

# THROUGH CHRIST

EPHESIANS 4 - 6

DISCUSSION GUIDE



## A. Background and Introduction

The church at Ephesus is one of the most interesting churches in the New Testament. Scripture gives us a lot of information about this one specific church—including her beginning, middle, and end.

Acts 19–20 records for us the founding of the church while Revelation 2:1–7 records a set of final instructions from Jesus to the church. In between Acts 19 and Revelation 2, the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. He also wrote two letters to one of the lead-elders at Ephesus: 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy.

Some pretty strong evidence from church history also indicates that the apostle John lived in and around Ephesus during the final years of his life. It's safe to conclude that both the Gospel of John as well as 1, 2, and 3 John would have been read by the people and leaders of this church.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the city itself, Ephesus “was perhaps best known for its magnificent temple of Artemis, or Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world [and was about 100 yards in length]. It was also an important political, educational, and commercial center, ranking with Alexandria in Egypt[.]”<sup>2</sup>

## B. The Founding of the Church

By the time Paul arrived in Ephesus, the city was around 300,000 in population and was home to a 25,000 seat theater—the largest of the Greek open-air theaters.<sup>3</sup> To put that in perspective: Grande Stadium in Midland seats 15,000 people. The city was thick with religious and spiritual devotion to the various gods of the ancient world, but the temple of Artemis held a special degree of influence over people. As one commentator points out:

Ephesus was the center of the cult of Artemis (or Diana, as the Romans called her). In Roman lore, Diana was the goddess of the hunt. She symbolized virginity. But in the ancient metropolis of Ephesus, Artemis symbolized sexual fertility...In Ephesus, as in other Greek and Roman temples, a great deal of the so-called worship of the goddess was actually cult prostitution.<sup>4</sup>

Not unlike our modern day, Paul was sent to preach to a city and people who were giving their lives away to something that would not satisfy and that was requiring very much of them. These people were enslaved to a false religion that held out promises it could never deliver. The idolatry of the city was part of its cultural makeup, something that defined the people. The beliefs and practices of the people were deeply entrenched and personally cherished. When the gospel came to Ephesus, we read the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas J. Kostenburger, L. Scott Kellum, & Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 791.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1680.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 321.

<sup>4</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 328.

**Acts 19:1–7.** Paul meets some disciples of John the Baptist who hadn't yet received Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Paul then shares Jesus with these disciples and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. This event is very significant in the course of salvation-history, because it marked the definitive moment where the Holy Spirit was poured out in a Gentile city—indicating the full inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ, something Paul would later write to the Ephesians about (Ephesians 2:11–3:8)

**Acts 19:8–10.** Paul begins to reason with Jews and Gentiles about the truthfulness of Jesus. He begins with the Jews in the synagogue, but turns to the Gentiles when the Jews remained “hardened and would not believe” (Acts 19:9). After moving his dialogue meetings to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, we learn that Paul faithfully “conducted discussions everyday...for two years” (Acts 19:9–10). The result being that “all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10).

**Acts 19:11–20.** Luke (the writer of Acts) makes it clear that God was doing a special work through Paul while he was in Ephesus. It's not a stretch to say that God was confronting the demonic powers of darkness in this city by displaying His superior power and authority over them. In this section, we read about Paul's confrontation with the demonic and the power by which Jesus delivered people. Here we read about the “works [they] did it first” in Ephesus (Revelation 2:5). Luke tells us “many who had become believers came confessing and disclosing their practices, while many of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them in front of everyone” (Acts 19:19–20).

**Acts 19:21–41.** Amazing. Powerful. Glorious. These would be appropriate words to describe God's powerful grace at work in the city of Ephesus. But another word would be appropriate as well: *disruptive*. Specifically, God's work to save people out of pagan religion completely disrupted some of the local businesses whose products were used in the temple (Acts 19:28–34). As a result, a riot broke out in Ephesus that ended with the involvement of the city's clerk, who was the city's chief magistrate and executive official. This is the irony of the gospel: while it certainly comes with God's power to save, it also comes with the power to disrupt the cultural idols we hold so dear.

**Acts 20:17–48.** “After the uproar was over, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them, and after saying farewell, departed to go to Macedonia” (Acts 20:1). After traveling around many cities and encouraging various disciples, Paul returned to Ephesus and “summoned the elders of the church” (Acts 20:17). What follows is Paul's heartfelt charge for these men to protect the church from false teachers.<sup>5</sup> The plurality of leadership makes it clear that Paul understands the responsibility for the care of God's people doesn't fall to a single leader, but to a body of qualified leaders who love Jesus and love His people. Paul's exhortation reminds these men of the sobering call to which they have been entrusted.

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<sup>5</sup> It's interesting to note that some of the most important statements about the importance and qualifications for Elders center around the Ephesian church. See this passage as well as 1 Timothy 3:1–7.

## C. Some Important Observations

**Focus on love, not just knowledge.** The story of the Ephesians is very insightful, full of knowledge and wisdom for us to apply to our lives. This is so important to have, but having the right knowledge is not the ultimate goal. Rather, that knowledge is meant to stir our affections for Jesus, bringing us into a deeper communion with Him. To steal a phrase from Paul, the goal of this guide is to help you “know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

**Before you Begin.** To help you focus your heart in this direction, we encourage you to spend some time in prayer before you begin each week’s reading. This is so important. Prayer can be the difference between us merely knowing information in our *heads* and believing it in our *hearts*. A helpful outline to help you structure your prayers is I.O.U.S.<sup>6</sup> It looks like this:

- Incline my heart to your will and not to selfish gain (Psalm 119:36).
- Open my eyes to see wonderful things in your Word (Psalm 119:18).
- Unite my heart to love and fear your name (Psalm 86:11).
- Satisfy my soul in your steadfast love (Psalm 94:11)

## D. How to Use this Guide

As you work through this guide, you’ll notice some basic features for each week. These are meant to guide you in both your first hearing of the Sunday message and your devotional time in the Scriptures. If you’re working through this guide in a small group, this guide will provide you with plenty of Scripture, reflection, and discussion questions. Let’s briefly look at each segment of the guide in order.

**The Main Reading.** This is the section of Scripture for the week. It will also be the passage(s) you hear preached from the stage. This will be the focus of your reflection and discussion in your devotional or small group time.

**Optional Extra Reading.** These are passages that provide additional background or supporting information for the main reading.

**Scripture Memory.** This is a passage from the main reading for you to commit to memory. Don’t snub this off as something only children do. Scripture memory is a powerful tool to reorient and retrain your mind to think God’s thoughts after Him (see Psalm 119:11; Romans 12:2).

**Sermon Notes.** This is a section for you to take some brief notes on the Sunday Sermon. You may want to bring this guide to Sunday morning service or just simply jot down some things you remember from the message before you meet with your group. It’s up to you.

**Reflection Questions.** These are the questions for you to think through and reflect on. If you’re in a small group that’s going through the sermon series, these questions will be the starting point for your discussions.

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<sup>6</sup> This outline comes from John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 151–153.

## Main Reading

### Ephesians 4:1–16

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit —just as you were called to one hope( at your calling— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. **7** Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. **8** For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. **9** But what does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? **10** The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. **11** And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. **14** Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. **15** But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head —Christ. **16** From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

### Optional Extra Reading

- John 17:20–23
- 1 Corinthians 12:4–31
- Galatians 5:16–26
- 2 Timothy 2:14–26
- James 4:1–10
- 2 Peter 1:3–15

### Scripture Memory

*But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head: Christ. — Ephesians 4:15*

### Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1. What stands out to you in this passage and why?**
- 2. In light of the gospel, what are the character traits we should exhibit as Christ followers? (v. 1–3)**
- 3. For what purpose has God given teachers in the church? (v.12) What are specific things you could do for those around you that would be a ministry to them?**
- 4. Why is it important for us to grow spiritually and not be easily persuaded by wrong ideas about God and the gospel? (v. 13–15).**
- 5. What are some specific ways you can pursue maturity in your walk with Christ?**

# Main Reading

## Ephesians 4:17–32

**17** Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. **19** They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more. **20** But that is not how you came to know Christ, **21** assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, **23** to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth **25** Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. **26** Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and don't give the devil an opportunity. **28** Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. **29** No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. **30** And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. **32** And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Romans 12:1–21
- 2 Corinthians 7:1–13
- Philippians 2:12–13
- Colossians 3:1–17
- 1 John 2:1–17

## Scripture Memory

*Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.* — Ephesians 4:25

## Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?



## Discussion Questions

1. **What stands out to you in this passage and why?**
2. **What are God's instructions for believers listed in v. 22–24? Where do we find the power to do these things? (See Philippians 2:12–13).**
3. **According to verse 29, what should our speech be like? How would you assess your own speech?**
4. **What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? What sort of behavior grieves Him? (v. 30–31).**
5. **Why do you think God cares about how we conduct our lives (i.e. our attitudes, our speech, our relationships, etc.)?**

# Main Reading

## Ephesians 5:1–21

Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, **2** and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God. **3** But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. **4** Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. **5** For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. **7** Therefore, do not become their partners. **8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light — **9** for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth — **10** testing what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. **13** Everything exposed by the light is made visible, **14** for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. **15** Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise— **16** making the most of the time, because the days are evil. **17** So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. **18** And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: **19** speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, **20** giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Leviticus 19:1-2
- Matthew 5:14–16
- John 8:12–20
- Galatians 5:1–26
- Romans 13:8–14

## Scripture Memory

*Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise - Ephesians 5:15*

## Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?

## Discussion Questions

1. **What stands out to you from this passage and why?**
2. **What are some specific things you can do to imitate God in your life (v.1)?**
3. **Why is living a Godly life important for a believer (v. 3–10, 15–21)?**
4. **Does God love us more if we are more obedient? Why or why not?**
5. **What do you think it means to be “filled with the Spirit” (v.18)? Hint: notice the contrast between getting drunk.**

## Main Reading

### Ephesians 5:22–33

**22** Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, **23** because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her **26** to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. **27** He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. **28** In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30** since we are members of his body. **31** For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. **32** This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. **33** To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Genesis 2:21–24
- Matthew 11:28–30
- Mark 10:35–45
- 1 Corinthians 7:1–16
- Colossians 3:18–25
- 1 Peter 3:1–7

### Scripture Memory

*This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church.* — Ephesians 5:32

### Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?

## Discussion Questions

1. **What stands out to you from this passage and why?**
2. **What are some things we learn about God's heart for marriage in these verses?**
3. **Who sets the example for how men are supposed to love their wives and how is it phrased in v.25?**
4. **Do you think there's a difference between what the Bible and our culture mean by the words "submit" and "love"? Why or why not?**
5. **According to verse 22, whom are wives ultimately called to submit to as they submit to their husband's leadership? What does this practically look like?**

# Main Reading

## Ephesians 6:1–9

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. **2** Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, **3** so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. **4** Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. **5** Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ. **6** Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart. **7** Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people, **8** knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord. **9** And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Deuteronomy 6:1–9
- Exodus 20:1–17
- Colossians 3:23–25
- 2 Thessalonians 3:10–13
- 1 Timothy 5:3–4

## Scripture Memory

*Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people, knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord. - Ephesians 6:7–8*

## Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1. What stands out to you from this passage and why?**
- 2. Why do you think God gives these instructions to parents and children in v.1–4?**
- 3. In v.4, who does God address as the primary (not exclusive) teacher of the children? What are your thoughts about this?**
- 4. In v. 5–9, what do we learn about how we should work? What are some of the challenges you have to this?**
- 5. In light of these verses, what are some specific areas in your life you want to change and/or grow in?**

# Main Reading

## Ephesians 6:10–24

**10** Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. **11** Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. **13** For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. **14** Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, **15** and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. **16** In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit — which is the word of God. **18** Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. **19** Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. **20** For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should. **21** Tychicus, our dearly loved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me so that you may be informed. **22** I am sending him to you for this very reason, to let you know how we are and to encourage your hearts. **23** Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Genesis 3:1–7
- Isaiah 11:1–5
- Isaiah 52:7
- Isaiah 59:17
- Zechariah 4:1–6
- Matthew 4:1–11
- 2 Corinthians 10:3–5
- 1 Timothy 6:11–14
- 1 Peter 5:7–8

### Scripture Memory

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. - Ephesians 6:12*

### Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
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## Main Reading

### Revelation 2:1–7 CSB

Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands: **2** I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. **3** I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and have not grown weary. **4** But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. **5** Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. **6** Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

### Optional Extra Reading

- Matthew 22:34–40
- John 15:1–11
- Acts 19:11–20
- 1 John 4:7–21

## Scripture Memory

*But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.* — Revelation 2:4

## Sermon Reflection

1. What were some key points that stood out to you from the sermon on this section?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did this stand out to you?

## Discussion Questions

1. **What stands out to you from this passage and why?**
2. **What are the sorts of things about the Ephesian church that Jesus knows and commends them for (v. 2-3)?**
3. **Why do you think Jesus was concerned that the Ephesians had “abandoned” their first love (v.4)?**
4. **Have you ever experienced seasons in your life when you weren’t as close to Jesus as you would like to be? Do you resonate with what it means to “abandon” your first love like the Ephesians did?**
5. **As you consider these words from Jesus, is there anything you feel like you need to “repent” from (v.5)? Is there anyone you can talk to about this who can pray with you?**