After going through a difficult time after hurricane Katrina, I set out to memorize the book of Ephesians in hopes that it might give me the gospel-saturated encouragement that my heart needed. Every day on my 30-45 minute commute, I turned over these words in my mind and heart. God fed my hungry soul during this experience. I had been trying to overcome my despondency with three scoops of Moose Tracks ice cream every night, but I soon discovered that Ephesians is better than Moose Tracks! Man really can't live by bread (or ice cream!) alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And believers around the world for centuries have been nourished and blessed by Ephesians.

Klyne Snodgrass says, "'Pound for pound,' Ephesians may well be the most influential document in history" (Ephesians, NIV App Commentary, 17). Ephesians is only six chapters. It's four pages in my particular Bible. It has only 155 verses. It will take about twenty minutes to read the whole thing out loud. Yet, in this little book is divine beauty and power. Listen to some of the following statements about the importance of this letter:

- "The Switzerland of the New Testament" (Snodgrass, 17)
- "The crown and climax of Pauline theology" (Snodgrass, 17)

(The following quotes taken from O'Brien, Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 1):

- "the divinest composition of man" – Samuel Coleridge
- "John Calvin's favorite"
- "The crown of St. Paul's writings" – J.A. Robinson
- "The quintessence of Paulinism" – F.F. Bruce
- "Only Romans can match Ephesians "as a candidate for exercising the most influence in Christian thought and spirituality" – Raymond Brown

Why is Ephesians such a big deal? Let me mention just a few reasons why this letter is so significant.
First, Ephesians deepens our understanding of the gospel. Many take themselves too seriously and the gospel far too lightly. Ephesians explodes the modern world's superficial understanding of the gospel. Here we dive down into “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

Second, Ephesians also magnifies the importance of the church, perhaps greater than any other NT letter. In this letter, we read how the church is central to God’s eternal purposes (cf., 3:10).

Third, lives have been forever changed by the exploration of this little book. John Mackay, former president of Princeton Sem. recalled how took his Bible in the hills of Scotland at the age of 14, and was transformed. He said, “I saw a new world… everything was new… I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the center of everything… I had been 'quickened.' I was really alive.” (in Stott, 15). May a whole new world be opened up to you, also!

Fourth, Ephesians may also be considered “the most contemporary” epistle in the NT. Apart from a mention about slavery (which I’ll explain later), this letter “could be have been written to a modern church” (Snodgrass, 17). Paul doesn’t name particular false teachers, mention specific problems in the church at Ephesus, nor does he include his travel plans, like he does in other letters. As a result, Christians love it today because it is so contemporary.

- Ephesians is widely known as a “circular letter” because it was probably read throughout the churches in the great Ephesus region.

Fifth, Ephesians provides grace-filled encouragement. If you are tired, discouraged, beat up, lonely, or confused, welcome to Ephesians! Our souls need to see this description of the glorious grace of God.

- We need the Gospel everyday. Yes, Christians need the gospel everyday. Remember, this letter was written for Christian churches. Paul is writing to ordinary people. Some were wealthy. Some were simple employees. Some worked on the port. Some were servants of masters. Some worked out in the small villages. They were Christians living in the world. They needed to understand who they were and then how to live in that reality just like us.
Sixth, Ephesians offers some very practical answers to basic questions about the Christian life. So, if you're a new believer, this is great book to study in depth. If you're not a Christian, but you are interested enough to study what Christians believe, then this is a wonderful book to explore. Would you stay for the whole study? We will look at the following questions in this series:

- Why worship? (Eph. 1:3-14)
- What should we pray for? (1:15-23)
- What's so amazing about grace? (2:1-10)
- Who are we? (2:11-22)
- Why is the church a big deal? (3:1-13)
- What should we pray for? (3:14-21)
- How can we be unified? (4:1-16)
- How can we imitate God? (5:1-14)
- What's God's plan for marriage? (5:15-33)
- How should we parent? (6:1-4)
- How should we see our vocation? (6:5-9)
- How do we fight? (6:10-24)

By way of introduction to the letter today, I want to take a look at the first two verses, and then look at the message of the letter. We will consider: (1) the author, (2) the recipients, (3) the greeting, (4) the message.

#1: THE AUTHOR (1:1a)

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1a)

While some argue against Pauline authorship, Paul himself says he is the author (1:1; 3:1) and also gives two strong exhortations about "speaking the truth!" (4:15; 25). I think we should believe him.

