



SERIES OVERVIEW

together

a four-week study in Ephesians

st bart's

Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan.

All rights reserved worldwide.

overview

As people put their trust in Jesus, the Lord does *even more* than secure our salvation. He fills us with his Spirit, enjoins us in his mission, and sets us apart as a people—*his people*. To be “in Christ” (Paul’s favourite way of describing the Christian’s status) is shorthand for our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection—the reality pictured in baptism. In union with Jesus, we receive forgiveness, a new identity, a shared life, a common purpose, and the promise of life forever.

As Mike Bird, puts it:

When it comes to salvation, what matters is “location, location, location.” Paul places a huge amount of emphasis on being “in Christ.” For instance, “Whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit” (1 Cor 6:17), and “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5)... In our union with Christ, we participate in his obedience, death, resurrection, vindication, exaltation, and future glory. Consequently, justification and transformation can never be conceived in abstraction from union with Christ as they both proceed immediately from that faith union itself. God’s salvation revealed in the gospel is apprehended only in union with Christ as applied by the Spirit.¹

No book of the New Testament works through the implications of being *in Christ* more prominently than Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In this four-part series, we explore the rich blessings of our union with Jesus and the profound implications this has for us as a community—formed together, sent together, and joined forever to the praise of his glory.

Outline

Week 1	Together <i>in Christ</i>	Ephesians 1:1-14
Week 2	Together <i>as Community</i>	Ephesians 2:11-22
Week 3	Together <i>on Mission</i>	Ephesians 4:1-16 (& Matthew 28:19-20)
Week 4	Together <i>Forever</i>	Ephesians 5:21-33 (& Revelation 19:1-10)

¹ Michael Bird “*Evangelical Dictionary, Second Edition*”, p.601-602.

Context

- **Author & Date:** Whilst some have doubted Pauline authorship, the general consensus of scholars (as per the letter's introduction) is that it is an authentic letter of Paul written towards the end of an extended period of imprisonment (likely after almost all of his other letters, circa AD 62).
- **Ephesus:** Ephesus was a city located in Asia Minor (modern day western Turkey), known for its idolatry of various gods and goddesses, along with imperial worship of the emperor (and his family) as a deity.
- **Context:** Whilst many of Paul's letters are written to address specific issues (e.g., theological problems in Galatia, divisive issues in Corinth), Ephesians has no obvious presenting problem. It's likely that the letter was intended to be used as a 'circular', to be shared amongst various Christian communities of the early church as an encouragement regarding the centrality of Christ.
- **Backstory:** Paul's story with the Ephesians begins in Acts 19 with his visit to Ephesus which lasted for two to three years (likely AD 52-54). Paul began preaching in the Jewish synagogue, but due to the 'obstinate' reception he received, Paul shifted his teaching to a private lecture hall. Paul's ministry was accompanied by extraordinary miracles, with many coming to profess Jesus as Lord. Paul's departure from Ephesus was hastened by a "great disturbance" in the city, led by craftsmen whose business of selling religious paraphernalia in honour of Artemis was undermined by the sheer number of people converting to Christianity. Paul wrote the letter sometime later (AD 62) from prison.



The Prayers of Ephesians

Other than reading through Ephesians at least once (it won't take long), the next best way to familiarise yourself with the letter is to *pray it*. The letter is punctuated by prayer (or least very prayer-esque words!). *For example:*

- **Wisdom and Knowledge (Ephesians 1:14-23):** Praying for wisdom and revelation in knowing God. Also that our hearts would be enlightened to grasp the hope of God's calling, the riches of God's inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God's power towards believers.

- **Strength and Experience of God's Love (Ephesians 3:15-23):** Praying for strength through the Spirit. Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith. Power to grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love. To be filled with the fullness of God (i.e., not to 'become divine', but be shaped and matured by God's own life and presence).
- **Boldness for Proclamation (Ephesians 6:18-20):** That our prayers would be at all times in the Spirit (i.e., prayer enabled, shaped, and sustained by the Holy Spirit), along with boldness to proclaim the Gospel.

