

Believers Have Questions: Ephesians Has Answers
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Opening Discussion: **When we pick up the Bible searching for answers in everyday life, what are some examples of the kinds of questions we might have?**

Believers have questions about how to live the Christian life. Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians contains answers to those questions. This will be an introduction and overview of Ephesians. If you want a great summary of both doctrine and practical application, this book does it in just six chapters.

Let me set the stage for this letter: Paul is in prison in Rome and has nothing but time on his hands. He decides to summarize for these growing Christians what it means to be a follower of Christ. What do we believe? How should we live? What about relationships? How can we "live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you?" (Eph. 4:1)

If this were today, and if Paul had computer privileges, he likely would have written a blog. His blog posts would have been shared from church to church on social media. Who knows? If he had a mobile device and WIFI, he might have done daily Snapchats or Periscope broadcasts of his thoughts. As it was in that day, he composed a letter and sent it by way of a man named Tychicus to the churches in Ephesus. It's a letter that is both FUNDAMENTAL and PRACTICAL. "In this epistle the first three chapters deal with doctrine (the calling of the church) and the last three chapters with application (the conduct of the church)."ⁱ

One commentator said:

"This epistle is the greatest doctrinal statement among the 13 epistles of Paul in the New Testament. Galatians, Romans, and Ephesians form a trilogy of theology. In Galatians Paul defines the Christian way of salvation as being by faith, not by works. In Romans he widens his range and outlines the Christian concept of truth or righteousness. In Ephesians he gets it all together in a concise but comprehensive statement of the Christian calling."ⁱⁱ

- Finding answers on how to live the Christian life is an intriguing topic.
- Forty minutes on doctrine...not so much. However, doctrine is important.
- Doctrine is simply a collection of beliefs. **Why should followers of Christ know doctrine?**
- A study done by Lifeway Research and Ligonier Ministries revealed that many Americans (even professed believers) have a fuzzy idea of key Christian doctrine.
 - Most Americans (71 percent), and in particular Black Protestants (82 percent) and Catholics (87 percent), say people must contribute some effort toward their own salvation.
 - About 6 in 10 Americans (61 percent) say hell is a real place. Black Protestants (86 percent) and Evangelicals (87 percent) are most likely to say hell is real. Catholics (66 percent) and Mainline Protestants (55 percent) are less convinced.

- Overall, Americans don't seem too worried about sin or being sent to hell. Two-thirds (67 percent) say most people are basically good, even though everyone sins a little bit—an optimistic view of human nature at odds with traditional teaching about human sin.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Link to the article: <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2014/10/28/americans-believe-in-heaven-hell-and-a-little-bit-of-heresy/>

To quote Ed Stetzer who conducted the study:

“People like to believe in a generic Christian-ish god with cafeteria doctrines. However, when we asked about harder beliefs—things that the church has and still considers orthodoxy—the numbers shift.”

- Doctrine and theology are central to following Christ. Ephesians has doctrine.
- Let's begin with a basic doctrinal question: How does salvation REALLY work?

Ephesians 2:1–10 (NLT)

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.* He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.^{iv}

- Let's pause right there. Look at verse three. Anyone who is honest with his or herself knows that verse three is true!
- Question: Think of the most moral...but unsaved...person you know. **What would they do if they KNEW they wouldn't get caught?** Let's focus on those of us who are followers of Christ. **What would YOU and I do if we KNEW we wouldn't get caught? Be honest! Why are these observations true?**
- Can we all agree with verse three? That left to our own natural inclinations we'd all be "breaking bad?"
- Don't feel special. Verse three says "all of us used to live that way." Verse two says, "just like the rest of the world." Then Paul adds: "obeying the devil."
- Why? We've worked our way back to verse 1: We were "dead in our sin." Dead to the things of God if left on our own. Every little baby is born with a spiritual "death sentence" that takes effect when they are old enough to understand and reject the message of the Gospel.
- So, what you and I instinctively know about our own nature is what is called the DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN. [St. Augustine coined that term.]^v
- J.I. Packer wrote: “The assertion of original sin makes the point that we are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners, born with a nature enslaved to sin.”^{vi}
- So what can we do about that? Nothing! But God did. Verse four of chapter two:

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

- There are many verses in our Bibles that should be highlighted. Ephesians 2:8-9 are two of them.
- God saved you and me by His grace. **What is God's saving grace?**
- **How can we take part in His saving grace? (V.8)**
- **Saved by grace, through...what? What does that mean?**
- **Who can take credit for this? (V.9)**
- **How does this verse RELEASE us or give us freedom? If we could get to Heaven by being "good enough" what would human nature cause us to do according to verse 9?**
- I want you to SOAK IN verse 10. Just IMAGINE that term!!
- Ephesians 2:10 tells us this is not a restoration job, it's NEW CONSTRUCTION!

