

Ephesians Overview

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 May 2015

[0 : 00] Children, you are now dismissed to go learn about this guy named Jonah and what happened in the stomach of a big fish.

Salvation belongs to the Lord, is what Jonah discovered, in the stomach of a big fish. We're going to be hitting the book of Jonah next week.

We're going to do the book of Jonah in the month of June. And so four sermons in Jonah in the month of June. And today, of course, marks the last sermon out of the book of Ephesians.

We've been in this book for about a year and a half. We started in October 2013. And there was a very specific reason why we started our life together as a church in the book of Ephesians because the book of Ephesians is all about unity.

If you would turn in the book of Ephesians to Ephesians chapter 6, to the last two verses of the chapter, the last two verses of the book.

[1 : 09] In verses 23 and 24, Paul writes to these Ephesians a benediction. In verse 23, he says, Peace be to the brothers.

And then in verse 24, he says, Grace be with all. Now if you would flip in your Bible in Ephesians to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 2, you're going to notice something.

Paul starts the book with an introduction with the same two words. Grace to you and peace from our Father and Lord Jesus Christ, you saints who are in Ephesus.

So here we have a book that starts with grace and peace and ends with grace and peace. And in between this grace and peace is a whole book about unity.

If I were to summarize the entire book of Ephesians with just one word, it would be the word unity. Oneness. Togetherness.

[2 : 18] We-ness. And that's why we started with this book in our life together as a church. To unite us together around what God has done for us in Christ.

It's no wonder then, that Paul in the very last words of this book on unity, closes with love.

So if you notice in verse 24, Grace be with all who love. Our Lord Jesus with love. Incorruptible. Peace be to the brothers in love with faith.

Love is at the heart of unity. So to close our study of the book of Ephesians this morning, I want to remind you afresh of all that God has done for us in Christ.

He has united us together in Christ so that we would live united for Christ. United in Christ in order to live united for Christ.

[3 : 31] So this morning, six unifying truths from the book of Ephesians. Oh God, open our eyes.

Show us Christ. In his name we pray. Amen. Unifying truth number one. It's found in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 through 14.

We've been united by God's sovereign plan. We are united by God's sovereign plan. In 1.4 we read this, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless.

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. The plan that unites us is an eternal plan. It was a plan that was in God's mind before the foundation of the world.

And this sovereign plan, not only is it eternal, but it's Christocentric. I know you don't say that word that much. Will you say it with me?

[4 : 36] 1, 2, 3. Christocentric. It's got some great kind of feel to it, doesn't it? Let's say it one more time together. 1, 2, 3. Christocentric.

Christocentric. What that means is that Jesus is at the middle of everything. He's the focus of it all. It's a plan for the fullness of time that's focused on Christ.

And we see that in chapter 1, verses 9 and 10. He says, Making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him.

Christocentric. We're united by a sovereign plan that's eternal and Christocentric. It's a plan that, through the Gospel, makes known a mystery.

God all along, from before the foundation of the world, had a plan to unite a people for himself.

Made up of Jews and Gentiles. It's crazy.

[5 : 42] It's a mystery. It was a mystery. Revealed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. More on that later. This plan, this sovereign plan of God is salvific.

It's a rescue plan. It's an eternal Christocentric rescue plan. A plan that prioritizes the redemption of sinners.

The rescue of men and women whose sin has separated them from God. You know what? God has addressed our greatest problem as human beings.

In Christ. He's addressed it. From before the foundation of the world, God had the greatest answer, solution to our greatest problem.

In Christ. We were redeemed by His blood. And I just want to add to you, salvation is just not just a rescue from.

[6 : 52] It's a rescue to. God called us out of darkness and sin and brought us into light and life. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us to be holy and blameless before Him.

He called us to something. This is a rescue plan from sin to Him. God. But it's just not about saving sinners.

This plan is a comprehensive plan for the fullness of time. Look at verse 10.

Verse 10. Chapter 1. As a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him in heaven and on earth.

Sin messed things up royally. It separates sinners from God. And then it separates a sinner from a sinner. It has internal effect.