General Resources

- *Read:* "The Message of Ephesians" by John Stott. 
- *Read:* "The Vision of Ephesians" by N. T. Wright.
- *Read:* "Gathered Together" by Karl Deenick. 
- *Watch:* "Ephesians" by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-ephesians/>
- *Previous Series* from St Bart's (including Children's Resources):
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/ephesians>

St Bart's Resources (including for families)

For the series overview, weekly sermons, small group material, and weekly children's curriculum, visit: [stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/together](https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/together)

ADAM LOWE

St Bart's Anglican Church, December 2025



Summaries by Adam Lowe (AL)



Available to borrow from the St Bart's Church Library ([stbarts.com.au/library](https://www.stbarts.com.au/library))

how to use this series overview

For each week in the series, a Bible reading, “the big idea”, some reflection questions, and a prayer is provided.

- **PRAY**

Begin with prayer, for example:

Gracious God, please enlighten our minds, enliven our hearts, and shape our wills according to your life-giving Word. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

- **READ from the Bible**

Read the part of the Bible that we are focusing on for that week. Some key verses (from that reading) are also printed — you might even like to memorise these!

- **REFLECT**

Read the ‘big idea’ and use the questions to reflect on the Bible passage. This will help prepare for the sermon and the following week’s small group questions (provided on the St Bart’s website).

- **PRAY**

Each day a prayer is provided that you may like to use. Of course, you need not to be limited to this prayer.

Week 1

Together in Christ *Ephesians 1:1-14*

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.
Ephesians 1:11-12

READ EPHESIANS 1:1-14

REFLECT. The phrase “in Christ” (or “in him”) appears eleven times in the first fourteen verses of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians alone! For Paul, *union with Christ* (through Jesus’ death and resurrection — as pictured in baptism) is not only at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, but it is the central motif of his letter. Having been made into a people *in Christ* (a new humanity), there are numerous implications that span the past, present, and future. First, those who are in Christ are **blessed** spiritually *now* — in fact one could spend their entire lifetime plumbing the beautiful depths of these blessings and still only scratch the surface: we have been chosen *in him* (before the world began); predestined for adoption *through him*; and redeemed *through his blood*. Second, we will be **united** with all things in the fullness of time *under Christ*. Third, we are **purposed** for the praise of *his glory*. Finally, we (all who trust in Jesus) are **marked** with the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers, teaches, convicts, directs us in praise, and is a guarantee of our future as God’s beloved possession. AL

- How does being *in Christ* also make us into a people?
- How does being *in Christ* shape your identity?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for every spiritual blessing that you have poured out on us in Christ. Please help us to delight in these glorious riches, to know you better, and increasingly direct our lives in praise of your glory. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Week 2

Together as Community

Ephesians 2:11-22

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.
Ephesians 2:19-20

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22

REFLECT. Union with Jesus not only binds us to him forever, but also unites us as a *forever people*. We are a community not defined by our backgrounds, shared interests, or like demographics, but our belonging to Jesus. This community is not merely one of shared affinity, but a transformed reality as the Lord incorporates us into his people through his Son. Elsewhere, Paul envisions this community to be like a body, but here Paul uses the descriptors of *fellow citizens* (all belonging to the one Kingdom) and *household members* (all belonging to the one family). There are a number of implications at the top of Paul's mind: (a) whilst once excluded from God's people, Gentiles can now belong; (b) barriers that once existed between us have now been overcome; (c) the means of this being 'brought near' is by the blood of Christ (he is the 'chief cornerstone'); and (d) a new — reconciled — humanity is the fulfillment of God's purpose. This community of *peace* (i.e., those who enjoy peace with God *through Christ* and are to make God's peace known by the power of his Spirit) is also a community of God's *presence*—as the *whole body* is being built together as a dwelling place of God's Spirit. AL

- If we are together being 'built into a dwelling place of God', what are the implications of how we prioritise our communal life as God's people?