Further, the early church universally accepted Pauline authorship, and it wasn't until the late 18th and 19th century that it was challenged (Obrien, 4). (For more on Pauline authorship see O'brien Frank Thielman, Ephesians, Baker Exegetical, 1-30, and Akin – danielakin.com). While Ephesians has its own uniqueness in style compared to Paul's other letters, that doesn't mean he didn't write it.
Others claim it is too impersonal for a man who spent three years there, but I think this is a weak argument as well. Paul could have simply chosen to be reflective. And he didn’t know all the believers (especially those out in the villages, and those who came to faith after he left). And the letter was probably circular and therefore general.

Paul follows his usual form in this prologue by of identifying three elements: the sender, the recipient, and a greeting.

Formerly, he was a persecutor of the church (Acts 9:1-2). But God made him an “apostle to the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15). Paul attributes this conversion and calling to the grace of God (1 Tim 1:15). Paul is an example that God can radically change anyone.

In Ephesians 3:7-8, Paul highlights the grace of God and his mission to the Gentiles. (Read) Paul’s message of grace was something that he himself experienced personally. You could say that the portrait in Eph. 2:1-5 was just like Paul’s experience.

He is an apostle "of Christ Jesus," that is, his authority came from Jesus Christ. While sometimes the term "apostle" is used in a non-technical sense, more often than not it is used in a technical way, referring to those whom the risen Christ called and commissioned. (See O'brien, 84) Paul says that he was an apostle by the "will of God." God's will is a theme in the letter, emphasizing God's purposes. Paul's apostleship was not of his own choosing (Gal 1:16). God appointed him from birth.

**Application**

- As an Apostle writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul's words have the same weight for us today. Because of this, we must listen with humility and attention. Paul is speaking to us through this letter by the Spirit. Charles Hodge says, “The epistle reveals itself as the work of the Holy Ghost as clearly as the stars declare their maker to be God.”

- Later Paul says that the church is built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). In Acts 2, the church was “devoted to
the Apostles’ teaching” (2:42). We too should love the Apostle Paul's instruction in this letter. It is a gift from God to us. I would encourage you to memorize all or portions of it.

**From where is Paul writing?** Three times he mentions imprisonment (3:1, 4:1, 6:20). I believe Paul wrote this letter near the end of his two-year imprisonment in Rome about the same time as Colossians, and Philemon, approximately AD 62. He was chained to a Roman soldier during this time but free to receive visitors. Of these visitors, one of them probably included a secretary who took down the words of Paul. Paul then sent all three letters with Tychicus who was with him in Rome.

According to Milton, 26.5% of the wording in Colossians appears in Ephesians. It is a good idea to read Colossians as you study Ephesians. (in Thielman, 8).

**#2: THE RECIPIENTS (1:1b)**

"to the saints in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1b).

There is a lot of discussion about whether “in Ephesus” was part of the original wording. Some documents do include it. However, other early documents omit it, having no geographical name in its place. But the grammatical construction is awkward if you omit it (Thielman, 13; O’brien, 85). It could be that it was simply dropped somehow. F.F. Bruce thinks that the churches of Asia Minor were to insert their own name. (O’brien, 86). O’brien concludes that it "was a general epistle sent to mainly Gentile believers in Southwestern Asia Minor, and that it was linked with Ephesus at an early stage, perhaps because of its being a strategic church or because it was one of the several cities to which the letter was sent."

With a similar position, Dr. Akin says the following (which expresses my view):

It is possible (probable) that Ephesians is a circular letter addressed to various churches in Asia Minor in the general vicinity of Ephesus. The circular address of the epistle explains the omission of a city name in the address. During Paul’s stay in Ephesus (the bulk of his third missionary journey recorded in Acts 18:23–21:17), the impact of his ministry was felt beyond the boundaries of the city of Ephesus. Consequently, it would be quite natural for him to write the Christian
A study of Paul's ministry in Ephesus seems valuable, though he was probably writing to the wider Ephesian region. I agree with Chapell who says, "the cultural environment of Ephesus in the first century clearly illuminates the type of Asia Minor social context Paul's audience experienced" (Chapell, 10). In other words, if it was included for several churches throughout in Asia Minor, then a look at Ephesus will still help us understand the context. In fact, Acts 19 says illustrates the connection between Ephesus and Asia Minor, as Luke writes as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (10, cf. 20:27).

Consider the (A) the Struggle in Ephesus and (B) the Saints in Ephesus.

