

Discovering Our True Identity

(Studies in Ephesians)



Part 2

19 April to 13 September 2020

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the second set of study notes for our series in Ephesians, Ephesians is a book that has a lot to say about our true identity.

Our lives are often too busy, and we can find ourselves rushing things. As I prepared this series I noticed a neighbour parking his car hurriedly, grabbing his phone and his iPad and tapping away before jumping out - in his haste he was oblivious to his children waiting for him at the window.

Many of us will know the temptation to rush meals, sometimes there just doesn't seem to be time to chew properly never mind stopping to enjoy the food. Lunch might be a sandwich eaten whilst dashing from one appointment to the next, or dinner might be bolted down whilst the television distracts us.

Very often we can treat the Bible in the same way. Have we really got time to read this slowly we ask ourselves. I've heard Ephesians preached a few times over the years and with six chapters it often gets broken into 6 to 10 studies, each study covering huge amounts of ground but fitting (just) into a term.

Sometimes it is good to slow down and chew over passages properly, and that is what we are doing with Ephesians.

My prayer is that as we do so we will begin to grow into our true identity in Christ, and that we will encourage and cheer each other on as we do so.

Grace and peace,



Neil Douglas

Using these notes

Although the notes are written in a format for small group use in a bible study, they are also just as usable for self-study so please don't be put off by the format. For example discussion questions can be used for self-reflection.

The notes are designed to be used whether you have heard the sermon or not.

The preacher may not read these notes when preparing the sermon; they will always bring what they feel God wants to say to us.

We do expect God will speak to us through the sermon though so I would encourage you to listen to it on the website if you missed it, and that is why the first question is always about the sermon.

The rest of the questions provide a way of engaging with the topic each week regardless of whether you have had an opportunity to hear the sermon or not, but please do try to listen to the sermon as it should enrich your study of the topic.

There are weeks where there are no notes, these are weeks where the preacher / topic is not part of this set; we are also taking a break from the series over the summer holiday period. Please feel free to use these weeks creatively, or you may wish to devote them to extended prayer for the life of Ebenezer, our other communities, and God's vision for our future.

Date: 19 April

Theme: God's grace is enough

Key Readings: Ephesians 3:7-13

Additional

Readings: 1 Timothy 1:12-15, Colossians 1:25-27

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What does being 'a servant of the gospel mean to you'? Discuss reasons why people can feel unable to be 'a servant of the gospel' and consider Paul's background (1 Timothy 1:12-15)
2. Paul talks of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ', discuss some of these riches that you have experienced. (Colossians 1:25-27)
3. How can we 'make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery'?
4. What role is Paul explaining in v10 for the church and who is it directed at?
5. Do you feel free to approach God freely and confidently? Explain your answer.
6. Does it matter if we have a wrong understanding of our standing before God?
7. What can you do to understand your position before God better?

Leader's Notes

God has given Paul a gift. It is the power to 'teach the Gentiles about his (God's) rich gifts'. God's riches are difficult to discover. No one can measure them. They are like wealth at the bottom of the sea. It is so deep that you cannot bring it to the shore. This wealth is the greatness of God. It is the riches of his wisdom, knowledge, beauty and power.

This wealth is not money and possessions. We can receive spiritual riches now in our life upon the earth. The death of Jesus has made this possible. But there is even more wealth. We will share the life of Christ in heaven. This wealth is greater than anything that we can think of. Moreover, it is forever.

God has made known the secret of his plan to Paul himself. He has also made it known to the other apostles and prophets (verse 5). We have seen the complete plan of God. First, he shows his plan to Paul. Then he sends Paul (and other people) to preach the gospel in the entire world. This is by the spoken message. It is the task of the growing church. There are angels in the air round us. We cannot see them. They watch the church as it grows. So they see the immense wisdom of God too. It is all 'in Christ Jesus our Lord'. God is working out his plan in history. The whole world is included.

Christians have received the gift of salvation from God. We have received it by faith. We can now come straight to God. We can come without fear. We can come at any time. It is like a little child who runs to his father. That is how it is with us.

The sweetest part ... is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realise this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His

will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how ... If God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me.

Hudson Taylor (Founder of the China Inland Mission - now OMF)

Weekly Prayer Focus:

As we continue on in Ephesians please pray that we will afresh receive the spiritual riches that God has for us, that we will realise that God's grace is truly enough, that we will grow individually and together in all that God has planned for us, and that as a result the communities around us will be transformed by the power of Christ.

Date: 26 April

Theme: His love changes everything

Key Readings: Ephesians 3:14-21

Additional

Readings: John 17; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What are some of the glorious riches that God offers us?
2. How does the Holy Spirit strengthen us?
3. In what ways can we become more rooted and established in Jesus?
4. Why does Christ's love surpass knowledge?
5. What 'immeasurably more' things do you need God to do in your faith, life and church?
6. Spend some time praying for each other that God would come and fill each person a fresh with the Holy Spirit.

Leader's Notes

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

This one sentence is packed full of hope, and healing, and wholeness. The first thing that we note is that, in life, we are "rooted and established." We are not like those who are "without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). We are not detached from any ultimate meaning. We are not an accident of nature. We have a place in the Universe. Our existence means something.

