



Class Notes

Ephesians

Ephesians 1-6

Dr. Tim Mackie

In Ephesians, Paul summarizes what the most important apocalyptic event in history is: Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit to bring new creation right here in the present world. Paul wants his audience to comprehend the nature of the apocalypse of Jesus and how to respond to it. In this class, we'll take a deep dive into Paul's letter to the Ephesians and, by placing Paul's letter in its first-century context, we'll reshape our perception in significant ways.

Last updated on: August 21, 2024

Table of Contents

Module 1: Introduction to Ephesians

[Session 1: Introduction to Paul](#)

[Session 2: The Apocalypse of Jesus](#)

[Session 3: Paul's Apocalypse](#)

[Session 4: Reflecting on the Introduction to Ephesians](#)

Module 2: The Design of Ephesians

[Session 5: Design of Ephesians 1-3](#)

[Session 6: Reflecting on the Design of Ephesians 1-3](#)

[Session 7: Macro Design of Ephesians 1](#)

Module 3: Blessing and Election

[Session 8: Blessing and Election in the Biblical Story](#)

[Session 9: Reflection on the Blessing and Election](#)

Module 4: The Coming Age

[Session 10: Paul's Prayer for an Apocalypse](#)

[Session 11: This Age and the Age to Come](#)

[Session 12: Reflecting on This Age and the Age to Come](#)

Module 5: Identity

[Session 13: From Death to Life](#)

[Session 14: Paul's View of Grace](#)

[Session 15: Introduction to the Powers](#)

Module 6: The Powers

[Session 16: Paul's View of the Powers](#)

[Session 17: The Powers in the Hebrew Scriptures](#)

[Session 18: Reflecting on the Powers](#)

Module 7: Jesus

[Session 19: How Jesus Destroyed Enmity](#)

[Session 20: Reflecting on the Torah](#)

[Session 21: Garden and Temple Imagery for God's People](#)

Module 8: It's All About Love

[Session 22: Paul Summarizes His Message](#)

[Session 23: Paul's Prayer for Love](#)

Module 9: Transformation Begins

[Session 24: The Apocalyptic Imagination](#)

[Session 25: Unity Not Uniformity](#)

[Session 26: The Meaning of "Head" in Ephesians 4:15](#)

[Session 27: People as Gifts in Ephesians 4](#)

Module 10: The New Humanity

[Session 28: From Old to New Humanity](#)

[Session 29: From Dark to Light](#)

[Session 30: From Folly to Wisdom in Relationships](#)

[Session 31: Submit to One Another](#)

Module 11: An Epic Conclusion

[Session 32: The New Household Code](#)

[Session 33: Equality in the Household](#)

[Session 34: The Armor of God](#)

[Session 35: Reflecting on the Armor of God](#)



Module 1: Introduction to Ephesians

SESSIONS 1-4

Learn more about the author of Ephesians and discover the biblical meaning of “apocalypse.”

Session 1: Introduction to Paul

Key Takeaways

- Paul's letters have influenced the world and shaped civilization.
- If Paul's words have become over-familiar to us, we can shift our focus and let his words become strange and new again as we learn more about Ephesians.

The Authorship of Paul's Letters

Placing Paul's letters in their first-century context will reshape our perception significantly.

1. **Letters had multiple authors.** The named co-senders of Paul's letters (Timothy, Sosthenes, Silas) were contributors to the content of the letters. They are named because they are co-authors, which means that Paul's letters contain material that is Pauline and non-Pauline, with Paul as the authorizing sender.
2. **Letters were compiled communally over time.** Paul's letters would have been created over periods of weeks and months in multiple stages and in group sessions with the named co-authors. They would have gathered in guest rooms, inns, and roadside stops, discussing and debating about how to word and arrange the letter.
3. **Material was employed in multiple contexts.** Teachers and writers carried notebooks (wax tablets in wood frames) where they would take notes, write down ideas and short paragraphs, and collect materials they could employ in multiple contexts.
4. **There are shared materials between letters.** Paul's letters contain preformed material from these notebooks, such as Hebrew Bible quotations, excerpts from early Christian hymns, teaching traditions, and sermon material that Paul had composed previously (the shared material between Colossians and Ephesians is a great example). This shows that many letters involved the editing and composition of preexisting material interwoven with new material written for the specific audience.
5. **Paul used a secretary to write his letters.** The skill set required to write these letters was highly specialized. Secretaries played a variety of roles from transcribing dictation to composing letters based on the sender's ideas. Paul's letters show a variety of practices.
6. **Letters went through multiple drafts.** Paul's letters certainly went through multiple drafts involving editing, re-wording, and re-ordering material until Paul was pleased with the final product (2 Corinthians is a great example).
7. **Letters became part of collections.** Paul would have retained copies of his letters kept in notebooks, and the growing collection provides a plausible context for the first set of publications of Paul's letters.

8. **Letters were expensive to produce.** Some of Paul's letters were much longer than a typical letter in his time (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians). Letters were very expensive to produce. In today's currency, the letter of 1 Corinthians would have required about \$2,300 to write and send.
9. **Letter carriers played a key role in a letter's reception.** They would have read the work aloud, explained difficult parts based on personal knowledge of the author's intentions, and answered questions from the recipient. Phoebe (for Romans), Eutuchus (for Ephesians), Epaphras (for Philippians), and Onesimus (for Colossians and Philemon) are among the named carriers.

Reflection Question

Describe your familiarity with the letters of Paul (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). What are some challenges you have faced when reading his letters? Maybe it's his use of language, cultural context, his teachings on women and slaves, or something else.

Session 2: The Apocalypse of Jesus

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *apokalypsis* means to uncover or reveal—literally and metaphorically.
- Ephesians summarizes the most important apocalyptic event in history: Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as well as the gift of the Spirit.
- Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians cover how to understand the apocalypse of Jesus, and chapters 4-6 talk about how to respond to the apocalypse of Jesus.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

With your understanding so far, summarize what Paul wants to communicate in his letter to the Ephesians.

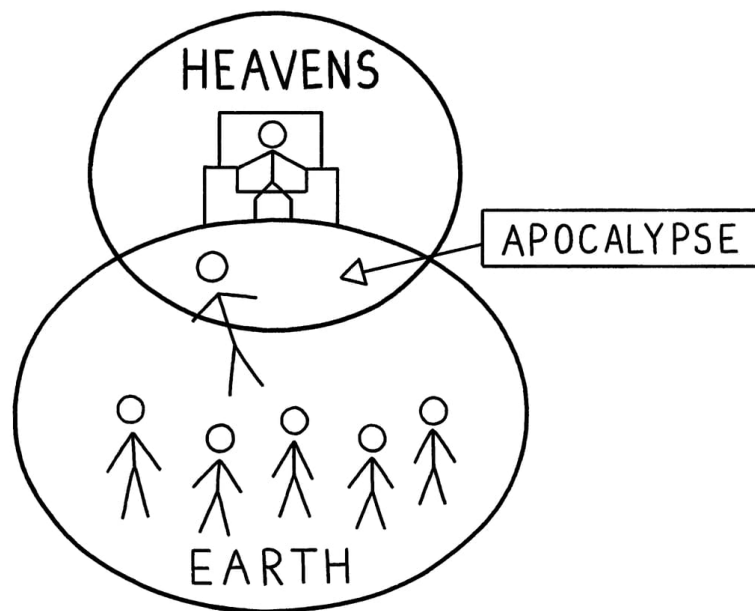
Session 3: Paul's Apocalypse

Key Takeaways

- According to the Bible, Heaven and Earth are distinct but not separate realities.
- An apocalypse is when the bond between Heaven and Earth becomes visible to us.
- Paul experiences his own apocalypse when Jesus reveals himself as the risen Messiah and calls Paul to share this revelation with others. This encounter is foundational to the book of Ephesians.
- Ephesians is an invitation to experience the risen Jesus and allow that apocalypse to transform us.

The Heavens and the Earth

In the biblical worldview, the heavens and the earth are distinct but not separate realities. When Paul encounters Jesus ([Acts 9:1-6](#), [22:6-7](#), [26:13-18](#)), God reveals this bond between Heaven and Earth to Paul in a way that transforms his assumptions about what God is doing in the world.



The Overlapping of Heaven and Earth. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

According to the biblical worldview, are Heaven and Earth distinct spaces? Why is this important for understanding a biblical apocalypse?

Session 4: Reflecting on the Introduction to Ephesians

Key Takeaways

- God's ultimate purpose and plan is to unify Heaven and Earth in the Messiah. This idea is the framework for the whole book of Ephesians.

Who Is Paul Addressing?

In Ephesians 1:1, Paul addresses his letter to “the holy ones” (Greek: *ἅγιοις*). This important term is usually translated “saints,” which results in English readers missing the full theological significance of this term.

Holiness (Hebrew: *qadosh* / Greek: *hagios*) is first and foremost an attribute of God, defined as his unique, one-of-a-kind otherness by virtue of his status as the Creator and source of all reality.

Isaiah 6:3 Instructor's Translation

... “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh God the mighty, the whole land is the fullness of his glory.”

In the twin realms of Heaven and Earth, God has two parallel families of image-bearing representatives, the spiritual beings (“the host of heaven” in [Gen. 2:1](#)) and the human rulers on the land ([Gen. 1:26-28](#)). Both families are invited into God's presence to share in his holy status.

Israel as the Holy Ones

Israel is called to be a holy nation ([Exod. 19:6](#)). When they are faithful to the covenant and have access to God's presence in the temple, they become “holy ones.” “I am Yahweh your God, and you will make yourselves holy, and you shall be holy ones (*ἅγιοι*) for I am a holy one (*ἅγιος*)” ([Lev. 11:44](#), [19:2](#), [20:7](#), [26](#); [Num. 15:40](#)).

Spiritual Beings as Holy Ones

Spiritual beings are also referred to as “holy ones” (*ἅγιοι*) in the Hebrew Bible ([Zech. 14:5](#); [Ps. 89:5-8](#); [Dan. 8:24](#)).

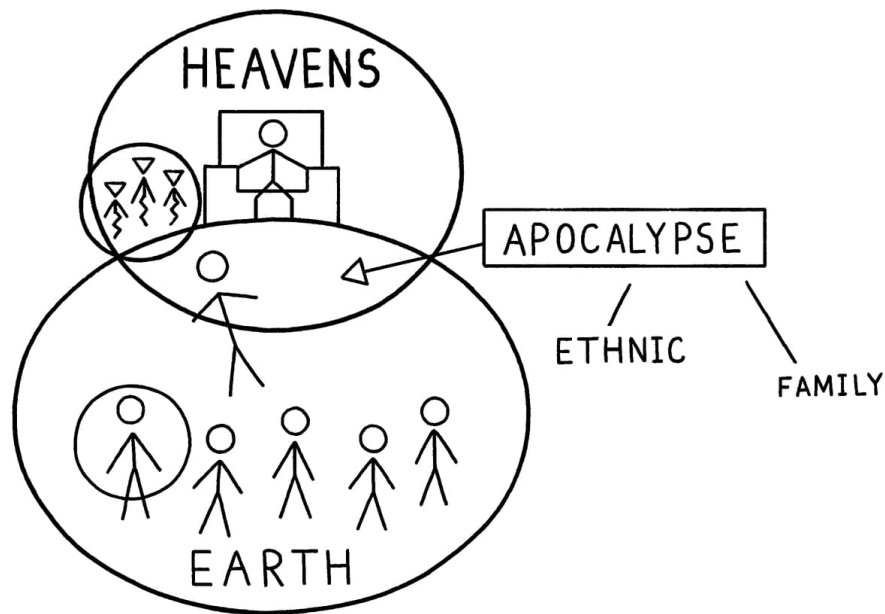
Psalms 89:5 Septuagint/LXX

The heavens will praise your wonders, Yahweh,
Even your faithfulness, in the assembly of the holy ones (*ἐκκλησίᾳ ἁγίων*).

Psalm 89:7 Septuagint/LXX

God is greatly feared in the council of his holy ones (ἀγίων) ...

Paul assigns the terminology of God's divine heavenly council to those who trust in the Messiah. Jesus the human Messiah has been exalted over the divine council to rule Heaven and Earth (Eph. 1:19-21), and that same status has been granted to his followers (Eph. 2:5-6).



The Space of the Heavens and the Earth. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

The apocalypse in Ephesians is about the reconciliation of all things, as well as the enthronement of humans with the Messiah. How can understanding these apocalypses as present realities change how you view your life in the here and now?



Module 2: The Design of Ephesians

SESSIONS 5-7

Venture into the exquisite literary design and symmetry of Ephesians 1-3.

Session 5: Design of Ephesians 1-3

Key Takeaways

- The first three chapters of Ephesians are designed symmetrically so that the reader will compare and contrast the corresponding sections.
- The center of this symmetrical design is about the new temple made from a unified people with Jesus as the cornerstone.
- To comprehend the revelation of Jesus is to undergo an experience of worship.
- Paul draws attention to his imprisonment because the lowest status is the highest honor in the Upside-Down Kingdom of Jesus.

Literary Design of Ephesians

The letter is designed with two large movements, each with a corresponding introductory and concluding section.

Movement 1: Chapters 1-3

A	1:1-14 Victory song to the Father, Son, and Spirit		
	B	1:15-21 Prayer for an apocalypse of power	
		C	2:1-10 Rescued from death and the Ruler of the age 2:11-18 Rescued from hostility and alienation from God's family
		D	2:19-22 The Messianic victory monument: the new temple
		C'	3:1-13 The imprisoned apostle of the messianic apocalypse
	B'	3:14-19 Prayer for power to grasp the Messiah's love	
A'	3:20-21 Doxology song to the Father and to the Son		
The Design of Ephesians 1-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).			

A and A': Praise

This section opens and closes with poetic hymns of praise ([Eph. 1:1-14](#), [3:20-21](#)), honoring God for revealing his purpose for all creation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

B and B': Prayers

Inside of these are two corresponding prayers for a revelation of knowledge and power ([Eph. 1:15-21](#), [3:14-19](#)) for God's people.

C and C': New Exodus

These are two contrasting expositions of the new Exodus. Ephesians 2:1-18 has two parallel panels retelling God's liberation of enslaved people ([Eph. 2:1-10](#)) who were separated from God's covenant family of Israel ([Eph. 2:11-18](#)). Each panel resolves in a celebration of their resurrection and incorporation into the new humanity. The corresponding section is Paul's own story ([Eph. 3:1-13](#)) of becoming a herald of the message in Ephesians 2:1-18, which has made him a "prisoner of the Messiah."

D: Victory of the Messiah

At the center of this rhetorical unit (and the climax of Eph. 2:11-18 as a whole) is the creation of the new messianic humanity, which is the new temple anticipated by the Hebrew Prophets and Jesus himself ([Eph. 2:19-22](#)).

Movement 2: Chapters 4-6

A	4:1-16 Promoting the unity of the new humanity
	B 4:17-5:2 The old versus the new
	B' 5:3-14 The light versus the dark
	B'' 5:15-6:9 The foolish versus the wise, Spirit-influenced humanity
A'	6:10-20 The battle for the unity of the new humanity

The Design of Ephesians 4-6. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

A and A': New Humanity

These sections correspond in that Ephesians 4:1-16 brings the "unified new humanity" theme of chapters 1-3 to a climactic summary and portrays the Messiah's body as a "mature man" who can stand firm against the "schemes" (*μεθοδεῖα* [Eph. 4:14](#), [6:11](#)) of hostile forces. This matches [Ephesians 6:10-20](#), which portrays the

Messiah's body as a warrior who dons the metaphorical armor of the divine warrior in order to protect their unity and stand firm.

B and B' and B'': Contrasts

These diverse sections each have a contrast between the old humanity and the new, explored from different angles. This contrasting "You are A so don't live like Z" pervades each of these units.

Outline of Ephesians

The Gospel and the New Humanity (1:1-3:21)

1. Prologue (1:1-2)
2. A New Song for a New Exodus (1:3-14)
3. A Prayer for Revelation and Resurrection Power (1:15-23)
4. From Living Dead to Membership in the Messianic Temple (2:1-22)
 - a. From Living Death to New Creation (2:1-10)
 - b. From Hostile Outsiders to New Humanity (2:11-22)
5. The Mystery of the New Creation Family (3:1-13)
6. A Prayer for Love Among God's Family (3:14-21)

The Unity and Family Ethic of the New Humanity (4:1-6:24)

1. The Unity of the New Humanity (4:1-16)
2. The Family Ethic of the New Humanity (4:17-5:2)
3. Living in Light, Leaving the Dark (5:3-14)
4. The Spirit-Empowered Life of God's Family (5:15-6:9)
 - a. Living Wisely ... (5:15-17)
 - b. ... By the Power of the Spirit (5:18-21)
 - c. The Spirit-Empowered Household (5:22-6:9)
 - i. Wives and Husbands (5:22-33)
 - ii. Parents and Children (6:1-4)
 - iii. Slaves and Masters (6:5-9)
5. The Spiritual War of the Messianic Family (6:10-20)
6. Conclusion (6:21-24)

Prologue: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 1:1-2

¹ Paul
an apostle of Messiah Jesus
through the will of God,
to the holy ones
who [are in Ephesus]
also are believing in Messiah Jesus,
² grace to y'all and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Messiah.

Ephesians 1:1-2. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

Summarize the logical flow of Ephesians 1-3 as best as you can.

Session 6: Reflecting on the Design of Ephesians 1-3

Key Takeaways

- Paul's mind and heart were shaped by the Hebrew Bible and the temple.
- Biblical literature is full of symmetry and repetition, and this design helps with memorization and meditation.
- Ephesians may have been a letter Paul wrote to all the church communities in the Lycus River valley, starting with the church in Ephesus.

Is Paul's Audience in Ephesus?

Although most modern translations include "to the saints in Ephesus" in the letter's opening ([Eph. 1:1](#)), some early manuscripts do not include the words "in Ephesus" in the phrase. It is possible that Ephesians has been, since its earliest form, intended for broad circulation within the Church.

"The words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are absent from several important witnesses (P46 & *B* 424c 1739) as well as from manuscripts mentioned by Basil and the text used by Origen. Certain internal features of the letter as well as Marcion's designation of the epistle as 'To the Laodiceans' and the absence in Tertullian and Ephraem of an explicit quotation of the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ have led many commentators to suggest that the letter was intended as an encyclical, copies being sent to various churches, of which that at Ephesus was chief. Since the letter has been traditionally known as 'To the Ephesians,' and since all witnesses except those mentioned above include the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, the Committee decided to retain them, but enclosed within square brackets."

Metzger, Bruce M. (1994). [A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament](#). United Bible Societies. 532.

"The earliest and best New Testament manuscripts omit the phrase 'in Ephesus' from 1:1. It is quite possible, then, that this document was intended as a circular letter and that believers in Ephesus were not the only intended audience. The contents of Ephesians seem to support such a theory. There is very little hint of any specific situations being addressed, or of one concrete community that's envisioned. The exhortations and warning to avoid doctrinal error seem quite general. Furthermore, the text assumes that the recipients have not have direct contact with Paul ([1:15](#); [3:2](#)), suggesting an audience other than, or at least wider than, Ephesus where Paul spent considerable time. It is likely ... that this 'circular' letter became associated with Ephesus because it was intended to circulate throughout the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital and epicenter from which Paul's gospel spread through the province (see [Acts 19:10](#))."

Gorman, Michael (2003). [Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters](#). Eerdmans. 576.

Ephesus in the Ancient Roman World

Founded around 1000 B.C.E. by Greek settlers, Ephesus rose to prominence as part of the Lydian empire, which founded the city as the home of Artemis of Ephesus. In the Roman era (1st century B.C.E.), it became the capital of the Roman province of Asia under the rule of Caesar Augustus. By Paul's day, it was a center for the cult of Caesar, where the emperor was worshiped as the divine son of the goddess Roma.

Ephesus was a port city (its harbor is now gone because of erosion) and was on all the highways between the eastern regions of the empire and the roads to Greece and Rome.

It was also architecturally impressive, with a huge 10,000-person theater, two large markets, and temples to Apollo, Roma, and Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world).



[Openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

Reflection Question

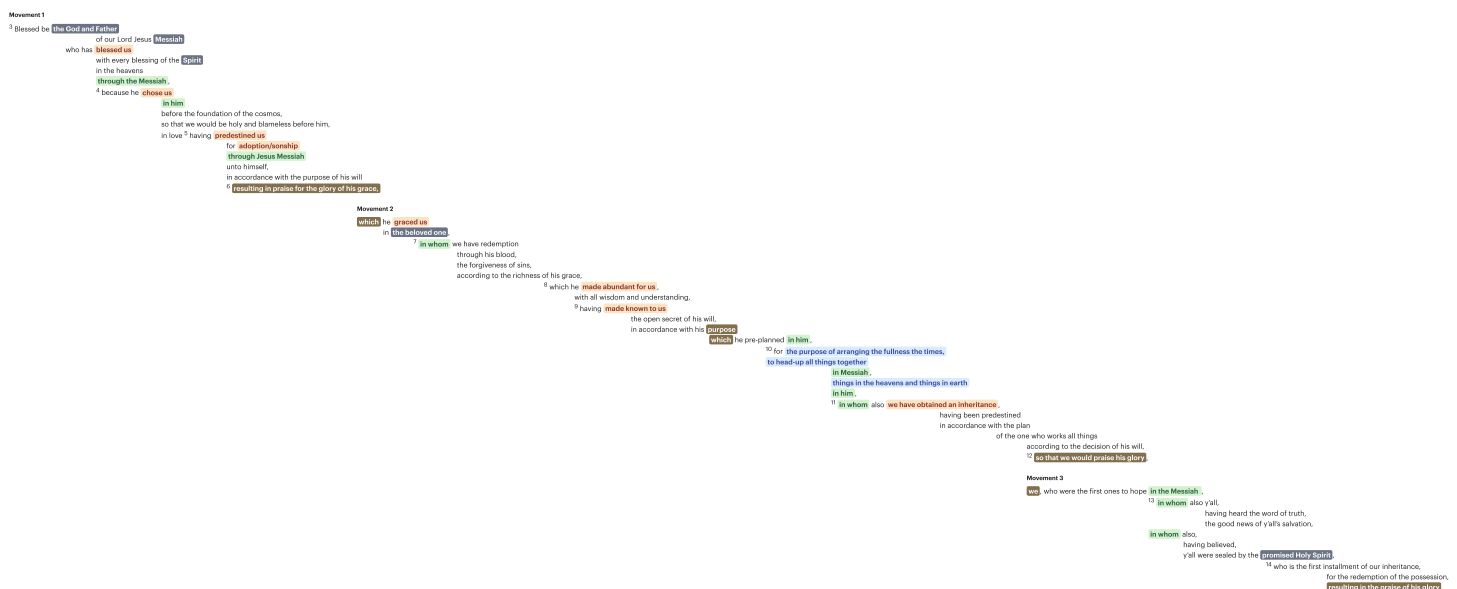
Do you have any questions or observations about the design of Ephesians 1-3?

Session 7: Macro Design of Ephesians 1

Key Takeaways

- Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence in Greek, culminating in the central movement in verse 10.
- Verse 10 gives us the core concept and vocabulary that is going to replay in every chapter: All things in Heaven and Earth become one in the Messiah.
- Ephesians 1:3-14 lays out the main theological ideas that Paul is going to explore in the rest of the letter.

A New Song for the New Exodus: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 1:3-14



Ephesians 1:3-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Key Themes and Ideas in 1:3-14

The Blessing of 1:3

Paul praises God for the many blessings given to his people. This is a Jewish-style hymn of praise that begins with “blessed be” (Hebrew: *baruk* ברוך / Greek: εὐλογητος) and recounts the story of God’s deeds.

Genesis 14:20 Instructor's Translation

Blessed be the most high God, who gave your enemies into your hands.

Judith 13:17b Instructor's Translation

... Blessed are you, our God who reduces your enemies to nothing on this day.

Psalms 66:20 Instructor's Translation

Blessed be God, who did not set aside my prayer or his mercy from me.

See also [Psalm 28:6-7](#), [31:21](#)

The Spirit-Given Blessings

- Election/chosenness (1:4)
- Adoption as God's children (1:5)
- Grace (1:6)
- Redemption (1:7a)
- Forgiveness of sins (1:7b)
- Knowledge of God's secret purpose (1:9)
- Hope of a future inheritance (1:11-12)
- Presence of God's Spirit (1:13-14)

The Trinitarian Nature of the Blessing

Ephesians 1:3 Instructor's Translation

Blessed be the God and **Father** of our Lord Jesus **Messiah**, who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every **Spirit**-blessing in the Messiah.

