paul's theology (beliefs about God) shape his prayers for the Ephesians. It is because he believes that God can do immeasurably more than all he asks or imagines that he is emboldened to pray these big prayers for the Ephesians.

10. If I really believed v20-21 were true, how would it change my prayers?

This final question brings us back to the starter question and gives us the opportunity to examine and change how we pray in the light of the passage. You might want to talk about how this will change what we pray for and maybe also how we pray.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:1-3

Context

- **The relationship between chs1-3 and chs4-6**
 - In chapters 1-3 Paul has been telling us about God's great plan of salvation. "Through Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and was raised from death, God is creating something entirely new, not just a new life for individuals for a new society. Paul sees an alienated humanity being reconciled, a fractured humanity being united, even a new humanity being created. It is a magnificent vision." (Stott.)
 - Now in chapters 4-6 Paul "moves on from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. So he turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (in the indicative) to what we must be and do (in the imperative), from doctrine to duty, 'from the credenda ... to the agenda', from mind-stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living." (Stott.)
 - Whilst there is a division between chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6 it is important to recognise that the two halves are closely interconnected as we will see in 4:1-3.
- **"As a Prisoner for the Lord, then..."**
 - As Paul turns from exposition to exhortation he describes himself using the same terms that he used in 3:1. Paul could have appealed to his apostleship as the basis for what he was about to tell them to do but instead he appeals to his suffering as a Prisoner of Christ for their sake. The Jewish Paul has shown his commitment to unity by suffering for Gentiles, this is the basis for his appeal to unity in 4:1-3.
- **"Live a life..."**
 - 4:1-3 are not only connected with what has gone before in chs1-3 but also with what is to come in the rest of the letter.
 - Living (sometimes translated walking) has already occurred in ch2 in relation to our old way of life (2:1-3) and the new good deeds that God has prepared for us to walk in (2:10 - the ESV translation picks this up "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*")
 - This theme of living/walking now runs through the rest of the letter (4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15.) This helps us to see how "living a life worthy of the calling you have received" is the headline and summary of 4:1-6:24, everything else flows from this verse.
- **"The calling you have received..."**
 - Paul has spent chapters 1-3 unpacking this calling. O'Brien writes "*As believers they have already been called into the blessings of salvation (1:3-14) with its wonderful hope (1:18). They have been united with Christ in his resurrection and exaltation so that they now share in his rule over the new creation (1:20-22; 2:6). Both Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God by the death of Christ and called into the one new humanity (2:13-16). They have become members of God's household, the new temple in the Lord (2:15, 19, 21), and have freedom of access to the Father by one Spirit (2:18). As those who have been called into one body, the church (cf. Col. 3:15), they have a divinely ordained role in God's purposes for the cosmos (Eph. 3:10). But God's gracious calling not only bestows great privileges on them; it also carries with it solemn responsibilities.*"

- Stott summarises God’s calling for his new society as a call to be united and to be holy. With this in mind we can then see how Paul writes about the unity of the church in 4:1-16 and the holiness (set apartness) of the church in 4:17 onwards.
- **“Keep the unity...”**
 - Although we are just studying 4:1-3 in this first study it is worth noticing how these verses fit into the rest of chapter 4. As we have just seen the theme of unity runs through 4:1-16 and particularly 4:4-6 where Paul stresses the oneness of the church.
 - Unity has been a key theme in the letter right from 1:9-10 through 2:11-22 and it will continue to be a key theme in the rest of the letter.

Notes

- **“I urge you”** - Paul was an apostle so he could have commanded them to do these things. Instead he chooses to urge them as a prisoner for the Lord. To urge has the sense of exhorting even begging them to do what Paul says. We must not see Paul’s applications in ch4-6 as mere advice. He is begging us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.
- **A call to imitate Christ** - Each of the virtues that Paul urges the Ephesians to display can be found elsewhere in the New Testament and they are seen most clearly in the Lord Jesus. Paul is therefore encouraging the church to imitate Christ which is hardly surprising when we consider that the church is the body of Christ (3:6.)
- **Humble** - Humility was not something that Greek society celebrated. If someone was described as humble they were usually being insulted. In contrast the New Testament celebrates the humility of Christ (re-read Philippians 2:1-11). As Coekin says *“Being humble is not being shy. It means restraining our sense of entitlement to be the focus of other people’s care and attention, by submitting ourselves to others with respect, in order to promote their best interests.”* Similarly Lewis said, *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”*
- **Gentle** - Gentle or meek was one of the ways that Jesus described himself (Matthew 11:29). He is the King who came and established his kingdom without force but with meekness (Matthew 21:5.) Again Coekin helpfully reminds us that *“Being gentle is not being weak. It means dealing with other people with kindness rather than roughness, with empathetic compassion rather than demanding force, and with soft encouragement rather than hard bullying.”*
- **Patient, Bearing in Love** - *“Patience’ is that long-suffering which makes allowance for others’ shortcomings and endures wrong rather than flying into a rage or desiring vengeance”* (O’Brien.) Bearing with one another is the practical expression of patience. As we loving bear with each others faults we are imitating the loving patience and forbearance of Christ who was incredibly patient with everyone he met and has been incredibly patient with each of us!
- **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...”** - Paul is not urging the Ephesians to create unity but instead to maintain the unity that the Spirit has already established. Paul devoted much of chapter 2 to show us how God has Jews and Gentiles together through the death of Christ (2:11-22) and in 4:4-6 he will remind us of all that unites us.

- There is also an important connection between v2 and v3. Humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance are all key virtues if we are to maintain our visible unity that the Spirit has established.

Big Idea - Imitate Jesus as you live out your Spirit-given unity together

Application

- The applications of this passage are self-evident. The key is to tease out what humility, gentleness and patiently bearing with one another in love will look like in our local church.
- Similarly we need to think practically about what it will look like to maintain our unity when we can be as many as 200 on a Sunday morning? How do we do this in practice?
- There will be specific applications that are highlighted in the sermon which you may want to pick up and discuss further.

Bible Study

Starter Question - Unity is vital in any organisation. Why is unity so important? What are some of the different ways that people try to foster and maintain unity?

Unity is obviously a key theme in these verses. This question is designed to get us thinking about unity. Encourage people to think about their experiences at work or as part of a team. Perhaps people have had some particularly interesting team building experiences that they might like to share.

1. Paul urges us ‘to live a life worthy of the calling you have received,’ but what is our calling? Re-read 2:11-22. What were we? What are we now?

You could survey the whole of chapters 1-3 to see what our calling is but this could take quite a long time. My suggestion is to focus on 2:11-22 because the key ideas of unity and holiness come through clearly. There are lots of details in these verses but the key things to see are our previous alienation from God and his people and how we have now been reconciled to God, united to one another as God’s holy temple.

The big aim is for us to see that as Christians we have a great calling which we are to live up to.

2. In what ways is Jesus “completely humble and gentle, patient and bearing in love?”

It may be that your group can immediately think of examples of how Jesus displayed these qualities. You might want them to consider passages such as Matthew 21:1-5, Philippians 2:1-11, Mark 10:45, Matthew 18:23-35. This is not an exhaustive list and you will no doubt be able to think of other examples. The big aim is not to look at every possible passage

but to help the group to see that v2 is not a random list of virtues but instead a picture of Jesus.

3. Take each of these virtues in turn and discuss;

1. what they will look like in practice in church life?

2. When we find it hard display these virtues around church? In what situations do we find it hardest to imitate Jesus?

The sermon on Sunday may have begun to address some of these questions and may provide you with a launch pad to application. It is important to remember that Paul is speaking in the context of the local church so try and encourage application with regard to the church rather than family or work (as important as these things are.) These questions will be really profitable if we talk specifically about our local church rather than just church in general. Try and avoid letting the discussion turn into a collective moan but at the same time try and encourage the group to be honest about struggles.

