

Studying the Letter to the Ephesians

Ephesians is about learning to let who we are in Christ, shape how we perform in life.

Ephesians Study 4 (⊕ 50 min.)



Warm Up (⊕ 10 min.)

1. Greeting / Welcome

2. Prayer Requests (try to balance the amount of time between prayer and / or testimony by limiting the amount of prayer requests and/or time for testimony sharing.)

3. Testimony Sharing (*Optional* - prior to the group study time, ask one person to share for 3-5 minutes on how the recent truths being studied have impacted their life. Remember: *authenticity is the key* - What have you (or a group member you've asked to testify) shared lately that gives them insight into your journey? Try to share things pertaining to the recent theme of the study.)




Overview of Today's Study (⊕ 2 min.)

Lesson Title: *"Direct Access"*

Lesson Theme: *God took away the prejudices of race and nationality by making access to Himself equally available to everyone through Jesus Christ.*








By the End of the Study today, we want to be able to answer this study's **"Key Question."**

Today's Key Question  How does God turn prejudice into compassion?

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- Lesson Outline:**
1.  Connecting the Studies
 2.  Bible Passage Study
 - a.  Set the Context
 - b.  3 Study Topics
 3.  Group Discussion
 4.  Review / Preview and  Key Question

1. Connecting the Studies (⊕ 3 min.)

A. During our last studies we observed how all 3 Persons of the Trinity had an important role in giving Christians a new identity. We saw that prior to our spiritual birth, we were dead to God, but we were very much alive to this world, to the devil, and to our personal flesh habits. We also noted that the way in which God makes the believer alive spiritually, is also the way in which He supplies the power and the desire to perform for Him.

B. What does this mean for our lives here and now?

One: I can expect to see changes in my thinking and sometimes a conflict when I try to operate under my old habits or selfish ways of living my life.

Two: I have been purposefully designed to perform God's will for my life. When I am pursuing it, I will enjoy satisfaction and fulfillment. *But the opposite of this is also true.* If I avoid God's call on my life, I experience discontentment and I will attempt to fill that void with whatever the world offers as a substitute.

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2. Bible Passage Study (⌚ 20 min.)

Set the Context Turn to & Read Eph. 2:11-22

1. **From and To:** The Apostle Paul has been shifting his readers' perspective from an outward judgment of people to an inward or spiritual consideration. He was teaching the Ephesians to see people, the way God sees people: *as either spiritually dead or spiritually alive.*

2. **Issue of Their Day:** Paul wanted the first century Christians to realize that God has always assessed man's spiritual condition by an individual's faith in Him. *Race was never the deciding factor* for spiritual regeneration. **Gal. 3:6-8** reiterates that even before Israel was a nation, **belief** in God's revealed method for salvation and spiritual rebirth was the deciding factor for one's eternal destination. First century Jews had had hundreds of years of traditional teaching that had misconstrued the truth of justification by faith. *Paul wanted Christians everywhere to know that the single distinguishing characteristic among mankind was their identity in Christ.*

3. **For Us in the Here and Now:** We have a tendency to judge people by external things and at the same time we do not have the ability to see internal things. So where does that leave us? It tells us we shouldn't judge or pre-judge anyone. Not only do we not have the capacity to properly judge someone else, but we also do not have the right to (Rom. 14:4).

4. **Continuing the Study:** In our study today, we will see how all people that have received a new identity because of Jesus Christ are united as one kind of people. These people aren't Jews or Gentiles or Americans or Brits etc. but are **in Christ.**

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Study Topic 1

Historical Prejudice – Eph. 2:11-13

Illustration ILL. Listen to this true story. Rabbi Michael Weisser lived in Lincoln, Nebraska. And for more than 3 years, Larry Trapp, a self-proclaimed Nazi & Ku Klux Klansman, directed a torrent of hate-filled mailings & phone calls toward the rabbi.

Trapp promoted white supremacy, anti-Semitism, & other messages of prejudice, declaring his apartment the KKK state headquarters & himself the grand dragon. His whole purpose in life seemed to be to spew out hate-ridden racial slurs & obscene remarks against Weisser & all those like him.

At first, the Weissers were so afraid they locked their doors & worried themselves almost sick over the safety of their family. But one day Rabbi Weisser found out that Trapp was a 42-year-old clinically blind, double amputee. And he became convinced that Trapp's own physical helplessness was a source of the bitterness he expressed.

So Rabbi Weisser decided to do the unexpected. He left a message on Trapp's answering machine, telling him of another side of life...a life free of hatred & racism.

Rabbi Weisser said, "I probably called 10 times & left messages before he finally picked up the phone & asked me why I was harassing him. I said that I'd like to help him. I offered him a ride to the grocery store or to the mall."

Trapp was stunned. Disarmed by the kindness & courtesy, he started thinking. He later admitted, through tears, that he heard in the rabbi's voice, "something I hadn't experienced in years. It was love."

Slowly the bitter man began to soften. One night he called the Weissers & said he wanted out, but didn't know how. They grabbed a bucket of fried chicken & took him dinner. Before long they made a trade: in return for their love he gave them his swastika rings, hate tracts, & Klan robes.

That same day Trapp gave up his Ku Klux Klan recruiting job & dumped the rest of his propaganda in the trash. "They showed me so much love that I couldn't help but love them back," he finally confessed.

If that could happen in Lincoln, Nebraska, what could happen here in our community, in our neighborhoods, if we truly began to live lives that **showed** the love of Jesus to those around us?

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A. Reread Eph. 2:11-13. What do these verses tell us?

God reached out to which people group first? Israel. Israel over the centuries of being God's chosen people, in pride, labeled everyone that was not Jewish as a Gentile or a non-Jew. A key distinguishing factor for being Jewish was the physical attribute of circumcision. The Jews by Christ's time had reached a point of arrogance in their "special" relationship with God that they felt it was proper to degrade non-Jews by calling them *uncircumcised*. In fact, everyone that was not circumcised as a Jew was considered unclean and unholy.

B. What do these verses mean?

1. God doesn't evaluate people the way the Jews did, based on physical attributes. God's evaluation of people is Christ based. Because the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah, they were the ones actually unholy. While they were busy isolating non-Jews from Jews, they missed the opportunity to become spiritually born and have true holiness in their inner person where it really matters.

2. Now that Messiah has come, everyone has the ability through Christ to get close to God. Having the good fortune of being born a Jew was no longer a deciding factor for closeness to God. Because of Christ's sacrifice ALL nations and races could and can get intimate with God.

C. How should this principle impact my life?

1. I should evaluate myself the way God does, from the inside out. I should worry less about my image and more about how close to God I am. Close **fellowship** with God fixes a bad **image**.


 Question 1

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2. If I'm not close to God, it is not God's fault. God has done everything necessary for me to get as close to Him as I want to be.

3. I should realize that every believer (myself included) has been saved from a sinful history. T or F Every believer has the same right to get close to God.  **Question 2** I have no right to view others as insignificant or as less important than myself.

4. I need to evaluate how I view others: How do I treat people that have nothing to offer me?



Study Topic 2


Christ "Levels the Playing Field" – Read Eph. 2:14-18

A. What do these verses tell us?

1. Jesus is the reason we are no longer the enemies God. By allowing His body to be abused and punished in our place, God's righteous judgment against the sins of mankind were completely satisfied.

2. Jesus is the reason we have a any access at all to God; He brought us close. We didn't reach out to God out of the goodness of our own heart. He reached to us and did everything necessary to make relationship possible with Him.

B. What do these verses mean?


1. Jesus "leveled the playing field": access to God is the same for everyone.  **Question 3** Relationship with God is fair for everyone because the way to be close to Him is the same for everyone – through Christ.

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2. Andy Stanley said it this way: "Everybody's welcome; everybody gets in the same way; and the price of admission has already been paid. Everybody's **welcome**; everybody gets in the **same way**; and the price of admission has already **been paid**."

 **Question 4** What could be more fair than that?"

C. How should this principle impact my life?

1. Jesus is the reason we can have peace with other people. Race and nationality are not acceptable factors for division. Spiritual condition is the only thing that truly differentiates one person from another.

2. If a person is a Christian, he or she should be reaching out to others to offer the kind of compassion that God has shown them. Remember, "Everybody's welcome."



Study Topic 3

Individual and Collective "Citizenship" – Eph. 2:19-22

A. What do these verses tell us?

Believers have a new and eternal citizenship. If a person has placed their trust in Christ, they belong to a new eternal group. This group is founded on all of the founding fathers of the Old Testament prophets and the apostles of the New Testament.

B. What do these verses mean?


Christ laid the foundation for unity at an unprecedented scale through a new citizenship for all believers. Believers are united despite race, despite nationality, despite personal background, despite gender, despite time, despite personality...

C. How should this principle impact my life?


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1. **When I evaluate** my personal citizenship in the Body of Christ, would I rate myself as a “**model citizen?**”  **Question 5**

2. **I must ask myself,** “Do I care more about my nationality or political party than I do about my eternal citizenship?”

3.  Group Discussion (⊕ 10 min.) Based on the time remaining, here are some suggested discussion questions. You may or may not have time enough for all of them.

(Are you facilitating the group's discussion or doing most of the talking during this time?)

From our last few studies and today's lesson, how does God assess holiness? He sees the spirit of man as either born again in holiness through faith in Christ's sacrifice or still dead in sinful unholiness.

Is there anything or any act in this physical world that can make a person's soul holy? Holiness and unholiness have nothing to do with any physical activity. Holiness is a spiritual quality that people can only achieve in their own spirit by receiving Christ's holiness by believing in His sacrifice. We have none of our own righteousness to offer. Regarding holiness and this physical world, as Christians mature in their relationship with Christ, His holiness which is in us begins to show itself in our behavior.

So how should we see others, do we have the right to judge others or be prejudiced toward others? *We should see others as either with or without Christ.* And since we can't see a person's soul to determine whether they have Christ or not, we need to equally share Christ with everyone and let the rightful Judge work out the details as He sees fit.

Are we judging someone else when we try to determine their spiritual condition? Not necessarily. Assessing another's spiritual condition can be helpful when trying to determine what course of ministry to pursue with a particular person – whether they require evangelism or discipling.

How should the truth about each of us being a “habitation of God” influence our behavior? If I take the time to consider the Holy Spirit's constant presence in me, I should be conscious about the choices I make and the things I allow myself to be involved in.

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4. ↔ Review / Preview (⊕ 5 min.) (What is the group learning to do that they can repeat when they are away from the group or this study is completed?)

🔑 If You Forget Everything Else, Remember...

How does God turn prejudice into compassion?

By making **access** to Himself the same for everyone, we are compelled to show **kindness** to all others the way God **showed** His love to each of us. 🖐️ **Question 6**

Getting Ready for Next Week

1. Remember your alone time with God - prayer & Bible reading
2. Bible memory key verse for next week's study: **Eph. 3:12**
3. 🔑 Key question for **next week's** study:

How does prophecy strengthen a Christian's faith?

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