Paul is clear about the nature of the grounds of our being. We are not about bare existence but about love. Love is always personal by definition. If we are grounded in love then we are grounded in a loving person, God. The roots of our life go down into a bedrock of love and from this we are able to draw up into ourselves continually the love of God. The whole context of our life provides for our need to be loved and cared for.

Paul prays that we will "know this love that surpasses knowledge." It is clear that Paul has two different kinds of knowing in mind. One type of knowing allows us to enter into this love, the other leaves us floundering. Both types of knowing are honoured in the Bible. The knowing of the mind and the knowing of the spirit are both encouraged. The knowing that Paul prays for us to excel in with respect to the love of God is one of a deep inner experience and contact that is more immediate than thought. This is not to say that this kind of knowledge is irrational but that it is relational. While words and thoughts fail in trying to grasp the love of Christ there is a deep, personal, and relational level at which we may experience his love. In this way the mind filled with thoughts of God's love only begins to know what the spirit "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" already knows.

I am more than a brain and a body. I have feelings, needs, hungers, desires, motivations, longings, drives, hopes, and aspirations. I hurt, get wounded, experience healing, and taste freedom. Being filled or satisfied is not something that the mind can do for us all by itself. There must be an acknowledgment that we are in a living relationship with God and that our deepest needs are fed out of that relationship. This is why we practice prayer, meditation, and

worship in addition to rational reflection and cognitive thought.¹

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for our church family, that we may be a place of spiritual blessing for people, whether they are saved or not yet Christians, whether they are a part of us or just visiting. Pray that our church family will be a place where heaven regularly touches earth, changing lives, bringing salvation and healing. A place where we and those we encounter truly grasp the love of Christ.

¹ <http://proverbs2528.blogspot.co.uk/2006/12/rooted-and-established-in-love.html>

Date: 3 May

Theme: He places us in community

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:1-6

Additional

Readings: 2 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What would you say our calling is?
2. How does being humble and gentle differ from being everyone's doormat?
3. In what ways can we bear with one another?
4. How would you describe unity of the Spirit?
5. How can we be 'one body' with those who have different practices and beliefs to us?
6. Spend some time praying for the other churches in Scarborough.

Leader's Notes

The new Christians had gone from idol worship and all the evil practices that that involved, to worshipping God in spirit and in truth. So Paul wants to make sure that they live transformed lives, as he says 'a life a life worthy of your calling'. In other words make sure that your life is changed, that your words match your actions and that you are different to when you lead that empty way of life that only leads to death.

Paul then tells them what this new life looks like. He tells them to be completely, not a little or half-heartedly, but completely, humble and gentle. We are no longer to be hot heads that just shout our mouths off, but rather we are

now controlled by the Spirit of God, who is growing love, peace, joy, gentleness and other great things in us.

Paul says that we should be patient with each other, bear with one another. In other words, life is not about you anymore. It's about putting God first; it's about being there for others. It's about helping others when they fail, helping them till they succeed, and always showing them love. In the world that we live in it is very easy to pass by those that struggle, those that find life difficult, those that are downtrodden. However, Paul says that we should be patient with people and love people, for that is what God did with each one of us.

Then Paul says that as God adds to the church we should make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in other words you were called to be one, so stay as one. Make sure that peace is at the centre of your fellowship, that peace is at the centre of all your ministries, that you are a people of peace. As God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit love, bless and serve one another, so we, the church, the body of Christ, should be the same.

Paul says that we should look at all the things that we have in common and allow them to keep us together. Keep the main things the main things and allow God to move in and through you.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray that God will do something new and special amongst us. Pray that we will see people getting saved and healed each week

Date: 10 May

Theme: God provides all we need to grow

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:7-13

Additional

Readings: 1 Samuel 10:9-10; Acts 2:42-47; 13:1-3

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What would you say are the hallmarks of an apostle?
2. What would you say are the hallmarks of a prophet?
3. What would you say are the hallmarks of an evangelist?
4. What would you say are the hallmarks of a pastor?
5. What would you say are the hallmarks of a teacher?
6. What works of service has God called you to?
7. What can we do that will bring maturity into our lives?
8. What do you think God has called Ebenezer Baptist Church to?

Leader's Notes

There have been many books, essays and sermons given about these five ministry gifts that Jesus gave to the church, so in a short little piece like this I will not be able to do it justice!

It is my understanding that Jesus gave these gifts to the church, not for people to watch them 'do their stuff', but rather that these five gifts would operate within the life of a local church (often expressed through many people), and as they minister so the church is strengthened and equipped. I believe that their primary purpose is to equip

and train God's people for works of service in the world, not to train God's people to sit back and watch!

The Apostle will be someone that goes out and plants churches, one that will oversee churches, blessing and ministering to various church leadership teams.

The prophet would be someone who would bring the word of the Lord to the rest of the church; he or she would bring a sense of the purposes and mind of God.

The evangelist would train people up to take and share the gospel with others. They would also want to be with the apostle, seeing folk saved and brought into the kingdom.

