

# **Bible Study Material**

**St. John's Anglican Church Highton**

**Term 4, 2009**

## **Ephesians**

**The mystery  
made known!**

**10 Studies in the book of Ephesians**

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These 10 studies have been written to marry the teaching series of term 4, 2009 at St. John's Anglican Church Highton.

### Purpose

These studies are intended to be used as a helpful "resource" for our small groups and their leaders. Though they could be followed through as they are, they are certainly not written so as to be slavishly adhered to. Indeed, in the case of these

- 8) What general impression do you have from all of this as to the nature of the struggle which Christian people are caught up in?
- 9) The apostle Paul is clearly a man steeling himself for the battle as well (see, vv.19-20). From his prayer requests, what does this struggle involve / look like for him?

### **Application**

To what extent does this kind of thinking feature in your understanding of the Christian life? To what extent does your experience conform to this?

What is most likely to be lost on you if this struggle is overlooked? How might that be reflected in one's Christian life and experience?

When you do think of the Devil (and his minions and his schemes) is it more likely to be with fear and dread or with complacency? What is the right way to think about this, do you think?

Have you read C.S Lewis' 'The Screwtape Letters'? It is a fascinating, entertaining and insightful satire which constitutes an exploration of the spiritual reality described here. I am sure our bookstall could help you out – well worth a read!!

studies, the passages are so long you will probably have to be a little selective.

Each study includes a 'starter' which is aimed at initiating some general discussion around a broad topic and also serves to introduce one of the key themes of the passage.

Additionally, all of the studies include some direction as to possible avenues for application of the teaching of the text to everyday Christian living.

The bulk of the material involves observation and interpretation of the texts at hand.

The imagined context for these studies is a small group (somewhere between 6 and 15) dedicating somewhere between 40 and 60 minutes to Bible study. Obviously, variations and adaptations should be made according to the setting and use to which these studies are put.

### **Introduction to the letter to the Ephesians**

This letter from the apostle Paul is written from prison (3:1, 4:1, 6:20) – and so presumably from a Roman prison late in the apostle's life (early 60's?).

The actual destination has been questioned by some – since the words "in Ephesus" do not appear in our best and earliest manuscripts. Many have noted this and commented on. Perhaps the best explanation is that Paul was writing to a circular letter to a series of churches in and around Ephesus. In favour of this argument is the general nature of the letter. It gives little indication of specific circumstances and situations it is addressing. Some consider it the letter to the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16) – since it has so many similarities and parallels with the apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians. (But it is hard not to see Ephesians as a development of the letter to the Colossians rather than vice-versa.)

## Ephesians 6:10-24 – The Christian Struggle

It certainly has many of the hallmarks of a Pauline epistle. Most notably, it shares his characteristic structure. The first three chapters speak of God's gracious work to bring about our salvation – what might be considered 'our calling'. The final three chapters turn to encouragements and exhortations to "live a life worthy of the calling we have received" (4:1).

While one may point to various emphases and recurring themes (the centrality of the church, the cosmic and heavenly dimension, the unity of God's new people,...), the place of the 'mystery' which God has made known seems to occupy central stage. Throughout the letter various phrases and images are employed to capture the way in which God has made laid bare a great mystery which had been hidden long ages past. There is an emphasis on apprehending this revelation, being enlightened, casting of the futility of an old way of thinking, stepping out of the darkness and walking in the light; as well on making this secret known. This is not a mystery as we sometimes use the word to refer to a riddle or enigma (something unknowable), this is a mystery in the sense of a secret (something hidden from view). God in his mercy – through the life, death and resurrection of his Son, as well as through the preaching of this good news by the least of his apostles – has made this mystery known.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

### Recommended Reading

Here are a couple of suggestions for further reading should you be inclined. If you are after other or more specific recommendations regarding secondary literature on this letter – please contact Will ([will@stjohnshighon.org.au](mailto:will@stjohnshighon.org.au)).