A. The Struggle in Ephesus (Turn to Acts 19)

In 1 Corinthians 16 (a previous letter to another church written from Ephesus), Paul says,

"I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."

1 Cor 16:8-9

Here Paul mentions his long stay in Ephesus, which was about three years, the longest stay in his missionary journeys. Three months in synagogue (19:8), two years in the lecture hall (19:10), and "some time longer" (19:22).

One reason for the long duration was that he had many great opportunities for ministry. Among them was the daily public teaching in the hall of Tyrannus.

Those opportunities involved great opposition, though. In Acts 20:18-19 that he served in Asia with tears and trials. In 1 Cor 15:32, he says that he faced wild beasts in Ephesus. This might be a figure of speech, but it is likely a reference to what happened in Acts 19 in the theatre.

• App: Just because something is difficult, doesn't mean that you have moved out of the will of God. The will of God doesn't mean that
you are free from opposition. Opportunities and opposition are often mingled together.

What made this a difficult region in which to minister?

The Size of Ephesus
Ephesus is modern day Western Turkey. It was a busy port city, and the fourth or fifth largest cities in the world at this time (Chapell, 10). It’s massive theatre held about 25,000 people. The city hosted athletic events, similar to the Olympics. It was at the junction of four major roads in Asia Minor. There were several villages surrounding it. It was the gateway of Asia that became the gateway of the Gospel, as Paul's ministry in the city reached out into "all of Asia" (Acts 19:10).

• App: Today, much of the world is urban, and there is a massive need for churches to be planted in dense urban areas, where there's great diversity. Here in Raleigh we have students from all over the world... Picture a missionary today moving to somewhere like Manhattan or Istanbul (another gateway city) – massive city with great need for the gospel and local churches.

The Spiritual Warfare in Ephesus
If the size of this city alone were not enough to overwhelm a missionary, there was also tremendous spiritual warfare in Ephesus. Let me mention some expressions of the spiritual warfare.

First, the city was known for being addicted to different forms of paganism. Some were more sophisticated, and others more sleazy. The sophisticated types embraced the Greek notion of true enlightenment, which was about rising to high levels of mysterious knowledge. This knowledge was to be obtained not just by learning, but by experience, through both erotic and ascetic practices (cf., 1 Tim. 4:1-4).

As an example of the sleaziness of Ephesus, there remains today on the streets coming from the ancient dock, a sign carved in stone that guides used to direct sailors to brothels (Chapell, 19). (pic)

The culture was steeped in materialism, sensuality, and perverted idolatrous practices.
Second, it was also a tremendously difficult place of opposition because of the Roman emperor cult. The worship of the emperor was a prominent feature of life at all levels in Asia at this time. Caesar Augustus was spoken of as the "Savior." His birth was hailed as "the beginning of good tidings to the world" and the calendar was adjusted in light of his birth (Thielman, 21).

So there was a "gospel conflict." On coins, statues, temples and other items there was the gospel of Augustus, but the church was proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

Today, you can see the statue of the Roman emperor Trajan among the ruins in Ephesus. He ruled after Paul, but you can catch the spirit of Roman rulers at his time. The statute shows Trajan's foot on top of the world, giving the idea that he was a god (show picture). (It also shows that they weren't ignorant about the shape of the world).

Now compare this picture with Ephesians 1:21-22. There's only one who has all things under his feast, the Lord Jesus. When Christians said "Jesus is Lord" they were saying Caesar is not.

Third, it was a hard place because Ephesus was also the headquarters for the cult of the goddess Diana (Roman) (or Greek "Artemis"), whose temple was one of the seven wonders of the world! (show picture). It was once four times as large as the Parthenon. Paul's Ephesian ministry threatened the sale of those who made silver models of Diana (cf., Acts 19:23ff). Today there is just a scant remain of a pillar (show picture). It's about a mile from the ancient theatre that is still standing.

Perhaps the context of the Ephesians prompted to Paul to write in the particular style that he uses in this letter. He uses phrases like "principalities and powers," "the heavenly places," and emphasizes Jesus' lordship over all. Ephesus seems to have been obsessed with demons, magic, and idolatry, particularly the worship of Diana.

*Picture of Warfare (Acts 19:9-20)*
Paul had a short stay in Ephesus, which he proclaimed Christ in the synagogues (Acts 18:19-20). Then we get a flavor of the spiritual climate in Ephesus in Acts 19.

