

# Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] This evening we are going to read Ephesians, the book of Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We're going to read all of the letter.

So Paul's letter to the Ephesians from the beginning. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

[ 1 : 25 ] With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

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.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

[ 2 : 50 ] I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

[ 4 : 16 ] But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we are dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Therefore, remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

[ 5 : 58 ] His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

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.

In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

[ 7 : 21 ] In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations, as it has now been revealed by the spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God, should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In him, and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

[ 8 : 51 ] For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever.

Amen. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.

[ 10 : 26 ] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

but to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

[ 11 : 49 ] Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ.

From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity and they are full of greed.

that, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

[ 12 : 55 ] you were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin, do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold.

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer but must work doing something useful with their own hands that they may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.

[ 14 : 28 ] Follow God's example therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

God's sake but among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people.

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking which are out of place but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure no immoral impure or greedy person such a person as an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient therefore do not be partners with them.

For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness righteousness and truth and find out what pleases the Lord.

[ 15 : 51 ] Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret but everything exposed by the light becomes visible and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

That is why it is said wake up sleeper rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Be very careful then how you live not as unwise but as wise making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery instead be filled with the Spirit speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church his body of which he is the saviour.

[ 17 : 20 ] Now as the church submits to Christ so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.

In this same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all no one ever hated their own body but they feed and care for their body just as Christ does the church.

For we are members of his body. 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. However each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband.

Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. honour your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

[ 18 : 59 ] Fathers do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart just as you would obey Christ.

Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord not people because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do whether they are slave or free and masters treat your slaves in the same way do not threaten them since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no favouritism with him.

Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against all the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms therefore put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist with the breastplate of righteousness in place and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace in addition to all this take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the

Lord's people pray also for me that whenever I speak words will be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should Tychicus the dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord will tell you everything so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing I am sending him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage you peace to the brothers and sisters and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grace to you all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love Amen

Paul's letter to the Ephesians the story of how Paul came to the city of Ephesus is really interesting you can go read about it in Acts chapter 19 Ephesus was a huge city it was the epicenter of worship for most of the Greek and Roman gods and for over two years Paul had a really effective missionary presence there and lots of people became followers of Jesus years later after being imprisoned by the Romans Paul wrote this letter the movement of thought in the letter divides into two really clear halves in the first half Paul is exploring the story of the gospel how all history came to its climax in Jesus and in his creation of this multi-ethnic community of his followers the second half of the letter is linked to the first by the word therefore and here Paul explores how the gospel story should affect how we live every part of our life story personally in our neighborhoods and communities and in our families so let's dive in and we can see how Paul develops all of this chapter 1 opens with a beautiful

[ 23 : 29 ] Jewish style poem where Paul praises God the father for the amazing things that he has done in Christ Jesus from eternity past the father has purpose to choose and bless a covenant people and think here the family of Abraham and Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 through 3 and through Jesus now anyone can be adopted into that family Jesus' death covers our worst sins our worst failures and in Jesus we find God's grace in fact Paul says that grace has opened up a whole new way for us to understand every part of our lives he says in chapter 1 verse 10 that God's purpose was to unify all things in heaven and on earth under Christ which is a title that means Messiah God's plan was always to have a huge family of restored human beings who are unified in Jesus the Messiah this divine purpose became clear Paul says when we were first made into that family and here he's referring to ethnic

Jews in the family of Abraham but then Paul talks about how you and here he means non-Jews you all heard about Jesus and the salvation through him and you were also brought into this family by the work of the Holy Spirit and so here he's referring to the events told in the stories of Acts about how God's Spirit brought together Jew and non-Jew into one family in Jesus it's just like God promised to Abraham long ago notice also how in this poem Paul begins by talking about God the Father but then about Jesus the Son and then here at the end about the Spirit all three work together as Paul tells the story of the Gospel it's really cool after the poem Paul responds with a prayer he prays that these followers of Jesus would not just know about but personally experience the power of the Gospel that they would be energized by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and placed him as the exalted head of the whole world now in chapter 2 Paul goes back and he elaborates on some key ideas from the poem in chapter 1 especially God's grace and this new multi-ethnic family of Jesus he begins by retelling the story of how these non-Jewish Christians came to know Jesus before hearing about Jesus they were physically alive but they were spiritually dead they were trapped in a purposeless life of selfishness and sin and they were deceived by dark spiritual forces of evil but amazingly