The pastor would train people to love and care for each other, they would not be the centre of pastoral care in the church, but would equip others, so that the whole church was caring for each other. In the early days of the church, no-one was left in need and it wasn't just the disciples that did all the caring. Everyone played their part.

The teacher would come and make the difficult things of God simple and accessible for the whole church. They would train others to lead small groups in their homes.

All these people made sure that each Christian grew in their knowledge and understanding of God, but also that they would, in turn, also start to minister and reach out. I don't think that the early church had many passengers in church life; I think everyone had and played their own part in making the church, church. I also think that we need to get back to those good old days!

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray that God would continue to release and bring apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to us as a church, that we may grow stronger and more Christ like. Pray that we will all seek to grow more Christ like and to reflect Christ's love to those outside of the church.

Date: 17 May

Theme: Growing as the body of Christ

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:14-16

Additional

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12:12-37; 1 Peter 2:4-10

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What things seem to 'dent' your faith and make you doubt?
2. What things have you found have helped you to grow in your faith?
3. What do you think are the hallmarks of maturity?
4. How can we support and help one another?
5. If you could choose a new ministry/anointing for yourself, what would it be and why?
6. Spend time praying for each other, that each of you will go on to new and fresh ministries and anointing in God.

Leader's Notes

What is a mature Christian? Do we look at that in terms of how long a person has been a Christian, or how much they have grown in God? Or do we look at how they respond to life when it throws them a curved ball? I think it is the latter two, and mostly the last one.

You never really know what will come out of a person until they are squeezed. Will they ooze love, or bitterness, anger, or patience, or.... The Bible gives us some great verses and passages that teach us what maturity is and how we get to be mature. However, maturity is not normally an easy path; it is lined with pressure, disappointments, stress and temptation. For it is only as we overcome these things, that we start to mature! Paul didn't want the church to be moving backwards and forwards in its faith he wanted them to grow up, grow in love and to grow closer to God.

There are great benefits to being mature. We will have people in our church that can disciple new Christians, they will be people that bring wisdom and influence to a church meeting. They will be the ones that hold the church together when it goes through some rocky times.

So do we, each one of us, fancy stepping onto the pathway towards maturity and allowing God to shape us and mould us, so that we can grow in love, grow closer to God and then use what God has placed in us, to bless and encourage other people, inside and outside of the church?

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for the other churches in Scarborough, that God will bless them and they will see God moving powerfully in their services. Please pray that there will be a fresh sense of unity in God's purposes as the churches work to reach those who don't yet know Jesus in our town.

Date: 24 May

Theme: Discard your old way of life

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:17-24

Additional

Readings: Colossians 1:9-14; 2:9-15

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What things have you turned from since becoming a Christian?
2. What things have you turned to since becoming a Christian?
3. Paul says that we should have a new attitude of mind, how does the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) help us with this?
4. What does the word 'holiness' mean to you?
5. What currently are you and God working on that will make you more Christ like?.

Leader's Notes

We all struggle with the temptation of sin, even Jesus was tempted. Paul, when writing to the church, reminds them that they have turned away from sin, having found it to be an empty way of life and that they are now new creations in Jesus.

Paul tells us to put off our old ways and to live a new way, a way that pleases God, a way that is different, a way that will show others that God has made a big difference in our lives. The word repentance means to turn round and walk in the opposite direction. Not all that we did before we became Christians was bad or evil, but some of it was.

Those are the things that separated us from God. Now we are called to walk towards God as opposed to away from him and to do good as opposed to doing our own selfish thing. We are called to be different from those around us as we are now walking in the ways that God calls us to.

In Ephesians 1 we discovered that we are now seated in Christ. Christ is our new neighbourhood. We are his body, he is the head. God's incomparably great power flows through us. If we remembered that we are in Christ we would find ourselves doing less things that surprise him! It is when we forget that we are in Christ that we start remembering old patterns of behaviour and find ourselves living them out again.

In order for us to struggle less with walking in God's ways it is always good to ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit, to empower us and to remind us that we are in Christ. Jesus only never sinned because he was aware of God's continual presence, which is a challenge to every single one of us. Paul says that we should now walk in a new way of life. Micah says let us walk humbly with our God. Jesus said come to me and take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

Maybe it's time for some of us to walk in a few new ways?

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray that as we journey into the summer and we see fruit on the trees it will also be a time where we see spiritual fruit in our lives. Pray also that we will see many people committing their lives to Jesus, many people being healed and many people being disciplined.

Date: 31 May

Theme: Live in righteousness and holiness

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:25-28

Additional

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Galatians 5:16-21;
Colossians 3:5-11

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. In putting 'off falsehood' what sort of things could we put off?
2. Paul says we are one body, what does being part of a church mean to you?
3. 'In your anger do not sin' what do you think Paul really meant by that?
4. Is there any anger and/or bitterness that we are holding on to, that we need to give to God?
5. In what ways can we protect ourselves from the devil getting a foothold in our lives?
6. Paul says that we must work, what do you think Paul would say to Christians who have reached retirement age?

Leader's Notes

Paul is getting very practical in his teaching now of what a life in Christ looks like, and he lists off five things to pay attention to: Telling the truth, being joined at the hip, controlling our anger, don't give the devil material to work with, and do not steal.