4. BEC can be a large and diverse group of people on a Sunday morning. What practical things can we do to maintain and display our unity together? Are there things that we do that undermine our unity?

Again Sunday's sermon may provide you with a launchpad for application. Try and be as practical and specific to BEC as possible. Encourage the group to consider both corporate and personal applications. What can BEC as a whole do better? What can we as individuals do better? Why not try and set each other a challenge of putting into practice on Sunday what you have discussed as a group.

These studies in Ephesians 4 may well be quite short and application focused due to the length of the passages each week. This is no bad thing because it encourages us to spend lots of time applying God's word and lots of time praying in these applications.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:4-10

Context

- **v1-3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit**
 - In v1-3 Paul was urging the Ephesians to maintain the unity that the Spirit has established and which he has been explaining in the first three chapters. Now in v4-6 Paul wants us to be clear that he is not urging “unity at any price”. v4-6 show us that our unity as a church is to be grounded in our shared theology.
- **v11-16 - The reason why Christ has given us different gifts**
 - In v7-10 Paul will tell us that though we are 1 Christ has given us different gifts. The reason why Christ has given us different gifts/ portions of grace will only become clear in v11-16 where Paul will tell us that Christ’s desire is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...” and that this will happen as “each part does its work.”
 - v7-10 are therefore key for understanding that the source of our different gifts is Christ.

Notes & Tricky Bits

The passage naturally breaks into two parts; v4-6 and v7-10 (there will be a sermon on each of these.)

- **v4-6 - We are One...**
 - The first thing to notice about these verses is the Trinitarian nature of our unity (notice the references to the Spirit (v4), the Lord Jesus/Son (v5) and the Father (v6).) In these verses Paul is “describing the unity that each of the three persons of the Godhead creates between Christians in God’s church” (Coekin.)
 - **One Body** - Paul has repeatedly stressed that Christians are part of 1 body, Christ’s body (1:23). Regardless of ancestors or ethnicity we are now joined together in one body (2:14-16.)
 - **One Spirit** - Paul mentions the Spirit before the Father and the Son because he has just been urging us to maintain the unity of the Spirit. All share in the same Spirit (2:18, 2:22). There are not different Spirit’s for different people, all have access to the same Father by the same Spirit.
 - **One Hope when you were called** - The idea of calling takes us back to the theme verse (v1) “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Remember that we were hopeless (2:120) but God has called us and given us the wonderful hope of eternal life (1:18.)
 - **One Lord** - Numerous times in the letter Christ is referred to as ‘ the Lord’. He is the one, under whose feet, God has placed all things (1:22-23). There really is only one Lord.
 - **One Faith** - The word faith can be used in different ways. We can talk about our personal faith or someone “coming to faith” in the sense of saving faith in Christ. Here and in v13, it refers to something that is defined (see also Jude 3.) There is really only

1 true faith because there is only 1 true Lord. This faith is defined and we need to be agreed on this faith for there to be unity amongst us.

- **One Baptism** - Again there is only 1 faith because there is only 1 Lord and there is only 1 body into which we are baptised. This is not talking about the precise mode of baptism so try and avoid a lengthy discussion over whether baptism has to be full emersion or not because that really is Paul's concern here.
- **One God and Father** - There is one God who is the origin, ruler and sustainer of everything and everyone in the universe. There is some debate over whether this should just be applied to Christians or more broadly to everyone and everything in the universe. For what it is worth I think that one of the repeated themes of Ephesians is how God rules over everything (not just his people) so I take this verse to be referring to everything and everyone in the universe. For example see 11:9-10, 1:20-23, 3:14-15.)
- **v7-10 - ... But we are Different**
 - ***“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...”*** - Every single Christian has been given some “grace”. The grace that Paul is referring to isn't saving grace but is additional grace in the form of gifts for ministry/service (see 4:12.) This grace isn't for us and our benefit but for the benefit of the rest of the body (4:12.) Cooking helpfully suggests that “these gifts of grace are not just abilities but ministries - ways for us to serve his church family.”
 - We need to recognise that it is Christ who has apportioned grace to each of us. He has determined and chosen to distribute his grace as he sees fit. This helps us to guard against pride as well as envy and inadequacy. It's Jesus' church and it's his grace. As we go on through chapter 4 we are repeatedly reminded that every part of the body is vital and we all need each other serving one another if we're to be built up and mature.
- v8-10 - These are not the easiest verses to interpret but we need to focus on the big thing in these verses. Paul is using this quote from Psalm 68 to emphasise the point that he made in v7 - Christ has risen and ascended and he is the one who has distributed different gifts to his people. It is this idea of giving gifts to his people that Paul will pick up on and expand in v11 and following.
- Psalm 68 - In the original context of the Psalm the quotation refers to God rescuing his people from Egypt (see Psalm 68:7-10 for example.) God in victory then gave his rescued people to the world as a gift. Israel were always meant to be a blessing to the world. Paul picks up the Psalm and sees it fulfilled in Christ who has won the victory and now gives each of us as gifts of grace to the church. As Coekin writes;

“We don't just have God's gifts. We are God's gifts to his church. So my church is not just there in order to bless me, as though I am a shopper filling my basket in the supermarket. The opposite is true: we're all saved and given to our churches as gifts to bless others by serving them. We are not meant to be consumers but contributors!”
- **Ascended and Descended** - There are various different suggestions for what each of these refer to. The context of Ephesians helps us to be clear on what Paul means by each. He has already mentioned Christ's ascension in 1:20-23. Christ ascended to rule and it is in this sense of ruling that he fills the whole

universe (rather than in some semi-physical sense.) With regard to Christ's descent I think it is best to see this as referring to Jesus' incarnation and coming into the world rather than as taking this as a possible reference to his descent into death or hell. The big thing is to recognise that Paul is really focusing on Christ' ascent because that is when and how he distributes his gifts.

Big Idea - We are one in Christ but we are all different gifts of grace from Christ for his church

Applications

• **Unity**

- We need to recognise the importance of unity. In an age which celebrates diversity and individualism we could easily forget how important our unity is.
- We also need to remember where our unity comes from. As Christians we are united by God and our unity is to reflect the unity of the God who is Trinity. The church is to be like an orchestra playing a symphony. Just as an orchestra is made up of many different instruments so the church is made up of different people with different gifts and skills but they all need to be harnessed. Just as an orchestra needs every part playing to create beautiful music, so the church needs every part serving to be built up.
- We need to reflect on the foundation of our unity as a small group and as a church. When groups and churches are small it can be easy to be united by a shared background or culture instead of shared theology. As we grow larger it becomes more and more important that our unity is truly rooted in God and what he has done because we will increasingly come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. It is often said that 'Doctrine divides', v4-6 show us that the opposite is true - "doctrine unites."

• **Gifts**

- Every Christian has received some gift of grace from Jesus so as to serve the church. Everyone is a gift to their local church. Everyone has a part to play. Everyone is necessary if the church is to flourish and grow in maturity and faith.
- As we start to see this it should guard us against pride in thinking that we are more important than other people. It should also guard us against feeling inadequate or resentful because everyone else needs me.
- We also need to recognise that whatever gifts or abilities Christ might have given to us are not for our benefit. We often talk about "my gifts" but they are not really my gifts. They are Christ's gifts that he gives to the church. Each Christian is a gift from Christ to their local church. When we begin to grasp this it will turn us outward so that instead of focusing on ourselves when we come to church we're focused on everyone else and serving them. You might want to revisit some of the material we covered in 6 steps to loving your church which encouraged us to be involved in the ministry of the pew.

Bible Study

This passage will be covered in 2 sermons so there will be lots of sermon material that you can draw on. The following questions are merely a suggestion and you may want to pick and choose from them as well as using some of your own.

