

# The Epistle to the Ephesians

## Main ideas to cover in the lesson

- Background to St. Paul's epistles (How many did he write/ prison epistles/ Missionary trips that he did)
- Background to Ephesus & the church there (where is Ephesus? (Maybe show a map) When did St. Paul visit it ? How long did he stay there? When did he write the Epistle & Why ? Which group of people did he write the epistle to ?
- The Living body of Christ (Who is the body of Christ)
- Daily Christian living & its importance
- Weapons needed for our spiritual warfare

## Some Quiz Questions to use as the basis for the lesson ..

(The class could be divided into groups of 2 or 3 and they could be given a sheet with a list of questions and multiple choice answers to choose from / or they could be given the questions and they work out the answers themselves / or they could be given the questions and they get the answers from a list provided answers that is placed on the wall somewhere ...) The winning group would get a prize ..

How many books are in the bible ?

How many books are in the New Testament ?

How many epistles did St. Paul write? How many were written from prison

In which book of the bible do we read about St. Paul's missionary work & the various countries that he visited ?

How many missionary journeys did St. Paul go on?

What are the prison epistles?

Where is Ephesus located ?

When did St. Paul visit Ephesus?

When year St. Paul write the epistle to the Ephesians?

Name 3 spiritual blessings that we have been given by being children of God?

Who is the body of Christ?

Am I free to live my life anyway that I wish ? Why?

How many times in the bible are we asked to obey our parents ?

In our spiritual warfare, what spiritual armor should I be using for protection against the enemy?

## Lesson Details

(This has the answers to the questions above, but needs to be further summarized to only include the key ideas)

St Paul is writing a letter of **encouragement to the believers** in Ephesus. His aim is to strengthen their faith and explain God's purpose for the church, the body of Christ.

St Paul spent over **3 years** with the Ephesians church and was very close to them (verse 1 & 2: *To the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from god our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*). NB In those days the term ‘saints’ was used for all believers and members of the early church.

His letter **does not address any problems** like his letters to the Corinthians were but rather he aims to keep the Ephesians focussed on their faith, reminding them of God’s purpose for them, His love and the implications of being in the body of Christ; the church. He reminds them that they must strive to walk in the light and utilise the Spirit’s power to fight the forces of darkness.

## **Spiritual Blessings we have received**

**We have the following in our bank account ..all in Christ Jesus**

**Adoption/acceptance/redemption/forgiveness/wisdom/ inheritance/seal of the Holy Spirit/life/citizenship/ etc ...**

### **St Paul clearly outlines God’s plan for us**

The great number of blessings our Father has given to us and that each and every one of His children has been created with a great plan from above.

*In Christ we are freed from the bondage of sin – 1:7-8*

*In Him we have redemption through His blood,*

*the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace, which He made to **abound** toward us in all wisdom and prudence.* Paul highlights God’s kindness to the Ephesians, noting that God’s grace is **abundant** for those who are ***holy and without blame before Him in love*** (1:4).

God solves our need for significance and purpose; (2:10) *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Having received all the above blessings we need to ...

Ephesians 4:1-5 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*

## **The Church, the Body of Christ**

St Paul talks about the church being the body of Christ and he truly wants all believers to **function as the living body of Christ on earth.**

**I need to be a live and active member in the body. I cannot live my life anyway that I wish. I need to live my life in a way that helps to bring about growth to the whole body. My**

**growth and victory is the growth and victory of the whole body and my failure and defeat is the failure and defeat of the whole body.**

This means 1) Recognising that we are *members of the household of God* (2:19) and *members of one another* (4:25) and; 2) Understanding how as members of one another, we ought to behave in order to live in union with one another committed to serving our Lord Jesus Christ in love.

**‘In union’** – this means casting aside all grudges, anger, gossip, jealousy, criticism, bitterness and backstabbing, because these are all barriers to unity in the church.

I need to behave like My Father

The world around us teaches independence but that’s not what God’s plan is. If a brother hurts you or sins against you, Christ teaches that we should forgive.

**Provide some Examples of practical situations where this can take place ...**

In order to live as one body we need to be able to forgive as Christ forgave us... *and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you* (Eph 4:32). People aren’t perfect but that doesn’t change God’s perfect design for the church and what he wants the Body of Christ to look like. [Every week, the liturgy teaches the importance of reconciliation – **we have to be one together before we can be one with Christ** (The Prayer of Reconciliation).]

⇒ SO, we have to look at what we can do to make His plan work. Focus up and not around us. If we **all** stop looking at the ‘speck of dust in our brother’s eye’ and **all** focus purely on doing my bit right for God, then hopefully we can reach God’s plan for His church and make St Mark’s the most beautiful bride of Christ.