Telling the truth

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour

We should always be changing, always growing, always learning new things, always catching the whispers of God as we grow older. Paul never expects us to stand still. We have a life to live worthy of that calling.

Paul says the first easy step is to walk in the truth, don't let there be any falsehood in us. Paul says that truth and love replace the falsehood and bitterness from our old way of life. Paul is again giving us very practical advice as to what needs to be done in order to grow and flourish as a Christian. Showing us what our true identity is, showing us how to live this new life.

Falsehood is speaking what is untrue. The first line is a quote from Zechariah 8:16 but with a little change to it. "Here is what you must do. Speak the truth to one another. Make true and wise decisions in your courts."

Joined at the hip

25...for we are all members of one body

We are called to be a body, to be one functioning unit, joined at the hip as it were. We need to be there for each other, supporting each other. Most of the time our bodies work in harmony and hence efficiently, and as we do that as a church so it will be the same for us. God saves broken people and then puts them together and says get on, show grace, love each other, serve each other.

According to Jesus, loving our neighbour is the second most important command. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to a person full of their own self importance, telling the man that even if he doesn't know the person, he is your neighbour. Jesus elsewhere says 'Love one another...'

this is not simply a nice thing to try and achieve, this is a command from God.

Control your Anger

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

Paul says in your anger - Paul knew that there would be times when we are angry, but then says in your anger do not sin. So we have a choice here, when we get angry it is up to us as to how we react, none of this 'I couldn't help myself because you could, the old has gone the new has come, we are all new creations.

If we allow the fruit of the Spirit to grow and invade our lives, then there will be little or no place for anger. For anger is a very dangerous beast to allow room in our lives; if anger is allowed heart and head space then it will grow and grow, so Paul says don't let the sun go down on your anger. Deal with it, deal with it before it deals with you and corrupts you!

Don't give the devil material to work with

The devil loves to lurk around angry people hoping to be able to exploit a situation so that there is a break and breach of fellowship. Pride and hatred can soon come and join anger to make things worse. The devil is to be resisted (James 4:7) and given no place in our spiritual life or the church is in danger. Without openness and truth we give the devil a foothold to come and spoil everything.

Do not steal

There is also an OT principal at play here, the money lender had to return the cloak of a poor person so that he could sleep in it, the master has to pay the wages before the sun went down. Paul says that there must be a complete turnaround, no stealing. So no FaceBook at work? Can the workaholic steal time from their family?

Paul is not wanting the church to become full of millionaires, rather to have a church full of people with generous hearts, people that look out for and meet the needs of others, and this doesn't have to be done with money. Texts, cards, flowers and visits are, for some people, the best form of currency. Right from the start of the church they gave to any in need (Acts 2:44ff).

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for those in church who are suffering, either through ill health, lack of work, those who have family members with problems. Pray that as a church we will bless, encourage and support those who are in need, whatever that need may be.

Date: 7 June

Theme: Build up the body of Christ

Key Readings: Ephesians 4:29-32

Additional

Readings: Ephesians 5:1-7; Psalm 133; Colossians 3:1-11;
James 3:1-11

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Can you share examples with the group where people haven't used their 'talk' well?
2. James says that our tongues are dangerous, why do you think that is so?
3. What do you think grieves the Holy Spirit?
4. What practical things can we do to keep away from bitterness, rage and slander?
5. ARK can stand for acts of random kindness – what acts could we do for people in the church and outside of the church?
6. Are there people that you need to forgive and release from unforgiveness?

Leader's Notes

Question: "What does it mean to grieve / quench the Holy Spirit?"

Answer: When the word "quench" is used in Scripture, it is speaking of suppressing fire. When believers put on the shield of faith, as part of their armour of God (Ephesians 6:16), they are extinguishing the power of the fiery darts from Satan. Christ described hell as a place where the fire would not be "quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48). Likewise, the Holy Spirit is a fire dwelling in each believer. He wants to express Himself in our actions and attitudes. When believers do not allow the Spirit to be seen in our actions, when we do what we know is wrong, we suppress or quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We do not allow the Spirit to reveal Himself the way that He wants to.

To understand what it means to grieve the Spirit, we must first understand that this indicates the Spirit possesses a personality. Only a person can be grieved; therefore, the Spirit must be a divine person in order to have this emotion. Once we understand this, we can better understand how He is grieved, mainly because we too are grieved. Ephesians 4:30 tells us that we should not grieve the Spirit. We grieve the Spirit by living like the pagans (4:17-19), by lying (4:25), by being angry (4:26-27), by stealing (4:28), by cursing (4:29), by being bitter (4:31), by being unforgiving (4:32), and by being sexually immoral (5:3-5). To grieve the Spirit is to act out in a sinful manner, whether it is in thought only or in both thought and deed.

Both quenching and grieving the Spirit are similar in their effects. Both hinder a godly lifestyle. Both happen when a believer sins against God and follows his or her own worldly desires. The only correct road to follow is the road that leads the believer closer to God and purity, and farther away

from the world and sin. Just as we do not like to be grieved, and just as we do not seek to quench what is good—so we should not grieve or quench the Holy Spirit by refusing to follow His leading.²

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray that God will bless the missional activities of our church as we reach out to those who are on the very fringes. Pray for the different teams that they will have wisdom and discernment in their conversations with those who come, and that they will see the harvest that they long for.

² <http://www.gotquestions.org/grieve-quench-Holy-Spirit.html#ixzz3FZE4D1T6>

Date: 14 June

Theme: Live a life of love

Key Readings: Ephesians 5:1-7

Additional

Readings: Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 2:19-21; Galatians 5:19-26

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. How best can we live a life of love?
2. Which do we think is more harmful in church, sexual sin or gossip, and why?
3. How best can we develop an 'attitude of gratitude'?
4. If the immoral, impure or greedy won't inherit the kingdom, should they be welcomed into church? If yes, how do we go about welcoming them in safely?
5. What sort of thing do you think Paul had in mind when he talks about empty words?
6. Spend time praying for each other to grow closer to God.

Leader's Notes

What does it mean for us to "walk in love"? Does it mean that we should all walk around as if we were floating on cloud 9, filled with romantic and idealistic thoughts about our lives and relationships?

What does it mean for us to be a "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."? Does it mean that we are to abstain from anything and everything that brings us pleasure; wear drab clothes and a permanent expression on our faces that tell the world how miserable we are being children of the Most High God, living in a sin infested world?

Short answer to both these questions are assuredly in Christ - NO!

When I read Ephesians 5:1-2, one of the first things that come to mind is the tabernacle and the altar of incense that was placed on the west side of the Holy Place, and stood in front of the curtain/veil of the Most Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies).

The LORD said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy...And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people." Exodus 30:34-35, 37-38

Notice that the LORD our God gives us a sharp warning that the combination of these spices are "holy" they are set apart for God and should never be used for our own personal pleasures.

stacte n. ~ [Hebrew: שחלת (nataph)] one of the components of the perfume which was offered on the golden altar (Ex. 30:34; R.V. marg., "opobalsamum"). The Hebrew word is from a root meaning "to distil," and it has been by some interpreted as distilled myrrh

onycha n. ~ [Hebrew: שחלת (shěcheleth)] according to Hebrew interpreters, unguis odoratus, prop. the covering or shell of a kind of muscle found in the lakes of India, where the nard grows; which, when burning, emits an odor resembling musk

galbanum n. ~ [Hebrew: חלבנה (chelbēnah)] A bitter, aromatic gum resin extracted from an Asiatic plant (Ferula

galbaniflua) or any of several related plants and used in incense and medicinally as a counterirritant

frankincense n. ~ [Hebrew: לבונה (lěbownah)] a white resin burned as fragrant incense

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

May we all present ourselves as "living sacrifices" to God as we seek to die to self every day; consecrating our lives only for God's purpose and His pleasure, for this is where we will find our greatest joy...³

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for a new move of God within the churches of Scarborough. That the churches would work more closely together, that they would support and bless each other. Pray that the churches would be one, and they would seek together to see revival come to our town.

³ <http://www.sunnyshell.org/2009/05/walk-in-love-fragrant-offering.html>

Date: 21 June

Theme: Walk in the light

Key Readings: Ephesians 5:8-14

Additional

Readings: John 14:1-6; Isaiah 60:1-2; Colossians 3:12-17

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What are the top five things we need to do to live as children of the light ?
2. What is God calling you to do, that would please him?
3. Where can we see deeds of darkness happening in Scarborough? What do you think God wants us to do about them?
4. Do you think there are things that God wants us to 'wake up to' as individuals and as a church?
5. What three wise things could we add to our lives and our church family life?

Leader's Notes

Question: "How can I please God?"

Answer: Pleasing God is, or should be, the goal of all believers—all who call upon the name of Christ for salvation. The requirements for all who want to please God are that they must seek God by faith, walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh, and walk worthy of our calling in obedience and submission to the will of God. These things may seem impossible to do, but God wants us to please Him, and He makes it possible for us to please Him. We do these things by the power of His Spirit who lives in our hearts.

Paul reminds the believers in Rome that "they who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). So the first step in pleasing God is to accept the sacrifice for sin which He provided in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Only then are we "in the Spirit" and not "in the flesh." We do this by faith because "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

In Romans 8, Paul explains the difference between the sinful nature and the nature of those regenerated by the Spirit. Those who are still in their sin have their minds set on sinful desires, whereas the ones regenerated by Christ have a completely new mind that is controlled by the Spirit and desire to live in accord with Him. "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:6-7). So the first step for believers in pleasing God is to be sure we are walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

Furthermore, we must live by faith (Hebrews 10:38). God cannot be pleased with those who "shrink back" from Him

because they have no confidence in Him, or they doubt the truth of His declarations and promises, or do not believe that His ways are right and holy and perfect. The requirement of faith and confidence in God is not unreasonable; it is just what we require of our children and spouses, and it is an indispensable condition of our being pleased with them. So it is with God.