Starter - Think of an orchestra performing a symphony;

A. Why is unity so important in an orchestra?

B. Why is variety also so important?

The aim of this starter is simply to get us thinking about how both unity and variety are so important not just in church but in other areas of life. Hopefully introducing this image of the orchestra at the beginning of the study should allow you to refer back to it as you go through the rest of the study and consider the unity and variety in the church.

v4-6

1. There is much diversity in BEC (ethnicity, upbringing, Christian experiences etc) but what do all Christians share in common?

Here is a chance simply to recap v4-6. You might want to ask a few supplementary questions to make sure everyone understands each of the different terms.

2. Sometimes people say that, ‘Doctrine divides!’ How do you think that Paul would respond?

Whilst doctrine can be used to divide Paul clearly saw doctrine as a good thing that unites the church together. The repetition of One in these verses shows us this. The Spirit of truth creates unity in the truth - that’s the unity that really matters!

3. How important do you think it is that BEC is united in what it believes?

This question is closely tied to the previous question. If we are to continue to grow and embrace more people then our unity cannot depend on shared backgrounds and experiences. Instead it must come from being united in Christ. You might want to bring in the idea of the Orchestra at this point for why unity is so important.

v7-10

4. What has Jesus given to each Christian?

This is a straight forward observation question. You may need to help the ground understand what it means for Christ to apportion grace.

5. Why does Jesus give different portions of grace to each of us?

This isn’t favouritism on the part of Jesus or anything like that. Instead Jesus gives us different portions of grace so that we can all play different roles in building up the church. Feel free to dip into v11-16 at this point.

6. “We don’t just have God’s gifts. We are God’s gift to his church”

a) How does this change our attitude to ourselves and our gifts/abilities/skills?

Here we really want to explore the idea that my gifts are not really mine. They are Christ’s and they are the church’s before they are mine. This should mean that I’m less concerned, proud or discouraged by what “my” particular gifts might be.

b) How does it change our attitude to serving others in the church?

Again we begin to see that if I have particular gifts or skills or abilities from God they are not primarily for my benefit or enjoyment. Christ has entrusted them to me for the good of everyone else in the church. Serving is then not about me and what I get out of it.

c) How does it change our attitude to gathering on Sundays or as a Home Group?

Again this should lead us away from a consumerist attitude to church. Even when I come midweek, I might not be leading the study" but I come to serve others as I pray, chat and engage in the study.

7) In what ways could you be serving your group and the church?

Perhaps if your group is quite large you could split into 2s or 3s to talk about this and to pray for one another. Sometimes it can be hard to see what our gifts might be. Others who know us well can often see what we would be good at.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:11-13

Context

- **v7-10** - v11 begins “So Christ himself gave...” which reminds us that these verses flow naturally from the previous verses. In v7 Paul told us that “to each one of us grace as been given as Christ apportioned it.” Christ gives gifts to all his people “in order to fill the whole universe” (v10). Christ’s purpose is therefore to fill the whole universe with his rule (see back to 1:9-10 and 1:20-23.) This is important to see as we now focus on the church in v11 onwards. Christ’s purpose for his church (v13) and his purpose for the universe are linked.
- **v14-16** - Although we are just studying v11-13 this week it is important to notice that the theme of building up the church to maturity continues into v14-16. The consequence of being a mature church is that “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves...” (v14.)

Structure

There is a simple structure to these verses that helps us as we study them

(Christ) ascended higher than
all the heavens...



... **IN ORDER** to fill the
whole universe...



... **SO** Christ himself gave the
Apostles, the prophets, the
evangelists, the pastors and
teachers...



... **TO** equip his people for
works of service...



...**SO THAT** the body of
Christ may be built up...

... UNTIL we all reach unity in the
faith and in the knowledge of the Son
of God

... AND become mature, attaining to
the whole measure of the fullness of
Christ.

Notes and Tricky Bits

• *Apostles and Prophets*

- The reference to apostles and prophets here seems to be referring to their foundational role in the establishment of the church and the New Testament (see 2:20 and 3:5 and the notes for these studies.)

• *Are there apostles and prophets in the church today?*

- The term apostle is used in different ways in the New Testament;
 1. On one occasion it is used to describe all Christians when Jesus says “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent (same greek word as used for apostle) greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:16.) In that sense all Christians are sent out by Christ into the world and so it could be argued that all Christians are apostles/‘sent ones’ though this would be potentially very confusing.
 2. There were what Stott refers to as ‘Apostles of the Church,’ people who were sent out by a church either as messengers or on some other errand (see 2 Corinthians 8:23, Philippians 2:25.)
 3. There were the ‘Apostles of Christ’ men specially commissioned by the risen Christ who were witnesses of his resurrection. This included the 12 (with Matthias replacing Judas), plus Paul and James (the brother of Jesus.)
- In answer to the question, “Are there Apostles today?” we can therefore say that all Christians are still sent out by Christ on mission and that churches still send out missionaries (though it is very rare for them to be called apostles) but that there are no longer ‘Apostles of Christ’ because there are no eye-witnesses of the risen Christ alive today.

• *What about Prophets today?*

- The main use of the word prophet in the Bible is as someone who was “a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation” (Stott.) When one of these prophets such as Isaiah spoke they could legitimately say, “Thus says the LORD.” With the completing of the New Testament canon the work of such prophets was completed. This is why Paul describes these prophets, along with the apostles, as foundational in the establishing of the church (2:20). Prophets in this sense cannot exist today because if they did then we would have to add their words to scripture and the whole church would be compelled to listen. This line of arguing lies behind the claims of both Mormonism and Islam to be fuller revelations than Biblical Christianity.
- There is much debate over whether prophecy does continue today and if it does continue then exactly what it is. This really is not the place to get into what is a complex argument. All I would say is that we need to be careful when speaking about prophecy that we do not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the foundational Apostles and Prophets. We must be very careful not to set any modern day prophecy alongside scripture as equal or even superior to scripture. Scripture is our ultimate authority.

• *Evangelists*

- Very little is said about evangelists in the rest of the New Testament (see Acts 6:3-6 and 21:8 and 2 Timothy 4:4-5.) The word and the actions of Philip suggest that they were engaged in the proclamation of the gospel. While the term included itinerant evangelists going from place to place proclaiming the gospel it was not limited to them. Timothy was placed within a static congregation and yet he is told to do the

work of an evangelists amongst his other pastoral duties. Furthermore, here in Ephesians 4, Christ gives Evangelists to equip the church for works of service. This implies that Evangelists not only spent time sharing the gospel with non-Christians, they also spent time equipping the rest of the church for evangelism.

- ***Pastors and Teachers***

- Pastors are those who are to shepherd Christ's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; cf. John 21:16.) Pastors are Overseers and Elders who are to lead the church by caring for and nurturing the church.
- There is some debate over whether Pastors and Teachers describes one group of people or two different but overlapping groups. It seems likely that it describes two groups so that whilst all Pastors are teachers, not all Teachers are Pastors.

- ***“Equip his people for works of service”***

- Christ gives teachers to the church not just for entertainment, edification or education but for the church's equipping. As O'Brien puts it 'The ministry of the officials does not find its fulfilment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister'. The job of Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers is to equip the rest of the church for service/ministry.
- In this sense every member of a local church is a Minister! Everyone has been given a ministry/a portion of grace (v7) and it is the job of the word ministers to equip everyone for their different ministries. The job of pastors and teachers is not to monopolise ministry but to multiply ministry.
- Richard Coekin uses the illustration of the church as like a football match. He says that the Church is often like a football match because at a football match there are usually 22,000 desperately in need of exercise and 22 people desperately in need of a rest. He argues that the biblical picture of the Church is “not about a crowd gathering on a Sunday to watch expensive professionals (pastors and teachers) playing the game. Instead the players on the pitch are the congregation. The Bible-teachers are the player coaches, training them to play the game of loving God, loving each other and loving their community, working as a team against the world, the flesh and the devil. The spectators are the watching world.”
- Each of us has a ministry and that ministry is to be directed towards building up the body. Again we return to the repeated theme of how our individual gifts and ministries are not for ourselves but for the sake of the church.