[7 : 58] It throws us, doesn't it? And then it separates us from others. And then it brings hostility with our creation. Sin is made a comprehensive problem of things.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's plan for the fullness of time, is a comprehensive solution. A solution that gets us right with God. That brings peace within ourselves.

Peace with others. And one day, peace with creation. Jesus comes back and He makes all things right. He recreates the heavens and the earth. No more threats.

This sovereign plan which unites us is comprehensive. I'm not sure if you noticed this. This is a sovereign plan worked out by the triune God.

God the Father ordained it. Verse 4. Christ the Son accomplished it. Verse 7. The Spirit, verses 11-14, applies it. If you just look at verse 3.

[9 : 03] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's two of the three who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. That word spiritual, you can say spirit blessing.

As in the Holy Spirit. This sovereign plan is a sovereign plan of the triune God. And it's a plan that brings about blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly blessings.

Blessing upon blessing upon blessing upon blessing. In Christ. Blessing upon blessing upon blessing. This plan for the fullness of time is a plan of blessing for all who would receive.

So here's what I want you to walk away with. When we think about being united by God's sovereign plan. God doesn't fit into our plans.

[10 : 22] God has fit us into His eternal plan. And He's fit us into His plan for the fullness of time by uniting us to Christ.

That's who we are. We are people united by God's sovereign plan for the fullness of time. The second unifying truth that I want you to see is in chapter 2, verses 1-10.

We are united together. We're united to Christ by God's grace. We were once dead. Dead to God. Last year, almost to the day, I was walking by Southport Beach House and I saw a body in the water. I ran down.

As soon as I touched the body, I knew that this man was dead. He was cold. I dragged him out on the beach. People ran. Multiple people tried to perform CPR to resuscitate this man.

[11 : 31] He was dead. No life. No one on the face of the planet was able to resuscitate him. Dead.

Dead. No life. Apart from Christ, we are dead to God.

No life. We cannot resuscitate ourselves. We cannot give ourselves life to God. We can't manufacture from within ourselves that which is pleasing to God.

You know what? Chapter 2, 1 through 3 is not a pretty picture for us apart from Christ. Not only were we dead, we were rebels.

Following the prince of the power of the air, the course of this world, we were living for our passions and desires. We were by nature children of wrath.

[12:34] We were under God's just penalty for our sin. And then, verse 4, two words, two little words.

It's like, it's like the dawning of the sun, the darkest part of day, of night.

Two little words. But God. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive.

He made us alive together with Christ. Christ, for by grace you have been saved. God, in His grace, gave us life to Him.

None of us could earn this grace. None of us deserve this grace. None of us solicited this grace. None of us in this room could merit the grace. None of us in this room could meet a condition so that this grace would then be poured out on us.

[14:01] None of us. God's grace is unconditional. It's incomprehensible. It's incomparable. As Chris Tomlin would sing, it's indescribable.

It's amazing grace. Amazing grace. Amazing grace of our great God. And what He did for us is that He made us alive with Christ.

He united us to Christ. He bound us to Him and so His resurrection life was granted to us. And we were made new creations, fully forgiven, completely and forever, accepted, adopted, liberated, redeemed.

Objects of God's grace for eternity. He's going to pour it out on you for eternity, Christian. He's lavish with His grace.

So here's what all this means. In Ephesians 2.10, we read this, for we are His workmanship. Literally, *poema* is the Greek word.

[15:15] You hear the word *poema*? Poetry? We are His craftsmanship. We are His workmanship. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Created, made alive, regenerated in Christ Jesus for good works. Here's the walk away. Good works does not save us. We were saved for good works.

Good works could never save us. But God in His grace did save us in order to walk in the good works that He has prepared for us in advance.

So if you're not a Christian, today's the day. God is offering you this fullness and wonder of salvation freely.

And all you need to do is receive it by faith. take it. Take it. And if you are a Christian, do you know how we respond to this?

[16:21] We rejoice. We say, Amen. I was dead and now I'm alive. I was blind but now I see. I was lost but now I'm found. Amen. Amen. Amen.