"Spirit-blessing" (Lit. *εὐλογία πνευματικῇ*) does not refer to the nature of the blessing (as spiritual instead of physical), but to the source of the blessing. It is a gift of God's Spirit.

Reflection Question

Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence in Greek. How would you summarize the main idea of this long sentence?



Module 3: Blessing and Election

SESSIONS 8-9

What did Paul mean when he wrote about the concepts of election and predestination? Dive in and find out!

Session 8: Blessing and Election in the Biblical Story

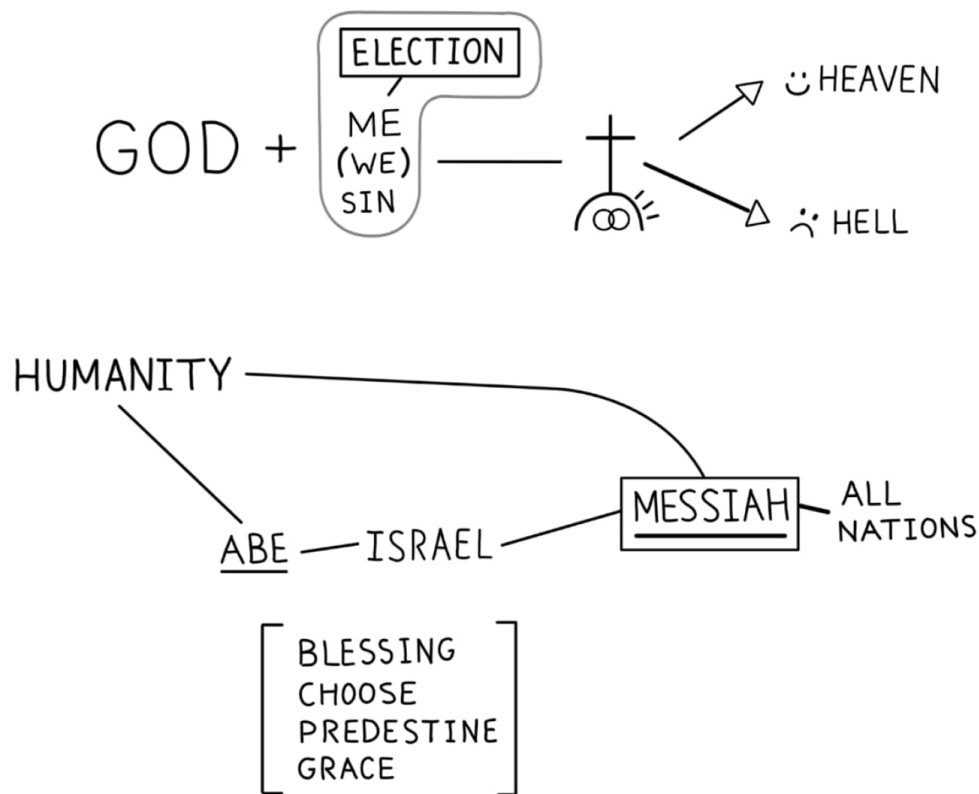
Key Takeaways

- We need to let Paul and the Hebrew Bible define what he means by the words he uses.
- Understanding Paul's view of the biblical story will help us understand his writings.
- Biblical election is about God choosing one out of the many to restore his blessing to the many.
- When Paul uses the words "election" and "predestination," he is referring to God choosing Israel as a vehicle to restore his blessing to the nations. Notice how Paul's concept of election is corporate—it is not referring primarily to individuals.

The Biblical Storyline of the Blessing

The key words of this blessing trace the development of the blessing through Israel's Scriptures so that the entire story focuses on the messianic realization of the blessing promised to humanity.

God's universal blessing and commission of the humans ([Gen. 1](#)) is forfeited through rebellion, so Abraham and his seed now bear the responsibility of covenant faithfulness as the family through which God will restore his blessing. Israel itself experiences God's blessing ([Exod. 1](#)) and is commissioned to represent God's holiness to the nations. As the nations fail, the seed of David is commissioned as the next carrier of that blessing ([2 Sam. 7](#)) so that the original plan of God's blessing for the nations can be fulfilled ([Ps. 72](#)). This narrative arc is core to the significance of Jesus' "incorporative messiah-ship." In Christ, people are invited to discover their identity as the new humanity in the family of Abraham. What is true of Jesus is now true of them.



Two Different Stories of the Bible. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Humanity

Genesis 1:28 NASB

God **blessed** them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Abraham

Genesis 12:2-3 NASB

² And I will make you a great nation,
and I will **bless** you,
and make your name great;
and so you shall be a **blessing**;
³ and I will **bless** those who **bless** you,
and the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be **blessed**."

Genesis 22:17-18 NASB

¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ **In your seed** all the

nations of the earth shall be **blessed**, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Israel

Exodus 1:1, 7 NASB

¹ Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household ... ⁷ But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

David's Messianic Line

2 Samuel 7:12-14, 29 NASB

¹² When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me ... ²⁹ Now therefore, may it please you to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord God, have spoken; and with your blessing may the house of your servant be **blessed** forever.

Psalms 72:17 NASB

May his name endure forever;
may his name increase as long as the sun shines;
and let men **bless** themselves by him;
let all nations call him **blessed**.

The Risen Jesus and the Spirit

Acts 2:14-36 and Acts 3:12-26 both speak to the risen Jesus being exalted to rule both Heaven and Earth. The gifting of the Spirit to the people spreads God's blessing to the nations as was promised to Abraham.

“God's purposes for the human race in general have devolved on to Abraham and from him onto Israel, through whom the divine plan will be fulfilled. Israel is, or is supposed to become, God's true humanity. What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham, who will inherit a new Eden with its restored glory. ... [In Second Temple Judaism] the expectation for a Messiah was for one who would draw onto himself the hope and destiny of the entire people of Israel... The word Χριστός in Paul should regularly be read as 'Messiah,' and one of the chief significances that this word carries is incorporative, that is, it refers to the Messiah as the one in whom the people of God are summed up, so that they can be referred to as being 'in him,' as coming or growing 'into him.'”

Adapted from Wright, N.T. (1993). [*The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*](#). Fortress Press. 20-21, 25, 41.

Election and Predestination in Ephesians

Election and predestination must be understood in light of Paul's use of these terms in context of the biblical storyline that is focused on Israel and their covenant with Yahweh.

Israelite and Messianic Focus of Election Terminology

The primary referent of Paul's election language is Israel as the covenant family of Abraham.

Romans 9:4-5 Instructor's Translation

⁴ The Israelites, to whom belongs adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of Torah and the temple service and the promises, ⁵ to whom belong the patriarchs and from whom comes the Messiah in terms of his ethnic descent.

Romans 9:11 NASB

for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls

God's election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was predestined (see [Rom. 9:6-13](#) for more).

Romans 11:2, 5 Instructor's Translation

² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew (predestined) ... ⁵ So now in the present time, there is a remnant according to the choice/election of grace.

In Paul's view, the chosen covenant people are the chosen, elected, and predestined people of God, which now includes Jews and Gentiles who believe in Israel's Messiah, the true elect, chosen, and predestined one.

Romans 8:28-29 Instructor's Translation

²⁸ We know that for those who love God, he works all things toward good for those called according to his purpose, ²⁹ because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many siblings ...

For Paul, the Messiah is part of God's eternal identity—the eternally elect, chosen, and beloved one. Because Jesus represents, incorporates, and embodies God's covenant people, those who trust in him will join the eternally chosen family of God.

Election Language Within the Biblical Storyline

God's eternal purpose is to bring his blessing to the world through the human family of Adam and Eve, then of Abraham, which is fulfilled in the Messiah. The calling/choosing/predestining of Abraham's family is narratively expressed in Genesis through Exodus and thematically expressed in Deuteronomy. Long before the Exodus generation lived, God planned for his people to inherit the promised land and become a blessing to the nations. The story of Israel is an analogy to the story of humanity in [Genesis 1-3](#). A human family will be united to God and inherit the cosmos to rule in the love and blessing of God.

The divine blessing celebrated in Ephesians 1:3-14 is the inclusion of the nations into the messianic Israel of the new exodus. All of the key words in the poem are adopted from descriptions of the patriarchs, Israel, and the Davidic Messiah. These images are applied to the Israel now restored “in Christ Messiah” (Eph. 1:3-12) and extended to the “believing Gentiles” (Eph. 1:13-14).

- “Spirit blessing” [see blessing chart above]
- “Chosen ... before the foundation of the cosmos”
- “Predestined us in love”

God’s Loving Choice of the Patriarchs and Israel

Deuteronomy 4:37 Instructor’s Translation

Because he **loved** our fathers, he **chose** their seed after them, and led them out of Egypt with a strong arm.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 NRSV*

⁶ For y’all are a people holy to the LORD y’all’s God; the LORD y’all’s God has chosen y’all out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. ⁷ It was not because y’all were more numerous than any other people that the LORD **set his heart on y’all** and chose y’all—for y’all were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ It was because the LORD **loved** y’all and kept the oath that he swore to y’all’s ancestors ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 10:15 NASB*

On y’all’s fathers, Yahweh **set his affection** to **love** them, and he chose their seed after them, y’all all, from among the peoples.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 14:2 NIV*

For y’all are a people holy to the LORD y’all’s God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen y’all to be his treasured possession.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

God’s Loving Choice of the Messianic Son

Psalms 89:19b-20, 24-29 NASB*

¹⁹ I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰ I have found David my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him ...

²⁴ My faithfulness and my **covenant love** will be with him,
and in my name his horn will be exalted.

²⁵ I shall also set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶ He will cry to me, ‘You are my Father ...

²⁷ I also shall make him my firstborn,

the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁸ My **covenant love** I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant shall be confirmed to him.

²⁹ So I will establish his seed forever
and his throne as the days of heaven.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Paul Describes Israel as the Predestined Family of God

Romans 9:11 Instructor's Translation

[Isaac is chosen] before doing good or bad, so that God's purpose, in accordance with his choice, might stand, not based on works, but on the one who calls.

Romans 11:2, 5 Instructor's Translation

² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew (**predestined**) ... ⁵ So now in the present time, there is a remnant according to the choice/election of grace.

God's Loving Designation of Jesus as the Beloved, Predestined Son

Mark 1:11 Instructor's Translation

This is my Son, the beloved one, with him I am pleased.

John 17:24 NASB*

Father ... you loved me before the foundation of the world.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Paul's Inclusion of Gentiles into the Predestined Family of God

Ephesians 1:5 Instructor's Translation

Predestined for adoption as sons ...

Romans 8:28-29 Instructor's Translation

²⁸ ... those who are called, in accordance with his purpose, ²⁹ that those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be transformed together into the image of his Son ...

"For Sonship/Adoption"

Adam

God appoints humanity (Hebrew: 'adam) as the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28) to rule the world. In Genesis 5:1-3, Seth is the son of human "in his likeness according to his image," so the human (Adam) in God's image is the firstborn son of God. See also Luke's genealogy of Jesus that calls Adam "the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

The “Adoption” of Sons in Genesis

God’s subversion of the firstborn custom and predestination of the second-born to high status is seen with the characters of Abel/Seth, Shem, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Judah.

Israelites

Exodus 4:22-23 NASB*

²² Say to Pharaoh, “Thus says Yahweh, ‘Israel is my son, my firstborn. ²³ ... Let my son go that he may serve me’”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

David and His Seed

Psalms 89:20, 27, 29 NASB*

²⁰ I have found David, my servant ...

²⁷ I will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the land. ...

²⁹ And I will establish his seed forever, and his throne as the days of the heavens.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Paul Describes Israel as the Adopted Ones

Romans 9:4 Instructor's Translation

the Israelites, to whom belongs adoption as sons

God’s Loving Adoption of Those Who Are “In the Messiah”

Ephesians 1:5 Instructor's Translation

... predestined for adoption as sons ...

Ephesians 2:19 Instructor's Translation

... members of God’s household

Galatians 4:5-6 ESV

⁵ ... so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!”

Romans 8:15-16 NASB

¹⁵ ... you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God

"It is in the context of the role of Israel as the elect—chosen to provide God's blessing and the Messiah—that Paul speaks of election [in Ephesians 1], rather than in the context of individual predestination to salvation ... Paul asserts in this chapter that God's holy ones were 'chosen' to bring the blessing of redemption to all nations in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. It was Israel that was foreordained unto adoption for this purpose ([Eph 1:5](#)), chosen in the beloved (i.e., the Messiah) for God's glory (i.e., to declare the sovereignty of Israel's God, [Eph 1:6](#)) before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless ([Eph 1:4](#)) and to be the first ones to hope in the Messiah ([Eph 1:12](#))."

McRay, John (2007). [Paul: His Life and Teaching](#). Baker Academic. 339-340.

"The key to understanding what Paul means by [the word 'election'] is the phrase 'in Christ.' When Paul says believers were chosen before the foundation of the world 'in him,' ... He means that Christ preexisted before the creation of the universe and that, by God's choosing of him (who is the Elect One), those who would come to be 'in him' by faith find themselves among 'the elect' in the person of their redeemer. God, because of his great love, destined that those who believe 'in Christ' would be adopted as his sons and daughters. The concept of election and destining here is corporate. If one is in Christ, one is elect and part of the destined Messianic family. Paul is not talking about the pre-temporal electing or choosing of individual humans outside of Christ to be in Christ, but rather of the election of Christ and what is destined for those ... who are in Christ. The concept here is explicitly developed from the story of Israel's election: If someone was 'in Israel,' one was a part of God's chosen people. Individual persons within Israel could opt out by means of apostasy, and others, even non-Israelites could be grafted in by faith in Israel's God (see the story of Ruth). In [Ephesians 1:3-14](#), these biblical concepts of election are focused on Christ ... who can incorporate into himself those who trust in him. Christ has become the focal point of Israel's election and salvation, because in Paul's thinking the identity of the people of God has been whittled down to the story of Jesus the Anointed One and then built back up in the risen Christ thereafter. When Paul later speaks of how someone gets 'into Christ,' he does not speak of God's predestination, as though a person is programmed to be disposed towards faith. Rather, he says, 'in Christ, when you heard the word of truth, the good news ... you believed and were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise' ([Eph 1:13](#))."

Witherington III, Ben (2007). [The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 233-235.

Paul's Presentation Contrasted With Other Jewish Sects

Paul's presentation of election and predestination stands in strong contrast to other Jewish communities in the Second Temple period who addressed the same topic. The sectarians of Qumran developed a very clear concept of double-predestination.

Damascus Covenant 2:6-8: "Those who turning aside from the path and abominate the precept, there will be for them no remnant or survivor. For God did not choose them at the beginning of the world, and before they were established he knew their deeds."

Garcia Martinez, Florentino & Tigchelaar, Eibert J.C. (2019). [The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 553.

Rule of the Community 3:13–17: “The Instructor should instruct and teach all the sons of light about the nature of all the sons of man ... concerning the times of their punishments and the times of their reward. From the God of knowledge stems all there is and all there shall be. Before they existed he established their entire design. And when they have come into being, at their appointed time, they will execute all their works according to his glorious design, without altering anything. In his hand are the laws of all things and he supports them in all their affairs.”

Garcia Martinez, Florentino & Tigchelaar, Eibert J.C. (2019). [*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 75.

When Ephesians 1 is contrasted with the Dead Sea Scrolls, “Notice the total lack of discussion of the predestination of the wicked ... Ephesians does not depict election as that which divides the human race but as that which unites it in Christ, hence the strong contrast with the Qumran language about the election and salvation of the few righteous in contrast to the majority of the race.”

Perkins, Pheme (2000). “The Letter to the Ephesians.” *The New Interpreter Bible*, Vol. XI. Abingdon Press. 373.

“Even before creation God chose a people (in Christ) who would stand before him holy and blameless in love. Note that the thought here is not primarily of the election of individual people to the church (though that may be implicit), to be holy and blameless before him in the world (as at [Phil. 2:15](#)). The primary thought is rather that God eternally chose a people in Christ (us, i.e., the church), to be holy and blameless before him at the final judgment (as at [Col. 1:22](#), which is in Paul’s mind here), and so enter into the full blessings of the Messianic age, and new creation.”

Carson, D.A. (1994). “Ephesians.” [*New Bible Commentary, 4th edition*](#). Intervarsity Press. 1225.

“In Ephesians 1 Paul is not dealing with an abstract doctrine of double predestination in which God has chosen some for redemption and others for condemnation (note that the 'negative' side of double predestination is entirely absent in this passage). Rather, he is dealing with the scriptural story of God’s promises to Israel, now fulfilled in Christ and offered to the Gentiles who, like their Jewish brothers and sisters, may become inheritors if they receive God’s Messiah by faith.”

Thornhill, A. Chadwick (2015). [*The Chosen People: Election, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism*](#). IVP Academic. 223-224.

The New Exodus

Israel’s Redemption from Egyptian Slavery

Exodus 6:6 NASB*

I, Yahweh, will bring y’all out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver y’all from their slavery and I will also redeem y’all with an outstretched arm

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 12:13 NASB

The [Passover Lamb's] blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

See more in [Exodus 13](#)

Exodus 15:13 Instructor's Translation

In your covenant love you have led the people whom you have redeemed,
guiding them to your holy dwelling place.

Israel's Exile Is a New Slavery Because of Their Sins

Ezekiel 39:23 NASB

The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against me, and I hid my face from them.

Deliverance From Babylonian Exile as a New Exodus

Isaiah 11:11-16 NASB

¹¹ Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
will again recover the second time with his hand
the remnant of his people, who will remain,
from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
and from the islands of the sea.

¹² And he will lift up a standard for the nations
and assemble the banished ones of Israel,
and will gather the dispersed of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.

¹³ Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart,
and those who harass Judah will be cut off;
Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,
and Judah will not harass Ephraim.

¹⁴ They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west;
together they will plunder the sons of the east;
they will possess Edom and Moab,
and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.

¹⁵ And the LORD will utterly destroy
the tongue of the Sea of Egypt;
and he will wave his hand over the River
with his scorching wind;
and he will strike it into seven streams
and make men walk over dry-shod.

¹⁶ And there will be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant of his people who will be left,

just as there was for Israel
in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

Hosea 2:14-15 NASB

¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
bring her into the wilderness
and speak kindly to her.

¹⁵ Then I will give her her vineyards from there,
and the valley of Achor as a door of hope.
And she will sing there as in the days of her youth,
as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.

The New Exodus as a Forgiveness From Sin

Israel's new exodus will require a redemption from slavery to sin and evil and the making of a new covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 NASB

³¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The New Covenant Family

Adam and Eve

Genesis 3:6 NASB*

When the woman saw that the tree was ... desirable to give wisdom [regarding "good and evil"], she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband and he ate.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Humanity's fundamental sin is the choice to seize our own wisdom.

Joseph

Genesis 41:38-39 NASB*

³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, "Where can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God/gods?" ³⁹ ... There is no one so discerning and wise as you are!"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Joseph is also given wisdom (to rule the nations) by God's Spirit.

Torah

Deuteronomy 4:5-6 NASB

⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and judgments ... ⁶ So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

The Son of David

1 Kings 3:7-12 Instructor's Translation

⁷ "... I am but a child ... ⁹ give to your servant a heart that listens, to rule judge your people to discern between good and evil ..." ¹¹ God said to [Solomon], "... Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart ..."

The Seed of David

Proverbs 3:13, 18 Instructor's Translation

¹³ How blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
the one obtains discernment. ...
¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
and those take her are blessed.

Messiah: The Incarnate Wisdom of God

1 Corinthians 1:24 NASB*

... the Messiah is both the power of God and the wisdom of God.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Colossians 2:3 NASB*

[Messiah] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

God's Plan to Unite Heaven and Earth in the Messiah

Paul views Jesus' story as the cosmic climax to the story of the universe which began in Genesis.

In Genesis, humanity was called to rule over a unified Heaven and Earth in Eden (Gen. 1-2), but they forfeited that calling by falling prey to sin and rebellion (Gen. 3). The hope of an exalted humanity ruling over a unified

Heaven and Earth became attached to the line of David (Ps. 8) and was projected forward after the exile into a cosmic future hope of the Son of Man (Dan. 7).

This storyline is brought together in Ephesians 1:9-10 in a dense theological statement that underlies the message of the entire letter.

Ephesians 1:9-10 Instructor's Translation

⁹ ... having made known to us the open secret of his will, in accordance with his purpose having been predestined in accordance with the plan of the one who works all things according to the decision of his will, which he preplanned in him, ¹⁰ for the purpose of arranging the fullness the times, to **head up all things** together **in Messiah, things in the heavens** and **things in earth** in him ...

“To head up all things”

“To head up all things” (Greek: ἀνακεφαλαιόω), or to bring into unity and harmony, assumes that the cosmos is fragmented and broken and needs to be put back into an ordered unity. Jesus is the one in whom all things find their purpose and healing. This is why Paul constantly uses words like “make one,” “unify,” and “together” (Eph. 1:10, 22; 2:14-16, 18; 3:6; 4:1-7, 13; 5:31).

Paul also uses this verb in Romans 13:9-10. “You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet. And if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

“Christ is the one in whom God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe ... [T]he stress is placed on the one in whom God’s overarching purposes for the whole of the created order are included ... a universe that is centered and reunited in Christ. The mystery which God has graciously made known refers to the summing up and bringing together of the fragmented and alienated elements of the universe (‘all things’) in Christ as the focal point.”

O’Brien, Peter T. (1999). *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Eerdmans. 59.

“In Messiah”

Jesus is the ultimate human, whose death and resurrection redeemed humanity from sin (Eph. 1:7, 14) so that anyone who turns to him in faith (Eph. 2:8-9) is joined to his life transforming power (Eph. 2:5-6; 4:20-24). Paul constantly refers to God accomplishing all this “in Christ.” And he says that followers of Jesus find their true identity “in him” (he uses these phrases over 20 times!).

“Things in Heaven”

Spiritual beings and powers that were in rebellion against God and humanity (Eph. 2:1-3) have been defeated by Jesus (Eph. 1:21-22; 4:8). The creation of a new humanity in Jesus points to the subjugation of these spiritual powers (Eph. 3:9-10). These powers are still in rebellion and must be resisted by God’s power (Eph. 6:10-19).

“Things on Earth”

Earth is the human realm where people once estranged from God are now reconciled to him through Jesus ([Eph. 2:1-10](#)) and reconciled to each other ([Eph. 2:11-18](#)). The Jew and Gentile divide is the essential biblical image of humanity divided ([Eph. 2:14-18](#)), and they are now unified as one church by the Jewish Messiah ([Eph. 2:19-22](#)).

“Paul’s view of heaven was derived ultimately from the opening statement of the OT. ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ ([Gen. 1:1](#)). Created reality had two major parts. That part known as the heavens could be thought of in terms of the atmospheric heaven (e.g., [Ps. 147:8](#)) or firmament (e.g., [Gen. 1:7, 14](#)). As the upper part of the cosmos it also came to stand for the dwelling-place of God, pointing beyond its own createdness to the divine transcendence (e.g., [Ps. 2:4](#)). Not only so, but the upper limits of the firmament were regarded as concealing a presently invisible created spiritual order (e.g., [2 Kgs. 6:17](#); [Job. 1:6](#); [Zech. 3:1](#)). Here heaven had a priority as the upper and controlling element and yet in its created aspect it was involved in God’s plan for the ages, for in Yahweh’s acts of judgment the heavens as well as the earth are shaken (cf. [Isa. 51:6](#); [Amos 8:9](#); [Hag. 2:6](#) and [Isaiah 65:17](#) and [66:22](#)) can speak of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, pointing to cosmic renewal. In Ephesians ... ‘the heavenly realms’ ... have reference to heaven as a distinct part of the created universe but one which retains its concealing relation to the spiritual world and to God himself, and thus also its aspect of incomprehensibility. The reference is to this heaven as it takes its place in the cosmic drama of redemption, that is, in that act of the drama which Christ has inaugurated by his resurrection and exaltation. Since Christ is central in God’s plan for heaven, the Church ‘in Christ’ also plays a vital part in this realm. As we shall see, 3:10 and 6:12 take their place naturally within this definition of the formula, for heaven is still involved in this present evil age with the consequence that there will remain hostile powers in heaven until the consummation brings in the fullness of the new age with its reconciled and renewed cosmos.”