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

- Now you know the doctrine of SALVATION by FAITH through GRACE.
- We've just answered the question: What is the real deal about salvation?
- In summary: I'm terrible by nature. God is holy by nature. He can change me to be RIGHTEOUS by giving me a NEW nature and covering me with the RIGHTEOUSNESS of Christ.
- Now that you know some doctrine, let's talk about some day-to-day QUESTIONS. In this brief introduction to the study you're about to begin we'll give you a "taste" of the kinds of questions Paul answers in this letter.
- Questions like:
 - How does God expect a Christian to live? (1:4)
 - How can I become more like Christ? -- SANCTIFICATION? (1:4)
 - How can I try to live a holy life? (Ch.4)
 - How can I love other people the way I should? (Ch. 5)
 - How can I have a clean reputation as a follower of Christ? How can I not embarrass Him? (Ch. 5:7-14)
 - How can I be wise? (Ch. 5:15-6:9)
 - What about alcohol or other mind-altering substances? (5:18)
 - What about husbands and wives? Parents and children? Employees and employers? (Ch. 5:21-6:9)
 - How can I battle demonic forces? (Ch. 6)
- Let's look at some verses that address some of these questions.
 - How can I strive to live a holy life? (Ch.4)

Ephesians 4:1-3 (NLT)

...lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each

other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:22 (NLT) tells us to...

²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

Ephesians 4:25 (NLT) says...

²⁵ So stop telling lies.

Ephesians 4:26 (NLT) warns us...

²⁶ ...“don't sin by letting anger control you.”* Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry,

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT) says...

²⁹ Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ephesians 4:30 (NLT) warns...

³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live.

Ephesians 4:32 (NLT) encourages us...

³² ...be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

- How can I love other people the way I should? (Ch. 5)

Ephesians 5:1–2 (NLT) prescribes that we...

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.

² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us* and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

- How can I have a clean reputation as a follower of Christ? How can I not embarrass Him? (Ch. 5:11)

Ephesians 5:11 (NLT)

¹¹ Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.

- What about alcohol or other mind-altering substances? (See 5:18)
- What about husbands and wives? Parents and children? Employees and employers? Ch. 5:21-6:9 give us very specific guidelines. Go home and read it! You'll have some great discussions on “submitting.”
- How can I battle demonic forces? Ch. 6 describes how to equip ourselves with the “armor of God” before we go out into the world each day.

- Let me close with a final question: How can I pray for spiritual growth for myself and other Christians? Paul gives us a beautiful example in chapter three.

14 When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father,* 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.* 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. 17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. 18 And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

- Paul prayed this prayer for the Ephesian believers and it is one of the most BEAUTIFUL prayers you can pray for other Christians and for YOURSELF too!
- Have you ever “prayed” scripture? Let’s learn how to make this YOUR prayer.
 - Lord, when I think of how you saved me I want to fall to my knees!
 - You are the Creator of everything and you have unlimited resources.
 - I'm asking you to empower me with the inner strength that only comes by Your Spirit living in me.
 - I know the more I trust in Christ the more my heart will become His home.
 - Father, I need deep roots to infuse me with Your love and power.
 - I need that power to even begin to understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep Your love is. Please help me!
 - I know my finite mind can't grasp all this, but I ask that You help me daily to experience it.
 - Father I want to be a complete follower of Christ. Please help me to soak up all Your fullness of life and power. Help me to realize that I will run dry if I don't drink it in daily!
 - Help me to daily believe that You want to accomplish infinitely more that I could ever ask or think of.
 - Finally Lord, help me to always give You all the glory for all of this.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- You’re about to begin one of the most valuable Bible studies in scripture!
- As we said at the beginning, Believers have questions about how to live the Christian life. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians has answers to those questions.
- If you want a great summary of both doctrine and practical application, this book does it in just six chapters.
- Best of all, you can read the whole book in about 20 MINUTES!!!!
- My challenge to you this week is to begin reading this short little book to get a feel for it. As you read, jot down the questions that come to mind and bring them to class. Then in future weeks you’ll be prepared to really absorb what Paul has for us in Ephesians.
- Remember, Bible study isn’t about knowledge it’s about CHANGE.
- It’s not about how much you get into Ephesians. It’s how much of Ephesians gets into you!

ⁱ Hoehner, H. W. (1985). Ephesians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 615). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Fields, W. C. (1972). Ephesians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The teacher’s Bible commentary* (p. 745). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2014/10/28/americans-believe-in-heaven-hell-and-a-little-bit-of-heresy/>

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^v Building on Paul’s comparison of Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12–21, Augustine (ad 354–430) framed the classical notion of original sin. Original sin refers to both (a) the first historical sin of humankind, and (b) the bondage to sin that is transmitted to the generations by a distortion of the will (i.e., concupiscence).^v

^{vi} Packer, J. I. (1993). *Concise theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.