God in his great love and mercy he saved them he forgave all of their sins and he joined their lives to Jesus' resurrection life and he's brought them back to life too and so now having been created as new human beings through Jesus they have the joy of discovering all of the new calling and purposes and tasks that God has set before them not only have they been shown God's grace they've also been invited into a new family before hearing about Jesus these non-Jewish people they were not just cut off from God they were cut off from his covenant people the family of Abraham and for a really practical reason the commands of the Sinai covenant they formed like a boundary line around the family they were like a barrier that kept most non-Jewish people away but in Jesus the laws of the Torah have been fulfilled and the barrier is removed the two ethnic groups have become as Paul puts it a new unified humanity that can live together in peace so Paul goes on in chapter 3 to marvel at the unique role that he got to have in spreading this good news to non-Jewish people and even though he's in prison he's thanking God for the chance he's had to see this covenant family grow so huge so Paul closes the first half of the letter with another prayer this time he prays that Jesus' followers would be strengthened by God's spirit to simply grasp and comprehend the love that Christ has for his people the second half of the letter begins with Paul shifting gears and he starts challenging the reader to respond to the gospel story by how they live their own life story so he starts in chapter 4 with just the everyday life of the church the church is a big family with lots of different kinds of people but he emphasizes that they are one and one is a key word in this chapter they are one body that's unified by one spirit they have one Lord with one faith they have one baptism they believe in one God that's a lot of unity however Paul says unity is not the same thing as uniformity he goes on to explore how Jesus' new family consists of lots of very very different kinds of people but they're all empowered by the one Holy Spirit each using their unique talents and passions to serve and to love each other and to build up the church and here he uses two really cool metaphors one is building up the church as a new temple and the second is that they are all becoming a new humanity with Jesus as the head and this new humanity is a metaphor he's going to then run with for the next couple chapters

Paul challenges every Christian to take off their old humanity like a set of old clothes and to put on their new humanity in which the image of God is being restored and he then goes on into this long section where he compares this new and old humanity so instead of lying new humans speak truth instead of harboring anger they peacefully resolve their conflicts instead of stealing new humans are generous instead of gossiping they encourage people with their words instead of getting revenge new humans forgive instead of gratifying every sexual impulse new humans cultivate self-control of their bodily desires instead of getting drunk new humans come under the influence of God's spirit and he spells out what that influence looks like in four different ways the first two have to do with singing singing together but also singing alone and this is really interesting that the first thing that Paul thinks of about how the spirit works in the lives of Jesus' people is singing and music the third sign of the spirit's influence is being thankful for everything and the fourth is that the spirit will compel

Jesus' followers to put themselves underneath others and to elevate others as more important than themselves and Paul actually expands on this fourth point by showing how it works in Christian marriage so you have a wife who follows Jesus she is called to respect and to allow her husband to become responsible for her and the husband is called to love his wife and to use his responsibility to lay down his selfish agenda and to prioritize his wife's well-being above his own and Paul says it's this kind of marriage that's actually reenacting the gospel story the husband's actions mimic Jesus and his love and his self-sacrifice the wife's actions mimic the church which allows Jesus to love her and to make her new Paul then applies the same idea to children and parents as well as slaves and masters Paul closes out the letter by reminding these Christians of the reality of spiritual evil these are beings and forces that will try to undermine the unity of Jesus' people and to compromise their new humanity and so Paul challenges them to stand firm and to put on this metaphorical set of body armor which he describes in detail and Paul has drawn all of these pieces of body armor from the book of Isaiah and how Isaiah depicted the messianic king and so now as the Messiah's followers we need to make the Messiah's attributes our own since we make up