Lincoln, Andrew T. (2004). [*Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology*](#). Cambridge University Press. 140-141.

“To the Jew first, and then to the Greek”

Note the explicit shift in pronouns from “we” in vv. 3-12 to “you” in v. 13 and back to “we” in v. 14. The “we” is described as “those who first hoped in the Messiah” ([Eph. 1:12](#)), and the “you” refers to those who “believed and were sealed by the promised Holy Spirit” ([Eph. 1:14](#)). This is precisely the roadmap of the book of Acts, where messianic Jews were the first to believe and then, through the Holy Spirit, non-Jews were included.

“The key to understanding Ephesians 1 is found in the use of the pronouns of personal address. Who is the ‘I,’ who are the ‘we,’ and who are the ‘you all’ repeatedly referred to in these chapters? Scholars agree that one of the central issues addressed in this letter is that of a growing multiplication of Gentile converts who at best increasingly forget or at worst consciously dismiss the church’s Jewish-Christian roots. What often gets overlooked is that Paul is tackling this matter right from the start. Indeed Ephesians 1-2 are less about how individuals are saved than about the multi-ethnic nature of God’s new covenant people in Israel’s Messiah.”

Adapted from Haberer, Jack (2008). “Ephesians 1:15-23.” *Interpretation Vol. 62, No. 3*. 312.

“Paul is telling or reminding the Ephesians that through Christ they have become participants in God’s election of Israel, when God chose Abraham from among all people and graciously made a covenant with him. One of the reasons for God’s call of Abraham and the establishment of an everlasting covenant with him is to bring a blessing to the nations (cf. Gen 12:1–3). Because of what God does with Israel, all the nations are to be drawn to God. As Isaiah, among others, declares, this will happen when Israel is redeemed (Isa 2:1–4; Amos 9:11–12). In Acts 15:15–17, James reads Amos as announcing the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God ... And this is precisely what Paul is saying has happened in the death and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah.”

Fowl, Stephen E. (2012). [Ephesians: A Commentary](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 39.

Reflection Question

Summarize what “election” and “predestination” seem to refer to here in Ephesians 1. How have you typically understood these words? How have you heard them used?

Session 9: Reflection on the Blessing and Election

Key Takeaways

- The point of God choosing one family was never just to bless one family. The blessing was always meant for all humanity.



This session covers the notes from sessions 8

Reflection Question

Has your understanding of election been changed by this class so far? How would you share what you've learned with someone else?



Module 4: The Coming Age

SESSIONS 10-12

Examine Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul's prayer for an apocalypse, and his teaching on living in the "now, not yet."

Session 10: Paul's Prayer for an Apocalypse

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' identity as the beloved chosen one defines our identity as humans. His death becomes our death, his resurrection becomes our resurrection, and his rule over Heaven and Earth becomes our true calling as the images of God.
- Paul prays that God would give the people a spirit of revelation, so they might grow in their knowledge and understanding and be transformed by the apocalypse of Jesus.

A Prayer for Revelation and Resurrection Power: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason,
as I heard of y'all's faith in the Lord Jesus
and the love which is toward all of the holy ones,
¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks,
making remembrance on y'all's behalf in my prayers,
¹⁷ in order that the God of our Lord Jesus Messiah,
the Father of glory,
would give y'all a spirit of wisdom and revelation
in order to know him,
¹⁸ the eyes of y'all's heart having been illuminated
so that y'all would know
what is the hope of his calling,
what is the richness of the glory
of his inheritance among the holy ones,
¹⁹ and **what** is the surpassing greatness,
of his power toward y'all who trust,
in accordance with the working of the power of his might,
²⁰ which he worked in the Messiah
having raised him from the dead ones
and having seated him at his right hand
in the heavenly realm
²¹ above all rule and authority
and power and dominion
and every name that is named,
not only in this age
but also in the coming one,
²² and "he placed all things under his feet",
and gave him headship over all things in the church,
²³ which is his body,
the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15-23. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Flow of Thought in 1:15-23

Ephesians 1:15: Paul hears that new communities of people are showing loyalty to Jesus, demonstrated by their love that extends across boundary lines.

Ephesians 1:16: Paul places himself in the prophetic role of intercessor, standing at the intersection of Heaven and Earth and holding these people before God.

Ephesians 1:17-19: Paul prays that the "Father of glory" (temple language) would give divine wisdom and an apocalypse (being able to see Heaven's reality on Earth) so that their innermost being ("eyes of the heart") would come to grasp three things.

1. The future to which God has called his people, the manifesting of divine glory by ruling creation in the love and power of God (1:17).
2. The future “inheritance” that is the glory of the new creation ruled by God’s holy people (1:18).
3. God’s life-creating power being available to those with believing loyalty (1:19).

Ephesians 1:20-23: An exposition on the divine power of resurrection life

- 1:20: The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as cosmic ruler was the inauguration of God’s Kingdom, the new creation which now rules over our current age (Ps. 110; Dan. 7).
- 1:21-22a: Jesus was exalted as the true divine-human ruler of the cosmos, dethroning the “rulers, authorities, powers, and dominion.”
- The great temple of Artemis in Ephesus (see Acts 19) was the center of spiritual, cultural, and political power (Ps. 8). Paul is claiming that Jesus is the true authority to which all rulers are accountable.
- 1:22b-23: Jesus’ cosmic lordship is focused on one particular place in the present overlap of the ages, the *ekklesia* (“the called-out ones”), over which his authority is acknowledged and manifested in their worship and corporate life, which is “filled up” by the one who “fills all things.”

Key Themes in Ephesians 1:15-23

In Ephesians 1:17, Paul prays that believers would experience a “revelation” (Greek: ἀποκαλύψις / *apokalupsis*), an unveiling to see what can only be seen with eyes of faith, the exaltation of the crucified and risen Messiah.

Paul’s description of the enthronement of the crucified Lord in Ephesians 1:20-21 is modeled after multiple key texts in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Ephesians 1:20-21 Instructor's Translation

²⁰ ... in the Messiah, having raised him from the dead ones and having seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm ²¹ above all rule ...

Psalms 110:1-2 NASB*

¹ Yahweh says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

² Yahweh will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion, saying,
“Rule in the midst of your enemies.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ephesians 1:22 Instructor's Translation

And he placed all things under his feet ...

Psalms 8:4-6 NASB

⁴ What is man that you take thought of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than God,
and you crown him with glory and majesty!

⁶ You make him to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,

Daniel 7:13-14 NASB

¹³ "I kept looking in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
one like a Son of Man was coming,
and he came up to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

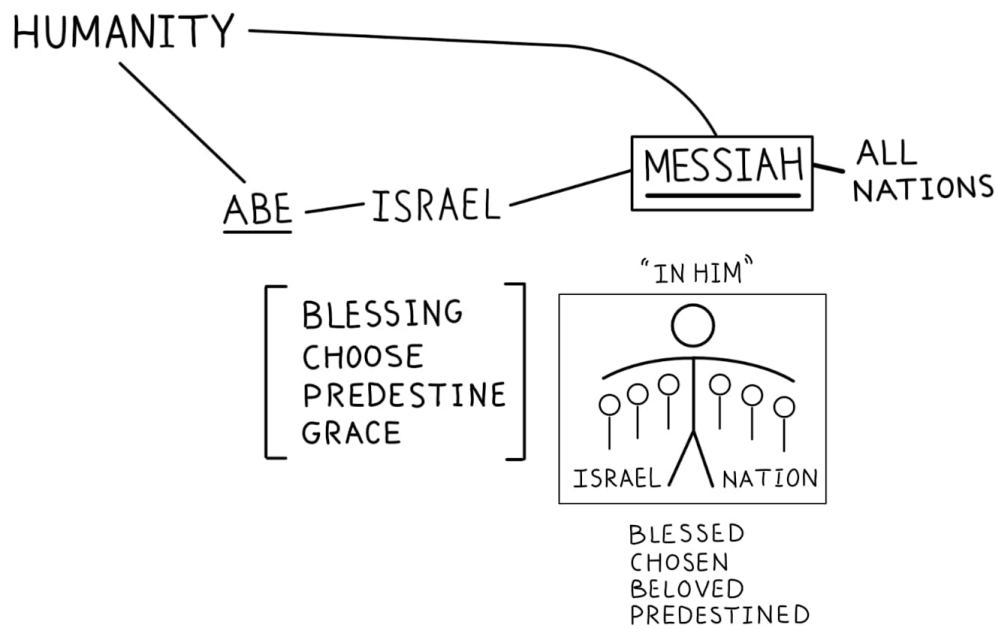
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion,
glory and a kingdom,
that all the peoples, nations and language
might serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion ...

Jesus was the suffering and exalted Messiah of Israel who fulfilled God's calling for Israel and all humanity. Now, the people of Jesus share in his death, resurrection, and exalted rule over the cosmos. Jesus' followers can now know Israel's true calling and purpose (Ps. 110 and Dan. 7), which was always meant to be the realization of humanity's true calling and purpose (Ps. 8 and Gen. 1).

Here, Paul reflects the common "two age" cosmic thinking of the Hebrew prophets, who describe a coming Day of the Lord when God will act decisively to rescue his exiled and enslaved people, regather them in a new Jerusalem, and bring them under the reign of a messianic king in a new Jerusalem/Eden/creation.

Paul inherited the message that God's Kingdom had truly arrived in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Paul consistently views God's Kingdom as decisively inaugurated in the present, with a future consummation to come. He makes this conviction clear by ascribing future realities to the present (Eph. 2:1-10).



Predestination of Israel. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

How would you summarize the main point of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 in one sentence?

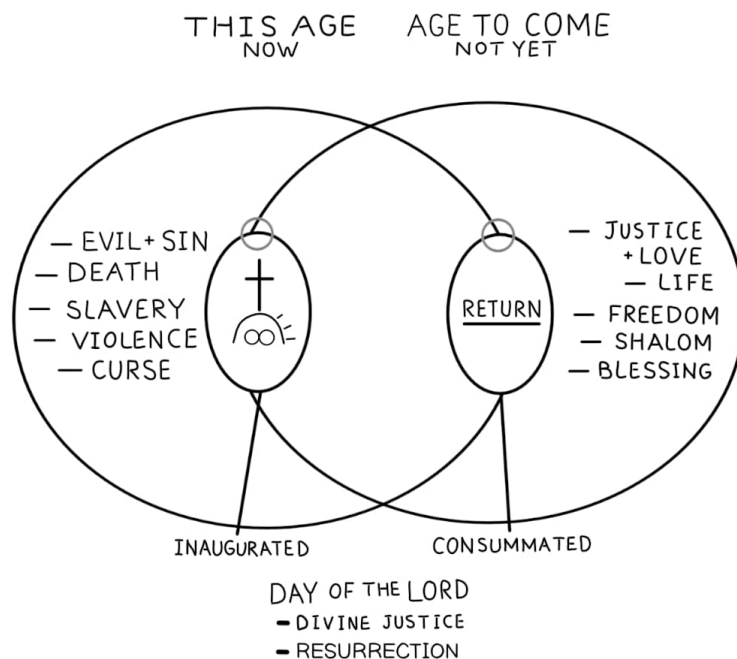
Session 11: This Age and the Age to Come

Key Takeaways

- In the overlap of the ages, Jesus is King, and his resurrection was a preview of the divine power he will demonstrate when he remakes all of creation.

Continuation of Ephesians 1:15-23

This session's diagram depicts the spheres of the current age and the age to come and demonstrates how the two merged in the death and resurrection of Jesus.



The Space of the Heaven and the Earth. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

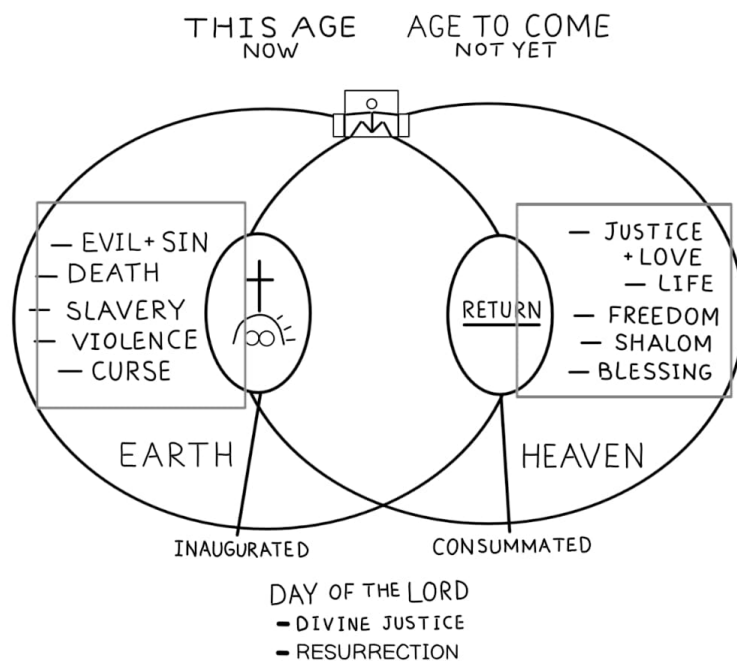
Paul teaches that we live in the overlap between this age and the age to come and that Jesus is already reigning as King. Is this a new idea for you or not? How do you experience the reality of the present or “dark age” in your life now?

Session 12: Reflecting on This Age and the Age to Come

Key Takeaways

- We live in the overlapping realities of this age and the age to come.
- Paul has a completely foreign worldview compared to our own. When we realize this, it allows us to better understand him.

Paul's Vision of This Age and the Age to Come



Values of this Age and the Age to Come. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).



Reflection Question

Every day we participate in one of two creations: one that is passing away or one that has begun but is not yet fully realized. How do you experience or participate in the reality of the “not yet” or “age to come” in your life now?



Module 5: Identity

SESSIONS 13-15

How do you understand the idea of grace—is it unmerited, unconditional? Look closer at the overall design of Ephesians 2:1-10 and Paul’s view of grace.

Session 13: From Death to Life

Key Takeaways

- In the parallel movements of Ephesians 2 (2:1-10 and 2:11-22), we see the former predicament, the agents of death, God’s intervention, and the new creation result. The first movement shows the story from a cosmic perspective, and the second movement shows the story from a covenantal perspective.
- Identities that divide people are irrelevant because we have a new identity in Jesus.
- Ephesians 2:8 is not about the individual. Paul applies the verse to social relationships within a church community.

From the Living Dead to Membership in the Messianic Temple

Flow of Thought in Ephesians 2:1-22

This section contains two larger movements that are set in parallel. Each part begins by describing the dismal past of the letter’s non-Jewish readers and their move toward their new destiny in the Messiah. Each paragraph addresses their former, overlapping identities told in two stories.

- Ephesians 2:1-10: Their human identity within the cosmos, from death to resurrection life and rule [Gen. 1-2]
- Ephesians 2:11-22: Their gentile identity among the nations, from outsiders to God’s covenant people to one new messianic humanity [Isaiah]

Paul has designed each of these movements to run in parallel.

	2:1-10 Their story from a cosmic perspective	2:11-22 Their story from a covenantal perspective
Their former predicament	2:1-3: And you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which at that time (ποτε) you walked ... doing the desires of the flesh	2:11-12: Remember, at that time (ποτε), you nations in the flesh ... were estranged from the citizenry of Israel, foreigners of the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world
Movements in Ephesians 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).		

	2:1-10 Their story from a cosmic perspective	2:11-22 Their story from a covenantal perspective
The agents of death	2:2: “the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience”	2:14-15: “the dividing wall, the hostility ... the Torah consisting of commands with decrees”
God’s intervention	2:4-8: But God, being rich in mercy ... made us alive together with the Messiah ... by grace you have been saved	2:13: But now in Messiah Jesus, you who were far have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah
The new creation result	2:5-6: He made you alive together with the Messiah ... and raised you up together and seated you together in the heavenly realm in the Messiah Jesus 2:10: You have been created in Messiah Jesus for good works	2:14-18: He made both groups into one ... in order that in himself he might create two into one new humanity ... through him we both have access by the one Spirit to the Father
<i>Movements in Ephesians 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).</i>		

He has also designed each movement to work by itself as a rhetorical symmetry so that the first half states the negative realities, which are then reversed in the paragraph’s second half.

Rhetoric	Ephesians 2:1-10	Ephesians 2:11-22
Negative past	2:1-2: You were dead in your transgressions and sin which, at that time, you walked in them	2:11-12: You were gentiles in the flesh ... without the Messiah, estranged from the citizenry of Israel ... without God in the world
Messianic transition	2:4-5: But God ... made you alive together with the Messiah	2:13-15: But now in Messiah Jesus you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah ... to create the two into one new humanity
Positive present	2:10: You are ... created in Messiah Jesus for good works which God has	2:19: Therefore you are no longer estranged ... but fellow citizens and members of God’s household
<i>Rhetorical Symmetry in Ephesians 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).</i>		

Rhetoric	Ephesians 2:1-10	Ephesians 2:11-22
	prepared before hand, so that you would walk in them	
Rhetorical Symmetry in Ephesians 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).		

From Living Death to New Creation: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 2:1-10

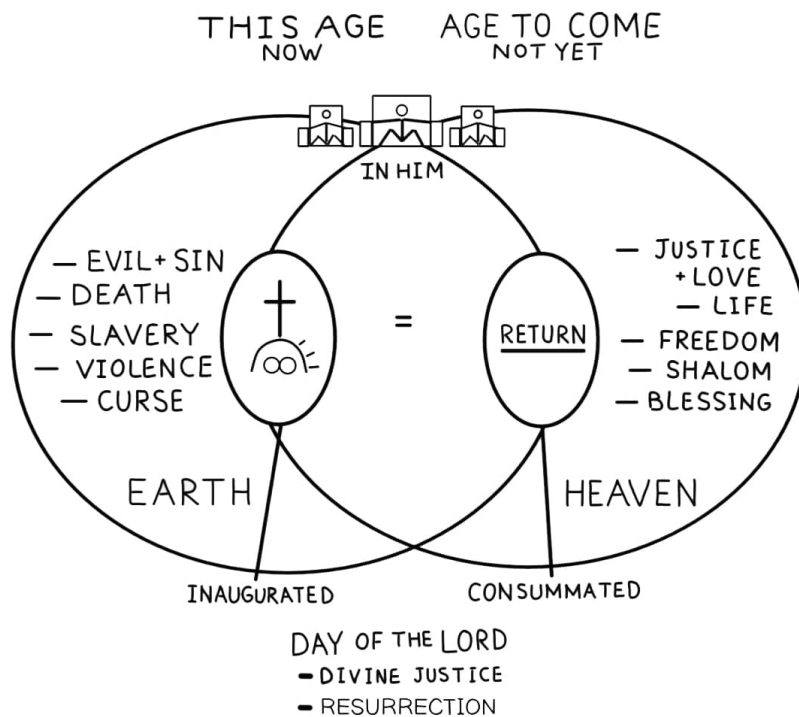
¹ And y'all, **being dead** in y'all's transgressions and sins,
² in which at one time y'all walked according to the **age of this world**,
according to the **ruler of the authority of the air**,
the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience,
³ among whom we also all used to live by the passions of our flesh,
doing the will of the flesh and the mindsets,
and we were by nature children of wrath,
as also were the rest.

⁴ But God, **being rich in mercy**,
because of the great love with which he loved us,
⁵ and we, **being dead** in our transgressions,
he **made us alive together** with the Messiah
—by grace y'all have been saved—
⁶ and **he raised us up together**
and **sat us together**
in the heavenlies
with Messiah Jesus
⁷ in order that he might demonstrate
in the ages which are coming
the surpassing richness of his grace,
by kindness to us in Messiah Jesus.

⁸ For it is by grace that y'all have been saved,
through trust,
and **this is** not from yourselves,
it is the gift of God
⁹ **[it is]** not from works,
in order that no one can boast.

¹⁰ For we are his handiwork,
having been created in Messiah Jesus
for good works
which God prepared beforehand,
so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:1-10. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).



Jesus Enthroned on the Day of the Lord. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

Ephesians 2:8 is often understood primarily as individualistic. Is that how you've read it in the past? In what ways has seeing this verse applied to social relationships within a community changed your understanding?

Session 14: Paul's View of Grace

Key Takeaways

- For Paul, the gift of grace is unconditioned, but it is not unconditional. It is not given on the basis of worth, but there is an expectation that we will reciprocate by living for Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.



This session covers the notes from sessions 13

Reflection Question

For Paul, grace is a gift given to someone who is not worthy, but it is also given with the expectation of reciprocity or response. How does this transform your understanding of grace?

Session 15: Introduction to the Powers

Key Takeaways

- Understanding Paul's first-century vocabulary and worldview will help us see what he means by "spiritual powers."

"The Powers" in Paul's Letters and the Hebrew Scriptures

"Modern people ... tend to assume that ancient people conceived of the 'principalities and powers' and believed in them in the same way that we conceive of and believe (or disbelieve) in them. We think they thought of the powers quite literally as a variety of invisible demonic beings flapping around in the sky, occasionally targeting some luckless mortal with their malignant payload of disease, lust, possession, or death. This view of their view finds its way into even the best modern translations of the Bible, where words like 'spiritual' and 'spirits' are ... taken to mean that non-material entities are involved. Therefore, we read ancient accounts of encounters with these powers, [some] can only regard them as hallucinations, since they have no 'real' physical referent ... In short, our eyes and minds are captive to a way of seeing and thinking that can only regard demons or angelic powers as either invisible versions of persons like ourselves, or as fantasies akin to dragons or elves ... A gulf has been fixed between us and the biblical writers. We use the same words, but project them into a wholly different world of meanings ... If our goal is to understand the New Testament's conception of the Powers ... we must instead attend carefully to the unique vocabulary and concepts of the first century, to grasp what they meant by the vocabulary of 'power' within their own language and worldview. It is a virtue to disbelieve in something that does not exist. But it is dangerous and arrogant to disbelieve in something simply because it exists outside our current, limited categories."

Adapted from Wink, Walter (1984). [*Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*](#). Fortress Press. 4.

Flow of Thought in Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 2:1-3: In their present state, apart from Jesus' sacrifice, Paul says that humanity was "dead in sin."

- 2:1: This is deeply rooted in Paul's understanding of the human condition, described in Genesis 1-4. Humans are made to image God to the world, but when they turn away to reflect only themselves and their desires, they cut themselves off from the source of all life and turn toward death. The claim of Genesis 1-3 (Adam and Eve = humanity and life) is that all humans have made this same choice.
- 2:2: The reality of evil on Earth isn't only of our own making. We are enslaved to dark spiritual forces of death that contribute to evil in the world. Human disobedience unleashes forces into creation that take on a life and agency of their own.

Ephesians 2:4-7: At precisely the point of humanity's worst and weakest inability, God showed rich mercy and love in multiple ways.

- 2:5: We were made "alive together with the Messiah" because our destined death was reversed by the Messiah's resurrection, which has become our own.
- 2:6: "He raised us together and seated us in the heavenly realm in the Messiah Jesus." In Ephesians 1:20, "[God's power] ... which raised the Messiah from the dead ones and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm."
 - Note: Being seated at God's right hand is about being given the role of true power through which the world can be ruled and run by the will of God. This authority belongs to Jesus, and it is given as a gift to his people. It doesn't mean that Christians ought to be running the world as such. Rather, the real running of the world is what happens in day-to-day life as people give themselves in love to the needs of others.
- 2:7: God's goal is for this new humanity to be an emblem of his grace and love into the new creation.

Ephesians 2:8-10: This entire scenario is a gift of divine grace. The new humanity is a new creation in the Messiah, which opens up a whole new way of life full of opportunities to love and serve others.

Key Interpretive Issues in 2:1-10

In Ephesians 2:2-3, "sons of disobedience" is a Hebrew turn of phrase where "son" means "member of a group" (the "sons of the prophets," 2 Kgs. 2:7, 15). The following phrase, "by nature, children of wrath," is more dense but has a similar meaning. The phrase "son of ..." or "child of ..." combined with a verb of negative punishment is a Hebrew turn of phrase as well. "A son of striking" means "one destined to be beaten" (Deut. 25:2), and a "son of death" means "one who must be put to death" (1 Sam. 26:16). In this sense, to be "by nature" does not refer to a developed doctrine of original sin; rather, it is developing the image of Ephesians 2:1, "being dead." When you live in a state of death, you are by nature bound to a life of the same—from death to producing more death until one dies.

