

Ephesians Reading Guide

If you had the opportunity to offer words of encouragement and challenge, a divestment of wisdom, to a group friends and family, what would you say? More to the point, if you could take by the hand your brothers and sisters in Christ and show them what it means to grow as a Christ follower, how would you do so? Perhaps you would remind them of the very foundations of their identity in Christ, pointing them toward their indissoluble hope in Christ and the grace that is theirs because the God of the universe set his love upon them before they took their very first breath. Perhaps you would invite them to remember that a part of their new, resurrection life in Christ is to be inextricably bound to other believers, living with humble selflessness that reflects the very heart of Jesus. Perhaps you would exhort them to realize that this new resurrection life will produce in them holiness and love and an existence that speaks of their place as citizens of the *now and one day* Kingdom of God. Perhaps you would extol them to filter all of their relationships through the lens of their own gospel transformation. Perhaps you would warn them of the fact that their allegiance to Christ brings real, spiritual opposition, and preparation for battle looks like a maturing faith and an ever-growing intimacy with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul spent nearly three years investing in the Church at Ephesus, and his letter to the group of churches in and around the city is filled with these exhortations, challenges, reminders, and more. In what is his most general letter to any church, Paul offers a robust exposition of the resurrection life that is now to be the lived experience of these Christian men and women.

Despite the general nature of the letter, Paul isn't writing into a cultural vacuum. These are believers who daily feel the tension of living new lives in Christ in the midst of real opposition in the form of false gods, lustful hedonism, idolatrous worship of the state, and the various and sundry everyday challenges of living in one of the largest and most influential metropolitan centers of the entire Mediterranean world. And when we think of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in those terms, it's easy to see a resemblance with our world today. We would do well to humbly sit under the wisdom offered in these six chapters, ingesting each encouragement and challenge and reminder in turn, and live together as a people whose identity is defined by our union with the resurrected Christ.

Ephesians is not a command to white knuckle our way into a new kind of behavior. It isn't some campfire singalong call to a cheap sense of camaraderie. It's an invitation to believe that God's redemptive work in our lives changes us completely, it binds us together, and it produces a new existence in us that speaks of hope and joy and humility and love that resemble the life of our Savior. Ephesians is a call to believe God when he says that we are new in Christ and, from that believing, live differently, ever in step with the Spirit. And this resurrection life touches everything about us.

May we be enthralled with the mystery of the gospel. May we see the glorious vision of a gospel-transformed community of faith living with Christ-exalting, others-serving humility. May we be a resurrection people in a dying world.

Ephesians 4:17-24 Reading Guide

Overview

The Psalms begin with an invitation to acknowledge that there is a righteous way and a wicked way to live. In Deuteronomy 30, we are reminded that obedience to the Lord leads to life whereas rebellion leads to death. And the New Testament picks up on this notion of two paths, two ways to live, in the teachings of Jesus as he, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, offers a glimpse of life within his Kingdom as opposed to life without.

Paul's language here flows from that source. He has already, throughout Ephesians, reminded them of the foundation of their redemption. That hope is rooted in the finished work of Christ. They have been made new, in a very real sense, because the resurrection power of God is operative in their lives according to the activity of the Spirit. They are one, have been given a new family name and purpose, a new language of love and humility and peace that is set in stark contrast to the harsh syllables of conflict and division that mark the language of the world.

All of this has been said thus far by Paul. They have been reminded. And in this exhortation, Paul is building on that foundation to say — *Christ has made you new, so let your life reflect that newness. You are citizens of a new Kingdom with a new language and new customs, so live and speak the life and language of your home in Christ.* Put off the old. Put on the new.

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:17-24

Supplemental Passages

Deuteronomy 30

This is but one example of the Lord reminding his people that there are two paths: faithful obedience leading to life and Godless rebellion that leads to death. Paul will pick up on this theme in Ephesians 4 to remind believers that their lives of faithful obedience are empowered through the transforming work of God in Christ.

Ezekiel 36:22-38

The Lord, through the prophet Ezekiel here, reminds Israel that he will do a new, transforming work to preserve and prosper them. The Lord will grant them a new heart and a new spirit within them. Ultimately, this anticipates the work of God in Christ that Paul speaks of Ephesians 4.

Matthew 5-7

The Sermon on the Mount provides insight, from Jesus himself, into life in his Kingdom. To know and follow Jesus is to walk a painful and difficult path, but one that leads to eternal life, whereas the path away from the Kingdom leads to destruction apart from God. Paul's language in Ephesians 4, then, of two competing ways to live, is not new, but a further exposition of what it means to know and follow Jesus.

Suggested Songs

"Build My Life" by Pat Barrett

"Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me" by CityAlight

"Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery" by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa

"Brokenness Aside" by All Sons and Daughters

Life Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Earlier, in 2:11-22, Paul expressly stated that many of the Ephesians *were* Gentiles before they knew Christ. Now, he makes a reference to their Gentile past (4:17). Why do you think Paul does so?
- 2) In what ways might life apart from Christ be characterized as futile? (4:17)
- 3) How should Paul's description of life apart from Christ in 4:17-19 fuel our prayers for our friends and family who do not know the Lord? How does it encourage our intentionality in sharing the gospel with those people?
- 4) Paul is not, in 4:20-24, simply telling the Ephesians that they need to try harder to be a better, more moral version of themselves. He is, instead, reminding them of who they are (new in Christ) and calling them to live in light of that truth. Why is it so important that our *doing* as a Christian flows from our *being* as a Christian?
- 5) How do we, practically, grow in putting off the habits of the old self and putting on the habits of the new self in Christ? How can we encourage one another in that pursuit?