Therefore, pleasing God is a matter of living according to His precepts, commandments, and doing so in love. We always want to please those we love and the New Testament is full of exhortations to righteous living and loving Christ by obeying His commandments. Jesus made this very plain: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). The Epistles are God's plan for believers and are filled with exhortations to display throughout our lives the behaviour that is pleasing to God: "For the rest, then, my brothers, we beseech you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you have received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more" (1Thessalonians 4:1).⁴

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for our Easter services and outreach events. Please pray that many people will come and hear and respond to the gospel message of Jesus.

⁴ <http://www.gotquestions.org/please-God.html#ixzz3FZReHFkn>

Date: 28 June

Theme: Be filled with the Spirit

Key Readings: Ephesians 5:15-20

Additional

Readings: Acts 13:49-52; Ephesians 1:11-14; 2 Timothy 1:6-7

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What wise ways does the Bible call us to live by?
2. Paul says to make the most of every opportunity, when was the last time you witnessed to an unbeliever?
3. Paul says that we should be filled with the Holy Spirit do you think this is a one off experience or a continuous experience and why?
4. How often do you ask God to give you a word or a picture or a song for someone?
5. What five things can you thank God for that he has done for you in the last month?
6. Try and write a Psalm of praise to God based around your experience of God in your life.

Leader's Notes

In verse 18 Paul says that we should be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Greek the word that Paul uses for 'filled' is in the present continuous tense which means that Paul is, in effect, writing 'keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.'

Paul didn't see being filled with the Holy Spirit as a one off event that only happened when you first got saved. Paul knew that we need to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit because as we go about our daily human lives we 'leak'. Sometimes that is because we might come along side people and minister to them and leave them some of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it's because we are sinning and we push the Spirit down inside of us as we fill ourselves with sin, and sometimes it's that we are not drawing close to God. However, whatever the reason is, we need to make sure that we are always full of the Holy Spirit. It isn't that the Spirit is absent in our lives, every Christian has the Spirit, it is that we need to ask the Spirit to bubble up inside us again and flood us.

Jesus said that when he left to be with his Father he would send one to be with us. That he would send a counsellor, or, as the original wording says 'one like another Jesus' to be with us. Jesus knew that left to our own devices we are weak, unstable and prone to doing our own thing so he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us, to speak the whispers of God to us and to make sure that we had enough strength to face each day.

Therefore it would be silly to completely ignore the power and blessing that the Holy Spirit can impart to our lives on a day to day basis. Paul says that we should be filled daily, that we should keep on asking for more and more of the Holy Spirit, and that we shouldn't lead powerless lives.

So, when was the last time that members of your small group asked God to fill them with His power? Would it be good to spend some time praying for each other to be filled with the Holy Spirit afresh? We all need his touch, his empowering and his presence in our lives if we are to lead a life that is worthy of the calling God has placed upon our lives.

Jesus never did any of his miracles, spoke any words of knowledge or went anywhere without the Holy Spirit empowering and equipping him, so I guess that means that we need the Holy Spirit fully present in our lives as well. Paul says that we are God's workmanship and that he has good works prepared for us to do, we will not be able to do them well, without the empowering that the Holy Spirit brings to our lives.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for there to be a move of God in the church. Pray that we would see more and more people becoming Christians. As a church we are called to preach the gospel, and we are currently not seeing many people being saved. Please pray that we would be faithful in responding to God as he sends us out into our week to witness about Jesus to friends, family and those we bump into on a day to day basis.

Date: 5 July

Theme: Chose to submit to one another

Key Readings: Ephesians 5:21-24

Additional

Readings: Genesis 2:19-25; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Colossians 3:18-21

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What do we understand by the word submit?
2. Why do you think Paul says that wives should submit and husbands must love?
3. In what ways can we submit to each other that would make church a better place?
4. In what ways do you think Ebenezer Baptist Church currently needs to submit to each other?
5. In what ways do we struggle to submit?
6. Spend some time praying for the married couples you know in church.

Leader's Notes

Just as there was an order in Genesis, so Paul can see an order that needs to happen in churches and in marriages. God created everything in the right order and at the right time, and his crowning glory of creation was humankind. Then, at the end of it all he says that a man shall leave his parents and be united to his wife.

Paul follows this order, not wishing to make everyone have a 'Victorian' type marriage, but so that they will have the very best marriages in a society where men ruled as they wished and women had few rights. Remember that we are

in the middle of some great practical advice that Paul gives on how to live the Christian life. In fact Paul starts tackling the subject of submission by saying that we should all submit to each other.

Paul doesn't want anyone to become a superstar, or bigheaded, or a power crazed leader; he wants the church to have gentle, loving leaders that consider the needs of those under their care. Within marriage Paul was looking for an equal partnership, not a husband lording it over his wife - Paul is saying that we should submit to each other, listen to each other, love, and care for each other.

It seems that submission isn't a great word in today's society. People want their rights, they want to be heard, they want people to serve them and be there just for them. Whereas Paul says 'let's serve each other, let's prefer one another in love, let's make sure that we are the servant to all and only the master of ourselves'. It can be a real struggle at times, but the benefits are so rewarding.

If we submit to each other, church will be a place where love and peace rule. No one will strut around like they own the place and everyone will be listened to and heard. Church will be a place where everyone is valued, not for what they do, but just for who they are. It will be a church where the will and purposes of Jesus are held high above the wills and plans of frail and fragile humans.