In Ephesians 2:3, "children of wrath" does not refer to a predestination of the eternally damned but to people whose corrupt actions have placed them among those who will face divine justice.

"In the Bible the 'wrath' of God, in turn, does not represent the intemperate outburst of an uncontrolled character. It is rather the temperature of God's love, the manifestation of his will and power to resist, to overcome, to burn away all that contradicts his counsels of love. According to Gal 3:13 the full 'curse' with which God threatened the trespasser was poured out upon Jesus alone so that those threatened by it might be saved. Curse is infinitely worse than wrath."

Barth, Markus (1974). Ephesians 1-3. Doubleday & Co. 231-232.

“Paul hastens to add in v. 3 that all Christians, Jew or Gentile, once lived according to the desires of ‘our flesh,’ by which he means carrying out in actions one’s sinful inclinations. Thus ‘we,’ which clearly refers to Jews, were once ‘children of wrath by nature like everyone else.’ It should be clear that Paul does not mean that people were destined for wrath, since he is talking about himself and in this case other Jewish Christians. He means that they were acting in a fallen way like those who deserved God’s wrath.”

Witherington III, Ben (2007). [*The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*](#). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 253-254.

Referring to Ephesians 2:8: “And this is not from yourselves.” To what does “this” (τοῦτο) refer? (1) “It refers to ‘y’all are saved’ or, much the same thing, to the whole preceding statement involving salvation by grace through faith, and this salvation by grace through faith does not take its source from within y’all’selves. The words καὶ τοῦτο ‘and this’ introduce the first of two balancing negatives (the second being 2:9) which enforce the positive statement that we have been saved by grace through faith. To adopt a parenthetical interpretation for this half of the verse is to destroy the parallelism between οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν ‘not of y’all’selves’ and οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ‘not of works’ both of which belong to the same flow of discourse. Nor does this interpretation destroy the idea that faith is created in the individual by God. Besides being taught in other passages, it is included in this one because, being a part of salvation, it too must come from God.”

Graham, Glenn H. (2008). [*An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians \(2nd Edition\)*](#). SIL International. 132.

Reflection Question

In Ephesians 2, Paul makes clear that all humanity was dead in their transgressions and sins and walked according to “the ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2). In your own tradition or life, how have you typically understood the idea of spiritual powers and their influence?



Module 6: The Powers

SESSIONS 16-18

Take a deeper dive into the biblical worldview of Paul to better understand his letter to the Ephesians.

Session 16: Paul's View of the Powers

Key Takeaways

- In the New Testament, the powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural.
- Paul sees the cosmic rulers (spiritual beings) as being invested in the political, ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic structures of our world.
- Paul sees spiritual beings as intimately connected to the earthly entities (rulers, social structures, etc.) who work to divide and corrupt what God has intended to unify.
- Enslavement to the powers is the human condition apart from the messianic hope.

Rulers, Authorities, Powers, and Dominions

The “rulers, authorities, powers, and dominions” are introduced in the first chapter of Ephesians ([Eph. 1:21](#)). Who or what are they?

The Heavenly/Spiritual Realm

In Ephesians, these powers exist in the parallel heavenly/spiritual realm, and evidence of their work is found in corporate human societies, institutions, and cultural ideologies.

Ephesians 1:20-21 Instructor's Translation

²⁰ Christ ... is seated at [God's] right hand in the heavenly realm, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, and power and dominion ... not only in this age, but also in the age to come.

Ephesians 2:2 Instructor's Translation

... the age of this world, the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit who is now working among the sons of disobedience ...

Ephesians 3:10 NASB

... the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12 Instructor's Translation

... not flesh and blood, but the rulers, authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the evil spiritual beings in the heavenly realm.

The Slanderer

In Paul's letter, the powers are related to, but distinct from, the role of "the satan" (the opposer), or "the devil" (the slanderer), who is said to influence people primarily on the individual and community level.

Ephesians 4:26-27 Instructor's Translation

²⁶ Don't let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ so you don't give a place to the slanderer.

The Influence of the Powers

In Paul's other letters, the influence of the powers is at work on a corporate level in social, political, cultural, and religious systems.

Colossians 1:16 Instructor's Translation

All things were created in him, things in the heavens and things on earth, the visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

Colossians 2:8 Instructor's Translation

They take you away captive through philosophies and empty deception, in accordance with human traditions and the elemental powers of the cosmos, not in accordance with the Messiah.

Colossians 2:15 Instructor's Translation

After disarming the rulers and authorities, he exposed them to public shame, triumphing over them in the Messiah.

Galatians 1:3-4 Instructor's Translation

³ ... Jesus Messiah, ⁴ who gave himself on behalf of our sins in order to rescue us from the present evil age.

Galatians 4:3 Instructor's Translation

We ... were enslaved under the elemental powers of the cosmos.

Galatians 4:8-9 Instructor's Translation

⁸ ... you were enslaved to what by nature were not gods. ⁹ ... the weak and impoverished elemental powers

1 Corinthians 2:6, 8 Instructor's Translation

⁶ ... the rulers of this age who are passing away; ... ⁸ the rulers of this age ... who, if they did know [the wisdom of God] they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 Instructor's Translation

²⁴ When [the Messiah] hands over the kingdom to God and Father, when he nullifies every rule and authority and power, ²⁵ for it is necessary that he rule until he has placed all enemies under his feet; ²⁶ the last enemy to be nullified is death.

Romans 8:38-39 Instructor's Translation

³⁸ Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers nor the present nor the future nor powers ... ³⁹ nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Messiah Jesus our Lord.

The Satan

The devil ("slanderer"), or the satan ("the one opposed"), works on the individual and community level.

1 Thessalonians 2:18 NASB*

... we desired to come to you ... but the satan hindered us.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Thessalonians 3:5 Instructor's Translation

I sent to know more about your faithfulness, lest somehow the tester test you

Romans 16:20 NASB*

The God of peace is soon to crush the satan under y'all's [the Roman house churches] feet.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Concept of "The Powers" in the Wider New Testament

The Earthly Powers

John 12:31, 42 ESV*

³¹ Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler (*archon*) of this world will be cast outside. ... ⁴² Nevertheless, even many of the rulers (*archontes*) believed in Jesus ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Luke 22:52-53 Instructor's Translation

⁵² Jesus said to the ruling priests (*arch-hiereis*) and commanders (*strategois*) of the temple and the elders,
⁵³ "... this is your hour, and of the authority (*exousia*) of darkness."

Romans 13:1 NIV*

Let every person submit themselves to the governing authorities (*exousiais*).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Romans 8:38-39 NASB*

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers (*archon*), nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers (*dunamis*), ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Jesus our Lord.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

These statements express a worldview in which the realities that we consider separate (spiritual vs. material) are unified and interconnected.

The Visible and Invisible

If you consider all of the uses of “power” vocabulary in the New Testament, you discover that the powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural.

Colossians 1:16 Instructor's Translation

For in [the messianic Son] all things were created, **things in the heavens and things on the earth**, things **visible** and things **invisible**, whether thrones or territories of dominion, whether rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

The parallelism makes clear that Paul saw these powers as both earthly and heavenly, visible and invisible, with manifestations that are both human and supra-human, material and non-material. This means that whenever the New Testament authors speak of power, they are referring to a power that is both of Heaven and Earth, material and spiritual.

Key Terms for Power

- *Archon/Arche*, ruler/rule: **A specific person** who is in a role of authorized authority, power, and widespread influence, mostly kings and officials of a monarchy or priests and officials of a temple
- *Exousia*, authority: **A structure or social arrangement** that is upheld and represented by an authorized person or group
- *Dunamis*, power: **The real or potential influence** manifest in military, political, or economic institutions or officials who represent them
- *Thronos*, throne: **The symbol of institutional or structural authority** or power associated with an institution (metaphorically refers to a structure of power, not a particular person)
- *Kuriotes*, dominion/lordship: **The sphere or territory of a ruler's power** or influence

Key Texts for Power

Key Pauline texts illuminate the reality of the powers.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 NASB*

⁶ We [the apostles] speak of a wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the **rulers of this age**, who are passing away; ⁷ rather, we speak of God's wisdom, the open-secret which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our exaltation to glory; ⁸ [a wisdom] that none of the **rulers of this age** understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The New Testament is clear that it was human rulers (*archon*) that crucified Jesus. “The chief priests (*archiereis*) and rulers (*archon*) delivered Jesus over to death and crucified him” (Luke 24:20). So at the very least, 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 includes Jewish and Roman religious, military, and political leaders and the institutions they represent (the temple and the empire).

However, to call Caiaphas and Pilate “the rulers of this age,” that is, of this entire world order, is extreme. Additionally, none of them were still in office when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He speaks of these powers in the present as still existing.

Later, when Paul speaks of Jesus’ death and resurrection, he again mentions the powers in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 NASB*

²⁴ Then [will come] the completion, when [Messiah] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has disempowered all **rule** (*arche*) and all **authority** (*exousia*) and **power** (*dunamis*). ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be disempowered is death.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The key verb “disempowered” (*katargeo*) does not mean “destroy” (as in the ESV, NRSV, and NIV); rather, it means “neutralize” and/or “make null and void” (see [1 Cor. 1:28](#); [Eph. 2:15](#); [Rom. 4:14](#)). Paul’s point is that every human and cosmic structure of authority governing human existence in this current age of death and decay will have to be subdued in order to make way for the new creation.

Literary Design of Romans 8:35-39

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Human Powers

^{35b} Will tribulation, or distress,
or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁶⁻³⁷ Just as it is written,
“For your sake we are being put to death all day long;
we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”
But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us.

Cosmic Powers

^{38-39a} For I am convinced that
not death, not life,
not angels, not rulers (*archon*),
not things present, not things to come,
not powers (*dunamis*),
not height, nor depth,

not any other creature,

^{39b} will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

The rhetorical logic is that no creature in God's world, however rebellious and hostile to his purposes, can overpower the divine love expressed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The hostile powers include human violence and opposition but also the corresponding cosmic powers who are responsible for suffering and death on a corporate, structural level. Notice that the cosmic powers in particular are called "creatures," that is, they have a proper role in God's world, though they are presently alienated from that role in their attempt to separate people from the creator's love.

Ephesians 1:20-23 NASB*

²⁰ [God] brought about in the Messiah, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenlies, ²¹ far above all **rule** (*archon*) and **authority** (*exousia*) and **power** (*dunamis*) and **dominion** (*kuriotes*), and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Messiah's heavenly rule is not only over the cosmic/heavenly powers, because Paul specifies that all powers, which includes Heaven and Earth (Col. 1:16), are placed under his rule.

The image of the risen Jesus at God's right hand is derived from a combination of Psalm 8 and Psalm 110 (see Mark 14:62 and Matt. 28:18).

The Powers in Paul's Worldview

"In Paul's first-century worldview, nothing in heaven can happen without profound repercussions on earth; indeed, that is the way true change on earth is brought about. Nor would the message of peace in heaven constitute much 'good news' for those seeking deliverance here on earth. No, the use of 'all ... every ... all things' here is uncompromising in its breadth. No human or cosmic power in this world or the world to come is exempted."

Adapted from Wink, Walter (1984). [Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament](#). Fortress Press. 60.

"If Christ is lord not only of persons but also of the powers, if his sovereignty extends beyond the individual to the social structures and spiritual influences that organize the world, it also extends to the very constituent principles of the physical universe itself, encompassing what we call the 'laws of nature.' This is what leads Paul to the phrase from Isaiah, 'new creation.'"

Adapted from Wink, Walter (1984). [*Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*](#). Fortress Press.

"[I]t is probable that Paul means by principalities and powers those institutions and structures by which earthly matters and invisible realms are administered, and without which no human life is possible. The superior power of nature epitomized by life and death; the ups and downs of historic processes; the nature and impact of favored prototypes or the catastrophic burdens of the past; the hope or threat offered to the present by the future; the might of capitalists, rulers, judges; the benefit and onus of laws of tradition and custom; the distinction and similarity of political and religious practices; the weight of ideologies and prejudices; the conditions under which all authority, labor, parenthood, etc., thrive or are crushed—these structures and institutions are in Paul's mind ... God's creation obviously does not consist of earthly-visible things alone. Just as [*Genesis 1:1*](#) treats the creation of the heavens and the earth, so also in [*Colossians 1:16*](#) 'invisible things in heavens' are added to those that are tangible. In the latter verse, either both or only the invisible things are identified with the powers. It is probable that in [*Ephesians*](#) Paul had in mind at the same time both visible, specific governors and the invisible authority exerted by them; concrete conditions and manifestations of life and the invisible mystery of the psyche; specific legal acts and the overarching role of law in general, etc. According to [*Ephesians 1:10*](#), both the heavenly and the earthly entities are subjected to Christ. Only when both are affected is the whole creation changed."

Barth, Markus (1974). [*Ephesians 1-3*](#). Doubleday & Co. 174-175.

"Paul considers the celestial bodies (also called 'the elements' in [*Galatians 4:1-8*](#)), to be personalized spiritual forces of some kind, supernatural beings that hold power over human beings ... [he] has in mind the tribal deities that were thought to oversee the nations on behalf of God (as in [*Deut 32:8-9*](#)) ... but this purpose deteriorated. These same regulating beings are what is meant in [*Ephesians*](#) as *kosmokratoras* ([*Eph 6:12*](#)), 'cosmic rulers.' But the metaphor in this word contains an ambiguity. On the one hand, they can be said to 'hold' (*krateo*) the world (*kosmos*), administering justice and order on behalf of God; on the other hand, their holding might easily become a 'grab' (*krateo*), in which they seek to detract attention from the true creator God and establish themselves as the ultimate in divine power and authority ... These are the 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' ([*Eph 6:11-12*](#))."

Longenecker, Bruce (1998). [*The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians*](#). Abingdon Press. 49, 54-55.

"The complex structures of our societies set limits to what we can see, understand, and choose to do. We are caught in the web of relationships, expectations, economies, cultural activities, acculturation to particular contexts, political and administrative arrangements which seem to take on a life of their own, larger and more enduring, and more resistant than the efforts of any individual or group of individuals to change or act in opposition to such forces. Here then is the concrete presence of the 'sin' which Paul describes, the force for evil that precedes the choices of those who appear to be choosing, preempts the actions of those who appear to be acting, and tends to crush out of existence any who persist in acting in critical opposition."

Domning, Daryl P. and Hellwig, Monika K. (2006). [*Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in the Light of Evolution*](#). Routledge. 16.

Paul envisions these cosmic rulers, or elemental powers, as spiritual beings invested in (what we call) the political, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic structures that divide humans and assign greater or lesser value to various groups, resulting in corporate and individual sin, oppression, and injustice. In Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans, it is these powers that have been conquered and overcome in the exaltation of the crucified Messiah.

"Paul's vision of the ultimate rescue of the entire created order ... a vision which flowed directly from what he believed about the Messiah, impelled him to understand 'evil' as a whole which was more than the sum total of humans sins or deaths. Rather, 'sin' and 'death' were themselves suprahuman forces bent on corrupting and destroying the creator's good world ... Based on Paul's language about the 'powers' the promise is both personal (the heart infected by sin, corrupting the mind into idolatry and the person into dehumanizing behavior) and cosmic, since the worship of idols allows the demons who masquerade behind them to gain power that is not rightly theirs ... Sin and Death have replaced, in Paul's mind, the wicked, idolatrous pagans as seen from within his pre-Christian worldview. Sin and death are the real enemies to be defeated, and indeed they have been defeated on the cross and will be defeated fully and finally in Jesus' coming."

Wright, N.T. (2013). [*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*](#). Fortress Press. 756.

Reflection Question

The powers are the human and cosmic authorities who are responsible for division. How does this relate to Paul's message in the letter to the Ephesians?

Session 17: The Powers in the Hebrew Scriptures

Key Takeaways

- The concept of the powers is first found in Genesis 1:17 with the delegation of rule to spiritual beings.
- In the Hebrew Bible, Israel is presented as a people group under the direct power and authority of God the creator rather than other cosmic rulers.
- When humanity is freed from slavery to the powers, there is no longer male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek. They become a people whose identities and destinies are no longer governed by the powers.

The Hebrew Bible Roots of the Powers Concept

The Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism contain the roots for the concept of the powers. Paul is continuing a long scriptural tradition of seeing Heaven and Earth as overlapping parallel realms (three-tiered cosmos) and humanity as enslaved to supra-human powers that influence societies and communities.

- “The host of heaven” whom God appoints to rule the order of time ([Gen. 1](#); [Job 38:6-7](#))

Genesis 1:14-18 NASB*

¹⁴ Then God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the skies to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights, the greater light **to rule the day**, and the lesser light **to rule the night**; and the stars. ¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ and **to rule the day and the night**, and to separate the light from the darkness.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 2:1 Instructor's Translation

Thus the skies and the land were completed, with **all of their hosts**.

Psalms 136:7-9 NASB*

⁷ To him who made great lights,
for his lovingkindness is everlasting:

⁸ The sun **to rule [ἐξουσιαν] the day**,
for his lovingkindness is everlasting,

⁹ The moon and stars **to rule [ἐξουσιαν] the night**,
for his lovingkindness is everlasting.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

- The rebel cherub snake (Gen. 3; Ezek. 28)
- The rebel sons of *elohim* (Gen. 6)
- The rebellion of Babylon and the scattering of the nations (Gen. 11; Deut. 4:19-20, 32:7-8; Ps. 82; Isa. 14)

Deuteronomy 4:19-20 Instructor's Translation

¹⁹ So that you don't lift your eyes to the heavens and see **the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of the heavens**, and be **led astray and worship them and serve them**, the ones whom Yahweh your God designated for all the nations under the heavens. ²⁰ But you, Yahweh has taken and he brought you out of the iron furnace of Egypt, to be a people-inheritance for himself.

Deuteronomy 32:7-8 NASB*

⁷ Remember the days of old,
understand the years of past generations. ...
⁸ When Yahweh gave the nations their inheritances,
when he divided up the sons of humanity,
he established the boundaries of the peoples,
according to the number of the sons of the gods.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 82:1, 6-8 Instructor's Translation

¹ God stands in the divine council,
in the midst of the gods he brings justice. ...
⁶ I had said, "Y'all are gods,
and all of you are sons of the Most High.
⁷ But on the contrary, y'all will die like humans
and like one of the rulers, y'all will fall."
⁸ Arise, O God, judge the land,
for you will inherit all the nations.

"This [idea in Deuteronomy] ... did justice to the reality of pagan religion and pagan political power with which religion was inseparably associated. It was a common phenomenon in the ancient world for a deity to be the personification of the state over which he [or she] presided. Under the successive domination of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, Israel was to have ample opportunity to discover that the pagan empires, whether they were symbolized by their earthly kings or by their heavenly guardians, were a power to be reckoned with ... This teaching [in Deuteronomy] asserted that all authority ... comes ultimately from the one God of Israel. Without some such teaching, it would have been all too easy for the pious Israelite to assume that the Gentile nations lay outside the sphere of God's kingly rule. In essence, therefore, the belief in national angels was a courageous proclamation of the universal sovereignty of God ... the Jews never really doubted that Gentile authority was derived from the Lord of all majesty and might, and that their pagan oppressors had no power over them except what was given them from above."

Caird, G. B. (2003). [*Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*](#). Wipf and Stock Publishers. 6-7.

In the Exodus, Psalms, and the Prophets

The exodus was both a liberation from slavery to Egypt and a defeat of its *elohim* (Exod. 12:12, 15:11).

Exodus 12:12 Instructor's Translation

And I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will strike all the firstborn of the land of Egypt, from human to beast, and **I will bring acts of justice upon all the gods of Egypt.**

Exodus 15:11 NASB*

Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh?
Who is like you, majestic in separateness,
feared in praises, doing wonders?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The subordinated *elohim* are obligated to give honor to Yahweh.

Psalms 89:6-7 Instructor's Translation

⁶ Who in the heavens can be compared to Yahweh?
Who is like Yahweh among the sons of God,
⁷ a God feared in the assembly of the holy ones,
great and feared above all who surround him?

Psalms 29:1 Instructor's Translation

Give to Yahweh, O sons of God,
give to Yahweh glory and strength.

The past exodus anticipates a new exodus where God's people will be rescued from the curse of the covenant and enslavement to the spiritual powers that will be destroyed just like Egypt and its gods.

Isaiah 24:21-23 Instructor's Translation

²¹ And it will come about in that day,
Yahweh will bring judgment against the host of the heights on high
and against the kings of the land upon the land.
²² And prisoners are gathered over the pit,
and shut up in the prison,
and after many days they will be judged.
²³ And the moon will be ashamed,
and the sun subject to humiliation,
for Yahweh of hosts reigns as king
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before his elders, glory!

Isaiah 27:1 Instructor's Translation

In that day, Yahweh will bring,
with his harsh and great and strong sword,
against Leviathan, the speedy snake,

against Leviathan, the twisting snake
and he will slay the sea-dragon who is in the sea.

Isaiah 34:2, 4 NASB*

² Yahweh has anger against all the nations,
and wrath against all their hosts,
he has dedicated them to destruction ...
⁴ And all the hosts [δυναμεις] of the heavens will rot,
and the skies will be rolled up as a scroll,
and all their hosts will wither,
like a leaf withers from a vine,
and like it withers from a fig tree.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Greek Translation Connection

In the Old Greek translation, these spiritual beings are called powers, rulers, authorities, etc.

Psalms 148:1-4 Septuagint/LXX

¹ Praise Yahweh ... from the heavens,
praise him among the high ones,
² praise him all his angels,
praise him all his hosts ["all his powers" δυναμεις].
³ Praise him sun, moon,
praise him all stars of light.
⁴ Praise him O heavens of the heavens,
and the waters above the heavens.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 103:20-21 Septuagint/LXX

²⁰ Bless Yahweh, O his angels.
Strong ones of might who do his word ...
²¹ Bless Yahweh, O all his hosts, ["all his powers" δυναμεις],
his servants who do his will.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Daniel 7:27 Septuagint/LXX

Then the rule and authority and greatness of the kingdoms under the heavens will be given to the people of the holy ones of the most high ones, and his kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and all authorities ["authorities and rulers" εξουσαι και αρχαι] will worship and serve him.

Daniel 10:13 Septuagint/LXX

And the ruler [αρχων] of Persia stood against me.

Second Temple Roots

This close connection between the celestial bodies and spiritual rulers with delegated authority over the cosmos permeates Second Temple Jewish literature.

Wisdom of Solomon 7:17-19 NRSV

¹⁷ For it is he [God] who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world [kosmos] and the activity of the elements [stoicheia]:

¹⁸ the beginning and end and middle of times, the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons [kairoi],

¹⁹ the cycles of the year [eniautos] and the constellations of the stars,

Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-3 NRSV

¹ For all people who were ignorant of God ...

² supposed that either fire or wind or swift air
or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water
or the luminaries of heaven were the gods [theoi] that rule the world.

³ If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods [theoi],
let them know how much better than these is their Lord,
for the author of beauty created them.

“God, being one, has about him an unspeakable number of powers, all of which are defenders and preservers of every thing that is created; Again, it is by means of these powers that the incorporeal world, perceptible by the intellect, has been put together, which is the archetypal model of this invisible world, being compounded by invisible species, just as this world is of invisible bodies. (173) Some persons therefore, admiring exceedingly the nature of both these worlds, have not only deified them in their wholes, but have also deified the most beautiful parts of them, such as the sun and the moon, and the entire heaven, which, having no reverence for anything, they have called gods. But Moses, perceiving their design, says, “O Lord, Lord, King of the gods” (Deut. 10:17) in order to show the difference between the ruler and those subject to him, (174) “And there is also in the air a most sacred company of incorporeal souls as an attendant upon the heavenly beings; for the word of prophecy is accustomed to call these souls angels. It happens therefore that the whole host of each of these worlds, being marshalled in their suitable ranks, are servants and ministers of the ruler who has marshalled them, whom they follow as their leader, in obedience to the principles of law and justice; seeing at once what is becoming, both for himself and for his works of creation, there are some things which he has entrusted to his subordinate powers to fashion; and yet he has not at once given even to them completely independent knowledge to enable it to accomplish their objects, in order that no one of those things which come to be created may be found to be erroneously made.”

Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Contempletiva*)

"... [B]ut Moses differs from [the Gentiles] widely in their opinion of God, not intimating that either the world itself, or the soul of the world, is the original God, nor that the stars or their motions are the primary causes of the events which happen among men. Rather, Moses teaches that this universe is held together by invisible powers, which the Creator has spread from the extreme borders of the earth to heaven, making a beautiful provision to prevent what he has joined together from being dissolved; for the indissoluble chains which bind the universe are his powers."

Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Contempletiva*)

"From of old you appointed the Prince of light to assist us, and in [his] ha[nd] are all the angels of [just]ice, and all the spirits of truth are under his dominion. You made Belial for the pit, angel of enmity; in dark[ness] is his [dom]ain, his counsel is to bring about wickedness and guilt. All the spirits of his lot are angels of destruction, they walk in the laws of darkness."

Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT)

Reflection Question

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 can present a different way of understanding the Tower of Babel (Babylon), as well as the overall story of the Bible. What are some of your thoughts, reflections, or questions about this?

Session 18: Reflecting on the Powers

Key Takeaways

- Paul's theology of the powers accounts for every type of brokenness in the human experience.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

What are some places, communities, or systems in our world that you see as potentially enslaved to powers beyond our control?



Module 7: Jesus

SESSIONS 19-21

Paradoxes, nuances, a wall, and a tree. Let's take a deep dive into Paul's theology of the Torah, the cross, and the garden.

Session 19: How Jesus Destroyed Enmity

Key Takeaways

- In order for God to create the true family of Abraham, he needed to destroy the hostility between Israel and the nations and dethrone the powers.
- The point of the Torah's narrative is to expose humanity's inability to be God's faithful covenant partners (including those God first chose).
- According to Paul, the commands in the Torah are good and righteous, but they have also created death and hostility.

The Role of the Covenant: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 2:11-22

- A ¹¹ Therefore remember, that at one time y'all, the gentiles **in flesh**, who are called "uncircumcised" by what is called "the circumcised" (what is performed by hands **in the flesh**),
- B ¹² that y'all were at that time, without Messiah, **estranged** from the **citizenry of Israel**, and **foreigners** of the covenants of the promise, having no hope and **without God** in the world.
- C ¹³ But now, in Messiah Jesus, y'all who were at one time **far off** have become **near** by the blood of the Messiah. ¹⁴ For he himself is our **peace**,
- D the one who made **the two into one**, and having destroyed the barrier of the wall, **the enmity**, ¹⁵ in his flesh,
- having set aside the Torah of commandments in decrees, in order that he might create in himself **the two into one** new humanity, making **peace**,
- ¹⁶ and that he might reconcile to God **the two by means of one body**, through the cross, having killed **the enmity** in himself.

C'

17 And as he came, he announced good news of **peace** to y'all who are **far off**, and peace to those **near**, 18 because through him we both, by means of one Spirit, have access to the Father.

B'

19 Therefore then, y'all are no longer **foreigners and immigrants**, but y'all are **fellow citizens of the holy ones** and **household members of God**,

A'

20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Messiah Jesus himself, 21 in whom the entire building is joined together, so that it can grow into a holy temple **in the Lord**, 22 in whom y'all too are being built together into a dwelling-building of God, **in the Spirit**.

Ephesians 2:11-22. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

This entire paragraph is designed as a symmetrical flow of thought, where each section contrasts with its partners.

- A and A': They used to be outsiders based "in the flesh," but now they are part of the messianic new temple in the Lord/in the Spirit.
- B and B': They were once estranged, foreigners, and without God, but now they are fellow citizens and members of God's family.
- C and C': They were once far off, but now they are brought near.
- D and D' and D'': The two that were separated have become one in the Messiah.

Flow of Thought in 2:11-22

Ephesians 2:11-12 *Past Reality*: Gentiles were not a part of the covenant family of Israel nor covenantally related to the creator.

Ephesians 2:13 *Present Reality*: The Gentiles who were once far from Yahweh have been "brought near" by the agency of "the blood of the Messiah."

- Key Question: How does the death (blood) of Israel's Messiah bring non-Israelites into the covenant family of Israel?

Ephesians 2:14-16: The Messiah has made Jewish and Gentile people one unified family of God by:

- Tearing down the dividing wall, the enmity in his flesh
- Nullifying the Torah consisting of commands in decrees

Ephesians 2:17-22: Jews and Gentiles are united by the Messiah as family members of God's household (οἰκεῖοι), which constitutes the new temple building (οἰκοδομῇ) anticipated by Israel's Scriptures.

- Hebrew Bible anticipations of a new temple (Ezek. 40-48; Joel 3:17-18; Zech. 6:12-15)

- New Testament realization of that temple as Jesus' followers (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-9)
 - Note: Paul combines the metaphors of the temple building (apostles/prophets as the foundation, believers as bricks, and Jesus as the cornerstone) and a tree ("grows into a sanctuary"), which is reminiscent of Psalm 1.

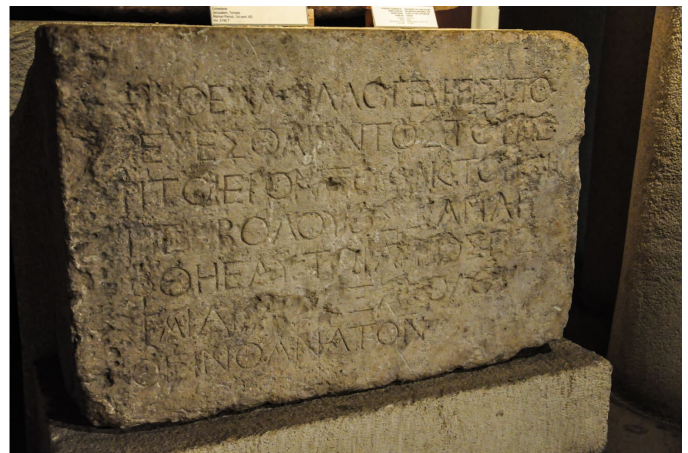
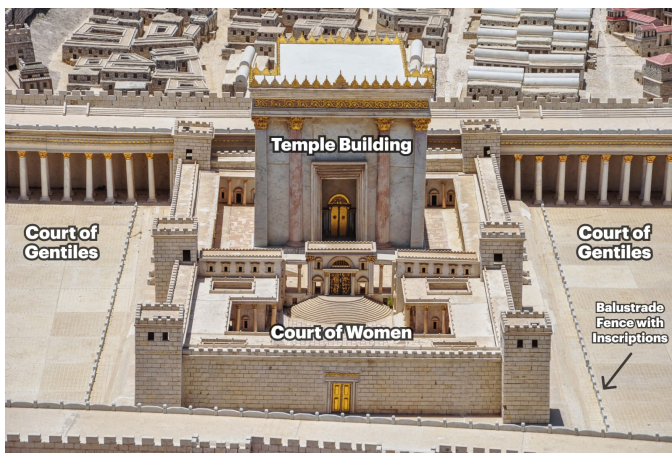
Key Interpretive Issues in 2:11-22

There are two interpretive questions that shape our understanding of what Paul is explaining in this passage.

1. What is the dividing wall, and how did Jesus' death ("in his flesh") take it down?
2. What does it mean that Jesus nullified the Torah, and what is the Torah's relationship to the torn down dividing wall in the previous line?

View 1

The dividing wall refers to the barrier wall that stood in the court of the Jerusalem temple with a sign.



Left Image: Rasmussen, Carol. (2010). *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (Revised Edition). Zondervan. Page 202. HolyLandPhotos.org. Right Image: Rasmussen, Carol. (2010). *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (Revised Edition). Zondervan. Page 221. HolyLandPhotos.org.

Pros of View 1

The following context refers to the new messianic temple, where Jews and Gentiles together are the new temple and have access to the Father through the same Spirit.

- [A] He is himself our peace
 - [B] the one who made the two groups into one,
 - [C] having torn down the dividing wall of hostility in his flesh
 - [C'] having nullified the Torah consisting of commands in decrees
 - [B'] in order to create the two groups into one new humanity,
- [A'] making peace.

Cons of View 1

Paul cannot assume that many (or perhaps any) of his Gentile readers in Asia Minor have been to the Jerusalem temple and know what he is talking about. At the time of Paul's writing this letter (in the 50s C.E.), the barrier still stood. The grammar, syntax, and rhetorical design of the sentence leads one to identify that the "wall" and the "Torah" refer to the same thing.

View 2

The dividing wall is a vivid metaphor to describe the paradoxical role of the Torah in God's purpose. In Ephesians 2:14-16, Paul is condensing his longer and more complex discussions of this point from Galatians 3 and Romans 7-8.

Progression of the Role of the Torah in the Story of the Bible

1. God gave humanity the first command in the garden (Gen. 2:15), and this was seized upon by "sin/snake," which worked a deception precisely through the command and resulted in human rebellion. God exiled the rebels and handed them over to exile and death.
2. God said that a promised seed would arrive to defeat the sin/snake precisely through a mortal wound by the sin/ snake (Gen. 3:15).
3. God called Abraham and his seed to live by covenant faithfulness, and after delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, he gave them the "Torah of commands" to make clear the terms of the covenant. Obedience to the covenant will bring life and blessing to all of the nations. And disobedience will bring exile and death and further hostility with the nations.
4. Israel goes on to violate the covenant, and their seed is handed over to exile and death. The good laws of the Torah, designed to bring blessing on Israel and the nations, were hijacked by the sin/snake so that they brought death (just like in the garden story).
5. Israel's Messiah became the covenant representative of Israel and the priestly representative of all humanity by being faithful to the terms of the covenant. However, he also died as a cursed violator of the covenant on behalf of all violators so that his resurrection life could be shared with all those who offer believing loyalty to him, thereby participating in his own life. (For this complicated but coherent line of thought, see Gal. 3:6-28 and Rom. 7-8, specifically Rom. 8:3-4).
6. After the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, the laws of the Torah are no longer the defining criteria for membership in the covenant family of Abraham. This includes the laws that separated Israel from the nations (kosher diet, circumcision, Sabbath). The defining marker of membership is believing loyalty to Jesus and his Father, which opens up God's family to people of all nations so that they can become the new temple.

“‘Barrier’ is the word used in the Septuagint for the protective hedge which God planted around Israel, his vineyard ([Isa. 5:2](#)). In Isaiah’s parable, it is God who breaks down the hedge around Israel and leaves it exposed to devastation because of Israel’s faithlessness. In the period of the Second Temple and later in the time of the Rabbis, Jews sometimes spoke of the Torah as a protective hedge which protected Israel from sin. In the Letter of Aristeas (v. 139) we read that Moses by the gift of the Torah ‘hedged us about with impregnable ramparts and iron walls, to prevent all contact with any of the other nations, and to keep us pure in body and soul, free from futile speculations, worshipping the one Almighty God above the creation.’ Paul’s point ... is that the Torah, intended by God to be a protective hedge, has been turned by Israelite nationalism into a cultural system that has totally isolated Israel from the Gentile world and is thus responsible for the hostility between Jew and Gentile. Only by the annulment of the legal code could the barrier be removed, and Paul says this was done ‘in his flesh.’ Paul is claiming (1) that Jesus deliberately drew off onto himself the hostility between Torah observant Jews and those Gentiles whose company they avoided, and (2) that this hostility brought him to the cross, and (3) that because he refused to return the hostility, it died there with him. This is a picture substantially borne out by the Gospel narratives, and for Paul the verification of it was plainly to be seen in any Pauline church, where Jew and Gentile mixed freely on equal terms.”

Caird, G.B. (1977). [Paul's Letters From Prison](#). Oxford University Press. 58-59.

Reflection Question

The Torah tells the story of God choosing a family, redeeming them from slavery, and giving them commands for how to relate with him and others. Unfortunately, this family continually fails to be faithful to God and his commands, leading to violence and death. With this in mind, summarize the purpose of the Torah in a few sentences.

Session 20: Reflecting on the Torah

Key Takeaways

- The new humanity doesn't do away with the law. Rather, it creates people who can actually live by the just requirements of the law.
- Paul views the laws of the Torah as wisdom literature, a source of divine wisdom.



This session covers the notes from sessions 19

Reflection Question

Paul has a very nuanced view of the Torah. How would you explain his view of the law? Does he see it as a good thing, a bad thing, neither, or both?

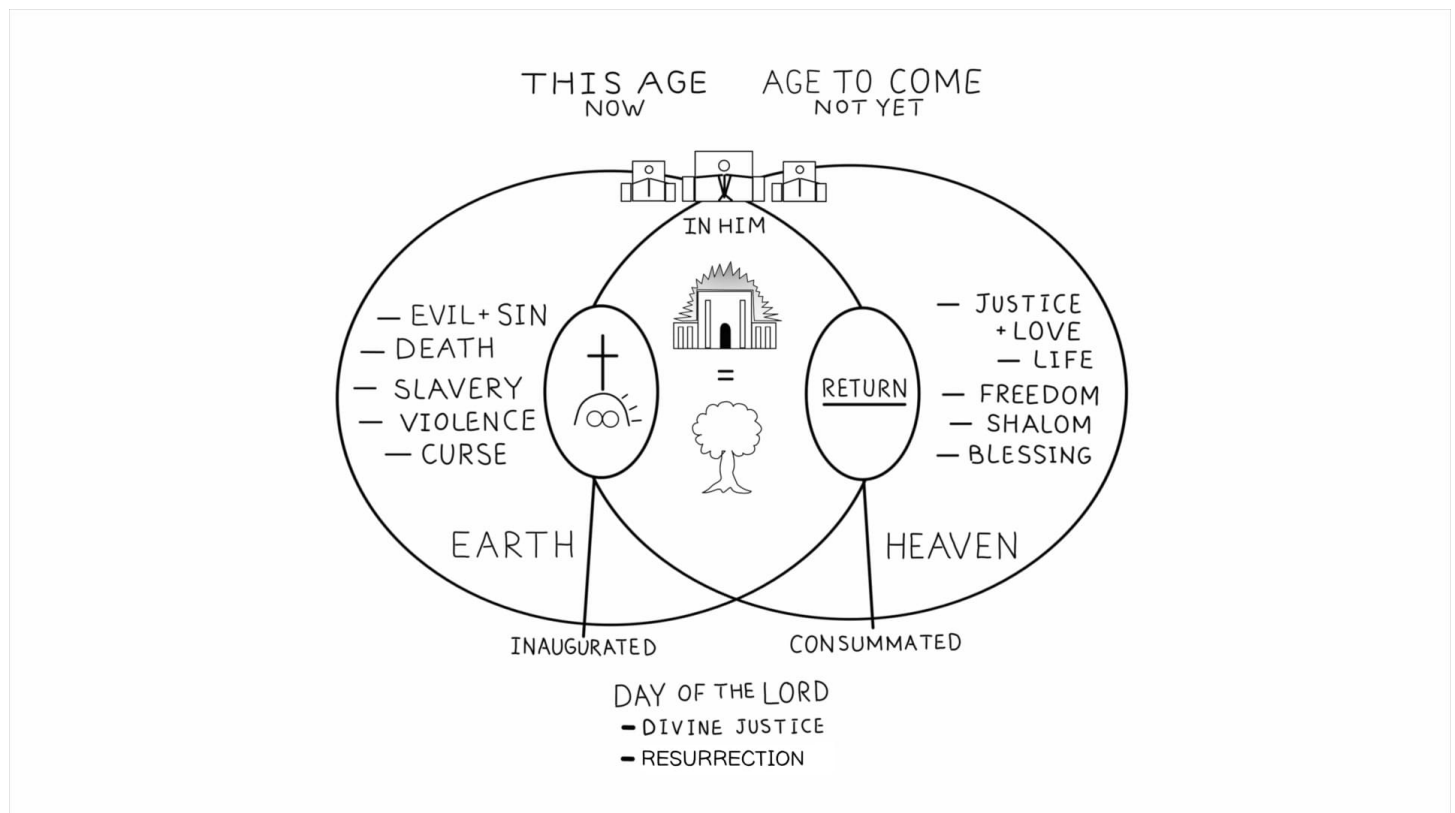
Session 21: Garden and Temple Imagery for God's People

Key Takeaways

- The new humanity is an assembly of people who are now the physical expression of Jesus himself.
- Paul uses the metaphors of a temple and a garden to describe the way that the new humanity fills the world with Jesus' presence.

Temples and Trees

Paul describes the new community of Jesus followers with a mixture of temple, tree, and body metaphors. All of these are pointing to the reality that Jesus is the place where the fullness of God comes to overlap with Earth. And the new humanity participates in this fullness in Jesus.



Temples and Trees. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

What is the significance of the new humanity being called God's temple?



Module 8: It's All About Love

SESSIONS 22-23

How does Paul wrap up and summarize the themes of Ephesians 1-3? Get started to find out!

Session 22: Paul Summarizes His Message (Eph. 3:1-13)

Key Takeaways

- When the new humanity gets together, disregarding the boundary lines of identity that keep them apart, they become God’s wisdom incarnate.
- Paul's boasting is always in the context of the upside-down value system of the Kingdom.

The Mystery of the New Creation Family: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 3:1-13

¹ For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner
of the Messiah Jesus
on behalf of y'all the nations —
² if indeed y'all have heard
of the arranged plan
of the grace of God
which was given to me
for y'all,
³ that it would be made known to me
according to revelation
at the open-secret,
just as I earlier wrote about in brief,
⁴ into which you are,
after reading,
able to comprehend my **insight**
into the open-secret
of the Messiah,
⁵ which in other generations
was not made known
to the sons of humanity
as it is now revealed
by the Spirit

Ephesians 3:1-13. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Flow of Thought in 3:1-13

Paul is about to pray, but his designation as “Paul the prisoner” prompts a discussion of how his imprisonment highlights God’s grace and triumph in the Messiah, instead of bringing shame and suspicion to his message.

Ephesians 3:1: Paul interrupts his prayer.

Ephesians 3:2-7: God’s cosmic plan to unite humanity in the Messiah was not made known fully to previous generations, but as chapters 1-2 make clear, Paul has been given apocalyptic insight into God’s open-secret to include all nations in the Messiah’s family and the divine power in order to spread this message.

Ephesians 3:8-13: Paul is the least qualified person to have been selected for this task (“I’m the least of all the holy ones!”), and his mission has two facets.

- Ephesians 3:8: He is to travel and share the good news with as many people as possible.
- Ephesians 3:9-10: He is to “bring to light” the open-secret of the creator God, that he is creating a new humanity who is not captive to the spiritual-social forces that seek to divide humans into competing and hostile groups. God’s wisdom is to use the crucified Messiah announced by a prisoner to overturn the powers that be.
- Ephesians 3:11-13: Paul’s imprisonment is not shameful but a sign of the power of the good news to challenge the powers.

“In the face of the powers and authorities ... whose rule over this present evil age is characterized by destruction, division, and leading humanity astray into idolatry, God’s power is demonstrated by his ability to create the ‘new humanity’ (Eph 4:24), and to set it in the midst of enemy territory, thus confounding the evil powers ... Paul is not here charging the church with the task of preaching to the powers ... Rather, he is claiming that God has made known his multi-faceted plan. The powers have ordered the present evil age in such a way as to exacerbate the divisions within humanity created by the Law (2:11-12). God confounds the powers, however, by creating in Christ one unified, multi-racial body consisting of formerly divided groups of people. The mere existence of the church as such a body set within the hostile environment of the present evil age proclaims the wisdom of God.”

Gombis, Timothy G. (2004). “Ephesians 3:2–13: Pointless Digression, Or Epitome Of The Triumph Of God In Christ?” *Westminster Theological Journal* (Fall). 320-322.

"[Paul] exults in his present occupation of a shameful, weak, and humiliating position. He glories in his imprisonment, calling himself 'Paul the prisoner.' Further, he claims that it was specifically to him as the one who is 'less than the least of all the saints' (ἐμοί τῷ ελαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων αγίων) that this grace was given (v. 8a), stressing his own unworthiness and lack of fitness for the task. Paul emphasizes his utter weakness and inability so that the triumph of God in Christ might clearly be seen. If Paul were in a position of political strength or earthly power, the clarity of this display to the evil powers might, in some measure, be diminished. Paul, therefore, highlights his humiliation and weakness."

Gombis, Timothy G. (2004). "Ephesians 3:2-13: Pointless Digression, Or Epitome Of The Triumph Of God In Christ?" *Westminster Theological Journal* (Fall). 317

To his ancient audience, Paul's imprisonment would have been a source of suspicion and shame, so Paul needs to reframe his position for his readers. The apocalyptic perspective reverses the social value of Paul's imprisonment. It is precisely through his low position that God's honor in defeating the powers is highlighted, much like David's small size and low social status increases God's reputation in his defeat of Goliath (1 Sam. 17).

Reflection Question

Instead of being a status of shame, Paul considers his imprisonment to be "your [the Ephesians'] glory" (Eph. 3:13). Paul's greatest honor is found in his suffering and ability to share and participate in Jesus' suffering. In what ways is this different or similar to your culture's value systems?

Session 23: Paul's Prayer for Love

Key Takeaways

- Paul concludes chapter 3 with a prayer that functions as a climactic summary of the core themes of Ephesians 1-3.
- To truly grasp the different dimensions of God's love, we must spend time with fellow Jesus followers who come from diverse backgrounds so that aspects of God's love do not remain beyond our reach.
- Ephesians 3:17 is about deepening our commitment to each other and discovering God's love.

A Prayer for Love Among God's Family: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason,
I bow my knee to the Father,
¹⁵ from whom every family-clan
in the heavenlies and on the earth
is named,
¹⁶ so that he would give to y'all,
according to the richness of his glory,
power to be strengthened
through his Spirit
in your inner human,
¹⁷ that the Messiah would dwell
in your hearts
through faith,
having been rooted
and established
in love
¹⁸ so that y'all would be **empowered**
to comprehend
along with all of the holy ones
what is the width and length and height and depth—
¹⁹ to know the
far-beyond knowing
love of the Messiah
so that y'all would be filled up
unto all the fullness of God.
²⁰ Now to the one who is powerful
beyond all things
to do overabundantly more
than what we would ask or conceive,
according to the power which is at work in us,
²¹ to him be glory
in the church
and in Messiah Jesus
for all generations of the age of the ages, amen.

Ephesians 3:14-21. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Flow of Thought in 3:14-21

Ephesians 3:14-15: Paul prays to the Father of all the “children of God,” both heavenly (i.e., the loyal cosmic forces that have not rebelled) and earthly (i.e., the tribes of humanity unified in the Messiah).

Ephesians 3:16-17: Paul's first request is two-part. He asks for (1a) God to give the people power (cf. 1:19) to enable an inner transformation and be strengthened by the Spirit so that (1b) the Messiah could take up temple residence in their communal hearts as they learn to love and serve one another.

Ephesians 3:18-19: Paul’s second request is also two-part. He asks that this “power” and “presence” would (2a) empower the people to grasp the cosmic scope of God’s love, that is, to (2b) experientially know the love of the Messiah that is beyond our full comprehension so that God’s own life “fills them unto all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:20-21: Paul praises God who is powerful to do beyond what humans can conceive of and acknowledges that God’s power is what’s at work in the Messiah’s people.

The Role of 3:14-21 in the Flow of Ephesians 1-3

This prayer functions as a climactic summary of the core themes of chapters 1-3. Nearly every phrase in 3:14-21 picks up a key image or word from earlier in the letter.

Ephesians 3:14-21		Links Back to Ephesians 1-3
The united heaven and earth and all its human and spiritual inhabitants derive from the creator of all	3:14-15: “I kneel before the Father from whom every family in the heavenly and earthly realms gets its name ”	1:10-11: God’s purpose “to head-up all things together in the Messiah, things in heaven and things on earth ” 1:20-21: God “raised the Messiah from among the dead ones and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm , far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name which is named ” 2:6: “And [God] raised us with the Messiah and seated us in the heavenly realm ”
	3:16a: “that he would give y’all, according to the richness of his glory ...”	1:7: “in whom we have ... forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of his glory ” 1:18: “that y’all might know what is the hope of his calling and what is the richness of the glory of his inheritance with/among the holy ones.” 2:7: “so that [God] could display ... the richness of his grace , shown by kindness to us in Messiah Jesus.” 3:8: “To me ... was given this grace to announce to the nations the good news of the inexhaustible richness of the Messiah”

Hyperlinks in Ephesians 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Ephesians 3:14-21

Links Back to Ephesians 1-3

The Spirit takes up residence in the corporate life of his people to give them new power

3:16: "that he would give to y'all ... **power** to be **strengthened** by his **Spirit** in our inner human"

1:18-20: I pray that you might know "what is the surpassing greatness of his **power** towards us who trust, in accordance with **working** of the **might** of his **strength**, which he worked out in the Messiah by raising him from the dead ones ... far above every ... power and dominion."

3:7: "I became a servant [of the good news] according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the **working** of his **power**."

1:17: I pray "that God would give you a **spirit** of wisdom and revelation as you know him"

2:18: "we both have access by one **Spirit** to the Father"

2:22: "y'all are being built together into a dwelling house of God by means of the **Spirit** "

God's new temple/house that is being built according to the house-plan as a place for God to dwell

3:17: "so the Messiah can **dwell** (κατοικησαι) in y'all's hearts through trust ..."

1:10: "the **arranged-house-plan** (οικονομία) of the fulfillment of the times, to head-up all things together in the Messiah"

2:19-22: "y'all are fellow citizens of the holy ones and members (οἰκείοι) of God's **house**, **built** (οικοδομηθέντες) on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the Messiah Jesus being the cornerstone, in whom the entire **building** (οικοδομη) is fitted together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom y'all are being **built** together (συνοικοδομεισθε) into a **dwelling place** (κατοικητηριον) of God, by the Spirit"

3:9-10: "the **arranged-house-plan** (οικονομία) of the open-secret ... that now the multi-faceted wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms"

Hyperlinks in Ephesians 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Ephesians 3:14-21		Links Back to Ephesians 1-3
God's love is prior to all reality God's new temple and new tree of life	3:17: "as you have been rooted and founded in love "	1:4-5: "having pre-established us in love for adoption through Jesus Messiah" 2:4: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us " 2:20-21: "having been built on the foundation (θεμελιος) of the apostles and prophets ... y'all grow (αυξει) into a holy temple"
Power to know the true apocalyptic reality	3:18-19a: "that you would have power to comprehend with all of the holy ones ... to know the beyond-knowing love of the Messiah"	1:18: "that that eyes of your heart would be enlightened in order to know ... what is the richness of his inheritance with/among the holy ones"
The church as the new temple filled with God's glory	3:19b: "... so that you are filled up unto all of the fullness of God himself "	1:22-23 "and [God] placed him as head over all things in the church, which is his body, the filled up-ness of the one who fills all things in every way "
Hyperlinks in Ephesians 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).		

Reflection Question

There are depths and dimensions of the love of God that are impossible to experience without regularly surrounding ourselves with other followers of Jesus who are not like us. Identify one way that you can live this out practically in your life.



Module 9: Transformation Begins

SESSIONS 24-27

Take a turn into the second half of Ephesians and explore what it looks like to live as if chapters 1-3 are actually true.

Session 24: The Apocalyptic Imagination

Key Takeaways

- Ephesians 4-6 is about imagining the new creation in the concrete setting of our lives.

The Shadow Series by Tim Noble and Sue Webster



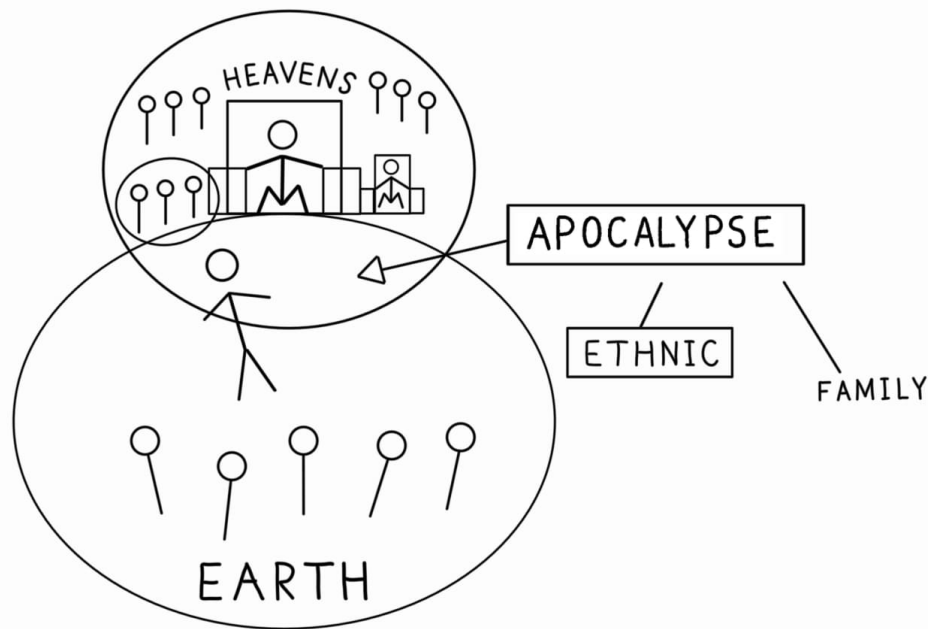
Noble, Tim. Webster, Sue (2003). *Sunset Over Manhattan*. Fazzino.com.



Noble, Tim and Webster, Sue (2000). *Wasted Youth*. TimNobleandSueWebster.com.

Tim Noble and Sue Webster's work provides viewers a type of apocalypse. The light shining on their art casts a new perspective and opens up a different reality. Paul goes through his own apocalypse and desires the same for other followers of Jesus. In Ephesians 4-6, he encourages readers to respond to this apocalypse with eyes opened to an alternate reality and imaginations sparked to live differently.

God's Diverse Family



God's Diverse Family. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2019).

Reflection Question

In Ephesians 1-3, we see Jesus as the suffering and exalted Messiah of Israel who fulfilled God's calling for Israel and all humanity. Now, the new humanity shares in his death, resurrection, and exalted rule over the cosmos, opening up a whole new way of life and new opportunities to love and serve others. What is one way that you can live as if this is actually true in your own life or ministry?

Session 25: Unity Not Uniformity (Eph. 4:1-16)

Key Takeaways

- The concept of the fullness or completeness of the number seven is seen all over the Hebrew Bible, especially on page 1 in Genesis.
- In Ephesians 4:7, Paul develops the point that unity is not uniformity.
- Paul quotes from Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4, and it's clear that this psalm influences the whole letter.

The Unity of God's Family: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ Therefore I urge y'all,
I the prisoner in the Lord,
to walk
in a manner worthy of the calling
with which y'all have been called,
² with all humility and gentleness,
with patience,
bearing with one another in love,
³ being zealous to keep the one-ness of the Spirit
with the bond of peace:
⁴ **one** body and **one** Spirit,
just as y'all were called by **one** hope of y'all's calling,
⁵ **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism,
⁶ **one** God and Father
of everyone,
who is over all and through all and in all.
⁷ But to each one of us was given grace/gift
according to the measure of the gift of the Messiah.
⁸ Therefore it says:
"Having ascended to the height,
he took captive the captive forces;
he gave gifts to people."
⁹ Now, what is "he ascended,"
except that he also descended to the lower regions of the land?
¹⁰ The one who descended,
he is also the one who ascended
high above all things in the heavenly realms,
in order that he might fulfill all things.
¹¹ And he gave some on the one hand as apostles,
and some prophets,
and some evangelists,
and some as shepherds and teachers,
¹² for the equipping of the holy ones
for the work of the ministry,
for the building of the body of the Messiah,
¹³ until we all attain
unto the unity of the faith
and unto the knowing of the Son of God,
unto a mature man,
unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Messiah,
¹⁴ so that we might no longer be babies,
tossed by waves
and driven by every wind of teaching
done by the trickery of humans,
in the craftiness
of a scheme of deception,
¹⁵ but doing truth in love,
let us grow up in everything into **him**,
who is the head,
Messiah
¹⁶ from whom all the body,
being joined together
and being united together
through every supporting joint,
according to the working by the measure of each one of the parts,
produces the growth of the body
for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:1-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Flow of Thought in 4:1-16

Ephesians 4:1-6

Ephesians 4:1: Paul picks up the thread from Ephesians 2:10 that people of God's new creation have a whole new way of life opened up to them, "good works" to "walk" in. Paul now begins the move toward summoning these church communities to live out these works in their walk.

Ephesians 4:2-3: Paul highlights that this new way of unified life will require enormous personal growth, relational maturity, and conflict resolution skills. But it's the only reasonable response, given the cosmic unity of God and his people.

Ephesians 4:4-6: This is a poetic summary of chapters 1-3 through the lens of the messianic Shema. Notice how the list builds in a Trinitarian climax, beginning with the Spirit (who creates the body to live by hope), to the Messiah (and believing loyalty and identification with him in baptism), and then to God the Father (who transcends and is in all creation).

The seven unities of Ephesians 4:4-6:

1. One body: The community of Jesus' followers that constitutes the present incarnation of Jesus (Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:12, 16; 5:23, 30)
2. One Spirit: The personal presence of the Father and Jesus that energizes the church (Eph. 1:20; 3:16, 20)
3. One hope: The future redemption and inheritance of the new creation promised in the Messiah (Eph. 1:11-14, 18; 3:6)
4. One Lord: The risen Jesus exalted to cosmic rule as Lord of all nations (Eph. 1:20-23, 3:10-11)
5. One faith: The open secret of the good news of the crucified and risen Messiah (Eph. 1:13; 4:11-13, 21)
6. One baptism: The means of incorporation into the resurrection and new creation (Eph. 2:1-11)
7. One God and Father of all: The one God and Father of the new messianic family (Eph. 1:2-3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 5:20; 6:23)

Ephesians 4:7-10

Ephesians 4:7-8: Having emphasized the unity of the Messiah's people, Paul quickly develops the point that unity is not uniformity. The Messiah has "given grace-gifts" to his people as a divine victor, which leads his mind to Psalm 68.

Ephesians 4:9-10: Paul identifies the divine victor Yahweh of Psalm 68 with the crucified Jesus, whose ascension was preceded by his descent to the grave (Paul is placing the victory motif of Psalm 68 within the foundational Messiah narrative of descent/ascent that he expresses elsewhere in his letters, Phil. 2, 2 Cor. 8:10). The victor is precisely the crucified one.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Ephesians 4:11-12: The "gifts" are leaders whose abilities sustain and guide the unity of God's people. They "build up" (a temple metaphor) God's people so they can do the "work" (recalling 2:10) of service.

- Ephesians 4:13: The goal is that the unified people of the Messiah embody the new humanity (a mature/complete human) that resembles the "fullness of the Messiah." No one person can fully reflect

the truly human Messiah, but a unified group of his followers can.

- Ephesians 4:14: A mature messianic humanity won't be susceptible to cultural pressures or deceptive teachers.
- Ephesians 4:15-16: People who are "doing truth" (lit. "truthing," ἀληθευοντες) in love are able to grow like a complex but organized body that attaches to the head, who is the Messiah.

Key Interpretive Issues in 4:1-16

The quotation of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:7-10:

Ephesians 4:7-10 Instructor's Translation

⁷ But to each one of us was given grace/gift according to the measure of the gift of the Messiah. ⁸

Therefore it says:

Having ascended to the height,
he took captive the captives;
he gave gifts to people."

⁹ Now, "he ascended," what is this, except that he also descended to the lower regions of the land? ¹⁰ The one who descended, he is also the one who ascended high above all things in the heavenly realms, in order that he might fulfill all things.

In the Hebrew and Greek version of Psalm 68, the text clearly reads "received" not "gave."

Ephesians 4:8	Psalm 68:18 Hebrew Text	Psalm 67:18 Septuagint
Having ascended to the height, he took captive the captives; he gave gifts to people."	You ascended to the height You took captive the captives you received gifts among men	You ascended to the height You took captive the captives you received gifts among men
ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἡχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.	עלית למרום שבית שבי מתנות באדם לקחת	ἀνέβης εἰς ὕψος, ἡχμαλώτευσας αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ,
<i>Ephesians 4 and Two Translations of Psalm 68. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).</i>		

However, Paul is not just quoting this line of Psalm 68 out of context. He has the narrative arc of the entire poem in mind, and he has adapted the wording of the quoted line in the light of the concluding line of the poem.

Psalm 68:32-35 Hebrew Text (Instructor's Translation)

³² Kings of the land, sing to God, praise the Lord. ³³ To him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times; behold, he gives with his voice, a mighty voice. ³⁴ Give strength to God; his majesty is

over Israel and his strength is in the skies. ³⁵ O God, awesome from your sanctuary. The **God of Israel himself gives strength and power** to the people.

Psalm 68:33-36 Septuagint/LXX

³³ Kings of the land, sing to God, praise the Lord. Sing to the God ³⁴ who rides on the heaven of the heavens toward the east. Behold he gives his voice, a voice of power. ³⁵ Give glory to God, over Israel is his majesty and his power is in the clouds. ³⁶ O God, awesome among your holy ones, the **God of Israel will give power and might** to his people.

Paul is alluding to the entirety of Psalm 68. From the divine warrior's battle with his enemies (Ps. 68:1-2), he leads the enslaved poor into liberation and freedom as their true Father (Ps. 68:3-6). This liberation is explicitly connected to the Exodus and wilderness migration (Ps. 68:7-14). And then, after the victory over Egypt, the divine warrior arrives at Mount Sinai (Ps. 68:15-19). Yahweh's choice of Mount Sinai is portrayed as staking a claim over against Mount Bashan in the north of Canaan, which was associated with the powers of spiritual evil (Ps. 68:15). Yahweh's enemies are called "the wild animal in the reeds" (Ps. 68:30a) that Yahweh must rebuke and the "bulls with the calves of the people, trampling underfoot" (Ps. 68:30b). The forces of spiritual evil are typically portrayed as wild animals (Dan. 7), so Paul's attention was naturally drawn to this poem in describing the Messiah's victory and processional enthronement over the powers of darkness (Eph. 1:20-21). It also seems like Paul's many prayers that God supply strength and power to his people are adapting the language of the final line of this victory poem (Ps. 68:32-35): God ascends the holy mountain to take up residence in his temple, so that he can give strength and power to his people. It is this entire set of concepts that Paul is drawing upon in his adaptation.

This is similar to how Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20 in Romans 11:26 but adapts the words based on other scriptural texts that focus on the same theme.

Isaiah 59:20:

- Hebrew text: "A redeemer will come to Zion (לציון)."
- Greek Septuagint: "A redeemer will come on account of Zion (ἐνεκαυ Ζιων)."
- Paul in Romans 11:26: "A redeemer will come from Zion (ἐκ Ζιων)."

Paul is reading Isaiah 59:20 in light of a few other Zion-restoration texts that say God's messianic salvation will emerge from Zion and go out to the nations.

- Psalm 14:7 and 53:6: "O that salvation for Israel would come from Zion (מציון = ἐκ Ζιων) when Yahweh restores his people."
- Psalm 110:2: "Yahweh will send your scepter of strength from Zion (מציון = ἐκ Ζιων)."

Ephesians 4:8: "He gave gifts to people," whereas Psalm 68:18 (LXX 67:18) reads "he received gifts from people."

"The author's use of *εδωκεν* in Ephesians 4:8 is not a 'reversal' of meaning. The author is doing more than citing merely one verse within the psalm in order to provide his scriptural warrant; rather, he is looking to the movement of the psalm as a whole. The imagery of divine warfare in this context indicates that the ideology of divine warfare ... provides the key to understanding the author's aim in appropriating Psalm 68 to speak of the giving of *χάρις* to the church. He depicts Christ as the triumphant Divine Warrior who, after he has ascended his throne, blesses his people with gifts ... Psalm 68, which is quoted in Ephesians 4:8, celebrates Yahweh as the conquering Divine Warrior, and utilizes the pattern of divine warfare to portray him as such. Significantly for our purposes, it contains this element of blessing after victory and enthronement, as it depicts Yahweh conquering his enemies and then blessing his people with gifts ... In our view, the imagery of Yahweh ascending to his heavenly throne from which he blesses his people is what the author aims to capture in the quotation in Ephesians 4:8 ... In this manner, the author portrays Christ as the victorious Divine Warrior who has the right to give gifts to his people because of his triumphs."

Gombis, Timothy G. (2005). "Cosmic Lordship and Divine Gift-Giving: Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8." *Novum Testamentum*. Brill. 373-375.

"The lower parts of the earth" (4:9)

There are two main options in the interpretive tradition:

1. The "lower regions" is from the reference point of the heavens, and so refers to the land itself. On this reading, the sentence refers to the incarnation, the (unmentioned) death, and then the exaltation.
2. The "lower regions" is from the reference point of the land, meaning under the land, that is, the grave. This is common biblical imagery for the grave. Paul is contrasting here the exaltation of the triumphant risen Messiah with his preceding humiliation, death, and burial "in the earth." This view does not necessitate the "harrowing of hell" tradition that developed much later. Rather, this is a reference to Jesus' death that brought about his victory over the forces of spiritual evil, referred to in Psalm 68 as "the captives."

"We simply want to establish the point that the phrase in v. 9 points to the grave as the place to which Christ descended, and that this reference has in view the death of Christ. This finds confirmation from Ephesians 2:13-16, where the author writes of the death of Christ as the means whereby he triumphed over the powers. He states that the basic division within humanity—the division between Jews and Gentiles—has been overcome 'by the blood of Christ' (*ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ*). Further, these two groups are part of the one body of Christ 'through the cross' (*διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ*), and it is by the cross that Christ has put to death the enmity that existed between them. By his death Christ has triumphed over the divisive effects of the enemy powers who have so ordered this present evil age as to create and exacerbate divisions within humanity."

Gombis, Timothy G. (2005). "Cosmic Lordship and Divine Gift-Giving: Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8." *Novum Testamentum*. Brill. 376-377.

Reflection Question

Paul is emphasizing the theme of unity in Ephesians 4:1-16. How do you know that he's not also emphasizing uniformity or sameness?

Session 26: The Meaning of “Head” in Ephesians 4:15

Key Takeaways

- “Head” (*kephale* / κεφαλή) does not mean “authority” in ancient Greek. Its primary nuance of meaning is (1) literal head, (2) literal source, and (3) metaphorical prominence.
- Paul’s many references to Jesus as the head occur in contexts of his role as source and creator.

The Messiah as “the Head” (4:15)

This is the second time Paul uses this key word (aside from the verb in [Ephesians 1:10](#), it appeared first in [Ephesians 1:22](#)). The range of meaning for “head” in English is not the same for *kephale* (κεφαλή) in Greek.

Perspectives on the Word “Head” in Ancient Greek

Literal Head

Head does not mean authority in ancient Greek. Its primary nuance of meaning is (1) literal head, (2) literal source, and (3) metaphorically prominent.

Leader

The Hebrew word head (ראש) often refers to leaders, some 170 times. But the Greek Septuagint translation only renders this word with the Greek word head (κεφαλή) six times out of 170! The fact that these Greek speakers preferred other words (like ἀρχη = “ruler” and ἀρχηγος = “leader”) instead of using the Greek word κεφαλή tells us that the word’s most common connotation was not leader but something else.

Source

“Authority is not a clearly established meaning of κεφαλή in the exhaustive ancient Greek lexicon by Liddell-Scott-Jones. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* concludes that ‘in ancient secular [Greek] usage, κεφαλὴ is not employed for the head of a society.’”

Schlier, Heinrich (1964). [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament](#). Eerdmans. 674.

Orphic Fragment (168): “Zeus is the head (κεφαλή), Zeus the middle, and from Zeus all things exist. ... ‘Head’ here clearly means ‘source,’ reinforced by the context that emphasized that through Zeus all creation comes into existence.”

Payne, Philip Barton (2009). [*Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*](#). Zondervan Academic. 126-127.

Body Functions

The physical head in ancient Greek thought was assumed to be the source of the body's functions, the source of information, perception, and provision for the entire body.

Source of Information and Perception

“For Hippocrates (of the Hippocratic oath) the ‘brain’ (ἐγκεφαλός) in the ‘head’ (κεφαλός) coordinates and controls all parts of the body. ‘I hold that the brain is the most powerful organ of the human body, for when it is healthy it is an interpreter to us of the phenomena caused by the air ... Eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet act in accordance with the discernment of the brain.’”

Hippocrates (400 B.C.E.). *The Sacred Disease*. 178.

Source of Provision

“Hippocrates describes the head as the starting point of the four thickest pairs of veins in the body (σώμα). From the head [they] reach to every part of the body and give nourishment (ἡ τροφή) and provide what the body needs ... He is not supplanting the heart as the organ that pumps blood to all the parts of the body, but rather stressing that the head controls the supply of blood to all the parts of the body.”

Arnold, Clinton E. (1994). “Jesus Christ: ‘Head’ of the Church (Colossians and Ephesians).” *Jesus of Nazareth*. Eerdmans. 352.

Source of Semen in Males

“Semen is secreted, as Plato and Diocles say, from the brain and the spinal marrow, but Praxagoras, Democritus, and Hippocrates say that it is secreted from the whole of the body.”

Durling, Richard (1973). *A Dictionary of Medical Terms in Galen*. Brill. 439.

Source of Nerves

Both perception and provision: Galen, a leading physician in the 2nd century C.E. summarized his tradition regarding the head and the brain as the “source” (Grk. ἀρχή) of the nerves (Grk. νευρων), of all sensation and voluntary motion, and of all will and motion.

Preeminent Source

In Jewish-Greek authors of the Second Temple period, the metaphorical word head was used primarily as an image of preeminent source.

Of a man as progenitor of family: Philo of Alexandria calls Esau the head (κεφαλη) of his clan. "Like the head (κεφαλη) of a living creature, Esau is the progenitor (γεναρχης) of the clans mentioned so far."

Philo; Translated by Colson, F.H. and Whitaker, G.H. (1932). [*Philo Volume IV: On the Confusion of Tongues. On the Migration of Abraham. Who Is the Heir of Divine Things? On Mating with the Preliminary Studies.*](#) Harvard University Press. 61.

Of something that is the fundamental source of other things: The Ten Commandments "are the general heads (κεφαλαια), embracing the vast multitude of particular laws, the roots (ριζαι), the sources (αρχαι), the perpetual fountains (πηγαι) of the laws."

Philo; Translated by Colson, F.H. and Whitaker, G.H. (1932). [*Philo Volume IV: On the Confusion of Tongues. On the Migration of Abraham. Who Is the Heir of Divine Things? On Mating with the Preliminary Studies.*](#) Harvard University Press. 120.

Life of Adam and Eve 19:3

the head (κεφαλη) of every sin

Sexual lust is called "the head," meaning source and origin.

Jesus as the Head

Paul's many references to Jesus occur in contexts of his role as source and creator of the things over which he is the head.

Colossians 1:17-18 Instructor's Translation

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things are held together; ¹⁸ he is the head (κεφαλη) of the body, the church; he is the beginning/source (αρχη), the firstborn from among the dead ones.

Colossians 2:19 Instructor's Translation

[Jesus is] the head (κεφαλη) from which the entire body through its joints and bonds is supported and held together and grows the growth of God.

Ephesians 4:15-16 NASB*

¹⁵ ... the head, that is, Messiah, ¹⁶ from whom the entire body ... grows

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Corinthians 11:3 NASB*

Messiah is the head of man, man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Messiah.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"These three parallel lines are grossly misunderstood if 'head' is interpreted to mean 'authority,' (especially the last line, which would result in the concept of the 'eternal subordination' of the Son to the Father), but they make perfect sense when understood to mean source/origin: Messiah is the origin of humanity (Messiah as Creator, as in 1 Cor. 8:4-6); man is the source/origin of woman (as in Genesis 2, alluded to later in the paragraph in 1 Cor. 11:11-16); God is the origin of the Messiah (that is, the incarnation of the Son is sent 'from' the Father). This is how the line has been understood from an early period."

Chrysostom, John; Translated by Chambers, Talbot W. (1889). "Homilies on First Corinthians" from [*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 12*](#). Christian Literature Publishing Co. 150-151.

Ephesians 5:22-23: Paul portrays the husband as the head of the wife primarily in terms of source as his allusion to the Adam and Eve story shows (Eph. 5:31-33), where the woman was made out of the man.

"Adam is appropriately Eve's 'head' by virtue of being her origin and source, and Eve in turn is his body, by virtue of their unity as one flesh. From here, Paul finds an interpretive correlation between Eve created from Adam and the traditional-cultural relationship between husbands and wives in the Roman world, where the husband is the benefactor and patron of the wife, from whom she derives her identity and the necessities of life."

Westfall, Cynthia L. (2013). "'This Is a Great Metaphor!' Reciprocity in the Ephesians Household Code." *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture*. Brill. 587.