We are in darkness and He brought us into light. We were dead in sin and He made us alive with Him. We are united by God's plan, sovereign plan and we are united to Christ by God's grace.

It's who you are, Christian. It's your identity now. Unifying truth number three. We are united to each other.

Look around. Look around. We are united to each other by the blood of Christ. We are bound to one another by the blood of Jesus.

In chapter 2, verses 11 through chapter 3, verse 21, Paul makes a seriously, seriously crazy claim. It's incredible. See, up to this point, a good Jew like Paul would kind of consider all of humanity in one of two camps.

[17:47] Everybody's either, you're either a Jew or you're not. It's that basic. You're either Jewish or you're not Jewish. You're a Gentile.

But God's plan in Christ, this Gospel about Jesus makes known a mystery from before the foundation of the earth.

God has always planned to do something amazing. And His plan was to take sinners from the Jews and take sinners from Gentiles and unite them together into one new people group.

Christians. The church. That's His plan for the fullness of time. The mystery made known. It's incredible. He's made us a new people.

chapter 2, verse 22. We are the new dwelling place of God by the Spirit. The church is not a building.

[19 : 01] I mean, if like an army of bulldozers came one day and just plowed this building down, you know what? We wouldn't be over. We would just find another place to meet and glorify Jesus.

Jesus. The church is not a building. The church is a blood-bought people. We the church. And we've been united together through the blood of Christ. You see, what God did in order to unite a people is to unite them through something of incredible value.

And that's the precious blood of Jesus. We read this in chapter 2, verses 13 and 14. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility. And He did it all through the cross. God unites a people of various backgrounds together through Jesus.

[20 : 12] through His blood. If Jesus' blood was able to unite Jews and Gentiles who really didn't like each other, His blood is able to unify black and white, rich and poor, the haves and the haves-nots, Republicans and Democrats, Packer fans and Bear fans, men and women, older generations and younger generations, the blood of Jesus is able to unite us all.

All. All. God purchased our unity through Christ and so our unity as a church is precious. it's blood-bought. We can't take it for granted. It's something we've got to be working at. It comes through the cross.

It's God's gift to us. So let me try to help us think about this. Each of us, before we became a Christian, we probably thought of ourselves through a particular lens.

kind of a primary way of saying this is who I am. You know, this gives me worth. This gives me meaning. This way of thinking about myself is the way that I define myself.

[21 : 50] When you become a Christian, that thing that once defined you now takes a back seat because Christ now defines you.

He is the primary definition and definer of who we are as people. Everything else takes a back seat. So let's get specific.

Think about your ethnic heritage. Hey, there's no denying that. I'm a Paisan. I'm Italian. Hey, yo. Hey, yo. Maybe you're Italian.

Or maybe your ethnic heritage is Mexican or Nigerian or Kenyan. Or maybe it's Chinese or Korean or Irish or German.

Scottish. Whatever that is, there's no denying it. But you know what?

[22 : 49] Now that you're in Christ, you've got a different heritage that trumps it. that puts it in its place. That brings definition to that.

That prioritizes that. Your spiritual heritage in Christ frames your ethnic heritage. It puts it in its right place.

So we don't deny it, but we don't elevate it above Christ. Think about your financial status.

Hey, there's no denying it. Maybe you're loaded. Maybe you've got nothing. Maybe you're like the rest of us, somewhere in between. But the immeasurable riches of God in Christ Jesus that are ours in Christ, you know what that's like?

That's like a shared bank account that we all have unlimited access to. It's all ours. It's all ours. It protects us from being defined by money.

[24 : 00] Whether you've got it or you don't, we're defined by Christ. He is our peace. So here's what Ephesians is teaching us. What unites us in Christ is far more greater than and glorious than all the combined differences we have between us.

We are a people united to and united by Christ. It's all according to His unifying plan. That's who we are. We're a new people group.

And our Jesus heritage trumps everything. It changes the way you live your life. We have been united to Christ so that we would live united for Christ.

The first three points that we've covered are all about who we are in Jesus. The next three points move towards how we live that out.

This is who you are in Christ united by a plan united in Christ united together by Christ and now we move towards being united for Christ.