- ***Unity***

- In 2:11-22 Paul told us that Christ has united us. Then in 4:3 we were told to maintain the unity of the Spirit and now we are being told to work for unity. This could seem like a confusing tension or even contradiction until we remember that we live in the now and the not yet. We are united in Christ by the Spirit but that unity is yet to be fully realised and will ultimately only be perfectly realised when Jesus returns. In the meantime we are to serve and minister with the goal of ever greater unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.
- Together we are to pursue a better and better understanding and knowledge of God as he has revealed himself through his Son in scripture. Together we are to pursue maturity as we leave our childish thinking and understanding about God behind and press on to know him better and better as he really is. This is not something we can do alone but something that we must do together.

- **Mature**

- We often talk about mature Christians and here Paul shows us that Christ is the standard for maturity. The perfect character of Christ is the standard which we are aiming for. Christ is the perfect human and so as we grow in doctrinal unity we are also to grow in Christ-like character. The two must go together.

Big Idea - Every member of BEC has a part to play in building up the church

Applications

- **Our attitude to the local church and our ministry** - The church is not just where I come to receive or to spectate. It is the body of Christ which I belong to. It is a group of people who need me to serve and minister to them so that together we can all grow up to become more like Jesus. Sunday services and other meetings are now just opportunities for me to receive they are also opportunities for me to serve. I come to be equipped to serve rather than just to be educated or entertained. All of us are ministers of the church!
- **Our attitude towards the Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers of the Church** - A church that employs people full-time can often wrongly feel that it's the job of the paid staff to 'do ministry.' This passage challenges such thinking. Full-time word ministers are a gift from Christ to equip and mobilise the rest of us for our ministries. When a church employs a Pastor it should mean everyone else doing more ministry rather than everyone else doing less ministry.

Suggested Questions

Starter - Someone has said that “*church is often like a football match; 22,000 people desperately in need of some exercise and 22 people desperately in need of a rest!*” **How true do you think this is? What will be the consequences for a church where the majority of the ministry is left to just a few people?**

Even if Football isn't your thing this analogy should serve to open up discussion about what the church is like. Whilst we don't want to encourage people who feel like the 22 to moan, we do want to consider the damaging consequences of a church where the majority of the ministry is done by a few. There are various reasons why this situation may occur. It could be that a few people cling to the ministry and don't let others get involved. Alternatively it could be because the majority refuse to get involved.

We will return to this analogy later on.

1. What is the job of Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers? What is the point of Bible teaching?

As a church we make a big deal about Bible teaching and so it is important that we are clear on the purpose of word ministry. It is not just for our own education, edification or enjoyment. Instead it is meant to equip us to go and serve. This has implications for how we approach sermons and Bible studies. Have I come just to soak up teaching or have I come to receive and then pass on what I've learnt?

2. Think about a typical Sunday at BEC. When does ‘the ministry’ happen? What does ‘ministry’ look like?

Instinctively we might think that the ministry is what the paid ministers do up the front during the service. Whilst this is ministry it is not the only ministry that goes on. Ministry/ service is going on before the service as people set up and serve coffee. It's going on as the music group leads us in singing, it's happening as people serve coffee and welcome, it's happening in the children's groups and the creche. It's happening as people chat and encourage one another after the service. It's happening as people show hospitality over lunch etc etc.

As with last week you might want to revisit some of the material from 6 steps to loving your church.

3. Go back to the football analogy. According to Ephesians 4, who are the players on the pitch? Who do you think are the spectators? Who are the player-coaches?

4. How does this change our attitude to coming to church or home group?

You could tackle questions 3 and 4 together. Whereas we might normally think that the players are the pastors and teachers who are up the front and the congregation are the spectators, now we begin to see that the congregation are the players. The pastors and teachers are the player-coaches who equip the congregation for ministry but then also play alongside. The spectators are then the watching world and the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms (see 3:10.)

Such a mind shift should help us all to see that we have a vital part to play in the ministry of BEC. Every member of BEC is a valued team member who has a vital ministry given to them by Christ.

5. What is Jesus' goal for his church?

6. What will it look like for BEC to be a mature church?

Christ wants his church to be built up and mature and his definition of maturity is a greater doctrinal unity as well as his church becoming more and more like him in it's character. You could take the time to pick out examples of Jesus' character and think about what it would look like for your group and our church to reflect Jesus' character more.

7. Practically how can we use the gifts that Jesus has given us to serve the church and help us together become mature and built up?

As with last week you might want to break into smaller groups or pairs for this part. We don't just want to talk a good game we actually want to play the game. Try and think about practical things that you could be doing this Sunday or this week to serve others and build them up. This will be different for each of us because we have different gifts but there will be something we can all do.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:14-16

Context

This passage continues the key themes of maturity and every member ministry that we saw last week.

Here's a summary of v11-14 to see the flow;

A path to maturity...

God gave... apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers

to... equip his people

for... works of service/ministry

so that... the body of Christ may be built up

to... maturity, the likeness of Christ

then... we will no longer be infants

Notes

v14

Infants - There is a strong contrast here between the mature person of v13 and the immature children of v14. O'Brien helpfully notices that in v13 the mature person is singular (i.e. united) whereas in v14 the immature are children (plural) which suggests immature individualism. There are obviously times in scripture when we are encouraged to be children (e.g. Mark 10:14 and 1 Peter 2:2.) We need to understand that the image of little children is used in different ways in the New Testament, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. In Mark 10 Jesus highlights the humble dependence of little children. In 1 Peter 2 Peter highlights positively how babies crave milk. Here Paul is using negatively emphasising how little children are constantly flicking from one thing to another as they chase the latest fashion and must have toy.

Tossed back and forth - The picture here is of the immature Christian being like a small row boat in the middle of a great storm in the Atlantic Ocean. As Christians and churches we can so easily be pulled in every direction by every new fad and craze in the church. Instability and ignorance are marks of immaturity in Christians just as they are marks of immaturity in children.

every wind of teaching - We should not be like little children who are ignorant of the false teaching that is out there. Particularly in today's world where so much 'Christian' teaching is available on the internet and shared on social media we need to be even more alert as to teaching that is not just unhelpful but simply wrong. Paul is clear that this false teaching is not accidental instead it is the result of "the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming." People can look good and sound good and have a great following and yet be wolves who are out to harm

the church. This makes it all the more important that Christ has given the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and the pastors and teachers who will teach the truth to equip God's people.

v15

Speaking the truth This is a well known and often quoted verse but it is worth paying close attention to what it says. Notice that it says "speaking the truth" not "speaking truth." This is not just about speaking truthful things to one another instead of lying to one another. This is about speaking THE truth of the gospel to one another (see 6:14.) In other words the way that we grow and mature is by helping one another see the implications of the gospel for our lives as believers. The gospel is not just how we come to Christ it is also how we grow in Christ.

in love Love is prominent throughout Ephesians (see Paul's climactic prayer at the end of ch3.) Throughout chs4-6 there are several times when Paul encourages us to love one another (see 4:16.) These instructions to love are summed up in 5:1-2. It is important to notice that Paul is calling the church to combine love and truth rather than choosing between the two as we so often do. John Stott is on good form when he says;

"Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God's revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself 'the Spirit of truth', and his first fruit is 'love'. There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity."

mature in every respect God doesn't just want us to grow in a doctrinal unity (though that is important.) he wants us to be mature in every way. Here we are back to the theme of v13 where God's goal is that we become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. In other words God wants his people (corporate not just individual) to become like Christ in every way. This will only be complete in the new creation but it is to be our goal now as a church. Our goal is to be united and mature faith, knowledge and love, every more reflecting the perfect man Jesus Christ.

v16

every supporting ligament There's a fair bit of debate over what or who Paul is referring to here. One possibility is to say that he doesn't mean anything in particular and having referred to Christ as the head of the body he is just embellishing the metaphor and therefore he doesn't mean anything in particular. Others suggest that "every supporting ligament" refers to the ministers of the word (v11) who support and facilitate the rest of the body doing its ministry. If this is the case then there are parallels between the pattern of v11-12 and v16. If I were you I

wouldn't spend too much time wondering about this. The big point that is clear is that Christ is the head of the body, it is his body, and every part of the body has a job to lovingly do so that the whole body will be grown up and mature.

grows and builds itself up as each part does its work - As Paul finishes this section we are back to where we began in v7. Christ has given grace to all his people because all have a part to play in building up the body. As Richard Coekin puts it simply "Church growth is a team game!" Building and growing BEC is not an individual sport like Tennis or Golf. It's a team game like Rugby where everyone has a different vital job to do otherwise success (growth and maturity) will not happen. There can be no passengers because the local church isn't a bus it is a body. When I don't commit to lovingly serve in a local church it is not just me who suffers, the whole body suffers.

