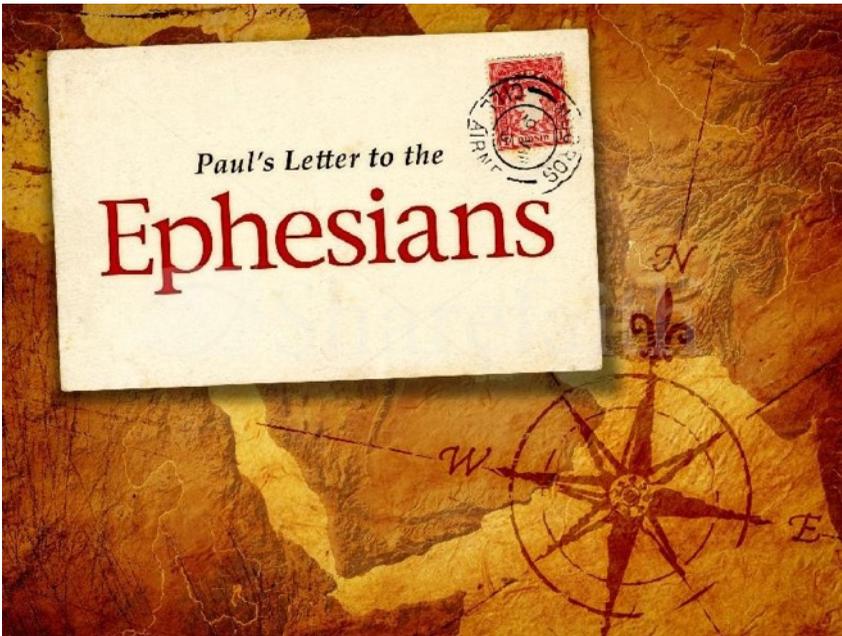


BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS



Ephesians 1: 15- 23

Having talked about all that God has done for them in Jesus Christ, Paul begins by letting them know he gives thanks for them.

Look back over verses 3 to 14, and then read verses 15 & 16

- **What are the true characteristics of any church that Paul gives thanks for?**
- **To what extent are those same characteristics evident in our own church family?**
- **Some people say it is possible to be a Christian, but not part of a church family. What in these verses suggests that it is not?**

Despite Paul's gratitude for the Ephesians he is still not satisfied. He prays that they may appreciate to the fullest possible extent the implications of the blessings they have already received. His prayer for them is "that they may know"

If you've not already, read verses 17 to 19

- **What are the 4 things that Paul wants the Ephesians to know?**
- **How do we come to know them?**
- **If the Ephesians have already received every Spiritual Blessing in Christ (verse 3) why does Paul need to pray for their Spiritual wellbeing?**

American Rock Band Vertical Horizon wrote this in one of their songs: "Sometimes I wish that we all were immortal, and the game of life always had a happy end, but I know it's not true. . . ."

By contrast "the hope to which he has called you" is a key idea in Ephesians and is something Paul prays for.

- **What is the Christian hope to which God has called us?**
- **In what ways is this hope a reassurance to you?**
- **Another song described Christian Faith as "pie in the sky when you die." How does our future hope affect the decisions of our daily lives today?**
- **In the run up to an election, different parties put forward their vision of how society will be in the future with them in power. How does the concept Christian hope feed in to that discussion and help us think about what we should be praying for?**

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR OTHERS?

On a friend's Facebook page advertising their coming Sunday's services, the sermon title was "What do you want God to do for you?" On the comments underneath, someone had written "shouldn't that be the other way round – what does God want us to do?"

It is very easy for our prayers to go down that line too. We compile lists of the things that we think God should be doing. They are all good things – for illness to be overcome; for violence and war to end; for hunger and poverty to be eradicated, etc. We share with God in prayer the things that are on our hearts.

Yet Paul prays very differently. We know the church was experiencing hostility; that it was a struggle to keep going faithfully. Yet Paul prays that they will know more of God, understand His ways, receive His wisdom, be given God's perspective on their plight.

What can we learn from Paul's example, and how can this enrich our personal and corporate prayer?

Look again at verses 19 to 21

In Philip Pullman's Dark Material's trilogy God is presented as an old man, who has lost his mind and all his power. God can no longer do anything to help. Paul writing to the Ephesians paints a very vivid and different picture of the way in which God is at work.

- **How has God demonstrated his power?**
- **Why is it important for us to know that this is the power that is at work in us?**
- **It could be argued that people like Philip Pullman come to their beliefs about God being dead because of the lack of evidence that God is still alive in the church. In what ways do you think our church today could be showing more signs of God's immeasurable greatness at work in us?**

We are reminded by Paul that Jesus is ascended and seated in the heavenly realms (verse 20). We will come back to this in more detail later when we look at chapter 2.

- **Why is it important that we know and remember this?**

Now look at the final verses of chapter one

- How is the church described in these verses?
- How does this compare with your understanding of what church is about?
- What practically could we do to encourage our own church to be more like the church that we read about as Paul describes God's purposes for it?
- What are the things that might hinder us becoming a church like this?

The church is central to God's purposes, and nowhere is this better explored than in Ephesians. It is easy to think that church is boring and a waste of time, yet Paul teaches us that this is God's great plan for the world. It is worth taking time to think through whether we have the right attitudes needed to enable not just what we do on a Sunday, but our shared life together to be aligned to God's purpose.

Using Ephesians 1 to help us pray.

Take some time to think about your walk with the Lord, now and over time. Some questions to help you might be:

- In what ways have you got to know God better?
- In what ways has your understanding of the Christian hope helped you make sense of daily life?
- How has your understanding of church developed over time, and what has been most helpful to you?

Now go back and look at the 4 things that Paul wanted the Ephesians to know from verses 17 to 19.

- Which of these do you really need to be praying for, for your own growth in faith?
- For the people that you already pray for, which of these do you need to be praying for them as well?

It is easy to lose heart, and to feel that when praying we are going uphill and not making much progress. Pray that God will enable you to trust in His power as you pray.