[25 : 21] This is how we walk. In chapter 4 we read that we are united as a body. It's one of Paul's favorite ways to describe the church.

A body. Christ is our head. He's got all the authority. We're dependent on Him.

He directs us. We're accountable to Him. Let me just be very clear and frank. I'm not the head of this church. Samir is not the head of this church.

Daniel is not the head of this church. Any elder brought on is not the head of the church. Even the elder team is not the head of the church.

Jesus is the head of the church. He's the head of this church. And so God gives elders to the church in order to equip the saints to build them up into the head.

[26 : 25] Jesus. We're not commanded to build them into us. We build into Christ. We are members one of another.

Jesus is our head and we are members one of another. In chapter 4, verse 7, we see that each of us, each of us has been given a measure of Christ's gift.

Each of us. Christ is the head and He's gifted each of us. And He's gifted each of us for the common good. When we talk about unity, we've got to be very clear about something and what we mean by unity.

When we talk about unity, biblically speaking, we're not talking about uniformity. We're not talking about everybody being the same because that's not how God has designed it.

We are not interested in producing clones unless they're of Jesus, of course. God has made each of us unique and gifted each of us with a particular gift and this glorious design of the body is that there are distinct and diverse members with unique functions that work together, united for the common good.

[28 : 01] So, brothers and sisters, don't feel like you've got to be something you're not. Don't feel like you've got to measure up to something you're not.

Diversity is part of God's design for the body. So, I mean, seriously, we celebrate diversity around here under the headship of Jesus. God is uniquely glorified when diverse members are humbly working together for the common good.

So, brother, sister, in Christ, what you need to hear is this, God has uniquely gifted you as a Christian. And so, the question is, how and where can you contribute to the common good of Christ's body, the truth?

God grows in chapter 4, verses 15 and 16, when we're rightly positioned to each other, when we speak the truth and love to one another, and we're living humbly with each other, you know what happens?

Growth. God grows us. He matures us. He grows us up into the head of our Lord. God grows us. We become more and more like Him.

[29 : 23] That's His design. But, what we learn from Ephesians is not only does He grow us as a body, we are a body in motion.

We are a body that's walking. And so, the fifth point I want you to see, the fifth unifying truth, is that we are a unified united body that walks in holiness.

In chapter 4, verse 24, we are told to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

We are to walk in the likeness of God. And I'm not sure if you remember if you were here when we were preaching through this, but this is a whole passage about regularly putting things off, things that aren't true of us anymore, and then putting things on that are like Christ.

And so, Paul just hits us with a flurry of things that can't be true of us anymore. And then he says, when you take those off, you've got to put on these things that are like Christ.

[30 : 37] So, you put off falsehood, and you put on speaking truth to one another. You put off sinful anger, and you put on being quick to make peace. You put off stealing with your hands, and you put on working hard, honestly, with your hands to be able to help others with your hands.

You're to put off talk that rots people out, and you're to speak words that nourish, that build up.

We're to put off grieving the Spirit, dividing, disintegrating, and we're to put on pleasing the Spirit, uniting, building.

We're to put off hardness of heart, and all bitterness. And we're to put on tenderness of heart, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

You know what? We really need to depend on our head, Jesus, in order to live this way. In order for us to personally deal with these things, and then help each other out with these things, can I just let you know, this past Friday, I had a dear brother and sister come up to me, and they love me so well. They're helping me see a blind spot, and I got them. They love me. They're helping me to walk in the likeness of Jesus.

[32 : 04] We're not only to personally walk in the likeness of Christ. We're to help each other walk in the likeness of Christ. We need each other. But not only are we to walk in the likeness of God, we're to walk in love.

Chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. We're a body that's walking together, walking in the likeness of God, walking in love. And in verses 5, 1 and 2, we read that this kind of love is an outward and upward kind of love.

We love others up to Jesus. We're looking to look out for the best of people, and the best for people is to love Jesus, to follow him and obey him.

I mean, that's how Christ loved us. So, would you just imagine with me for a little bit? What happens if more and more of us as a church, we were loving each other this way.