In summary v1-16 teach us that as BEC we need to "maintain our unity, contribute our ministry and grow in our maturity" (Coekin.)

Big Idea BEC will only grow and mature as everyone lovingly serves one another with their gifts.

Applications

Speaking Everyone in BEC is a gospel minister. That does not mean that we will all stand up and preach and teach but it does mean that we are all to be involved in 'gospelling' one another. We are to be talking about the gospel with one another and helping one another to see how the gospel is to shape and direct our lives as believers. The gospel has implications for every aspect of life (work, parenting, old age, anxiety, depression, fear, envy, pride, grief etc.) Formally and informally we are to be lovingly (crucial) helping one another to apply the gospel to our lives. In a sense the gospel is like a cream that we are to rub into every part of us as individuals and as a church. We need one another to help us do this. Some groups are great for building the sorts of relationships where we know one another well and can have these sorts of conversations. It is often difficult to have these conversations on Sunday mornings especially when we might be sat with people that we don't know so well but we can still be looking to talk about what we have heard in the sermon over coffee after the service. Again you might want to review some of the material from 6 steps to loving your church.

In the questions below there is a case study which you could use to help one another begin to think about how the gospel applies to different situations.

Serving and building As with the previous passages one of the key implications from this passage is that we all think hard about what gifts and opportunities we have to build up the rest of BEC. We are all different and Christ gives us different portions of grace so we all have something different to contribute to seeing BEC grow. You could talk about different areas of church life where people can serve. Service doesn't just have to be signing up to be on a rota. There are all sorts of different ways we can serve. Perhaps you and your group could brainstorm some different areas of service.

Questions

I have written quite a lot of questions and you probably won't have time to use all of them so feel free to focus your time on particular areas of application. If it were me leading the study then I would give most of my time to the case study and the talking about how we can practically speak the truth in love to one another.

Starter - In what sort of ways can children be like little boats tossed back and forth by the waves of a storm?

v14

1. How can Christians and churches be tossed back and forth by the waves of a storm?

We are really just trying to get the group to think about what v14 would actually look like today. For example such Christians would never really know their own minds. They are always following the last celebrity preacher that they heard regardless of whether what the preacher said was true or not.

2. Can we see something of ourselves in v14?

We must avoid thinking that we are immune from such immaturity so encourage the group to honestly examine themselves. We want to sit under God's word and let it expose us so we can change and grow rather than just discussing the Bible and how it applies to others. If that is all we are doing then we are hypocritically wasting our time aren't we?

v15

3. Are you the sort of person who is more likely to speak the truth without love or to love without speaking the truth?

We all have different personalities and temperaments so some of us will be more likely to 'fire from the hip' and 'tell it like it is' with little love. Others of us are so scared of offending people or hurting them that we never confront people with the truth even when that would actually be the really loving thing to do.

You might want to encourage the group to consider why they tend to behave as they do. What are their motivations?

4. Can you think of a time when another Christian lovingly helped you apply the truth of the gospel to an area of your life? What was it like?

5. What do you think holds us back from doing this?

6. How do we need to change so that this is something we do more of?

From my experience this is something we are not very good at and yet Paul is clear that these sorts of conversations need to be going on if we are to grow.

7. Read part 1 of the case study below. What do you make of Andy's response? What is good? What could be better?

Andy probably does what most of us would do. We sympathise and share experience but we haven't really got anything more to offer. On the one hand Andy is loving and caring but on the other hand you could argue that a loving friend would try to do more.

8. Read part 2 of the case study. What do you make of Tony's response? What is good and what could be better?

Tony has suddenly got something to say from the Bible which is good but again you'd question how loving he is being. You might also question how effective his words will be. My guess is that Greg already knows what the Bible says he should be doing. What he really needs is for a friend to help him see how the gospel connects with his life and the situation he is in.

9. Like Greg we often know the 'Do's and Don'ts' of the Bible but if we are really going to change and grow then the gospel needs to work in our hearts. What has the gospel got to say to Greg in his situation?

This might be a tough question for people to answer but it is an important one. Think about how the gospel will motivate Greg to be a better husband and be a better father and prioritise spending time with God's people? You might want to focus on just one of Greg's problems. The aim is not to identify what Dave should do (Tony has done that for us) instead we want to think about how the truth of the gospel will fuel this change.

10. How might you go about lovingly speaking the truth of the gospel to Greg?

This question is the natural follow on from (.9)

v16

11. What will happen if only part of BEC is working to build up the body?

We won't actually grow and mature to become more like Jesus. We might grow numbers and some people might grow individually but that is not Christ's goal for his church. He wants us to grow spiritually (as well as numerically) and he wants the whole church to grow. We all have a part to play.

12. What different opportunities do we have to play our part in building up BEC so we all become more like Jesus?

Here's a chance to brainstorm ways of serving so that we build one another up. It will be important to emphasise that everyone can do something and that everyone is needed. Don't just talk about ideas, come up with some concrete resolutions of what you are going to do.

Speaking the truth in love Case Study - Greg, Andy and Tony

Part 1

Greg is a 46 year old man in our church and has arrived at something of a crisis. He is overstretched at work and his marriage is suffering. He leads a home group, but is missing meetings and his own devotional life is in bad shape. Recently he stayed late at the office and got into conversation with a female colleague. They went out for a drink and though nothing 'happened' he realised afterwards just how close he was to letting things go too far. This incident persuades him something needs to change.

One Sunday Greg gets into conversation with his friend Andy. Having explained his situation, Greg is pleased that Andy sympathises with him and agrees how hard a proper work-life balance can be. Andy describes his own difficulties and then conversation moves on. Greg is glad to have 'shared' his problem, but knows he has no new advice and no spiritual perspective on his situation

Part 2

Next Greg goes to see his Tony. Tony listens carefully to his story before opening the Bible with him and telling him that he needs to love his wife (Eph 5), be a good father – which means spending less time at work – (Eph 6) and that he should flee temptation (1 Cor 6). He tells him to read his bible regularly and make home group a priority in his schedule. He urges Greg to see this as a crisis point and that if he doesn't act now it will be too late.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 5:21-33

Context

Unity under Christ - This is the big theme of the book (1:9-10, 2:11-22, 3:10-12, 4:3-6, 4:12-13.) God's great plan is to bring unity under Jesus and the church is where we see this happening. The church is God's masterpiece and is meant to be the place where God's glorious plan is displayed not only to a watching world but the heavenly realms. If a church is to be united under Christ then one of the things it will need is united marriages under Christ.

Living a Life worthy of the calling - In chapters 1-3 Paul explains the wonderful calling that is ours as Christians. God has called us to be part of the church, his masterpiece. Then in chapters 4-6 Paul tells us what it looks like to live a life in keeping with our calling. The church is the bride of Christ and so if we are married then our marriages are to reflect the marriage of Christ and the church.