First we read about Paul's teaching ministry:

> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (19:9-10)

Paul begins in the synagogue, speaking for three months. Then he went to the hall of Tyrannus, where he taught for two years. Paul was in a public auditorium or lecture hall, where lectures were given during the midday siesta period. (Paul also probably took a break from his trade).

**App:** We can learn a lot from this experience, but I'll mention only two:
- **One can gather anywhere to teach the Bible because Christians do not need a temple, sacrifices nor priests.** You might compare it to a community center where there are classes offered on a variety of subjects today. We meet in a generic facility and will probably continue unless someone wants to give us a church building. That's okay. We will always be a little ghetto.
- **Find way to share the gospel where your daily context.** Paul is using the typical siesta period to teach. This is sort of like you doing a Bible study before work begins with colleagues, or a businessmens luncheon, or starting something at your school during breaks.

Paul's teaching spilled out from the hall into the villages!

Then we read about the demonic opposition in Ephesus:

> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I
recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. (Acts 19:9-20 ESV)

Paul performed miracles that confirmed his message. Acts is a narrative and narratives are “descriptive not prescriptive,” meaning that Luke is simply describing what happened; he isn't prescribing that we do this. We aren't to go start an apron ministry! We should certainly apply the narratives but they're different from epistles, which give us clear exhortations.

Notice that he spirit leaped upon the Sons of Sceva and overpowered them, leaving them naked and wounded (publicly humiliated).

The result of Paul's ministry? There was awe, confession and repentance, and the exaltation of Jesus. This dramatic account culminates with the burning of books (which probably contained spells, incantations and other cultish practices).

- It was a spiritual awakening. Can you imagine those wrapped up in false religions, cults, and superstition, burning the books and worshiping Jesus?

Not everyone was thrilled with this movement, however. Luke mentions that Paul "stayed in Asia for a while" (19:22), and then verse 23, he writes:

"About that time there arose

no little disturbance concerning the Way"

(my emphasis)

These Christians were "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) here in Ephesus.
I’ve been asking this question, "Is that said about our local church?" Are we impacting the city? Let's pray that we can make a holy disturbance.

Notice that it was referred to as "the Way." Christianity early on was known as "the Way." (cf., 19:9; 9:2; 22:4). It was a new way of life. It was entirely different from other religions. It was centered on Jesus who said he was "the way, the truth and the life."

This holy disturbance, led to some series opposition next.

As you look at the next verses, you see that Paul now faces opposition from a fourth source: the silversmiths. This highlights the materialistic culture, as well as the superstitious culture of Ephesus. The next passage that some are upset because the gospel is now affecting the socio-economic system. Demetrius says:

> These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

(Acts 19:25-27 ESV)

Because many Ephesians were turning to Christ, they no longer wanted their silver statues. This created a massive eruption in Ephesus.

As a result, they drag Paul and his companions into the theatre where they were all but killed (20:28-41)

Finally, if you add to the list of these trials the "plots of the Jews" (Acts 20:19), then you have an incredibly difficult place to minister!

Amazingly, he spent about three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), probably around AD 52-54 (Thielman, 16). He had great success there, especially among the Gentiles but it wasn’t apart from opposition.

Application:
The church in Ephesus was birthed in large part, in the midst of opposition. If you plan on planting a church, or going to a tough city, and I know many of you will, remember this pattern. It will be a struggle. You may bleed. But take comfort in the story, as well. Be prepared for war. Be confident in the Lord of all.

Though some of you won’t move to these massive population centers, filled with almost entirely unconverted people, remember that we still live in a culture filled with the following: (1) idolatry, (2) superstition and the occult, (3) demonic activity, (4) gross, public sexual immorality, (5) materialism, (6) a love for education devoid of God, and (7) the worship of political leaders. Remember, the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to break through these forces, and bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. There is only One Lord. Proclaim him with boldness.

B. The Saints in Ephesus

In the middle of this culture, were "the saints." The word "saint" (cf., 1:15, 18, 3:8, 18, 4:12, 5:3, 6:18) has its roots in the OT, which speaks of God choosing a people from among the nations to be a "royal priesthood and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6).

Christ has made us into a holy people (Eph. 5:26). Positionally, we are holy because we are united with Christ. Now, we must live in a manner that is consistent with this position.

Personal holiness is about becoming in practice what we are in position.

Who were these saints? There were some Jewish believers there before Paul’s arrival (Acts 18:24-27), but later it seems that the churches were primarily Gentile.