Head as Source in Ephesians

- In Ephesians 1, Paul describes Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as elevating his status and becoming the head (Eph. 1:10) of all things in Heaven and Earth. For the spiritual powers and authorities, this means his subjection of and rule over them, so Paul draws upon the imagery of "being seated at God's right hand ... high above [them]" (Eph. 1:20). Whereas on Earth, Jesus is the head "of all things in the church, which is his body." The meaning of Jesus' headship is described as an organic one, where he is the source (= *kephale*) of the church's origin and identity. This is spelled out in the following paragraphs in chapter 2.
- In Ephesians 2, Jesus is portrayed as the creator of the new humanity, that is, as its *kephale*. In Ephesians 2:1-10, dead humans have been "made alive together" in the Messiah (Eph. 2:5) and "created in Messiah Jesus" as God's "workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). Then in Ephesians 2:11-22, Jews and Gentiles have been "created into one new human" so that "the two are reconciled by one body" (Eph. 2:15-16). Once again, the new humanity owes its existence and identity to the Messiah, and it's this role that Paul metaphorically calls *kephale*.
- In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul describes how the Messiah has given leaders as gifts to his people, to "build up the body of the Messiah" (Eph. 4:12). Once again, the Messiah is the creator and sustainer of his people who, as the receivers of such acts, are called "the body." When the church is faithful to its identity as the new humanity, they will "grow into him, who is the head, that is, the Messiah, from whom the entire body is joined together and united together" (Eph. 4:15-16). Once again, the Messiah's headship is defined as being the source from which the body emerges as a unified whole.

Reflection Question

What are the three different possible meanings of the word “head” in ancient Greek? Which meaning seems to be the best fit for Ephesians 4:15 and why?

Session 27: People as Gifts in Ephesians 4

Key Takeaways

- Leaders of the Church are not appointed based on the Greco-Roman categories of worth and honor. Rather, their ability to lead is a gift given in grace, and their purpose is to build up God’s people so they can be Christ’s body in the world.

Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament

In [Ephesians 4:11-12](#), the gifts are leaders whose abilities sustain and guide the unity of God’s people. They “build up” (a temple metaphor) God’s people so they can do the work (recall [Eph. 2:10](#)) of service.

Paul reshapes the very concept of leadership and influence in contrast to the Greco-Roman systems of honor and status. Those who lead in the messianic body are not installed on the basis of traditional categories of worth/honor. Rather, even their ability to lead (as apostles, evangelists, teachers, etc.) is a gift that they did not earn but were given in God’s mercy.

“Every believer is to reckon himself or herself dependent upon the single gift of divine mercy: Believers cannot boast as if there were something about themselves that rendered them worthy of the divine call. Re-grounded in the mercy of God, they are able to perceive their differentiated roles within the believer-community as divinely distributed gifts. Just as Paul’s authority to instruct as an apostle is a product of 'grace/gift' (χάρις), so each of them has a 'gift' (δῶσις) given to them ... Within this community, honor does not have to be sought: All the honor that counts has already been given, or will be given by God. Freed from the need to establish their honor in competition ... believers can afford to grant it to others.”

Barclay, John M. G. (2015). [Paul and the Gift](#). Eerdmans. 510.

Verse	Spiritual Gifts	Reference
Romans 12:6–8	1. Prophecy 2. Serving 3. Teaching 4. Exhortation 5. Giving	Romans 12:5-6: “Thus we the many are one body in Messiah, and each one is a member of another. And having graces/gifts (χαρίσματα) according the grace/gift which was given to us.”
List of Spiritual Gifts in New Testament. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).		

Verse	Spiritual Gifts	Reference
	6. Leadership 7. Mercy	
1 Corinthians 12:8–10	1. Word of wisdom 2. Word of knowledge 3. Faith 4. Gifts of healings 5. Miracles 6. Prophecy 7. Distinguishing between spirits 8. Tongues 9. Interpretation of tongues	1 Corinthians 12:4, 7, 12: “Varieties of gifts/graces (χαρισμάτων), but the same Spirit ... but to each one was given the revealing of the Spirit for the common good. ... Just as the body is one, and has many members, but all the members of the body, though being many, are one body, so also it is with the Messiah.”
1 Corinthians 12:28	1. Apostle 2. Prophet 3. Teacher 4. Miracles 5. Kinds of healings 6. Helps 7. Administration 8. Tongues	
Ephesians 4:11	1. Apostle 2. Prophet 3. Evangelist 4. Pastor 5. Teacher	Ephesians 4:7: “And to each one of us grace/gift (χαρις) was given, according to the measure of the generous gift of the Messiah.”
1 Peter 4:11	1. Whoever speaks 2. Whoever renders service	1 Peter 4:10: “Each one, just as he has received a grace/gift (χαρισμα), using it to serve one another, as good stewards of the diversified grace (χαριτος) of God.”
<i>List of Spiritual Gifts in New Testament.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).		

Definitions of Spiritual Gifts in New Testament

Apostle

Apostle, when capitalized, means those who saw the risen Jesus and were commissioned by him. This word is used to refer to the twelve disciples (Matt. 10:2, Mark 3:14) and the others who saw Jesus, like James ([Gal. 1:19](#))

and Paul (Gal. 1:1).

In general use, an apostle is a passionate initiator of spreading the good news and leading new efforts of church planting and building in new centers of ministry. It is used to refer to leaders in the early Jesus movement who helped initiate new ministry projects, like Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7) and Barnabas (Acts 14:14).

Prophet

Prophets are people steeped in the Scriptures and in the nuances of the present cultural moment, who can discern the will of God for specific people/communities and address them with authority.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul does not describe prophecy as “ecstatic speech.” Rather, the prophet has control of their faculties (14:32), and prophecy engages the mind (14:15, 19). It requires thought and mental engagement. This does not seem like ecstatic speech. It’s equated with instruction (*katekheisis*, 14:19), and it helps people learn (*manthano*, 14:31) and be encouraged (*parakaleo*, 14:31).

“Prophesying in Paul’s theology is the performing of intelligible, articulate speech acts which depend on the active agency of the Holy Spirit mediated through human minds and lives to build up, encourage, exhort, and comfort others in the context of interpersonal relations.”

Thistlethorn, Anthony C. (2013). [*The First Epistle to the Corinthians \(The New International Greek Testament Commentary\)*](#). Eerdmans. 1 Cor 14:2.

Evangelist

Someone who is able to share the good news about Jesus in a uniquely effective way.

The noun is used only to describe Philip of Caesarea (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5), but the verb is simply “to announce good news,” which widens the reference considerably.

Pastor

Pastor literally means “shepherd,” someone who cares about and can effectively guide the spiritual growth of a community of disciples.

Jesus is described as the “head pastor” of the universal church (1 Pet. 2:25, 5:4). The noun is used only here, whereas the verb is used of church leaders “to shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). In the New Testament, this refers to an activity, not the title of an office.

Teacher

A teacher is someone with growing knowledge of the Scriptures and the story of Jesus, who is able to explain and help people adopt a Christian imagination and its corresponding lifestyle.

Teachers are listed after apostles and prophets in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Their role seems to be connected to the passing on and explication of doctrines and traditions of the church (cf. Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 2:7).

Teachers appear to be central in the growth in wisdom and knowledge that Paul desires for the Ephesians in 1:17–19 and 3:18–19. (For more, see Stephen E. Fowl, [Ephesians: A Commentary](#), 141.)

Reflection Question

According to “the powers,” giftedness would be something to pursue and bolster in order to receive personal honor. But Paul has a different view of spiritual gifts. According to Paul, what is the purpose of the gifts in Ephesians 4?



Module 10: The New Humanity

SESSIONS 28-31

What does it look like to live as a new humanity unified under the Messiah? Jump in and find out!

Session 28: From Old to New Humanity (Eph. 4:17-5:2)

Key Takeaways

- In Ephesians 4:22, "self" is the Greek word for "human," referring to a communal identity, not an individual one.
- The moral exhortations in chapters 4-6 are grounded in the vision of the new humanity from chapters 1-3.
- Paul doesn't tell people to become someone new. He tells people to become who they really are.

God's Family as a Renewed Humanity: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 4:17-5:2

¹⁷ Therefore I say
and I testify by the Lord,
that you should walk no longer
as the nations walk
in the futility of their mindset,
¹⁸ having been in the dark in their mindset,
estranged from the life of God
because of the ignorance which is in them,
on account of the hardness of their heart,
¹⁹ who, after making themselves calloused,
they gave themselves over
to a lack of self-control
resulting in deeds of every kind of impurity
along with insatiable desire.

²⁰ But in such a way
you did not learn the Messiah,
²¹ if indeed you have heard of him
and were taught in him,
as truth is in Jesus,
²² that y'all are to take off the old humanity
of y'all's former way of life,
which is being corrupted

Ephesians 4:17-19

Paul picks up his portrayal of the gentile’s moral condition from [Ephesians 2:3](#) (“doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” Greek: *διανοια*). He stacks four phrases with overlapping and climactic meaning.

- “Futility (*ματαιος*) of the mind”
- “Darkened (*ἐσχοτιζειν*) in the mind”
- “Estranged from the life of God through ignorance”
- “Due to the hardening of the heart”

Ephesians 4:20-24

“You learned the Messiah” ([Eph. 4:20](#)) and “as truth is in Jesus” ([Eph. 4:21](#)) are unique phrases in the New Testament.

- “Learning the Messiah”: To “learn a person” is an unparalleled expression in the Bible. It assumes the content of the message and teaching of Christianity is Jesus himself, not a moral philosophy or life improvement. Being a Christian means engaging with him personally to learn a new way to be human.
- “As truth is in Jesus”: The real truth of Christian faith isn’t at its root found in a systematic arrangement of concepts. Rather, the truth is a person and is discovered by knowing and following him.

Ephesians 4:22-32

Paul contrasts the old humanity and the new humanity.

The Old Humanity	The New Humanity
Take off your old human	Put on the new human
Of your former way of life	Being renewed in the spirit of your mind
That is being ruined by deceptive desires	That has been created according to God in righteousness and holiness of truth
Take off lying	Speak truth
Anger	Not allowing the sun to set on your anger
Let the stealer no longer steal	Work so that you can share with others
The Old and New Humanity. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).	

The Old Humanity	The New Humanity
No rotten speech	Speak words that build others up and give a gift
No bitterness, anger, wrath, yelling, blasphemy	Kindness, compassion, forgiveness
<i>The Old and New Humanity.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).	

Paul doesn't simply prohibit destructive behaviors. He also commends new habits and practices to replace the old. If one starts practicing generosity or conflict resolution, the experience of anger or desire for shouting matches will slowly die away.

Paul's Old Testament Quotes in 4:25-30

Ephesians 4:25 *Instructor's Translation*
 Therefore, putting off lying, speak truth each one with his neighbor.

Zechariah 8:16 *NASB**
 These are the things you are to do: speak truth to one another
**Key Words Adapted by Teacher*

The entirety of Zechariah is addressing the post-exilic community of Judah, urging them to remain faithful to the covenant in light of the divine promise.

Zechariah 8:3 *NASB*
 Thus says the LORD, "I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain."

The whole chapter calls the Israelites to live in the present in light of those future hopes, especially because of the fact that the Gentile nations will one day be summoned to build the new temple with the restored Israel (Zech. 8:20-23). The chapter fits perfectly the now-not-yet framework of Paul's worldview.

Ephesians 4:26 *Instructor's Translation*
 Be angry and do not sin.

Psalms 4:4 *Instructor's Translation*
 Shudder/Tremble (with anger) but do not sin;
 speak to your heart, but be silent.

"The psalmist advises his adversaries to keep their rage within themselves, to maintain control of their actions and their evil words. It was when they spoke out loud and acted (v. 3) that their inner evil was released to afflict the innocent. And though silence and lack of action would not remove the rot within, it would at least curtail its evil effects."

Craigie, Peter C. (2004). [*Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*](#). Thomas Nelson Inc. 81.

"Here too Paul may have had the wider context of the psalm in mind when he used these words. He has just forbidden falsehood ([4:25](#)), one of the sins in which the psalmist's adversaries were engaged ([Ps. 4:2](#)). Paul is also about to recommend that his readers not let the sun set on their anger ([4:26b](#)), an idea that may have been prompted by the psalmist's advice to his enemies not to act on their anger, but instead to ponder their feelings in silence on their beds ([Ps. 4:4b](#))"

Thielman, Frank S. (2007). "Ephesians." [*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*](#). Baker Academic. 825.

Ephesians 4:30 NIV

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Isaiah 63:9b-10 NIV

^{9b} In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.

¹⁰ Yet they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit.
So he turned and became their enemy
and he himself fought against them.

"The statement echoes the language of [Isaiah 63:10](#), although it neither translates the Hebrew text literally ('they grieved [*atsab*] his Holy Spirit') nor matches the rendering in the LXX ('they provoked [*paroxyno*] his Holy Spirit'). Within its context, Isaiah 63:10 describes how Israel's rebellion against God, even after he had showed them mercy, turned God into their enemy and resulted in their exile. Elsewhere in his correspondence Paul turns God's judgment on a rebellious Israel into an admonition to God's eschatologically restored people not to follow the example of their 'fathers' ([1 Cor. 10:1-22](#))."

Thielman, Frank S. (2007). "Ephesians." [*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*](#). Baker Academic. 825-826.

Ephesians 5:1-2

The invitation to "become imitators of God" follows from the description of the "new human that is being created according to God" ([Eph. 4:24](#)).

Notice, then, that this link to the new human is directly connected to the model of the Messiah's love, exemplified in the self-giving offering of his life as a sacrifice and offering. This is foundational for Paul's experience and conviction about the Messiah's love.

Galatians 2:20 Instructor's Translation

I have been crucified with the Messiah, and I no longer live, but the Messiah lives in me. And what I now live in the flesh, by faith I live in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself over for me.

Notice also that being an imitator of God requires imitating the love of the Messiah. The two are so closely aligned in Paul's mind that to imitate one is to imitate the other, which was introduced already in Ephesians 4:32, "just as God in the Messiah forgave y'all."

Reflection Question

In Ephesians, Paul teaches that the new humanity is a present reality. Reflect on the idea that Paul is saying "act as you really are" rather than "become somebody different." What difference does this make?

Session 29: From Dark to Light (Eph. 5:3-14)

Key Takeaways

- There are two realities we can live in: light and dark. Light is the new humanity and new creation, and darkness is the old humanity and death. God's mercy allows us to come out from the powers and make a choice.
- God's wrath can be understood as God handing people over to their own self-destruction.

Leaving the Dark, Living in Light: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 5:3-14

³ But sexual immorality
and all impurity
or greedy desire,
should not be named among y'all,
as is fitting for holy ones,
⁴ also obscenity
or foolish talk
or inappropriate humor;
such things have no place,
but rather grateful thanksgiving.
⁵ For y'all should surely know this:
that no sexually immoral
or impure
or greedy person
(who is an idolator)
has an inheritance in the Kingdom of the Messiah and of God.
⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words,
because on account of such things
the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
⁷ Therefore, do not participate with them.
⁸ For you were at one time darkness,
but now (you are) light in the Lord.
Walk as children of light
⁹ for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and justice and truth
¹⁰ discerning what it is that pleases the Lord,
¹¹ and don't share together
in the fruitless deeds of darkness,
but rather expose them.
¹² For what is done in hiding by them
is shameful even to mention,
¹³ but everything that is exposed by the light,
is made visible,
for everything that is made visible is light.
¹⁴ Therefore one says:
Awake, Sleeper!
Rise from among the dead ones!
And the Messiah will shine on you!

Ephesians 5:3-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Rhetorical Design Features in Ephesians 5:3-14

Ephesians 5:3-6: The passage develops the portrait of the old humanity of Ephesians 4:22 (contrasted with the new humanity of Eph. 4:23-24), which is summarized in terms of sex and idolatry.

³ But sexual immorality
and all impurity

or greedy desire,

should not be named among y'all,

as is fitting for holy ones,

⁴ also obscenity
or foolish talk
or inappropriate humor;

such things have no place,

but rather grateful thanksgiving.

⁵ For y'all should surely know this:
that no sexually immoral
or impure
or greedy person
(who is an idolator)

has an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words. Because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Ephesians 5:3-6. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

The triad sexual immorality, impurity, and greed is repeated three times, along with three assertions that such behaviors have no place in the new humanity both in the present (Eph. 5:2 "as is fitting for holy ones," Eph. 5:4 "aren't appropriate") and in the future (Eph. 5:5 "will have no inheritance in the Kingdom of the Messiah and of God").

Why These Three?

“The important idolatries have always centered on those forces which have enough specious power to be truly counterfeit, and therefore truly dangerous: sexuality (fertility), riches, and power (glory) ... All idolatry is a form of covetousness, for by refusing to acknowledge life and worth as a gift from the Creator, it seeks to seize them from the creation as booty. Sexual lust elevates the desired object, whether a person’s own gratification or another person, to the center of life and is antithetical to the thanksgiving which recognizes God at the center.”

Lincoln, Andrew T. (1990). [Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians](#). Thomas Nelson Inc. 324.

Pattern of the Light in Ephesians 5:7-14

A 5:7 Do not be co-sharers with them

B 5:8a-b You are light

C 5:8c Walk as children of light

B' 5:9-10 The fruit of light is ...

A' 5:11a Do not be co-participants in the unfruitful works of darkness

a 5:11b but rather expose them

b 5:12 For the **things done** in hiding by them are shameful even to mention

c 5:13 but everything that is **exposed** by the **light** is made **visible**

d for everything that is made **visible** is **light**

Ephesians 5:6-13. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

This section is marked by a short symmetrical unit (Eph. 5:7-11a) focused around the contrast of darkness and light (from [Genesis 1](#)). It is framed by two prohibitions, “don’t be co-sharers” (συμμετοχος) and “don’t co-participate” (συγκοινωνειτε), with two inner statements about the light. And at the center is a positive command to embrace the reality of light. [This unit’s symmetrical design is also noted by Clinton E. Arnold in

[Ephesians](#) (Arnold, 2010).] This is followed by a short stair-step unit ([Eph. 5:11b-13](#)), which increases the contrast between dark and light. Not only is light the opposite of darkness, it has the ability (and responsibility) to shine on the darkness in order to expose it to public view so that it can be seen for what it actually is.

The Poem in Ephesians 5:14

The final poem in [Ephesians 5:14](#) is a quotation from a traditional poem or hymn about the call of the messianic age to those who are “dead” and are summoned to new resurrection life.

Ephesians 5:14 Instructor's Translation

Rise up O sleeper
Arise from the dead ones
and the Messiah will shine on you

In Greek:

ἔγειρε ὁ καθεύδων
καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν
καὶ ἐπιφαύσει σοι ὁ Χριστός

The language and poetic style is substantially informed by two texts: Isaiah 26:19 and Isaiah 60:1.

Isaiah 26:19 Instructor's Translation

Your dead ones will live,
my corpse they will rise;
awake and shout for joy
O sleepers in the dust,
for the dew of the light is your dew,
and the land will birth the spirits of the dead.

Isaiah 60:1 Instructor's Translation

Arise! Shine! For your light has come,
and the glory of Yahweh has risen over you!

Reflection Question

Instead of sexual immorality, greed, and foolish talking, Paul says to have “grateful thanksgiving.” How does thanksgiving counter these things?

Session 30: From Folly to Wisdom in Relationships

Key Takeaways

- If we submit ourselves to the influence of the Spirit, we will be filled with the life of the new creation.

The Challenge To Live Wisely: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 5:15-25

Three Contrasts

Contrast 1

¹⁵ Therefore, watch carefully how y'all walk,
a **not as unwise** ,
b **but as wise** ,
¹⁶ redeeming the time, for the days are evil.

Contrast 2

¹⁷ Because of this,
a' **don't be foolish** ,
b' **but discern what is the will of the Lord** .

Contrast 3

a" ¹⁸ And **don't be drunk with wine**, which is recklessness;
b" **but be filled by the Spirit** ,

Spirit Influences 1-4

¹⁹ **speaking** to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual poems,
creating poems and **singing** in y'all's hearts to the Lord,
²⁰ **giving thanks** always to God the Father for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah,
²¹ **submitting** to one another in reverence of the Messiah,

Two Concrete Examples of Mutual Submission

²² wives to their husbands
as to the Lord ...

²⁵ husbands, be loving your wives,
as the Messiah loved the church ...

Ephesians 5:15-25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

5:15-18: Three Contrasts

Paul here creates a triad of opposites, exploring the contrast between the old humanity and the new. Notice how all three revolve around the theme of wisdom, discernment, and outside influences.

1. Unwise/Wise: This is classic wisdom vocabulary from the Hebrew wisdom literature (especially Proverbs). Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (see [Prov. 5:21](#) where this becomes explicit), which is recognizing my capacities and limits as a human and living under the guidance and authority of one wiser and greater than myself.
2. Foolish/Discerning: Foolishness here is about the inability to discern the right way to be a human, a lack of intuition of why I exist and what my life is for. Discernment is about an ability to intuit what God would want in any given situation because my life has been shaped by his love and wisdom.
3. Drunk with wine/Filled with the Spirit: This is not a comparison of similarity, so that one should be “drunk with the Spirit” instead of wine. All three pairs are contrasting opposites, and this one is about contrasting influences. The outside influence of wine disintegrates your ability to make wise choices and discern God’s will. The outside influence of the Spirit fills you. But with what?

“Be Filled by the Spirit”

Greek note: Paul does not technically say “be filled with/of the Spirit,” as if the Spirit is the content of the filling. That requires the verb *πληρωω* and an accusative or genitive noun, as in [Acts 2:4](#) “full of the Spirit” (see also [Acts 4:8, 31](#); [9:17](#); [13:9](#); or [Phil. 1:11](#)). Rather, the use of this verb with the preposition “with” (*πληρωω* and *ἐν*) is regularly used to mark the agent of the filling, not the content, “be filled up by means of X.”

If the Spirit is here the agent of the filling, the content of the filling must be inferred. And Paul has given us plenty of clues in the preceding letter as to what God’s people are to be filled with.

Ephesians 1:22-23 NASB*

²² ... the church, ²³ which is his body, that which is filled up by the one who fills all things in all things.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ephesians 2:21-22 ESV*

²¹ The entire building ... grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you are built together into a dwelling place of God by means of the Spirit.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ephesians 3:16-17, 19 Instructor's Translation

¹⁶ that you might be strengthened through the Spirit in your inner human, ¹⁷ that the Messiah might dwell in your hearts ... ¹⁹ to know the love of the Messiah, so that you might be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:10 Instructor's Translation

The one who descended is also the one who ascended above all the heavenly realms, in order that he might fill all things.

Ephesians 4:13 NASB*

until we all attain ... unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Messiah.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"In the light of these earlier instances of the 'fullness' language, then, we conclude that the content with which believers have been (or are being) filled is the fullness of (the triune) God or of Christ. No other text in Ephesians (or elsewhere in Paul) focuses specifically on the Holy Spirit as the content of this fullness. It is better, then, to understand 5:18 in terms of the Spirit's mediating the fullness of God and Christ to believers ... To be admonished, 'Be filled by the Spirit', then, means that Paul's readers are urged to let the Spirit change them more and more into the image of God and Christ, a notion which is consistent with Pauline theology elsewhere."

O'Brien, Peter T. (1999). *The Letter to the Ephesians (The Pillar New Testament Commentary)*. Eerdmans. 391.

Ephesians 5:18-21: Four Manifestations of the Spirit's Influence

Every one of these four verbs indicates the results of the Spirit's influence, and they are all related to the common life of the worshipping community.

- "Speaking to each other in songs": This likely refers to the worship gathering, where Christians sang their theology (remember Eph. 5:14) and worldview into reality.
- "Singing ... in your hearts to the Lord": Poetry and song as an expression of loyalty, rapture, and spiritual connection to God has deep roots in the Jewish tradition (via the Psalms) and morphed into the Jesus movement, forming the heartbeat of their corporate worship.
- "Giving thanks for all things": This too is related to the corporate nature of the church's life, where people from all stations of life come together to share their stories and experiences of the Messiah's love and presence with them in their daily lives.
- "Submitting to one another out of reverence for the Messiah."

Reflection Question

In Ephesians 5:16, Paul uses the Greek word *exagorazo*, which can be translated as "liberate the time." As the new humanity, what does it mean to liberate the time?

Session 31: Submit to One Another

Key Takeaways

- Verse 22 to the wives and verse 25 to the husbands are illustrations of the same governing verb "submitting." Wives and husbands are to submit to one another out of reverence for the Messiah.
- Paul's redefinition of submission as considering other people as more important than yourself was a radical statement in an honor/shame society.