Being Filled with the Spirit - In 5:18 we were told to be 'filled with the Spirit.' This is the big theme running throughout the rest of chapters 5-6. Being filled with the Spirit is not just about speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs... (5:19) it's also about wives submitting to their husbands (5:22), husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church (5:25), children obeying and honouring their parents (6:1-3), Fathers bringing their children up in the Lord (6:4), slaves obeying masters (6:5) and masters treating their slaves well (6:9.) Being filled with the spirit is actually more down to earth and day to day than we might at first think.

Spiritual Warfare - Having spoken about submitting to the authorities that God has ordained (in marriage, family and work) Paul finishes the letter on the theme of spiritual warfare (6:10-17.) He seems to move from very ordinary things (marriage etc) to very extraordinary things (spiritual warfare) but the two are closely linked. We have already seen from 4:26-27) that Satan is active in every day disagreements and anger. Marriage, Family and work are the sorts of ordinary environments where spiritual warfare actually takes place and Satan seeks to bring hostility and division in marriages, families and workplaces.

God's Design for Human Marriage - Genesis 1-22 give us God's design for marriage. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life. Men and women are equal in status and value because they are equally made in the image of God. Yet men and women are not the same, they are different with different roles. They are equal but different and their differences compliment one another. This equality and difference is to be reflected in the marriage. The wife is to submit to the husband because in God's design for marriage the husband is to be the head. But as the head the husband is not to be a bully who rules. Instead because his wife is his equal (in Adam's language she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh) he is to love her as Christ loves the church.

The Eternal Marriage between Christ and his Church - Time and again in the Bible the covenant relationship between God and his people is expressed in terms of marriage (see Hosea and Revelation 19.) God made human marriage not as an end in itself (which is how we so often view it) but as a picture of God's relationship with his people. Human marriage is just a temporary shadow of the permanent eternal marriage between Christ and his church.

Tricky Bits

Marriage is a very emotive subject - The subject of 'Marriage' is one that contains both great joy and great pain depending on who we are talking with. Some in your group will be happily married, others will be unhappily married, some will be unmarried and happy, others will be unmarried and deeply hurting as a result. This is therefore a subject that needs to be handled with great care and sensitivity. How you speak and lead the group is vital. You may want to adapt the questions below to sensitively suit your group. You may also want to start the evening by acknowledging that this is a very difficult subject to talk about and emphasise that we want to be gracious, loving and building one another up as we study this passage.

Submission and Authority - The idea of a wife submitting to her husband is not popular in our society today. There will undoubtedly be some in your group for whom this idea is very hard to accept. You will need to have carefully thought through what this passage is saying and what it is not saying before you start. You will also find it helpful if you have thought through some of the likely objections to this passage and what you will say. I would strongly recommend listening to Mark's excellent sermon on this passage where he helpfully unpacked the passage and what the Bible means by submission. (You can find the sermon here <http://bec.uk.net/resources/sermons/app/series/everyday-life-ephesians-5-6>)

What about v21? - Some take v21 and argue that it means that this is teaching that every Christian should submit to every other Christian. This can't be what Paul is saying because in 5:22-6:9 he goes on to give asymmetrical commands. As Christopher Ash argues it means, 'Submit to one another in all the contexts in which submission is appropriate: that is, the contexts I am about to explain to you.'

Big Idea - Human marriage is a temporary shadow of the permanent marriage between Christ and his church

Applications

For Wives - Submit to your husband because of Christ

We need to be clear what this does not mean. Submission here does not mean something that you are forced to do. Wives are not to submit to their husbands because they are big bullies. Biblical submission is voluntarily to place yourself under the loving leadership of another. Similarly submission does not mean that women are inferior to men. As Genesis 1-2 make clear men and women are equal but different.

This is not saying that wives should submit to their husbands if their husbands tell them to do something that is illegal or against God's word. It is also not saying that wives are to be silent doormats who never express their opinions.

Instead wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Notice that they are to submit to their husbands as you do to the Lord. In other words (to use Mark's phrase) "They are to look through their husbands and see Christ" Jesus is the perfect man, and perfect husband who will always love them and never let them down. They are to submit to their husbands not because they deserve it but because Christ calls them to. We must remember that Christ is not only the model to husbands of what it means to be a loving head. He is also the model to wives of what it looks like to submit. The Son always

perfectly submits to the Father's will (think Gethsemane.) Jesus is therefore not calling wives to do something that he is not prepared to do himself. It is because he submitted himself to the headship of his Father that he went to the cross to make us his bride.

For Husbands - Love your wife as Christ loves his church

The first thing to notice is that where wives are told to submit, husbands are not told to rule. We might instinctively think that ruling and submitting go hand in hand but instead love and submission go hand in hand. Again Jesus is both the reason and the model for this love. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. It is because Christ has laid down his life for us that he has the right to tell us how we are to behave.

It is not just that husbands are to love their wives, that love is given a shape... the cross! Christ's love for the church is a sacrificial life. He gave up his life for the church. This is the level of love that Christ calls husbands to have for their wives. Husbands are to lead in marriage but their lead/headship is to be one of loving, sacrificial service. Again they are to love their wives this way regardless of whether their wives deserve this kind of love. The church didn't deserve Christ's sacrificial love and yet he freely gave it any way.

Notice too that husbands' love for their wives is not only meant to be sacrificial it is also meant to be sanctifying (v26.) Husbands are to strive to help their wives grow in holiness and godliness. This is to be a key expression of a husband's love for his wife. Leading her and loving her in such a way that she grows more and more like Christ.

For Everyone - See human marriage for what it is meant to be

Whether we are married or not there can be a tendency today to either idolise marriage or to dismiss marriage. To those who are tempted to dismiss marriage this passage reminds us that marriage is a wonderful thing. Marriage is a God-given picture of the relationship between Christ in the church. This gives marriage great value. But... we must not fall into the other trap which is to idolise marriage. So often whether we are married or not we treat marriage as if it is the greatest thing ever. We treat human marriage as if it is the ultimate relationship and the place where all our desires for love, safety, security, companionship and intimacy will be found. When we do this we idolise marriage and expect it to carry a burden of expectations that it was never designed to carry. Marriage is a good gift from God but it is not the ultimate gift from God. It can be a place of love, intimacy and companionship but it is meant to point us on to the ultimate marriage where perfect love, intimacy and safety are to be found. Whether we are happily married or not, whether we are happily single or not, we must all remember that human marriage is the shadow, Christ and the church is the reality!

Questions

You might want to start by acknowledging that this could be a difficult subject to talk about for some in the group and to emphasise that we want to build one another up with what we say.

Starter Questions - In what ways is marriage idolised today? In what ways is marriage downplayed today?

As normal there are no right or wrong answers here. Instead we want to get people talking and thinking about how marriage is viewed today. You can think about how it's viewed by society as well as how it is viewed by Christians.

1. What is the connection between human marriage and the marriage between Christ and the Church?

Human marriage is a picture/shadow of the true everlasting marriage between Christ and his church. When human marriage works well it displays something of the relationship between Christ and the church. Husbands are to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loved the church. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Instead of looking to society to show us what marriage should be like we are to look to Christ and the church.

2. In practice what will it mean for those of us who are wives to submit to our husbands?

c) What will it not mean? Are there any limits?

d) What will it mean to do it "to the Lord?"

This discussion could go in all sorts of directions so you will need to be prepared. You will also need to be prepared to step in and redirect the discussion if you feel it is going down the wrong path. It might be helpful to start by thinking what this does not mean? What is this not telling wives to do? What is this not saying about women? Then you are in a position to move on to think about what this is positively saying about wives and submission.

Spend some time thinking about the motivation for submission. The motivation doesn't come from how great one's husband is. The motivation comes from how great Jesus is, that's the sense of v22.

3. Have a look at Mark 14:35-36 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. How does Jesus' submission to the Father alter our view of submission?