So let us submit to each other and bless and encourage each other. For it says in Psalm 133 that where we dwell together in unity, there will be the blessing of God.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for unity, love, mutual submission, and respect in our Ebenezer church life. Pray that love and peace radiate from us and that we would be in all ways good news to a broken and hurting world.

Date: 12 July

Theme: Love as God loves us

Key Readings: Ephesians 5:25-33

Additional

Readings: Genesis 2:19-25; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Colossians 3:18-21

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What are the top five ways to love someone?
2. If you are married, what is the best thing about your marriage?
3. How can Ebenezer Baptist Church show its love to the communities around it? Think about those communities we don't currently connect with.
4. What does being a church member mean to you?
5. Jesus said 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself', how well do we love ourselves? Do you like the person that God has created you to be?
6. Spend some time praying for the marriages in the church. Pray also for those who have lost their loved ones, and for those who are living a single life.

Leader's Notes

Paul is again giving us some great practical advice on how to how have strong and healthy marriages. In the time of Paul, husbands would have ruled their home and hence their wives and there would have been a lot of inequality in marriages. So here Paul is bringing a liberating message, one that would have transformed many marriages within the church.

As in all things in God's order Paul is saying that love has to be at the front, it has to be the most important thing there is. Marriages should be based on love, which at the time of Paul when there would have been many arranged marriages, (where the wife never had a say as to who her husband would be) was a fairly revolutionary idea. Paul says to husbands, 'love your wives; first and foremost, love her, she is not a possession, or a cook, or a baby making machine, she is a human being with emotions, needs and feelings, so treat her with love'.

The Bible says that God is love, not just loving, but is love and we are called to be imitators of God, we are called to love. Called to love those that we are married to, love those that we are in a family with; to love those that are in church with us and to love those that we meet on a day to day basis. This will be a challenge to us as not everyone we meet will be 'loveable'. Some people will get on our nerves, others will upset us with their words and/or actions, but God says we are to love them.

Paul says that our example to look to is Jesus. Jesus who gave himself up for the church which, if you looked at the synagogue at the time, was full of people and their own self importance; full of leaders that didn't care about the people but loved the power that their office gave them. It was full of people that would use a woman caught in adultery as a trap for Jesus and wasn't very concerned about plotting to kill Jesus! These were the people that Jesus loved and gave his life for.

So who in our lives is a challenge to our loving character? Who are we feeling more anger, hate and bitterness to than love? What are we going to do about it? Avoid them? Tell them just what we think of them? Or love them? We need to ask God to give us a love and care for them and

to pray for them, till our feelings towards them change; to watch out for and care for them.

Paul says 'love your wives', Jesus says 'love your neighbour', so there is no getting away from this. We are called to love just as God loved us, and that's totally and without measure.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

In a world that demands its rights and where people live according to their own desires pray that our modelling out of godly loving relationships will bring glory to Christ and lead people to God.

Date: 19 July

Theme: Living as God's family

Key Readings: Ephesians 6:1-9

**Additional
Readings:**

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Who do we think rule most modern families; the parents or the children, and why do we think that?
2. In what ways do you think children need to have a godly father role in their lives
3. Why do you think Paul doesn't condemn slave trading?
4. In what ways can we, as Christians, make our work places a better place for all?
5. What could we do as Ebenezer to become even better at being a big happy family?
6. Spend time praying for those who have management positions at work, pray for God's wisdom to be upon them.

Leader's Notes

We have a sign in our house with the words on it 'Remember as far as anyone knows we are a normal family' When our children were at home it was stuck up right in the middle of our hallway so that we all see it as we move about our home. It is a humorous reminder to us that we are family, that we are connected to each other and that we need to be there for each other.

Paul, in effect, is telling fathers to be involved in their children's upbringing, to not just tell them off and then ignore them, but to love them and show them a godly way to live; to do things with them that will help them grasp the love and blessing of God for their own lives.

This is a challenge! Not only to those of us who are parents but to all of us. For God wants the church to be like a family, where there is give and take, where there is love and care, where we are there for each other. If we look at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where God has placed us, where can we love and care for people? Where can we 'parent' and bless others, so that they will grow up knowing more about the love and grace of God?

God wants everyone in church, and those on the edge of church, to feel loved, special, cared for and valued. This will only happen as we look at where God has placed us and who we can help. Paul covers some of the major areas of his day, family life and those who were rich enough to have slaves. He was wanting to make sure that everyone had a better life, that everyone knew more love in their lives.

In Titus, Paul encourages the church folk to be there for each other. He urges the old men to look out for the young men and train them up, and the older ladies to take on the younger ladies and train them. So who is there that we can help? Who is there that is younger than us that we can pour

our lives into? Who is there that is more mature than us, that we can go to for help and wise counsel? God never intended us to do the Christian walk on our own, we need each other.

So encourage the people in your group to start to mentor others in the church, and to get support and help for themselves. Let's live out Paul's vision where love rules in all that we do as we help each other, so that in times to come people will look at Ebenezer Baptist Church and continue to say that they are just one big happy family.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray for the missional activities in our different church communities, that more of our church family will take part, and that many would respond to the creative ways we share the love of Christ.