**God’s original plan for the church**

- In the gospels we receive Christ’s teachings e.g. forgive. In the book of Acts we learn **how** to live e.g. how to forgive. *Are we still behaving as the disciples did in Acts?*
- Church is a family – you don’t just go to St Mark’s but rather you **belong** to St Mark’s. We are to love one another with unfailing love. In the
- God is the head of the body – the church. In the same way that a parent delight’s when they see all the kids around the dinner table, so too does God when He sees all His children at church. We need to be encouraging each other to love the church, not causing one another to stumble. If someone complains about the church/ the priests etc you should not listen, but rather encourage them to focus on the real reason we **NEED** the church. **The church holds the keys to salvation. It is our protection.**

**What does it mean to live as the body of Christ?**

- Unity must be worked at (Eph 4:1-6). We can overcome our differences because of the thing that unites us; *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.*

- The Holy Spirit is critical in building unity but we have to be willing to be guided to do our part to keep the peace. Eph 4:3 *endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace*. The Holy Spirit is God's seal that we belong to Him and His guarantee that He will fulfil what He has promised (Eph 1:13-14)
- Importance of praying together – Matt 18:20 *for where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them*. When the disciples asked Jesus 'how do we pray?' Jesus answered "**Our** Father which art in heaven..." and not "My". In the creed we pray "Truly **we** believe" not "**I** believe". We are supposed to worship together in the church. By giving people a lift to church, you may not realise it but you are serving the Lord and fulfilling His plan. He doesn't want us to come alone but to fight to bring others with us.
- Together we are more powerful in our prayer – *many wonders and signs were done through the apostles* (Acts 2:43)... *And with **great power** the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus and **great grace** was upon them all* (Acts 4:33). God gave GREAT POWER and GREAT GRACE to the twelve not to one person...
- Accepting each other's differences – and recognising that we all have a purpose for God. St Paul writing to the Corinthians explains that the church is composed of many types of people, of different backgrounds, *'whether Jews or Greeks – slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit'* (1Cor 12:13). He says that just because we are all different doesn't mean that we aren't of the same body *'If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?'* (1 Cor 12:15). God has created us all different for a purpose: *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased... indeed there are many members, yet one body. And eye cannot say to the hand 'I have no need of you'* (1 Cor 12:18-24). St Paul demonstrates that if a weaker / more insignificant part of the body is taken away – then the whole body becomes less effective and suffers.
- Humility is essential to live in unity – we should not be proud and think we are better than others. Instead we should use the gifts we are given and encourage others to use theirs. All are valuable to the efficacy of the body.
- There can be no jealousy or even apathy. St Paul says we must empathise with our fellow Christians (1 Cor 12:26); *If one member suffers, all members suffer with it, if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it*.

## **Guide to everyday Christian Living**

### **Being Renewed in the Spirit of Your mind to put on the New Man**

Ephesians 4:22-24 *"that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."*

One point to note to the class is that often we think of sin and darkness to be submitting to lusts of the flesh alone, but as St Paul points out in chapter 2:3; following the course of the world rather than of the Lord means fulfilling the desires of **flesh** and **mind**. How then can we ensure that our thoughts are from our father? We ought to be training our mind and our hearts to think and feel as Christ would and praying that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we may be guided by Him. St Paul urges the believers to *find out what is acceptable to the Lord* (5:10).

We ought to be training our minds so that we are ever conscious of the Lord's presence and always wanting to do His will.

- How might we discover what is pleasing to the Lord? Do we actively seek to do this? Why not – why do we procrastinate?

St Paul is clear in how God wants us to behave toward one another. **Read 4:25 – 5:21** and identify the traits we ought to have in order to become a living body of Christ.

4:25 **do not lie** – this disrupts unity, creating conflicts and destroying trust

4:26-27 we are taught how to handle **anger** – not to let it cause us to sin and not to take our anger to bed when we sleep – resolve it first.

4:29 **speak no evil** – and not just that but **nothing** which is not for edification – how much do we say daily that is not constructive?!

4:32 Be **kind** to one another, **forgive**.

5:1 **Imitate God**. The only person we should adore and emulate is our Lord Jesus Christ, men can fall...

5:2 Walk in **love**

5:8 Walk as **children of light**... finding out what is acceptable to the Lord

5:15-16 Walk carefully

5:11 **Confess** sins

5:18 Be **filled** with the **Holy Spirit** speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always... submitting to one another (humility)

From this passage alone it is clear what we ought to do to be following Christ, how to set ourselves apart, holy, to do what is pleasing and right in the Lord's sight.

## **Spiritual armour that is needed in our spiritual warfare (6:14-18)**

**We are in a war and we need to be prepared to fight & defend ourselves ..**

Notice that there is no back – the Christian is not supposed to run from enemies, but fight the good fight of faith, praying always!

Girdle of truth

Breastplate of righteousness

Shoes of readiness to bear the gospel

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation

Sword of the Word

Prayer.