[ 30 : 58 ] Jesus' body practically I think Paul means for Christians to begin to form habits proactively using prayer and the scriptures and our relationships with each other to help us grow and mature as followers of Jesus and that's the letter to the Ephesians very powerful it's where Paul summarizes the whole gospel story and how it should reshape every part of our life story we're starting a series in Ephesians in the pattern of preaching through different sections it seemed to me that we were due for another epistle and we've recently tackled both of Peter's letters so we're back with Paul this time last year there was a picture that did the rounds online of a guy I think he was preaching with on the screen a general Pauline letter outline it goes like this grace I thank God for you hold fast to the gospel for the love of everything holy stop being so stupid Timothy says hi that's a fair description of most of Paul's letters and in Ephesians well here we are at the start grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord

Jesus Christ and at the end well it's Tychicus coming with the letter this time not Timothy sending greetings but it's not far astray from the pattern the thanksgiving that gets delayed to verse 15 of chapter 1 but it's certainly thoroughly present an exhortation to hold fast to the gospel absolutely woven through the whole letter but maybe you noticed as we read through there isn't this time an obvious challenge of false teaching by which the church are being led astray Paul's not correcting some heresy he's not telling them they've all got it wrong and they should stop being so stupid that's there in most of his letters but not in Ephesians now as you can no doubt imagine commentators have taken this and piled it up with other supposed evidence and used that to argue that this isn't Paul writing at all honestly I don't want to waste our time with that one tonight I can point you to the books that engage with all of those different arguments from the linguistics and the theological content and so on and so on if you want reasons why we should believe that it is Paul who writes Paul's letter to the Ephesians for most of us

I suppose the first word of the letter will suffice Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to God's holy people in Ephesus the faithful in Christ Jesus but what we do then need to ask ourselves is if Paul's not writing to deal with false teaching if he's not writing because there's a crisis in the church if he's not calling them to repent of their stupidity well why is he writing this letter what's the purpose of the book of Ephesians because he doesn't just write for the fun of it letter writing is an expensive business you think we had it bad with the postman on strike well try sending letters in a context where there is no postal service at all writing a letter means in this case sending Tychicus to go and take it in our day of email on whatsapp we forget what's involved in communicating from one side of the Mediterranean to the other in Paul's day this isn't something to do lightly and Paul's in prison as he writes the openings of chapters 3 and 4 tell us that most likely this is Paul's



Roman imprisonment that's described in Acts chapter 28 that's a sort of house arrest that leaves freedom for visitors like Tychicus or Timothy to come and go with news and with letters and so on but don't imagine that that means this is an easy thing Acts 28 verse 20 tells us he's chained up during this imprisonment for instance he is suffering for the sake of the gospel but anyway in that context he's going to the effort of writing this letter why is he doing that?

well Paul's intent I think is to produce encouragement and joy in Christ right at the end of the letter he says encouragement is the reason why he's sending Tychicus and when we read the book with that kind of a perspective hopefully you can see how it makes sense Paul starts the letter by reminding the recipients the Ephesians reminding people of the extraordinary privilege of their inheritance in Christ Paul finds for himself great joy and great encouragement in knowing that he and all God's people are in Christ even as he himself is in prison Ephesian believers and we likewise may well live in an alien world we may find ourselves in a difficult context we may be enduring trying circumstances but in Christ we find strength to live for Christ that theme of being in Christ is very clearly an important one

[ 36 : 08 ] I have on my desk at the moment the book of Ephesians printed out on one sheet of A3 paper and various highlights all over it highlighted in purple 21 instances of the phrase in Christ or similar parallels in the first three chapters of the book Paul is big on being in Christ so as Gardiner puts it as we read this letter we should be encouraged many theological truths are addressed many challenges are laid before God's people but in the end one truth shines out for which we are to praise God he has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ why then does this series get the title Doctrine for Life well the book of Ephesians divides into two very clear sections as they were saying on the video that's universally acknowledged chapters 1 through 3 and chapters 4 through 6 provide two big chunks of the letter the first three chapters are thoroughly theological in our post-modern world well Ephesians is unabashed in its strong affirmation of the importance of truth

Ephesians says there is a difference between fact and fiction and knowing the truth matters there's not many commands not many instructions in the first half of the letter those first three chapters but the commands that do come up are about knowledge about affirming truth so in chapter 1 verse 17 Paul's prayer is for the Ephesians to know God better in 2.11 they're instructed to remember their past circumstances and God's reconciling work in 3.4 his desire is that they might understand at the end of chapter 3 he prays that they might have power but power for what?