The Ephesians churches were perhaps made up of perhaps thirty-forty people in a home (Treblico, 98).

But these churches had had about a seven to eight year absence from Paul by the time Ephesians was written. They needed instruction.
There may have been a lack of unity among the Pre-Paul converts and those who came later, and a division between the Jew and Gentile groups.

- **Application**: Ephesians, then, provides some critically important truths about the **nature of the gospel and how we are unified**. Ephesians is like Romans in this regard. **In Romans Paul is also trying to unite the church, Jew and Gentile, around the gospel.**

Paul also calls them "**faithful**." This term most likely means "believers" rather than "trustworthy." They were those who trusted Christ for salvation (cf., Eph. 1:13).

While they live in Ephesus, the saints are "**in Christ.**" They live in union with Christ.

Ephesians focuses more on union with Christ and on being "in Christ" more than any other letter, about **thirty-six times** (Snodgrass, 39). **In Paul’s 13 epistles it occurs some 164 times.**

This is the heart of Christianity; to be united to Jesus Christ. **Christians are people who are in Christ. You are united to his death, and his resurrection (2:5-7).**

**Application:**
- Only by being "in" Christ that one can have access to "every spiritual blessing." If you are in Christ, then "Christ's riches are your riches, His resources are your resources, His righteousness is your righteousness, his power is your power. His position is our position: where he is, we are... what he has, we have" (MacArthur, 10).
- And because we are in Christ, though opposition be on every side, we are secure in him.
- Your identity therefore is in Christ; **not in your performance, your popularity, or your productivity, or prominence.**

**#3: THE GREETING (1:2)**

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"
This greeting is the same type of greeting Paul uses for his other letters. By saying, “Grace” Paul is not saying “hello,” but is rather giving a "prayer wish" for grace to come to the Ephesians.

Paul is the theologian of grace; grace runs through this letter. It appears 12 times in this letter (charis). (cf., 1:6-8a; 2:4-9; 4:7; 4:29)

I want grace to run through IDC.

The same is true for "Peace." Paul was praying for God to bring peace to his readers. We learn much about God’s peace in Ephesians:

- 2:14 – “[Christ] is our peace”
- 2:17 – “He came and preached peace”
- 4:3 – “maintain the bond of peace”
- 6:15- “the gospel of peace”

These letters were read aloud in corporate worship (Col. 4:16). As he heard them, blessing was coming to you.

This grace and peace comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

- What a magnificent picture of the Father in this letter (cf., 1:17; 4:6).

- There is also a majestic picture of the Lord Jesus as well, as the cosmic king of all.

Jesus fills the mind of Paul. Notice the very end of the letter (6:23-24). Believers “love our Lord Jesus with love incorruptible.”

#4: THE MESSAGE

I think the key thought is this phrase "in Christ."
Ephesians shows us that God is forming a new humanity through Christ, by the Spirit. It describes how Jesus Christ died for sinners, was raised, and is now exalted above all competitors, and is now the head of the cosmos and the church. Through our union with Christ, we share in these same events – raised with Christ and seated with him (Eph. 2:5-7). This great salvation is owing to the grace of God (Eph 2:8-10).

In the letter, there are several "formerly but now" expressions

- 2:4 – We were dead in sin now we are “alive with Christ”
- 2:13 – We were separated from Christ but now in Christ Jesus we “have been brought near”
- 2:19 – We were “strangers” but now we are “fellow citizens”
- 4:20-24 – we were darkened in understanding but now we have “learned Christ.” We have put off the “old self” and put on the “new self”
- 5:8 – we were darkness but now we “are light in the Lord”

Ephesians divides naturally into two parts (note verb tenses):

1. Who We Are in Christ (Our Position)
   
2. How We Are to Live in Christ (Our Practice)

1. Our Position: Who We Are in Christ (1:3-3:21)

In the opening chapters, we read about how God in his glorious grace, saves sinners through Jesus Christ, granting them spiritual life. The focus is not on what we must do, but rather on what God has done for us. The verb tenses are mainly passive.