These passages show us that submission is part of the Trinity. The Son willingly submits to the loving headship of the father. The Father never submits to the Son, instead the Son submits to the Father. He does so willingly because he knows that his father loves him. Notice that Christ submits not just when it is easy but when it is costly. When Jesus calls us to submit whether that is a wife submitting to a husband, a child submitting to their parents or a citizen submitting to a government, he is not asking us to do something that he has not done first!

4. What will it look like in practice for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church?

a) What sort of love will they have for their wives?

b) What will they want for their wives?

Here the key is to really focus on the costly sacrificial nature of Christ's love. Husbands are not getting off lightly here. They are to come to marriage not seeking to be served but to serve, to lay down their lives in love for their wives. With that sort of attitude in place we can then think practically about what this will look like. Notice too that the focus is on sanctification. As the head of the marriage husbands are to approach every decision lovingly thinking about what will help their wives to grow in godliness and become more like Christ. It should be a joy and a pleasure for a wife to submit to her husband because he loves her so selflessly.

5. How does this passage stop us dismissing marriage?

6. How does this passage stop us idolising marriage?

These two final questions tie the whole study together. They are important because they help us apply the passage to all of us whether we are married or not. All of us will at times have a wrong view of marriage. Some of us will idolise marriage while others of us will dismiss it. This passage helps us to see both the great value and dignity of marriage because it is a picture of Christ and the church. This passage also helps us to see that marriage is not ultimate. So many of us (both married and unmarried) need to be reminded that God has something better than human marriage for us. He gave his Son to die for us to make us his bride. It is as we enter into and grow in a relationship with Christ that we find our deep longings for love, intimacy, safety and belonging are truly met.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 6:1-9

Context

- **Unity and Order** - Unity and order are good parts of God's design for marriage, family work and the church. God's great plan is to bring all things together in unity under Christ (1:9-10.) The church is the place where this plan is put on display to the world and the heavenly realms (3:9-10.) As Christians we are to submit to the different authorities that God has put in place over the different parts of our lives.
- **Submission (5:21)** - Submission to authorities holds this whole section of Ephesians (5:21-6:9) together. Authority is part of God's good design and blessing is found as we live in submission to the different authorities that God has put in place over us (6:3.)

Tricky Bits

- **The Promise in v2-3** - There are a few tricky aspects to this promise.
 - Firstly, when the promise is first given in Deuteronomy 5:16 it says 'in the land...' In Ephesians it says 'on the earth.' Paul has taken the Old Testament promise that was given to Israel before they entered the promised land and he has expanded it to the whole earth in the church age. In the church age this promise is not just for 1 ethnic group living in 1 particular land. Instead it is for people of all ethnicities all around the world who submit to the Lordship of Christ and the authorities that he has put in place.
 - The second problem with this promise is how literally we take it. Clearly not everyone who obeys and honours their parents does live a long life, some people die tragically young. There are two things to say in response to this. Firstly none of us perfectly keep any of God's commandments let alone this one. Secondly this promise is meant to convey the sense that family life works best when we follow the makers instructions and submit to the authorities that he has put in place over us.
- **Parents disciplining their children** - There is the potential to get bogged down in a debate about whether or not it is right for parents to smack their children or not. This can become a very heated area of debate amongst parents so if I were you I would try and avoid getting into exactly how you should apply Proverbs 13:24. Instead I would focus on what is clear from this passage. Fathers are to train/discipline and instruct their children in the Lord. There will be different ways that this can be done in practice.
- **Slavery** - Again this could lead down all sorts of rabbit holes that you may want to avoid. It is helpful to remember that slavery in the 1st century was different to the slave trade of the colonial period. Many doctors, architects and managers were slaves in the 1st century and so 1st century slavery is closer to 21st century employment than 18th century slavery. It's also important to remember that Paul doesn't ever approve of slavery. Indeed he actually condemns slave traders in 1 Timothy 1:10. What Paul is doing here in Ephesians 6 is not approving of slavery but instead telling slaves how to operate while they are slaves. Elsewhere he will encourage slaves to seek their freedom if this is possible (1 Corinthians 7:21.) Here he is telling them how to serve if they are slaves.

Big Idea - Honour and obey those who God has put in authority over you. If you are in a position of authority then remember that it's God who has given you that authority and serve him.

Applications

- **For all of us who are children - Honour and Obey Your Parents**
 - What this looks like in practice will change as we grow older but it applies regardless of our age. Depending on who is in your group you will want to steer the conversation in particular directions. There will be a whole set of applications for those who are still living under their parents roofs. There will be very different applications for those whose parents are growing older and frailer. What will it look like to honour a parent who is suffering with dementia or unable to care for themselves physically?
- **For Fathers - Take responsibility for training and teaching your children to know the Lord.**
 - Father's are to be the Pastors of their families taking responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of their children. Too often those of us who are Dad's leave this vital ministry to mum or to the church when we should be taking the lead. Mothers and the church have an important role to play, but Dad is to take a lead as the one who is ultimately responsible.
 - What this looks like in practice will again vary depending on the age of our children. A situation like home group where there are a range of different people all at different ages and stages of life can be a source of rich experience that can be helpful to one another.
- **For Workers - Wholeheartedly obey and serve your earthly bosses because of your heavenly boss.**
 - Everyone's work situation is different so what this looks like in practice will vary but all Christians are called to this counter-cultural approach to work and those in authority over us. Our boss might not be very good, they may be unfair, but we are still to obey them as long as that does not mean disobeying the Lord. Mark's sermon on this passage is well worth listening to for helpful applications. <http://bec.uk.net/resources/sermons/app/series/everyday-life-ephesians-5-6>
- **For Bosses - Remember you have a heavenly boss and serve him as you exercise your authority.**
 - Whilst many bosses seek to treat those working under them well, the Christian has a unique motivation for doing this. We don't just do this for a quiet life or for high productivity, we do it because we are mindful that ultimately we work for a heavenly master who sees everything.

Questions

Starter Question - How do we normally feel about someone being in authority over us?

We are going to be thinking about authority in the home and the work place so it will be good to start by recognising that we are not always keen on authority. We don't always like to be accountable to someone. We can often feel that our freedom is being stifled. We almost always would prefer to be the person in authority rather than someone under authority.

1. Look at 6:1-3. Think about the different stages of life (children, teenagers, adults).

c) What might it look like to honour and obey our parents through these different stages of life?

Depending on who is in your group will shape which direction the discussion goes. Feel free to focus on the stages of life reflected in your group. For many of our groups this will mean wrestling with the question of honouring ageing parents.

d) How does Jesus motivate us to do this when we find it hard?

It's important that we don't just leave this as law. Jesus is calling to live like this in response to his grace (remember 4:1.) God has graciously made us part of his family through Christ. The fact that God is our heavenly father should shape how we relate to our earthly parents. In Christ we also have a powerful example not just of how he honoured and obeyed his earthly parents (Luke 2) but also how he always sought to honour and obey his Heavenly Father even when that meant great pain and sacrifice (Mark 14.)

2. Look at 6:4. What are Dad's to do? How are we to do this?

These are designed as simple observation questions to get the group looking into the text for the answers.

a) Think about the different stages of life (child, teenager, adult.) What will this look like in practice as our children grow up?

If no-one in your group has young children or teenagers but many in your group have adult children then you may want to focus your discussion on the relevant stage of life rather than talking about areas that are not particularly relevant to your group. This can provide a great opportunity to bring out the wisdom in your group. Just make sure that your group is clear that we're talking about training and instruction in the Lord and not just general parenting.

b) How can those of us who are not parents be involved in this vital ministry?

This is a vital question because there will be many in our groups who are not parents who are feeling left out at this stage. Whilst Father's are primarily responsible for this ministry it is a burden that they can't carry alone. You might want to talk about what it will look like for mum's to support and help dad's? What will it look like for them to work as a team? What will this look like in families where only 1 of the parent's is a Christian? Other questions to talk about could include; 'What's the role of the church in all this? How as parents can we make the most of church activities that our kids attend? How can families be better at drawing single people into family life so that everyone is blessed?