**Starter** – How does the reality of the Devil, demons and evil spirits feature in your thinking and in your Christian life?

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### Read Ephesians 6:10-24

- 1) How do you respond to an order to "be strong" (v.10)? How does the qualifier "in the Lord and in his mighty power", help you to understand what this might mean / involve?
- 2) What is the goal of this strength (v.11)? (**Clue:** "to stand" is a repeated idea in this section – see, vv.11, 13, 14,)
- 3) When you read of the "devil's schemes / wiles", what sort of things come to mind?
- 4) Why is it important to recognise with whom our struggle is? How might we be tempted to blur this careful distinction? And with what consequences?
- 5) How does the detail of all the armour help you to understand the nature of the battle / struggle?
- 6) Clearly prayer is decisive (v.18). What kind of prayers do you think the apostle Paul has in mind given the context?
- 7) "Watch and pray" sounds a lot like the Lord Jesus (compare Matthew 26:40-41) – what do you make of this kind of language? What does it mean to "be alert"? What are we supposed to be "watching for"? What are the implications of all this for our prayers?

8) How appropriate and applicable is this word to the current working scene?

### **general**

- 9) Do you think there is a difference between ‘submit’, ‘honour’, ‘obey’? If so, what?
- 10) Do you read in this any suggestion that people are unequal (unlike in dignity,.. etc) – wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters?
- 11) Do you find any significance in the fact that wives, children, slaves are addressed first and not the other way round?

### **Application**

What makes ‘submission’ (in any form, to anyone other than God) something so hard for us to accept?

If you are married, how have you sought to conform to this word from God in your marriage relationship?

If you have children, has this word shaped the way your household is conducted? How? How is it going?

At what point does a child outgrow their obligation to this command of God? Upon reaching their majority? Upon marriage and the establishment of a new family? What of adults with ageing parents?

How would you describe your work ethic (either as employer or employee)? Does this apply / change with regard to your voluntary service? How? Why?

### General

*An Introduction to the New Testament* ed. by D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1992)  
*New Bible Dictionary* [2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.] (IVP: Leicester, England; 1982)

### Commentary

*The Message of Ephesians* [BST] John Stott (IVP: Leicester, London; 1991) **G**  
*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [NICNT] FF Bruce (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1984) **T**  
*The Letter to the Ephesians* [PNTC] Peter T O’Brien (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1999) **T**

**G** – general commentary with easy accessibility and uncomplicated pastoral concern

**T** – more technical commentary with more academic discussion of original / Hebrew and history / background etc

## Ephesians 1:1-14 – To the praise of His glorious grace

**Starter** – When people talk about being “blessed”, what do you think of? What do you think they mean?

OR

What is the greatest goal you have (had) in life? What impact has this had on the rest of your life?

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### Read Ephesians 1:1-14

- 1) After a brief introduction (vv.1-2), the apostle Paul launches into one long sentence (vv.3-14) of exuberant praise, cataloguing all that God is about in this world. God’s activity spans all of time – from before the beginning to the very end. From our vantage point, fill in the table below to see the ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’?

Verse	Past	Present	Future

## Ephesians 5:21-6:9 – Authority and Order

**Starter** – How do you tend to respond when you read in the Bible things you do not really want to hear? What are the natural temptations?

OR

How do you respond when the Bible says things which you know the world will mock and ridicule? What are the natural temptations for us?

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### Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9

#### vv.21-33

- 1) What is the wife commanded to do? And why?
- 2) What is the husband to do? And why?
- 3) How is the parallel of ‘Christ and the church’ helpful to understanding this?

#### vv.1-4

- 4) What are children called to do? And why?
- 5) What role are parent called to exercise? What might it mean / involve to “exasperate your children”? How can this be avoided?

#### vv.5-9

- 6) What are slaves called to do”? Why? How is this fleshed out in the instructions which follow? What principles about ‘service’ are we able to learn from this instruction?
- 7) What of masters? What temptations are being addressed here?

your own attitude reflected in your practice? Are there things you think you / we need to address?

When you review your speech, are you happy with the results? Are there changes you will make on account of this study?

When you review your sexual practice, are you happy with the results? Are there changes you will make as a consequence of this study?

Do you think you live sufficiently differently from the world around you? At what points are the lines most blurred and the distinctions most unclear? Why do you think? What can be done about this?

- 2) What are “spiritual blessings”? Which ones in particular does the apostle Paul cite in verses 3-10?
- 3) What significance attaches to being ‘chosen’ in your mind? And what have God’s people been chosen for/to?
- 4) What do you understand by ‘predestined’? What have God’s people been predestined for/to?
- 5) What does it mean to have ‘redemption’? How does the apostle Paul expand on this?
- 6) We often think of God’s will as a bit of a ‘mystery’. In what sense has this mystery been made known to you?
- 7) What is the great goal to which God is working all things (v.10)? How easily does this sit alongside all *our* spiritual blessings in your mind?
- 8) What role does Jesus play in our blessings?
- 9) What motivates God to pour out his blessings upon us as he has?
- 10) In verses 11-14, the apostle Paul uses his pronouns carefully – who are the ‘we’ of vv.11-12, do you think? And who are the ‘you’ of vv.13-14?
- 11) How were the Gentiles included in God’s salvation?

### **Application**

Do you consider yourself blessed? How do you think of your spiritual status? How does it affect you to hear that God has blessed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing

in Christ? Are there moments when you doubt this? When are you tempted to feel like you have missed / are missing out? What causes this?

Do you believe that God works out all things in conformity to his will? What experiences are most likely to challenge this belief? How do you tend to respond to this?

If God’s great goal in this world is to bring all things together under Christ, what does that mean for you personally? To what extent would you say you have owned this goal for yourself? For others?

What response do you think all this calls for from you? How practised are you at ‘praise’?

11) How are we to respond to those who refuse to oppose such practices?

12) How are we to respond evil deeds in general?

**Read Ephesians 5:15-21**

13) What do you think is meant by “making the most of every opportunity”? How would one do this?

14) When you hear people speaking of being “filled with the Spirit” – what picture comes to mind? The apostle fleshes his picture out using four participles / activities. Fill in the table below to reconstruct this picture. See if you can think of ways in which these activities work their way out in your own life and experience.

<b>Be filled with the Spirit – Ephesians 5:18</b>		
<b>Verse</b>	<b>Specified activity</b>	<b>Personal experience</b>
v.19		
v.19		
v.20		
v.21		

**Application**

How does the apostle’s stance on sin compare with your own and what you perceive to be ours (as a fellowship)? How is

Verses	Put off	Put on
vv.25-27		
		Work and do something useful with one's own hands, so as to be able to share with those in need
vv.29-30		
	Bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every kind of malice	

## Ephesians 1:15-23 – Not ‘what’ you know, but ‘who’

**Starter** – How happy are you with your prayer life? What do you consider to be the marks of a healthy prayer life? What aspects of prayer do you find hardest?

\* \* \*

### Read Ephesians 1:15-23

- 1) Before launching into the ‘content’ of the apostle’s prayers, what can you learn about the ‘practice’ of prayer from the little window we are given here into Paul’s?
- 2) What makes it easy to ‘stop giving thanks’?
- 3) What makes it hard to ‘keep on asking’?
- 4) When the apostle Paul introduces his prayers by saying “For this reason,…” (v.15) – what reason is he referring to?
- 5) What things mark the Ephesians out as Christians in Paul’s mind? How would / could you spot these things? What might they involve?
- 6) What does the apostle actually pray for? And why does he pray for these things?

Verse	The ‘what’	The ‘why’
17		
18		

- 6) Are there any surprising counter parts here?
- 7) Which do you find easier: refraining from that which is wrong; or, fulfilling that which is right? Why do you think?
- 8) How much do you think of the Christian life as “following God’s rules” (v.25ff, v.29ff) and how much do you think of it as “imitating God himself” (v.24, 5:1)? Is there a difference here in your mind?

### Read Ephesians 5:3-14

- 9) There is something very black-and-white, all-or-nothing about the apostle’s language here – “not even a hint” (v.3), “out of place” (v.4), “once darkness, now light” (v.8), “have nothing to do with” (v.11). What does this reveal about his attitude to wards sin? How does it compare with your own?
- 10) In what sense are immorality and greed a kind of ‘idolatry’?

- 7) How does Paul unpack knowing the ‘hope’ to which we have been called in what follows? How does his version of the Christian hope compare with yours?
- 8) What guarantees does the apostle have, and offer to us, that God can actually answer his/our prayers?

### Application

How do Paul’s prayers compare with yours? How do you account for any discrepancies? What can be done about this?

If our prayers are a reflection of what is important to us (either for us or for others), what do you tend to find yourself praying about most? How often do you pray for greater ‘knowledge’?

And if you were asked how it might be possible to “know God better” – what would you say? How would your answer compare with Paul’s prayer?

Are you coming to know God better? Do you think often about the future that God has prepared for us? Why / why not, do you think?

## Ephesians 4:17-5:21 – Darkness and Light

**Starter** – In some ways Christians are just like everybody else, in other ways we can be really quite different. What would you consider to be the biggest differences between believers and unbelievers? Is there an underlying difference in your mind?

### OR

If you had to write a brief manual of Christian ethics (moral behaviour), what issues would you want to include with priority?

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### Read Ephesians 4:17-24

- 1) A strong contrast is drawn in this section. Sometimes you see most clearly what something is when you can see it up against that which it is not. How do the pagans live? And why?
- 2) How is the follower of Christ to be different? And what accounts for this?
- 3) What do you understand by the phrase “put off the old self”? How might one do this?
- 4) From the descriptions and instructions given here, what do you think is involved in “putting on the new self”?

### Read Ephesians 4:25-5:2

- 5) The contrasts continue in this section with regard to particular behaviour. It is true (generally speaking) that making changes is easier when you are exchanging one thing for another (for example, often smokers can give up smoking only by substituting chewing gum for smoking cigarettes, etc). In each case, the apostle calls on people not simply to leave one way of living behind, but to replace it with a new way. Fill in the table below.

9) What steps / sequence is out lined here? And what is its result?

**Read Ephesians 4:14-16 – MATURITY**

10) Again Paul refers to this captivating image of “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (v.13). From what follows, what does this look like in practice? What does it involve?

11) What threatens our maturity? What are the marks of infancy?

12) What action on our part will best facilitate our growth together?

**Application**

What are the marks of a church wracked by disunity? Have you ever experienced this? How did you (would you tend to) respond? What can be done about it?

What differences are you thankful for in our fellowship? Which ones do you struggle with a little? How are you dealing with this?

Do you see the sequence described here at work in the life of our church? What factors do you think we could all do with addressing for the sake of our own growth and maturity? [Remember you need to say this in love 😊].

What works of service build the body of Christ up? Are you involved in any of these? If not, what do you think you could be doing for the sake of the body?

**Ephesians 2:1-10 – Before and After**

**Starter** – Why do we love a ‘rags to riches’ story? In what sense is every Christian person’s story a rags to riches story? OR

If you had to describe the difference involved in becoming a Christian, what would you say?

\* \* \*

**Read Ephesians 2:1-10**

1) How does Paul describe the ‘before’ of every convert to Christ (see, vv.1-3)?

v.1	Status (in general)	
v.2	Without (relation to world, devil)	
v.3	Within (relation to inner nature)	
v.3b	Before God (standing before him)	

2) In what sense does this ring true for you?

3) It is not uncommon to hear people say, “I’m not a Christian as such, but I am a good person.” What do you think they mean by this? How would you respond to such a statement?

4) When did God act to address this situation? And what is the significance of this timing?

5) What did God do?

6) What motivated God in acting like this?

7) How does this explain what Paul means by the terms 'grace' and 'faith'? What are the opposites?

Term	Meaning	Significance
Grace		
Faith		

8) If you have to believe / have faith to be a Christian, doesn't that mean you have to work (do something)? How do you understand this?

9) The apostle Paul is equally clear on the place 'good works' must not, and yet must, occupy in the Christian life. How do you understand this? What is at stake in being clear on this?

### Application

How do you conceive of the situation out of which Christ saved you? If you have been a Christian for a while, has the way you think about this changed much over time? In what way?

What things convince you of God's great love and rich mercy? And what factors demonstrate the extent of these for you?

Where would you point others to see the riches of God's grace and kindness to us?

How does this passage impact the way you think of those around you – both Christian and not? And how should it

## Ephesians 4:1-16 – Living Worthy of Your Calling

**Starter** – What causes most divisions amongst people at church? And why? How do you account for this? What can be done about this?

\* \* \*

### Read Ephesians 4:1-6 – UNITY

- 1) We have reached a turning point in the letter. In light of 'our calling' the apostle Paul now tackles the life that is worthy of it, encouraging us to live it. What would you expect the first duty or obligation that falls to the Christian person to be...?
- 2) Why do you think 'unity' is so important to God (compare Study 4 Ephesians 2:11-22)?
- 3) What is the source and the grounds of our unity (vv.4-6)?
- 4) What might be involved in "making every effort"?
- 5) What makes being "completely humble and gentle" hard? And when in particular (in your own experience) is this hardest?
- 6) What might "bearing with one another in love" entail?

### Read Ephesians 4:7-13 – DIVERSITY

- 7) Why are there differences amongst God's people? Who is responsible for this? And what is his goal in it?
- 8) How can these differences serve the purpose of unity? How can they hinder it? What do you think is key in ensuring the former and preventing the latter?

How does Paul's approach to God in prayer (compare his statement in 3:12) compare with your own? Is your's any different? How? Why do you think? What can be done about this?

impact the way in which you describe and talk about the change/conversion involved in becoming a Christian?

How does the contrast of the 'before' here help you to think about the 'after' of the Christian life you now live?

## Ephesians 2:11-22 – The Peace of Christ

**Starter** – If you were to ask the person in the street, “What do you think is the greatest cause of conflict in the world?” – what do you think would be the most likely candidates for their response?

\* \* \*

### Read Ephesians 2:11-13

- 1) What we read here is in many ways the ‘social / corporate’ equivalent of the ‘personal’ before and after we meditated on last week. How is this before conceived of for the Gentiles / nations (see, verse 12)? How might you put these things in your own words?

<i>Separate...</i>	
<i>Excluded...</i>	
<i>Foreigners...</i>	
<i>Without...</i>	
<i>Without...</i>	
<i>Far away!</i>	

### Read Ephesians 2:14-18

- 2) All of this is overhauled by the “blood of Christ” (v.13). How did Jesus’ death bring those who were far off near?

### Read Ephesians 2:19-22

- 3) What are the consequences of Christ’s action as described here?

- 4) Why (& where) is such ‘power’ required?
- 5) How (& where) is it given?
- 6) What is the purpose of this gift? With what ultimate result?
- 7) What do you understand by the majestic vision of “being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (v.19)?
- 8) How does all that Paul has said / prayed help us to picture such a reality?
- 9) Paul concludes with a doxology (a word of praise to God). How does this affect the way in which you view his prayer/request? What does it add to the tone?

### Application

How does this passage shape your understanding of the ‘powerful’ Christian life? What does it look like? What does it involve?

Paul speaks of God’s love as “surpassing knowledge”. From your own experience (yourself and others), what factors make God’s love something both knowable and yet unknowable? What makes us most likely to underestimate it? What might cause us to doubt it?

In what sense can fullness be a matter of knowing that you are loved? How does this compare with your experience of life in general?

How does Paul’s conception of God compare with your own? Is yours any different? How? Why do you think? What can be done about this?

## Ephesians 3:1-21 – Powerful Christianity

**Starter** – The Christian life has a peculiar knack for throwing us up against our own weakness. Where are you most likely to feel acutely your weakness? What things do you think of as amongst your chief struggles?

**OR**

It is relatively easy to pray for others when they share with us their requests and needs. How do you go in praying for others when you do not have such specifics? What might you want for those whose particular situation you are not so familiar with?

### Read Ephesians 3:14-21

- 1) This section starts, “For this reason,..” – which actually reiterates the note on which the chapter starts (see, verse 1). What reason governs and motivates what Paul is about to say? How does this affect what you expect him to say?
  
- 2) Again we get a little window into the apostle Paul’s prayer life. What things do you think we have to learn from his pattern of prayer?
  - How does he describe the one to whom he prays?
  - How does this affect the way he sees those for whom he prays?
  - On what basis does he pray?
  - How does his prayer conclude?
  
- 3) What is the actual content (ie, request) of his prayers? And why does he pray for these things?

Prayer	Request	Purpose
v.16&17		
v.18&19		

- 4) What do you think might be the significance of the distinctively Jewish way Paul describes the result (fellow-citizens with, holy temple, etc)?

### Application

It comes most naturally to us to see our salvation as a merely personal matter – something between ourselves and God, a personal relationship we have with him. How does this passage challenge stopping at this point?

Israel knew what it meant to build a temple for the Lord (- they had to do it a couple of times!) If God is still in the business of building for himself a temple – what part can you play? Where do you fit in? What things are key in terms of building and protecting this new structure?

Clearly the Jew – Gentile divide (& its abolition) was massive for the believers in Ephesus. Does such a distinction still feature in your thinking? Why? Why not?

Each week at church in a kind of formal way we have the custom of sharing together the peace which Christ has won. This is a peace both between us and God and between ourselves (each other). What things most threaten that peace do you think? And what do you think is most likely to secure it?

## Ephesians 3:1-13 – Managing God’s Mystery

**Starter** – How good are you at keeping secrets? What makes it so hard at times?

**OR**

In what sense do you think of yourself as having received grace from God for the sake of others?

\* \* \*

### Read Ephesians 1:1-13

- 1) How does the apostle Paul conceive of his status and role? What was the special administration of God’s grace given to him?

<b>Status</b>	
<b>Role</b>	

- 2) How does Paul feel about himself in light of the special task he has been assigned?
- 3) When you hear the term ‘mystery’, what do you tend to think of? What’s the difference between a secret and puzzle/riddle? Which do you think best captures the kind of thing the apostle is talking about here? [Clue – compare vv.5 & 9]

- 4) The ‘mystery’ Paul speaks of he has already written about briefly (v.3 – compare 1:9). What is this mystery? How does he elaborate on it here (vv.2-6)?
- 5) Where does the apostle think to point people to in order to see clearly the mystery of God’s will made plain (see, vv.10 & 11)?
- 6) How does Paul see his own part in all of this? And how is he concerned for the Ephesians to see it? In what sense might his sufferings discourage them?

### Application

In what sense do you see yourself as a prisoner &/or slave of Christ Jesus and his gospel? Whichever way, what does this look like in your life?

In what sense do you feel yourself to have received a special insight into the riches of God’s grace and his eternal plans and purposes? Is this a burden to you in any way? What do you do with this grace?

How central is the church in your understanding of God’s eternal purpose? How is your understanding reflected (or otherwise) in your practice / involvement / commitment?