   A. We Now Have New Life in Christ (1:3-2:10)

In the first two chapters, the new life we have in Christ is explained with power and beauty. Look at this new life we have:
• We have been chosen and adopted by the Father (1:4-6)
• We have been redeemed by the Son (1:7-12)
• We have been sealed with the Spirit (1:13-14)
• We have been given resurrection power (1:19)
• We have been given eyes to see the Lordship of Jesus (1:15-23)
• We have been brought from death to life by grace through faith in Christ (2:1-10)
• We have been raised and seated with him in the heavenly places, "so that in the coming ages he may show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:5-7)
• We have been created for good works (2:10)

Christianity isn't about becoming religious. It isn't about becoming a "nice person." It isn't about conforming to a list of rules. It isn't about adopting a philosophy. It isn't about financial prosperity. It's about becoming a new person. It's about going from death to life. It's about going from darkness to light.

We aren't calling you to religion, we are calling you to Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.

A. We Now Have a New Community in Christ (2:11-3:21)

When God saves sinners who brings them into a new community. This new community called the church is made up of various groups of people. Both Jew and Gentile are now one. Notice how Paul says it:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might create one new man in the place of two.

Eph. 2:14, 15

We now belong to a new community united in Jesus. We are now "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (2:19).

Stott says, "The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history."
On the contrary, the church is God’s new community. For his purpose … is not just to save individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build up his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory“ (The Living Church, 19-20).

• Isn’t it awesome to know you belong to something that exists the display the glory of God? Yes, it would be great to wear the jersey of your favorite team, but you belong to something much better! You belong to the church of the living God.

• When you become a Christian, you belong to God, and you belong to brothers and sisters.

Timmis says, “It is not that I belong to God and then make a decision to join a church. My being in Christ means being in Christ with others who are in Christ. This is my identity. This is our identity…. If the church is the body of Christ, then we should not live as disembodied Christians” (Total Church, 41).

Are you living out your corporate identity by belonging to a local, visible church? Do you have brothers and sisters that you love, serve, weep with, rejoice with, and celebrate with? You were saved for community.

2. Our Practice: How We Are to Live in Christ (4:1-6:24)

In the second half of the letter, Paul shifts. He turns his attention to the responsibilities of the saints. Now, many of the verb tenses are imperatives.

A. We Must Now Pursue Unity and Purity in Christ (4:1-5:14)

The vision for unity that is explained in chapter 2:11-22 is now fleshed out in these verses. How can we be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3).

Paul goes on to describe how the following unites us:

- Our distinct character (1-2),
- Our doctrinal convictions (4-6)
• Our diverse capabilities (7-14)
• Our dependence on Christ and one another (15-17)

Then in 4:17-5:14, Paul talks about a particular way that believers are to “walk” (4:17, 5:2, 5:8). They are to live out their new identity in purity and love.

B. We Must Now Pursue Submissiveness and Stability in Christ (5:15-6:24)

Finally, Paul begins to talk about we should live out Spirit-filled relationships (5:14-6:9). He emphasizes submission, love and respect in our relationships within the church, marriage, as parents and children, and in the workplace. Christians should pursue harmony in the home, at work and in the church.

We also have an enemy to stand against (6:10-20). The book closes with vivid imagery of our spiritual battle with the devil. By the power of God, we are to take our stand.

So, Ephesians is teaching us about a whole new way to live. New people, pursue different lifestyles than the surrounding culture. That was a challenge in Ephesus, and it's a challenge today.

Don't Lose Your First Love

The last thing I want you to notice is the last phrase in Eph 6:23-24. Paul closes this great letter to the saints with an implicit admonition to love Jesus purely and simply, "who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible."

Reading the book of Ephesians should increase our love for Jesus.

What is interesting about the church in Ephesus is that even though it had an amazing history, the final mention in Revelation 2:1-7 about this great church is that they "lost their first love."

Think about it: Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Paul, Timothy and now John had ministered to this church. What a heritage! But now, about 40 years after the first generation of believers, they had lost their love.
Though they were commended for spotting heresy (Paul predicted wolves would enter in Acts 20, and 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John illustrates this), they lost their love. They had a cold orthodoxy.

Is your service to Jesus mechanical?
Do you love him, or are you just using him for your own ambitions?

Jesus told them to repent. That’s what we must do if we have lost this love for Christ. He says do what you did at first. Return to extolling Jesus for who he is and what he has done.

Sadly, as you look at the ruins of Ephesus you see that they never got their first love back.

Final Questions

1. Are you in Christ? Are you enjoying the privileges of being in Christ? Do you understand who you are in Christ? Are you living out of that new identity in community?

2. Have you lost your first love? Has your love for Jesus grown cold? Let’s pray for our love for Christ to be rekindled in this series.