"Mutual Submission" in the Context of the Greco-Roman World: Two Views of Paul's Meaning

View 1

"The pronoun 'to one another' does not mean that all believers are to submit to all other believers but that, among believers, submission should take place as it is described in [5:22-6:9](#)."

Thielman, Frank (2010). [Ephesians \(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament\)](#). Baker Academic. 373.

View 2

"The mutual submission admonished here relativizes conventional authority structures for people who lived in a society where status and authority were rigidly marked and strictly observed. The epistle's call for a relativity of authority within the Spirit-filled body requires a disposition of humility similar to that described in [Philippians 2:3-4](#), where others are considered to be of higher status, and people attend to the interests of others rather than their own. Moreover, mutual submission is done 'in reverence for Christ.' That is, believers' obedience to Christ will lead them to submit to one another. Whatever authority and status an individual might have in the world is relativized by believers' common service to one Lord, Christ. In this common service they are both able to and called to submit to each other."

Fowl, Stephen E. (2012). [Ephesians: A Commentary](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 186-187.

In view 2, [Ephesians 5:21](#) is parallel to [Galatians 5:13](#) "become slaves of one another through love. ... This expression [Gal. 5:13] adjusts an inherently hierarchical relationship (slavery) not by canceling it, in the name of 'equality,' but by making it reciprocal, a hierarchy that turns both ways. The simple but powerful word 'one another' (Grk. ἀλλήλοις) turns a one-way relationship of power and superiority into a mutual relationship of reciprocal deference, where each seeks to promote the interests of the other."

Barclay, John M. G. (2017). [Paul and the Gift](#). Eerdmans. 435.

Reflection Question

This session presents two views of the concept of mutual submission in the context of the Greco-Roman world. Which view is the most compelling to you and why?



Module 11: An Epic Conclusion

SESSIONS 32-35

Experience the epic conclusion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Session 32: The New Household Code

Key Takeaways

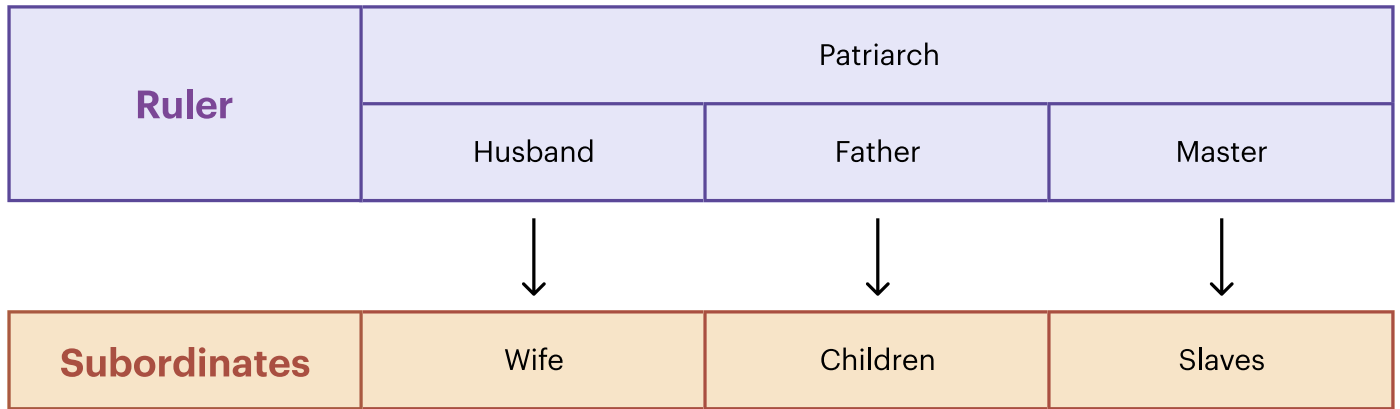
- Mutual submission is a marker of a Spirit-filled community.
- Ephesians 5:21-6:9 fits the literary form of a well-known Greco-Roman tradition called a household code, where a patriarch is informed of his responsibility to order his household as a miniature Roman Empire.
- By speaking directly to wives, children, and slaves, Paul is giving them a level of status and dignity they did not possess in their own culture and society.

The Spirit-Empowered Life of God's Family: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 5:21-6:9

²¹ submitting to one another in reverence of the Messiah,
²² **wives** to their own husbands
as to the Lord
²³ because the husband is the head of the wife
as the Messiah is head of the church,
the the deliverer of the body.
²⁴ But as the church submits to the Messiah,
so also wives **[submit]** to their husbands in every way.
²⁵ **Husbands**, be loving your wives,
as the Messiah loves the church
and gave himself on her behalf,
²⁶ so that he could set her apart
having purified
by washing of water
with a word,
²⁷ so he could present the church to himself
glorious,
having no stain
or wrinkle
or any such thing
but that she would be set apart

Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

The Greco-Roman Household Code



The Household Hierarchy. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Household code instructions were always addressed to the man alone, who ruled over his household that consisted of women, children, and slaves who were “by nature” inferior.

“Seeing then that the state is made up of households, before speaking of the state we must speak of the management of the household. The parts of household management correspond to the persons who compose the household, and a complete household consists of slaves and freemen. Now we should begin by examining everything in its fewest possible elements; and the first and fewest possible parts of a family are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children.”

Aristotle (350 B.C.E.). *Politics*. 1:3

“Of household management we have seen that there are three parts: one is the rule of a master over slaves, which has been discussed already, another of a father, and the third of a husband. A husband and father, we saw, rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs; the rule over his children being royal, and the rule over his wife is based on natural constitution. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature.”

Aristotle (350 B.C.E.). *Politics*. 1:12

“The woman ... is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be obedient, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for God has given authority to the man.”

Josephus, Flavius (2021). [Against Apion \(Book II\)](#). Alpha Edition. 24.

Paul's Reimagined Household Code

Paul's innovation is to adopt this cultural form of the household code but entirely reshape the foundation on which it rests: the assumed superiority of the patriarch. Instead, he places the risen Messiah in that position, which enables him to transform the code in two noticeable ways.

First, he addresses the traditionally subordinate parties (wives, children, slaves) as dignified moral agents who are not inferior but active participants in a household of the Messiah. This is outstanding in ancient household codes.

"Contemporary household codes were given for the benefit of patriarchs in that they were advised in how to manage or control their households—wives included—for their own benefit and for a stable society. In contrast to this, Paul addresses wives directly, exhorting them to participate fully and willingly in the New Humanity. He subverts the contemporary notion that the ordering of the household should be for the benefit of the patriarch or for those in power when he sets in parallel the "headship" of the husband in relation to his wife and that of Christ in relation to the church (5:23). The headship of Christ is characterized by his providing salvation for the church, recalling Christ's giving himself to death for the salvation of the church. This is the kind of "headship" Paul has in mind, so that those in subordinate positions in the New Humanity do not exist for the comfort of those at the top. Rather, those who have authority or power are to use it for the good, protection, and nurture of those subordinate to them."

Gombis, Timothy G. (2005). "A Radical New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians." *JETS*, Vol. 48/2 (June). 317-330.

Paul's address to the patriarch in all three roles is a radical undermining of his inherent male authority. Instead, he becomes an agent of the Messiah's dignifying love to each group in his household.

We know that Paul cared about how the Christian household appeared to their Greek and Roman neighbors and that misbehavior could harm the reputation of the entire movement.

- 1 Timothy 6:1: Paul urges Christian slaves to honor their masters, "so that the name of God and our teaching might not be blasphemed."
- Titus 2:3-8: Paul urges older women to be exemplary matriarchs in the household, "so that the word of God will not be dishonored" (Titus 2:5), and so that "those hostile to us won't have anything bad to say about us" (Titus 2:8).

"The reminder of the links between discussion of the household and discussion of the state in the Greco-Roman world, whereby the household was viewed as the foundation of the state, is extremely significant for interpretation of the early Christian use of household codes. It reveals that proper household management was generally regarded as a matter of crucial social and political concern and that any upsetting of the traditional hierarchical order of the household could be considered a potential threat to the order of society as a whole ... In Greco-Roman culture, wives, children, and slaves were expected to accept the religion of the male head of the household (called the "paterfamilias"), and so religious groups that attracted women and slaves were particularly seen as potentially subversive of societal stability. Writers in Greco-Roman society singled out the cults of Dionysus and Isis, which attracted women devotees, and also Judaism, since Jewish slaves rejected the worship of their Roman masters' gods ... As Christianity spread in the Roman world and women and slaves converted to this new religion, it too became the object of similar suspicion and criticism. Social tensions between Christians and the rest of society, as well as tensions within the early Christian movement, need, therefore, to be given their due in any account of the emergence of Christian household codes. It may well have been external factors, the need to respond to accusations from outsiders and to set standards in line with common notions of propriety, as much as internal ones, the need to respond to enthusiastic demands for freedom on the part of believers, that led Christians to take up the household code."

Lincoln, Andrew T. (1990). "Ephesians." [Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 42](#). Thomas Nelson Inc. 358.

Wife Yields Voluntarily to Her Husband

Paul uses head (κεφαλή) here as a metaphor for source, which in a Greco-Roman culture was a socio-economic reality. The man in his 20s or 30s and/or his parents would arrange a marriage to a young, teenage woman, and he would become her provider so that his household and family could reshape her identity. Just as the head provides food, water, and air to the body, so the husband is the provider for his wife.

In [Ephesians 5:22](#), Paul explicitly defines what he means by head.

If Paul was using the metaphor "head" to primarily mean authority, this was his chance to do so, but instead he defines head in parallel to savior.

"This final clause ('he being the savior') is added to interpret the special sense in which Christ is here called the 'head of the church.' It is the function of the head to plan the safety of the body, to secure it from danger and to provide for its welfare. In the highest sense this function is fulfilled by Christ for the church and in symbolic sense it is fulfilled by the husband for the wife."

Robinson, J. Armitage (1904). [St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians](#). Macmillan. 124.

"The place of the final phrase ('he being the savior') is called 'apposition,' the placing of a word or phrase beside another so that the second explains the first. The fact that Paul has modeled all three phrases after one another makes it clear, that Paul places 'savior' in apposition to 'head' to show that he intends 'head' to be understood as equivalent in meaning to 'savior.' If Paul intended to convey 'head' in the sense of authority, he would have said 'he being the authority of body' ... but his following description of Christ's relationship to his body states nothing about authority, but recounts how Christ loved and gave himself for the church, to make her holy, to purify her, to feed and care for her. These are the actions of a savior, the source of life and nourishment of his body, the church. Paul calls the husband to imitate Christ's actions in relation to his wife, not to assume authority over her."

Payne, Philip Barton (2009). [*Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*](#). Zondervan Academic. 283-284.

Paul's description of the Messiah's actions toward the body depicts Jesus as taking up the domestic duties that were typically assigned to women in the Greco-Roman household.

Husbands Called To Submit Themselves Through Self-Giving Love

Husbands are to imitate Christ's role as head, source of the church, provider, and caretaker of slaves (washing, nursing). Christ is described with female duties, and therefore so is the husband. The wife is the husband's body (wife is metaphorically a male body), a concept built on [Genesis 2](#) (wife and husband become one flesh).

"This instruction to the husband/patriarch is completely at odds with contemporary household codes ... First, husbands are commanded to 'love' their wives, a command that appears in no other contemporary household code ... which focus on the proper ordering of household units by the patriarch for his own comfort and ease. Second, husbands are not to dominate their subordinate wives, but their love is to imitate the self-sacrificial love of Christ. Paul directly confronts the system of domination in the wider culture ... where the great authority that is invested in patriarchs over their entire households was often exercised with conniving manipulation. Husbands are to resist the temptation to operate according to the Old Humanity, and not to take advantage of their position as the head, but rather to use the power of their position for the sake of their wives."

Gombis, Timothy G. (2005). "A Radical New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians." *JETS*, Vol. 48/2 (June). 327.

List of Obligations for a Husband to His Wife

The list of obligations that the husband has toward his wife in 5:29 and the actions of the Messiah for the church are rich in double meaning.

- [Ephesians 5:27](#): "Washing" and "having no stain or wrinkle" are metaphors from clothes-washing, stain-spotting, and ironing.
- [Ephesians 5:29](#): "To nourish" (Greek: *ἐκτρέφειν*) is used here of providing food and care, while in [Ephesians 6:4](#), it refers to raising children.
- [Ephesians 5:29](#): "To cherish" (Greek: *θάλπειν*), literally "to make warm." This primarily refers to what a mother provides for her children.

“Christ’s love is illustrated by the sanctification of the church, which is described in terms of domestic chores normally performed by women: giving a bath, providing clothing, doing laundry (including spot removal and ironing). Through analogy and metaphor, Paul has told the husband to follow Christ by serving his wife’s needs ... The Greco-Roman distinctions between males working and providing in the high-status public sphere (rural, forensic, political) and females working and providing in the low-status domestic sphere are broken down, as Paul unmistakably assigns intimate domestic service to both Christ and to the husband.”

Westfall, Cynthia Long (2016). [*Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*](#). Baker Academic. 94.

The image Paul draws from the word head meaning "source" aligns with his quotation of Genesis 2:24. In Ephesians 5:28-30, the wife is the husband’s body, so what he does for her, he does to himself because she is “him” and he is “her” by virtue of their “body-head” relationship.

“‘Each of you should love his wife as himself’ (Eph. 5:33). According to Paul’s argument, this means that a husband should treat his wife as he treats himself as a man. It is the Golden Rule in gender relationships ... This becomes the basis of one of his most powerful illustrations: the church is Christ’s body, which derives its life and identity from him (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19), [and] shares in his high position and authority (Eph. 1:20 and 2:5-6) ... As his body, believers are completely identified with Christ and his human status as co-heirs with him (Rom. 8:17). The analogy between Christ and the husband should lead men to share authority, status, power, and bring freedom that is comparable to what their head, Jesus Christ, has provided for them and intends for the rest of his body.”

Westfall, Cynthia Long (2016). [*Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*](#). Baker Academic. 95.

Reflection Question

What does Paul include in his household code (Ephesians 5:21-6:9) that would stand out from the ancient culture? What seems radical about his language?

Session 33: Equality in the Household

Key Takeaways

- Paul says the Messiah purifies the church. This imagery comes from the temple practices of ritual purification in the Hebrew Bible.
- Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus turned his worldview upside down and made him an apocalyptic imaginary. The heartbeat of Ephesians is how Paul scrambles the established concepts of worth, value, and rank.



This session covers the notes from sessions 32

Reflection Question

What is it that drives Paul's vision for social equality?

Session 34: The Armor of God

Key Takeaways

- Paul wants his communities to know that their real enemy is not other humans. Their enemy is the larger social, economic, political, and religious forces animated by the powers that govern and shape human existence.
- The new humanity is a corporate entity made of people who need to be shaped by the Spirit for a new kind of relationship.
- Paul tells us to put on God's own armor, the divine attributes that God himself used to confront the powers of evil.
- In Ephesians 6, Paul borrows from Isaiah 11, 52, 53, and 59 as he talks about the armor we all wear as the body of Jesus.

The Struggle To Live as God's Family: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, find strength in the Lord
and in the power of his might.
¹¹ Put on the full armor of God,
so that y'all have power to stand
against the schemes of the slanderer,
¹² because our battle is not against flesh and blood,
but against the rulers,
against the authorities,
against the cosmic-powers of this darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies.
¹³ Because of this,
take up the armor of God,
so that y'all have power to stand in resistance
on the day of evil,
and having fulfilled one's duty,
to stand.
¹⁴ Stand, therefore,
having girded y'all's loins with truth,
and having put on the breastplate of justice,
¹⁵ and having tied y'all's feet with the good news of peace,
¹⁶ in all situations having taken up the shield of faith,
by which y'all have power to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one.
¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation,
and the Spirit's sword,
which is the word of God.
¹⁸ With every prayer and petition,
praying on every occasion in the Spirit,
and for this reason staying alert
with all endurance
and petition
for all of the holy ones,
¹⁹ and for me,
so that a word would be given to me
when I open my mouth,
to make known with boldness
the open-secret of the good news,
²⁰ on behalf of which
I am an ambassador
in chains,
so that by it I might be bold as I am obligated to speak.

Ephesians 6:10-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

The Role of Ephesians 6:10-20 Within the Flow of 4:1-6:2

“There is one further important point to make about this passage. It is very easy to read this discussion of the armor of God and then to assume that this is a set of instructions to individual believers to take up the armor of God. That is not the way the text reads. Rather, the command to take up the armor of God is a summons to the community as a whole. Taking up the armor of God is a communal practice integrally tied to the unity of the church and the church’s witness to the powers (3:10). In this respect, 6:10–20 continues the emphasis on the common life of the church that began in 4:1.”

Fowl, Stephen E. (2012). [*Ephesians: A Commentary \(The New Testament Library\)*](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 200–201.

The Spiritual Conflict

Paul assumes that the unity of the messianic community will be threatened by the powers.

Paul wants his communities to know that their real enemy is never another human but the larger social, economic, political, and religious forces that govern and shape human existence. Paul, along with all Jews shaped by the biblical traditions, viewed these forces as manifestations of spiritual rulers, authorities, etc., who are opposed to the cosmic reign of the Messiah.

Kosmokratoras (Greek: *κοσμοκράτωρ*) in Ephesians 6:12 comes from “world, cosmos” (*kosmo-*) and “grab, hold” (*krator*). By this Paul refers to the ordering structures of a society.

“[W]hat Paul means by principalities and powers are those institutions and structures by which earthly matters and invisible realms are administered, and without which no human life is possible. The superior power of nature epitomized by the cycles of life and death; the ups and downs of historic processes; what a culture holds up as the ideal or the sub-human ... the power of capitalists, rulers, judges; the benefit and onus of laws of tradition and custom; political and religious practices; the weight of ideologies and prejudices; the conditions under which all authority, labor, parenthood, etc., thrive or are crushed—these structures and institutions are in Paul’s mind ... God’s creation does not consist of earthly-visible things alone. Just as Genesis 1:1 addresses the creation of the heavens and the earth, so also in Colossians 1:16 Paul speaks of ‘invisible powers in heavens and on earth.’ It is probable that in Ephesians Paul had in mind at the same time both visible, specific governors and the invisible authority exerted by them; concrete conditions and manifestations of life and the invisible mystery of the collective human psyche; specific laws and the overarching role of law in a culture, etc. According to Ephesians 1:10, both the heavenly and the earthly entities are subjected to Christ. Only when both are affected is the whole creation changed.”

Adapted from Barth, Markus (1974). [*Ephesians 1-3*](#). Doubleday & Co. 174-175.

Paul wants church communities to know that the “schemes of the slanderer” (Eph. 6:11) will be aimed precisely at the unity and mutual interdependence of the new humanity (recall the schemes of Eph. 4:14; see also 2 Cor. 2:11). Such schemes will always be large-scale and difficult to identify.

Present-day examples:

- Rampant individualism
- Patriarchalism and male supremacy
- Sexual “liberation”
- Western (democratic and capitalist) supremacy

- Digital consumerism (built on economic exploitation)
- Racism
- Self-actualization through radical individualism
- Digital hierarchies of social worth (a.k.a. Instagram and Facebook)
- Political factionalism

The Divine Armor

Paul has used the imagery of putting on armor in two other letters, and the parallels are illuminating.

- Romans 13:11-14: In light of the dawning of the age of new creation (“the day is near”), Jesus’ people are to “take off” the life-habits of the old age and to put on something new. “Putting on” the armor of the new age is synonymous with “putting on the Messiah,” a baptismal image familiar elsewhere in Paul’s writings (Gal. 3:27 “for as many as are baptized into Messiah, they have put on the Messiah;” see also Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9: In light of the dawning of the new age, Jesus’ people are to stay awake as “sons of light” and put on the armor of God’s attributes.

Paul’s reference in Ephesians 6:10 develops these images from his earlier letters and explicitly links them to the divine armor of the messianic king in Isaiah, which was further elaborated in the Wisdom of Solomon.

Isaiah 59:16-17 NIV

¹⁶ He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.

¹⁷ He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

Isaiah 11:5 NASB

Also righteousness will be the belt about his loins,
and faithfulness the belt about his waist.

Isaiah 49:2 NASB

[Yahweh] has made my mouth like a sharp sword

Isaiah 52:7 NASB*

How lovely on the mountains
are the feet of the one bringing good news,
announcing peace ...
announcing salvation ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Wisdom of Solomon 5:16-20 NRSV

¹⁶ Therefore they will receive a glorious crown
and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord,
because with his right hand he will cover them,

and with his arm he will shield them.

¹⁷ The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armor,
and will arm all creation to repel his enemies;

¹⁸ he will put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and wear impartial justice as a helmet;

¹⁹ he will take holiness as an invincible shield,

²⁰ and sharpen stern wrath for a sword,
and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 NASB

But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Ephesians 6:14-17 NASB*

¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having put shoes your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“The allusions made to OT passages show that all these weapons are used and tested by God himself, and that they are first entrusted to one person on earth: the Messiah. [Isaiah 11:2-5](#) avers that through the Spirit, or together with the Spirit, a special armament is given to God’s Anointed One: the (sword of) the word and the girdle of righteousness. Ephesians 6 goes beyond the OT: through the mediation of the Messiah and the Spirit, God’s weapons are now transferred to all the saints. The logic of the argument is this: if these arms are spiritual, and if they are sufficient for God and Jesus Christ—they will certainly be good enough for the saints.”

Barth, Markus (1974). [Ephesians 4-6](#). Anchor Bible. 784.

“If we recall Paul’s depiction of the church as the ‘body of Christ’ ([Eph. 1:23](#)) and the new temple of God’s presence here on earth ([Eph. 2:20](#)), it makes perfect sense that here Paul describes the community as the embodiment of Isaiah’s divine warrior. Paul is not merely addressing individuals, but their corporate identity as Christ’s body ... Paul does not derive the armor of God by pondering the outfit of a Roman soldier, but by considering the Scriptures ... and he calls the people of God to put on God’s own virtues ... But the enemy in the church’s warfare is not the world, nor people in the world, but ‘the powers.’ Paul subverts his own military metaphor by showing that this ‘war’ is waged by performing Jesus’ humility, self-sacrifice, and weakness.”

Gombis, Timothy G. (2010). [The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God](#). IVP Academic. 157-159.

Reflection Question

How do you think this section on the armor of God is bringing the whole letter of Ephesians to a culmination?
How does it relate to the message of the whole letter?

Session 35: Reflecting on the Armor of God

Key Takeaways

- The snake is always present when we choose between the old humanity and the new humanity.
- The powers want to persuade us that our real identity, value, and destiny is based on something other than Jesus' death and resurrection, the gift of his Spirit, and our unity as the new humanity. We resist the powers with the true reality of Jesus.
- Truth is not an idea that you need to learn. Truth is a person you must encounter.

Conclusion: Translation and Literary Design of Ephesians 6:21-24

²¹ So that y'all also might know how things are with me,
what I'm doing,
Tychicus will make everything known to y'all,
that beloved brother
and faithful servant in the Lord,
²² whom I sent to y'all for this reason,
so that y'all might know how things are with us
and that he might comfort y'all's hearts.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters,
and love
with faith,
from God the Father
and from Lord Jesus the Messiah.

²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Messiah
with incorruptible [love].

Ephesians 6:21-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Ephesians (2019).

Resources on Ephesians

Commentaries

General and accessible, comments paragraph by paragraph:

- N. T. Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*](#)

More detailed, comments verse by verse in expositional form:

- Ben Witherington III, [*The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*](#)
- John Stott, [*The Message of Ephesians \(The Bible Speaks Today\)*](#)

Other Books on Ephesians

- Timothy G. Gombis, [*The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God*](#)

Resources on the Household Code of Ephesians 5

- Cynthia Long Westfall, [*Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*](#)
- Philip Barton Payne, [*Man and Woman, One in Christ*](#)

Introductions to Paul

- Michael Gorman, [*Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*](#)
- Timothy G. Gombis, [*Paul: A Guide for the Perplexed*](#)
- N. T. Wright, [*Paul: A Biography*](#)
- E. Randolph Richards, [*Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection*](#)

Reflection Question

Read the last four verses of the letter to the Ephesians ([Eph. 6:21-24](#)). Now that you've reached the end of the letter and the class, how would you summarize the main idea of the book of Ephesians? Try to keep it to just a few sentences.