Date: 6 September

Theme: Our struggle is not against flesh and blood

Key Readings: Ephesians 6:10-17

Additional

Readings: Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 13:14-18; 1 Peter 5:6-11

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What would we say are the devil's schemes to draw us away from God?
2. In what ways have you used the armour of God to protect yourself?
3. How much do we know about 'spiritual warfare'?
4. Which piece of armour do you think is the most important and why?
5. What role do you think knowing our Bible plays in defending ourselves and why ?
6. Pray for each member of the group to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Leader's Notes

Paul understands that each one of us is in a battle, and that we need to defend ourselves. It is thought that Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest and would have had a Roman soldier stand beside him in his uniform. Paul takes each part of the soldier's uniform and gives it a spiritual meaning. He wanted his readers to be fully aware that they are in a battle and that God has given them all that they need to defend themselves.

Firstly we need to know who our battle is not against. It's not against other people or other churches, it's beyond that. Paul was saying that the church needs to be united. There would only have been one church in the town, so you couldn't fall out with people and then join another church, you had to work through your issues and come to a place of healing and wholeness. But he was also saying that when we encounter secular opposition it isn't the flesh and blood that is the enemy, it is the spiritual forces of evil.

Paul doesn't want any Christians to be picked off by the devil. So he shows us that we have many ways to not only defend ourselves, but also to attack. The devil will use the same tactics that he used on Adam and Eve, getting us to doubt and question God. The devil said to Eve 'did God really say...? Do you really think that you will die?' He didn't need to do much more. It will be the same with us. He will whisper, 'did God really call you to do this?' or, 'call yourself a Christian and you do things like that!'

Paul says that we have truth, righteousness, the gospel, peace, faith and salvation to help us stand. There will be times when we use one, some or all the armour to stand against the devil. However, we need to remember that we are on the winning side and that Jesus said the gates of Hades would not be able to withstand the church and if

you think about it then it won't be the gates that are moving ... There is also that old saying that the devil trembles at the sight of the weakest Christian on their knees praying.

We are on the winning side; the devil has to do as God tells him as it shows us in the book of Job. We can ask God to place his angels around us and we have the armour to shield us. This doesn't mean that we can get over confident and take risks, but it does mean that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us and don't forget the passage earlier in Ephesians that tells us we have God's incomparably great power given to us by God.

So take heart all of you that think you are in the midst of a battle, God is on your side and he will never leave you. He has given you all that you need to stand and fight and win. So be encouraged that you cannot be overcome or overwhelmed by the devil, for God is with you, always, and God always wins.

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please take time to pray for the fellowship in Ebenezer, that we would learn to stand in God's battle armour and to use the weapons he has given us with great effect.

Date: 13 September

Theme: Prayer strengthens our identity

Key Readings: Ephesians 6:18-23

Additional

Readings: Psalm 6; 32:1-7; 66:16-20; Jude 1:17-23

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. How often do we pray in tongues each week?
2. How would keeping a prayer diary help your prayer life?
3. How often do we pray for the leaders of Ebenezer Baptist Church and our other communities, and what do we pray for?
4. How can each of us make the gospel known to those around us?
5. Who is the most faithful servant you know and why?
6. Spend some time sharing where we are finding it hard in our lives, and then pray blessing and peace on each member of the group?

Leader's Notes

Paul has come to the end of his letter and said all that he wanted to these young churches. He has encouraged them and challenged them, exhorted them and loved them. So at the end of his letter the final thing that he wanted to leave with the church, was to pray in the Spirit and to pray for Paul that he would make the gospel of Jesus known. Paul spent his time between preaching the gospel and building up those new churches that had formed as people had responded to the gospel message. So encourage your group to take on those two things.

Praying in the Spirit means lots of things for me: when we pray in the spirit it builds and strengthens us, we communicate with God on a deep level, faith is imparted to us, we feel built up and blessed. It gives God a chance to speak to us, for as we are praying in the Spirit we are not too busy asking God to do this or to bless that. Paul knew that prayer is a vital key to us staying in touch with God, vital to us hearing from God, so he says at the end of his letter, 'pray'. I wonder how many of us feel that we pray enough? That we have a fulfilling prayer life or that we spend enough time in prayer?

Then Paul says, 'and make sure that you pray for me, that I will make the gospel known'. Paul wanted to keep the main thing the main thing, and for him that was preaching the gospel of Jesus. I wonder how many times we share/preach/showed the gospel to those around us. Can I challenge you, as a group, to ask each other every week for the next six months, how many times you shared Jesus with an unbeliever this week, and see what the answer is? We may be shocked to see how little we share the gospel!

At the end, Paul talks about Tychicus being a faithful servant. We are all called to be faithful servants. Where is

God calling each one of us to serve? I heard once of a church that insisted that to be a member of the church each person had to be a member of another club, so that they had opportunities to serve their communities and to share the gospel. Where do we think we can we start to serve, who can we serve and will we be faithful in the service?

Weekly Prayer Focus:

Please pray that as we complete our studies in Ephesians we will grasp what our identity is in Christ, and that it will transform us, re-energise us, and lead us out bring God's kingdom into the lives of those around us.

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