We were outward focused, and we were loving people to Christ, outward and upward. That's a game changer right there.

[33 : 08] I want to be a part of a church like that. Not only are we to walk in love, we are to walk in the light. Chapter 5, verse 8, we are the light in the Lord.

We were lit up by Jesus to light up the world. Another way to think about it is we're like a glowing body of Jesus, in a luminescent body, in a dark world.

You know streetlights at night? You know how they light up certain sections of the street, and then if you see somebody walking on the sidewalk, they'll walk in the light, and move in the darkness, and walk in the light again.

You know what I'm talking about? We're like living streetlights. Wherever we go, we have this radius of light around us. You know what happens as God adds to our number?

He's going to light up Kenosha more. And then as God adds to numbers of other churches in town, and we want that, He's going to light up our city for Christ.

[34 : 17] And then when we as a church come together, there's going to be a concentrated lightness in this room. But if we're kind of being lit up as we're supposed to do, it's also, verse chapter 5, 11, going to expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness.

Because not everybody wants to live in the light. A lot of people just want to live in darkness. And they're not going to like it when we bring our light to shine.

But you know what? We're just taking after Jesus, the light of the world. Lord. And if we are to suffer for being the living light of our Lord Jesus, you know what?

So be it. In the words of Paul, it's just light in momentary affliction preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.

You know that is? When I see my Savior face to face and he welcomes me in. The only thing I would add is let's just make sure we're picking the right fight.

[35 : 32] You know what I mean? So we're to walk in the light. We're to walk in wisdom. Chapter 5, verse 15.

We are to walk wisely, making the most of the time. In order to walk wisely, we walk under the influence of the Spirit of God.

We're to be filled with the Spirit. And when we're filled with the Spirit, he fills us with the fullness of Christ. The Spirit mediates the presence of Jesus in us and through us and fills us with the fullness of God.

And when that happens, we address one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, we sing and make melody in our hearts, we give thanks always for everything and we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And you know what that is? Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ? That's called unity. That's called unity. And it's a fruit of the Spirit in us, filling us.

[36 : 36] as a body we're to not only walk in wisdom but walk in roles. Husbands leading wives, wives letting your husbands lead.

Remember the dance? Remember the dance? Parents loving your children, children obeying your parents, supervisors slash masters, exercising your authority as unto Christ, and workers working

as unto Jesus.

You see, I'm not sure if you remember that but that passage in 521-69 was all about Christ. Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Husbands love your wives as to Christ.

Parents, dads, raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Children obey your parents in the Lord. Slaves, workers, as unto Christ.

Masters, remember you have a master in heaven. We're to be united in our walking out the roles of Christ. It really does separate us, set us apart in the way that we live.

[37 : 44] The sixth unifying truth and final. I mean, seriously, we've been talking about a lot of walking. Walk in likeness, walk in love, walk in light, walk in wisdom, walk in roles, and then in chapter 6, verse 10 and forward, Paul says, stand.

We're united in our stand against the schemes of the devil. Our enemy, Satan, is seeking to devour. But our fight is not against flesh and blood. He will use the world to tempt our flesh in order to bring about doubt, distraction, distortion, and division.

But Jesus triumphed over the devil through his death and resurrection. God set all things under the feet of Jesus. Chapter 1, verse 22. He's defeated, but he's on the run.

And in the meantime, we put our armor on. And we're strengthened and we stand firm against the devil. We are united in our stand against the devil.

[38 : 59] That unites us. So six unifying truths this morning. Ephesians begins with the greeting, grace and peace to the saints.

Ephesians ends with the benediction, peace be to the brothers, grace be with all. And in between is a book all about unity. We've been united in Christ so that we could live united for Christ.

And we are united by a love for Christ that is a love that's incorruptible. Let's pray. God, we do thank you for the book of Ephesians.

There's a lot in it. And it's all good. God, we do pray that the truths that we have learned over the last year and a half, that God, you would just press them in, that Jesus, you would be glorified and that we would live out the unity that you purchased for us through your blood.

God, we give you all praise. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen.