

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 5 (⊕ 50 min.)



Warm Up (⊕ 7 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 insight into your journey? Try to share things pertaining to the recent themes of the study.)



Overview of Today's Study (⊕ 1 min.)

Text: Turn to Eph. 3:1-13

Lesson Title: *"Revelation: The Confidence Booster"*

Lesson Theme: *As God reveals information about His future plans it reinforces the faith of believers.*

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 prophecy strengthen a Christian's faith?

(Handout Question 1 Answer is at End of Lesson)

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

1. Connecting the Studies (⊕ 2 min.)

A. During our last studies we saw how all 3 Persons of the Trinity were involved in giving Christians their new identity. We saw that prior to our spiritual birth we were dead to God, but alive to the world, the devil, and our flesh. We've seen that the way in which God gives new life to the believer's spirit is also the method by which He supplies the power and the desire to perform for Him. Last week we saw that all Christians are united by their identity in Christ. There is no reason for prejudice among believers based on race, nationality, or anything else.

B. How should this affect my performance toward others?

I need to see others as God sees them, either with or without Christ. Then I need to work to either help introduce them to Christ or help them get closer to Him if they're already saved.

Remember the Christians Job Description in 2 Cor 5:18?

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

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2. Bible Passage Study (⌚ 30 min.)

Set the Context Turn to & Read Eph. 3:1-13

1. *The Big Picture:* Having established the case for the unity of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Christ, Paul moves to reinforce his readers' faith by showing them that this unity of believers was God's plan from the beginning. *Listen to these verses outside of Ephesians:*

Gen 12:2-3 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Gen 17:5-7 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

Rom 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Gal 3:6-8 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

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2. *For Us Here and Now:* We can have tremendous confidence that we belong in the Family of God. It was always His plan to invite all who would believe in Messiah into the household of faith whether Jew or not.

3. *Continuing the Study:* In our study today, we will see how all people that have a new identity in Christ can be confident in the reliability of the Bible. The Christian's belief is not based on blind trust but on evidences that have consistently proven themselves over time and are continuing to do so.



Study Topic 1

Understanding What God Revealed to Paul – Eph. 3:1-7

Illustration How many saw the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*? Do you remember how it opened? The quote fades in on the screen:

"...with His stripes we are healed..."

And then the words fade in:

The Prophet Isaiah, 700 B.C.

Isaiah had written those words speaking of Messiah well over a half a millennium before Jesus would actually perform the work of His sacrifice. The fulfillment of this prophecy is just one of hundreds of prophecies that have been distinctly fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

The way in which this movie opened was a powerful way to communicate that the historical events of Christ's life were more than legend or random coincidences. The fulfillment of such types of prophecies offers tremendous evidence for Christians to have confidence in their reliance upon God's Word.

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Now, here is an example of why this is important in 2006:

An email message was sent to some of us here in the church bringing our attention to a particular mindset in our country.

A Christian man in Texas had written to ABC's on-line web person to complain against the immoral programming ABC has been pursuing. In his complaint, the Texas man referenced the Bible as the basis for his moral values which he felt were being assaulted by ABC's programming.

Here is ABC's reply from the ABC on-line webmaster:

How about getting your nose out of the Bible (which is ONLY a book of stories compiled by MANY different writers hundreds of years ago) and read the declaration of independence (what our nation is built on), where it says "All Men are Created equal," and try treating them that way for a change! Or better yet, try thinking for yourself and stop using an archaic book of stories as your lame crutch for your existence. You are in minority in this country and your boycott will not affect us or our freedom of statement.

Here's a partial summary of the attitude the world has toward Christianity:

- a. The Bible is only a book of stories.
- b. The Bible is of less value than the Declaration of Independence.
- c. Christians should think independently and not rely on the Bible.
- d. The Bible is only a "lame crutch" for a believer's reason for existence.
- e. Christians are a minority and are powerless to affect change in our country.

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Here's the truth regarding these mindsets:

- a. As God gave His written Word over the years, He commanded it to be highly valued, memorized, and obeyed because it *is* truth.
- b. It is to be respected above all other written works because it is the only one which is **"God-breathed"**, inspired by God. All other writings, while they may contain true statements, are ultimately flawed or imperfect as they are only written by men.
- c. From the beginning of recorded time, when mankind has acted independently from God, tragedy always results. The consequences of self-sufficiency are consistently negative.
- d. If the Bible's truth about the reason for our existence were wrong, mankind would be the most desperately empty, sorrowful, fearful creatures in existence. We have the ability to be self aware with the reality that our existence will be extinguished when physical life ceases. At least the animals aren't able to reason about their impending demise. Thankfully, there is more to us than meets the eye. We are indeed spirit beings living in a physical world.
- e. Finally, history has recorded how God would raise up generations of believers to do a work for Him and how their influence changed their society. God would bless not only the believers but the entire nation in which they belonged.

The account in the letter is real. Jim Neugent, concerned with what he had seen on TV in April 1999, sought a way to let ABC know he disapproved of their programming choices. He chose to contact them using the general webmaster e-mail link on the ABC website. The webmaster, probably frustrated with Neugent's poor choice of avenues to express his displeasure, indeed responded as Neugent claimed. Immediately after getting the webmaster's tragically tactless response, Neugent sent it to the world.

However, his chain letter doesn't tell what happened after he spread the word. ABC decried the actions of its employee and promptly fired him and issued a personal apology to Mr. Neugent. They pointed out that he acted without authorization and his comments "reflect neither the view of ABC nor of its executives." They also noted that they took his concerns under advisement.

We like bad news better than good. We like thinking that TV networks are huge, heartless corporations with a hive mind. If one employee says something negative, he or she represents the entire organization. It's not nearly as interesting to consider that companies like ABC have employees who are capable of acting on their own and experiencing terrible lapses of judgment. So, it's no wonder that the rest of the story has yet to catch up with this chain, even several years (and many more gay TV characters) later. Break this Chain!

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A. Reread Eph. 3:1-7. What do these verses tell us?

1. God's plan to bring non-Jewish believers into the family of God was divinely revealed to Paul.
2. Paul's persecution was the result of his preaching the gospel to the non-Jewish community.
3. Paul wants his readers to **understand** that it has always been God's plan offer **salvation** to all who would **believe**. (**Handout Question 2**)

B. What do these verses mean? 3:1-7

1. Paul's willingness to endure suffering is an indicator of his conviction concerning his faith. (**Handout Question 3**) In fact, the apostles, prophets and all Christians through the ages that have given up their lives for their belief, is an evidence for the truth of Christianity. People don't just give up their careers, marriages, families, social standings and their very lives for a myth, a legend or something they just *hoped* was true. All Paul had to do was denounce his faith in Christ and he could have been released from his Roman prison cell and avoided his impending execution.

2. God doesn't keep people in the dark about His plans. He wants believers to have an understanding of what His plan for His creation is. God really doesn't expect blind faith. He wants us to believe and understand as much as we can based on the amount of information He has chosen to reveal up to that point in time.

(For instance, Old Testament believers could not understand the concept of the church because it was not detailed in Old Testament times.)

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C. How should this principle impact my life? 3:1-7

1. I should have conviction about my beliefs in the Bible. I need to learn and study more to increase my convictions. It will raise my confidence. God revealed many truths about the church and about the true nature of our existence so that we would have assurance and boldness to share with others what we've learned about eternal life and God.

2. I should act responsibly as a keeper of the faith I have been entrusted with. (Handout Question 4) So many believers have given their lives over the years, how can I live like I'm too busy to care or worse, how can I act like I'm not even saved?



Study Topic 2

The Purpose for Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles –Eph. 3:8-13

A. What do these verses tell us? 3:8-13

God used Paul not only to reveal to humanity the mystery of the union between Jew and non-Jew but to the angelic host as well. The "principalities and powers" refer to both good and evil angels as seen in Eph. 6:12 (and compare 1:21). As the angelic hosts witness the church, God's wisdom is made evident to them.

B. What do these verses mean? Eph. 3:8-13

1. God used Paul, the "least of all saints", as His key spokesperson concerning the mystery of the Church. Paul's estimation of himself was sincerely humble in spite of the large amount of revelation he was entrusted with.

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2. Paul viewed his suffering as worthwhile as long as the gospel was communicated. (Handout Question 5) If the Ephesians truly understood “the dispensation of God’s grace that was given to” Paul (v. 2), they shouldn’t be discouraged because of his sufferings for them. His pain was for their gain. His preaching brought salvation to the Gentiles, but at the same time it brought the wrath of many Jews on him.

C. How should this principle impact my life?

I am faced with a couple of questions:

- How is my commitment level regarding telling others about eternal life in Jesus?
- Does my life show Christ’s influence on me and attract unbelievers to Him?

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?)

Haven’t people been willing to die for various causes over the years? Yes. So what’s so special about someone giving up their life for their belief in Christ? In a word, the resurrection. The fact that he appeared to so many after His death caused them to not be able to deny what they’d seen. These eye witnesses’ conviction was so strong it carried through to the people they were telling about the events. And the gift of eternal life is directly connected to belief in the resurrected Christ. Christ’s resurrection is evidence of the truth of His message of eternal life by belief in Himself as the Messiah.

Is the *whole* Bible reliable? Yes. God inspired it as it was being written and then protected it through the centuries as it was compiled.

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What lesson can we draw from God using Paul, (the self proclaimed “least of all saints”), as His key spokesperson concerning the mystery of the Church? No matter how rough your past is, God can still use you to do a great work for Himself.

Does this mean all Christians are supposed to be doing some great work for God? Not necessarily. Christians should seek first to do what God leads them to do. A good place for a believer to start is to help with a work which is suited for them in their local church body.

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 prophecy strengthen a Christian's faith?

Fulfilled prophecy **confirms** the **reliability** of the Bible and **validates** the believer's faith. (Handout Question 1)

Getting Ready for Next Week

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

How does a church maintain unity as differing people continue to join it?

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