PRAY

Gracious God, thank you that as we put our trust in your Son, you have also made us into a people. Please help us to live in a way that reflects this reality. Amen.

Week 3

Together on Mission

Ephesians 4:1-16

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service... Ephesians 4:11-12a

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-16

REFLECT. As Jesus dispatched the disciples to *go and make disciples of all nations* (cf. Matthew 29:19-20), Paul reminds the Ephesians that he also has gifted his people with an extraordinary array of gifts. Whilst it's unlikely that Paul intends this list to be exhaustive (i.e., apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), it provides insight into the *means*, *purpose*, and *vision* of these roles together. First the *means*: God has provided all that we need (*note the variety*) to fulfil his mission through the collective gifting of his church, not through individuals alone. That means that every part matters (cf. verse 16) and needs to be enabled. Second, the *purpose* of these roles is to equip his people for 'works of service'. Our gifts and roles are not only to be exercised (i.e., *put to work*), but directed to the building up of the body of Christ. This building up not only has an inward effect on the body, but also an outward effect as the body is equipped for proclamation. Further, there is no room for jealousy or boasting, for God has given by his grace and it is in his grace that we all have a role to play. Finally, the breathtaking *vision* for the giving and deploying of these gifts is so that we will reach unity (in Christ) and maturity, *attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. Wow! This vision will only be fully realised when Christ returns, but we actively anticipate his coming today by building up the body in love. AL

- What ways do you use your gifts to *build up the body of Christ*?

PRAY

Gracious Father, thank you for the gifts that you have bestowed upon your church. Please help us to work our gifts and enable every person to take their part. Amen.

Week 4

Together Forever ***Ephesians 5:21-33***

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31-32

READ EPHESIANS 5:21-33 & REVELATION 19:1-10

REFLECT. Whilst we are likely familiar with much of chapter five (not least from Christian weddings that we have attended), the mutual love that Christian married couples are called to express may have been more surprising to folk in the first century. Yes, submission within a marriage was accepted, but the balance of that equation only went one way: from the wife to the husband. Paul calls the Ephesians to not only *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*, but also to love one another with a *Christlike love* (i.e., husbands to love the wife as Christ loved the church, and wives, to express their love in respecting the husband). However surprising this teaching may be, the biggest surprise is saved for verse 32: *“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church”*. It’s easy to get preoccupied with what Paul means by ‘submission’ and in doing so miss the bigger point that he is making: that not only should a husband and wife’s marriage be a reflection of God’s love and way, but also — perhaps even more profoundly — that marriage is a pointer to the eternal relationship between Christ and his church. Jesus regularly compared his return to that of the bridegroom arriving (cf. Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-45; Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:1-13). John the baptist testified that Jesus was *the* groom (cf. John 3:27-30). Israel is oft-pictured throughout the Old Testament as the Lord’s bride. And Revelation envisages the fulfillment of New Creation as a *wedding feast between us and the lamb* (cf. Revelation 19). Whilst marriages *in this age* promise ‘until death do us part’, the marriage pictured between Christ and his church is an eternal one. That’s the ‘mystery’ (and glorious future) which

every Christian marriage — even in its imperfection — is to point to. It's not of course that those who are single cannot point to the future which awaits, but that marriage has a particular role in showing us a small glimpse of the relationship which has been made possible for us by Jesus.

In Revelation 19, as this future wedding banquet is described, it's important to not only note how wonderful (and final) that day will be, but that as we are joined to Christ we will also be joined to one another, forever. All things will be unified under Christ, just as Paul expounded earlier in Ephesians. That's our future in Christ! Therefore, as we look to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must live and love in a way that reflects that these relationships are not temporal, but eternal. AL

- How is Christian marriage unique?
- In what way is a Christian marriage to point to *the future which awaits us*?
- If we are connected to our brothers and sisters in Christ, how should that transform how we love one another and live as a community?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, how we look forward to that day when the bridegroom — Jesus — will return and when we will feast with you. Please help us to be ready, that we may grow in our trust in you and live to the praise of your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.