power to know power to grasp at a deep experiential level the reality of God's love so you've got these first three chapters of the book all about knowing the truth of what God has done knowing the right doctrine knowing what we're supposed to believe understanding the faith reminding them what they're supposed to already know and then the second half of the letter picks all of that up and runs with it the second half says okay well then how do we live in light of that and now in the second half there's plenty more commands and instead of the commands all being about knowledge and understanding now they're about living chapter 4 verse 1 being humble and gentle in the next verse verse 17 you must no longer live as the Gentiles do verse 22 put off your old self 5 8 live as children of the light and of course all of those commands about relationships in 5 21 and onwards and all of those commands all of those instructions that Paul is giving the Ephesian

Christians all of them are rooted in the knowledge of which they've been reminded in the first half of the letter and of course Paul being Paul as he goes through that second half he can't help but reiterate those same theological points and he can't help but keep coming back to different bits of doctrine but the emphasis has definitely shifted to the so what part of the letter everything of how Paul calls them and us to behave all of it is rooted in who God has called them to be why doctrine for life well because fundamentally this doctrine is about life chapter 2 Paul says as for you you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who is now at work and those who are disobedient all of us also lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts like the rest we were by nature deserving of wrath but because of his great love for us

God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved Paul says they have come from death to life this is doctrine for life the light shines and transforms the darkness alongside that there's another aspect of the purpose of the letter that's helpful for us to consider this evening and that comes through perhaps most strongly in the first part of chapter four but I think this theme is woven throughout one of the dangers of modern western christianity is an over individualization that we're focused on the implications of the gospel for me as a person rather than for us as a family or for us as a church Stott says one of our chief evangelical blind spots has been to overlook the central importance of the church but if we are each of us as individuals in christ as paul makes very clear in the first half of the letter if that's true of all genuine christians that we are each in christ well then we cannot help but be united to one another can we we're all in the one head and so of course paul will say in chapter four verse three make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace paul calls us to live out the reality that already exists if we read through ephesians or if you hear a series of sermons on ephesians and you come away with a private gospel then something has gone badly awry stott says ephesians is the gospel of the church this is about life together see god is creating in and through christ by the power of the holy spirit as we consider this morning he is creating a new society and this society is characterized by life in place of death by unity and reconciliation across the greatest of those ancient divides that jew gentile distinction bringing all to be children of abraham and unity and reconciliation too across across the greatest of modern divisions mending all alienation and all disunity this society is characterized by these wholesome standards of righteousness in place of the corruption of wickedness and by love and peace instead of hatred and strife this new society is however also characterized by vigorous and unrelenting conflict with evil this is most obvious in the second half of chapter 6 the armor of god characterized not by any kind of compromise not by winking at sin not by flirting with evil powers and evil deeds but by standing firm with all of the strength that god supplies we are in a battle and god has equipped us for it why doctrine for life well because doctrine should never be abstract doctrine shouldn't be an academic exercise our understanding of the great truths of our faith should not be something that just sits in a box in our minds as a unit no it affects everything it transforms all that we do god's desire is that we know him rightly in order that we then live rightly i've just started a book by sinclair ferguson that's called the christian life and in the first chapter

[ 44 : 16 ] of the book he says the studies which follow are unashamedly doctrinal this is not to suggest that we should play down the importance of experience the very reverse is true as we find our minds expanded by the grace of god our hearts should be correspondingly enlarged with love to him for all that he has done for us in christ this in turn should lead us to a richer experience of his love for us these doctrines are character building and life changing as all doctrine should be it's surely paul's intention that that is true of the doctrine he espouses in this letter it is doctrine for life not doctrine for doctrine's sake and i pray that the same will be true of this series of sermons over the coming months let's pray lord god we thank you that in our lord jesus christ you have blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in christ what a precious truth that is for us to hold on to what you have done for us transforms not only our future but our present our day to day experience lord we pray that you would continue that transforming work in our hearts in the week ahead and in the weeks and months ahead as we consider paul's words the holy spirit's words to us in this letter in jesus name amen amen here thanks and help when work in