3. Look at 6:5-9. How are Christians workers and bosses be different from their colleagues? What should our attitude, motivation and aims be?

a) From your experience when is this particularly hard? What do we need to remember in these times?

The big difference is that Christians don't just have earthly masters they have a Heavenly Master. Ultimately whether we're employees or employers we work for God and this should dramatically change the way we approach our work. Undoubtedly this can be very difficult at times and it is good to give people the opportunity to talk about some of these difficulties but let's try and avoid this simply becoming an opportunity to moan about our work. Where there are difficulties lets turn to prayer.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 6:10-20

Context

'Finally...' These verses are not just the last verses of the book, they are the where Paul draws together all of the great themes of the book.

Through chapters 1-3 we saw how God is bringing unity to all things under Christ. We saw how God brings people from death to life through Christ. We saw that God was creating 1 new united people, the church, under Christ and through the church displaying his glory to Satan and all his forces. It is because Christ has won the victory and is powerfully the head over all things that Christians are to 'be strong in the Lord', wearing Christ's armour and praying in the Spirit. There is a spiritual battle going on but chapters 1-3 show us that Christ has won the victory.

Through chapters 4-6 Paul has been showing us what it looks like to live as the people of God united under Christ (4:1.) We have seen that we are to be united, building one another up as we speak the truth in love to one another. We're to take off our old sinful self and put on our new self made in Christ. All this application is brought together in 6:10-20 as Paul urges us to put on the armour of God.

In many ways chapters 4-6 seem very down to earth with subjects like marriage, family and work. It might seem strange that the focus shifts suddenly to spiritual warfare but it is these seemingly ordinary areas of life that are the spiritual battle ground. Here is where Satan will attack and seek to break down the unity that Christ has given to the church. It's as we stand firm in Christ putting on his armour and praying in the Spirit that we can resist the devil's schemes.

Tricky Bits

Who are the rulers, against the authorities, against all the powers of this dark world and all the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms? (v12)

There's great potential to get dragged into a long debate about the exact meaning of this verse. The best way to understand this verse is by reading it in the context of the rest of the letter.

In chapter 1 we were told that God has powerfully raised and exalted Christ *'far above all rule and authority, powers and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in this age but also in the one to come.'* (1:21.)

Again in chapter 3 we were told that God's intention *'was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...'* (3:10).

Then in chapter 4 we were told, *'In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.'*

These passages show us that there is an unseen spiritual realm in which there is not just God and his angels but Satan and his evil forces. This leads us to see that 6:12 fits into

the wider context of Ephesians and the spiritual struggle that is raging but which ultimately Christ has won by his death on the cross.

Big Idea

Be strong in the Lord by continually putting on his armour and praying in his Spirit.

Applications

Belief and Action (v14-17) From chapters 1-3 of Ephesians we see that truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and God's word are things that God gives us in Christ. As we put them on we are standing in the victory that Christ has won for us. But having put on these different things they are then to change the way that we behave and this is seen in chapters 4-6. This means that much of the application in this study will be recapping and reinforcing many of the applications that we have unearthed as we worked through Ephesians. In particular we will want to think about what it means to put on truth and be truthful with one another (4:15, 4:21, 4:25). We will also want to think about what it means to wear peace (4:1-6 and 4:26-27.)

Prayer (v18-20) Whilst prayer is not part of the armour of God it is something that we are to be doing constantly alongside putting on the armour of God. Both putting on the armour of God and praying in the Spirit are vital if we are to be strong in the Lord. In v18 there are 4 'All's' that give shape and scope to our prayers. We are to pray in the Spirit (led by the Spirit-inspired word) on ***all occasions***, with ***all kinds of prayers***, with ***all perseverance*** and for ***all the saints***. This will undoubtedly challenge both the amount we pray as well as what we pray for both as individuals and as small groups. Notice too how as those who are taking up the sword of the spirit we are to pray that we would use this sword boldly (v19-20.)

Questions

Starter Question - This study is all about how we can be strong in Jesus. Where do people normally look for strength?

Here's a simple question just to get people talking. There are all sorts of sources of strength that people turn to such as ourselves, family, community etc. Whilst we don't want to be dismissive about any of these things we do want to set up a clear contrast so that people see that it is only by standing firm in Jesus that we will have the strength we need to face the spiritual battle that we are in as Christians.

1. In this passage Christians are told to put on the armour of God (v10-17) and to pray in the Spirit (v18-20). Why are these two things so vital?

What sort of struggle are we involved in? Who are we up against?

Before we get into the details of v14-20 we want to see why these things are so vital. We are in a spiritual struggle/wrestle against the devil and his forces. It might feel like we are in all sorts of flesh and blood struggles but we must not lose sight of the real daily battle that we are in.

2. What will it look like to put on each part of the armour of God in our daily lives?

You could split your group up and ask each sub-group to look up the references for one of the pieces of the armour. You can give each member of your group a copy of the table to fill in to help. It's vital that we understand the armour of God in the context of the rest of Ephesians rather than just imagining what these different things are. That's why I have given various different references to look up.

3. Let's turn to think about prayer in v18-20.

b) When are we to pray?

We are to pray on all occasions. There are plenty of other examples in the New Testament where we are urged to pray constantly (see Ephesians 1:15-16.) Our whole attitude is to be one that instinctively turns to prayer. We are to take every opportunity to pray because we are in a constant spiritual battle and so we need God's constant help.

c) What are we to pray?

We are to use all kinds of prayers. This means that we are to pray a mixture of confession, petition, thanks and praise. We are to pray short 'arrow' prayers as we go about our daily lives as well as setting aside time for longer periods of prayer. We're to pray for all sorts of different things because Satan will attack from all sorts of different angles. This means that we should pray for practical things such as people's health, work, relationships and family life. But we shouldn't just stop there, we should also be praying for church unity and spiritual growth and maturity. These are all things that have been a major focus in the letter and in Paul's prayers (see 1:15-23 and 3:14-21.) Notice too that we are to pray for boldness in evangelism (v19-20.) As those who are taking up the sword of the Spirit it is only right that we then pray for boldness to use it!

d) How are we to pray about?

We're in a constant battle so we need to pray with great perseverance and stamina. Like the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane we are to watch and pray. We are not to be spiritually asleep, but instead alert and awake by persevering in prayer. There may be seasons of life when we find prayer harder than normal. Even in these times we are to work hard so that we persevere in prayer.

e) Who are we to pray for?

Here we see that we are to pray for all God's people. This fits perfectly with one of the big themes in the book - the unity of all of God's people under Christ. As one united people, the church, we are to pray for everyone, not just those who are like us or who we are close too. This is a big reason why we produce a prayer diary - it would be good to have some of these to hand so that those who don't have a copy can get one.

4. How could our times of prayer as a Home Group change to better reflect this pattern of prayer?

Each group will be different in how they organise their times of prayer but we should always be prepared to change the way that we do things in response to God's word. Perhaps the range of your prayers needs broadening because you tend to only pray for church events or for those who are unwell? Perhaps you need to pray more for one another which may go hand in hand with being more open and honest with one another? Perhaps you need to spend more time praying for boldness in evangelism as you go about your day to day lives?

The Armour of God

	References	What will it look like to put this on in daily life?
The Belt of Truth	1:13, 4:15, 4:21, 4:25, 5:9	
The Breastplate of Righteousness	4:24-5:2, 5:8-10	
Feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace	2:11-22, 4:1-6, 4:26-27	
The Shield of Faith	2:1-10, 3:12, 3:17	
The Helmet of Salvation	1:13, 2:1-8	
The Sword of the Spirit	1:13, 3:5-7, 6:19-20	