

NT Reading Plan 2020

Living Hope Fellowship
Ephesians 1-6

Freedom of Focus

Ephesians is like drinking from the fire hose of theology. I've sat down twice already to put these notes in order and just keep getting blown away by the grandeur of this epistle. This is one of four letters Paul wrote while in prison (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Do you feel like your freedoms are being infringed today? Paul is in prison for his faith! Where is Paul's focus through every line of this letter? It's certainly not railing against his government or dragging on about his situation. Paul's focus is on the gospel of Christ.

1. Where do you need to realign your focus so it's more like Paul's?

According to Plan

Ephesians very clearly presents the outworking of the Father's eternal plan of redemption in Christ. What the Father had in mind before anything was created has been secured through Christ and is being applied by the Spirit. Everything is going according to plan and will culminate in the coming of the eternal kingdom of Christ.

2. How many of these words can you find: plan, purpose, will, counsel, especially in the first chapter?

Trinity

Paul builds his main themes of salvation, knowledge, mystery & revelation, the Church, and strength/power off of the doctrine of the Trinity. Before Paul applies these themes to the Christians, he prefaces each doctrine with who God is in triunity and what God has done in redemption. For example, **salvation** is the work of a triune God. The **knowledge** we need comes by way of the Trinity revealing the **mystery** of the gospel. The **Church** and relationships of human beings are to be patterned after the relationships of the Trinity. The **power** to live out the newness of our spiritual lives in Christ is derived from the almighty power of the Trinity.

- **Salvation** (1:3-14 which is one long sentence in the Greek!)
- Prayer for **knowledge** of the gospel (1:17)
- The **Church** as temple (2:18, 22)
- The **mystery** of the gospel revealed (3:1-6)
- Prayer for spiritual **strength** (3:14-19)
- The **Church** as body of Christ (4:1-7)

3. Pick up 3 colored pens and go through 3:11-22 highlighting Father, Son, & Spirit with different colors. Do you see the connection to the Trinity there?

Grace

Salvation is all of grace, not of works. Ephesians contains some of believers' all-time favorite verses on this theme of grace. Remember that God's grace goes infinitely beyond just giving us something we don't deserve. God gives us Christ, the exact opposite of what we deserve. (See 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24).

Eternal Perspective

This letter gives you perspective stretching back to eternity past and launching you into eternity future.

"even as he [the Father] chose us in him [Christ] **before the foundation** of the world" (1:4a)

"as a plan for **the fullness of time**, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (1:9).

"so that in **the coming ages** he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7).

"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is **the plan of the mystery hidden for ages** in God, who created all things" (Eph 3:8-9).

4. Who is mentioned in every one of these verses? Who is our eternal hope connected to?

In Christ Jesus

Paul is clear that all of the blessings believers receive is because of their union with Christ by faith. In a very real, vital way, the Scripture teaches that Christians are forever attached to Jesus Christ, therefore we have eternal life, are guaranteed a resurrection & new bodies, are seated with him in heaven, etc. This is a theme I trust will encourage a lifetime of study to unpack the riches of what the Father has done for us in Christ. In fact, you won't exhaust that study in this lifetime or the coming age (2:7)! Jesus/Christ and pronouns that refer to him occur dozens and dozens of times in this letter.

5. As a believer, what are at least 3 things that you have in Christ from Ephesians 2:1-10?

Power

The power of our almighty triune God has defeated rival powers through Christ's cross and, by extension, through the proclamation of the gospel by the church. Therefore, the church does not wrestle against flesh but much greater powers, so Christians must don appropriate armor for that kind of fight (all of which are pictures of putting on Christ himself like a new outfit). See 1:19-21 contrasted with 2:2; 3:7, 10, 16-17, 20; 6:10-12.

6. Since Christ is seated at God's right hand far above all other powers (1:21), and we are seated with Christ (2:6), how else would we defeat the enemy other than through the strength of Christ (6:10)?

Knowledge

"Knowledge" words occur frequently in Ephesians. For example, see 1:8, 17-18; 3:3-10, 18-19; 4:17-20; 5:15-17. The newly expanded revelation Paul has gained in Christ is cause for our deepest thinking and meditation, therefore Paul's prays to God that we might now that which is beyond knowledge. There's so much here for us to know, we'll never be done exploring the vastness of God's riches and kindness to us in Christ (see 3:19). How do we know that which surpasses knowledge? Keep looking to Christ.

Mystery & Revelation

Related to the theme of knowledge which permeates Ephesians is the concept of mystery. A "mystery" in the NT is something that was once hidden but now has been "made known" through further divine "revelation" to the apostle Paul. These new revelations tell us of the Father's will in Christ (1:9), the church comprised of Jew AND Gentile (3:1-6); marriage as a picture of the gospel (5:32), and the fullness of the gospel message itself now understood through the light of *New Testament* teaching (6:19).

The Church

Some of the richest teaching on the nature of the Church is found in this short letter. Paul explains that the Church is one body, not two. Where nothing else ever could, the gospel of Jesus Christ alone breaks down previous barriers between Jew and Gentile (see 2:11 and following). Utilizing two metaphors, the temple (2:11-22) and the body of Christ (1:23; 3:6; 4:4-16; 5:23, 30), Paul explores the riches of the Church more deeply. He then goes on to apply this teaching to various human relationships within the Church. In addition to dealing with ethnic division, the gospel speaks to husbands & wives, children & parents, slaves & masters.

Doctrine & Application

Paul neatly spends the first 3 chapters on laying down the doctrinal foundation of who the triune God is and what he has done. Only then does he proceed to giving exhortations and commands to the church in the latter 3 chapters. The gospel has very practical applications but you must first know the gospel (note the first words of chapter 4)!

7. What needs to change in your life so that you are walking according to your calling?