



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

A Spiritual Roadmap for a Family Trip

Ephesians 1-6

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Introduction

1. The challenge before us is daunting, more fully revealed in the directions I received with the title: "As a Church Family, we're ALL headed to Heaven (young, middle age, & old). How do we work together to get there? You can use whatever text you choose and you will have 30-40 minutes to speak." Think about all the Bible teaches about God's people, how we are to live, and our purpose for living. Can we do it justice in one lesson from one text?
2. Furthermore, can we do it justice in view of our cultural setting? Characterized by:
 - a. A booming economy where the rich provide funding for expensive buildings, notably grand entertainment venues and massive stadiums; yet, close by many live in poverty.
 - b. A diverse religious culture, with multiple houses of worship embracing a variety of worldviews, beliefs, and worship experiences.
 - 1) Also, there are thriving worldviews with little or no connection to traditional religions; like some of their religious counterparts, some cater to the cultural love for the sensual.
 - c. A melting pot of multiple ethnicities, but at times a place where there is bitter scorn and hatred between different races and other groups.
3. Those are descriptions of our culture, but I wrote them about ancient Ephesus.
 - a. "The leading city of the richest region in the Roman empire."¹ Population: about 250,000.
 - b. Cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse, with at least ten indigenous peoples well represented.
 - c. A diverse religious and philosophical climate: as many as fifty gods and goddesses were worshiped, including prominent Greco-Roman and Egyptian deities.
 - d. It was also a center for magic and the occult arts, believed to influence and protect from good and evil spirits that were involved in practically every area of life.
 - e. The primary deity was Artemis (Diana); some believed the temple statue had fallen from heaven (cf. Acts 19.35) (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple was also the major savings and loan institution for the entire region).
4. Due to the similarities between their culture and ours, I chose Ephesians as the lesson text.
 - a. Our discussion will necessarily be selective; hopefully, it will prompt you to explore it more.

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesians," in Arnold, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 3 (Zondervan, 2002), 301. Unless otherwise noted, the following characteristics are also from Arnold's comments.

- b. Note: Paul wrote as if he believed they could grow in their culture. If they could, so can we.

Body

I. Heaven, Eternal Life, and Growth.

- A. Eight times, Paul mentioned “heaven” or “the heavenly places.”² Notable are these two:
1. “Every spiritual blessing” is “in the heavenly places” (1.3).
 2. Salvation by grace results in our being “seated . . . in the heavenly places” (2.6).
- B. To think about heaven is to think about “eternal life,” but let us define it as Jesus did, in terms of knowing God and the Son (John 17.3); that idea is in turn sometimes connected with “growth” (cf. 2 Pet 3.18), suggesting a *process* of development, not just a “destination.”
- C. We see these ideas in Ephesians.
1. Paul talked about the process of growth.
 - a) 2.11-20 - God created “one man” from the hostile Jew and Gentile relationship so that: “the whole structure is joined together and *grows* into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are *built together* spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (vv. 21-22).
 - b) He told them to “*grow up* in every way . . . into Christ” (4.15).
 2. Ephesians 4.15 is part of a context where he said all members should “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, . . .” (4.13).
 3. The idea of growth as a process is also seen in Paul’s repeated use of the image of the Christian life as a “walk” (seven times — Eph 2.2, 10; 4.1, 17; 5.2, 8, 15).
- D. These ideas sharpen our focus: how do members of the church family grow in our knowledge of God and maturity in Christ on our shared walk? Time permits a look at only two big ideas.

II. Share the Right Aim: Grow in Holiness.

- A. Ephesians is “the epistle of the church”; the words “church” and “body” are interchangeable.
1. “Church” (ἐκκλησία; *ekklēsia*) appears nine times (1.22; 3.10, 21; 5.23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32).
 2. “Body” (σῶμα; *sōma*) also appears nine times (1.23; 2.16; 4.4, 12, 16; 5.23, 28, 30).
- B. But the root word for “holy” appears sixteen times,³ to refer, for example, to the “Holy Spirit” (1.13; 4.30), to believers who were to be *holy* and blameless before God (1.4; 5.27), and to Jews and Gentiles who were to be joined together into a *holy* temple (2.21).
1. English translations obscure other references to the words.
 - a) Christ gave himself for the church in order to *sanctify* (verb) it (5.26).
 - b) And in every chapter of the book—nine times in all—the believers are called “*saints*” (adjective), “the ones being holy” (1.1, 15, 18; 2.19; 3.8, 18; 4.12; 5.3; 6.18).
- C. The requirements of holiness: to learn and imitate Christ and the character of God (4.1, 20; 5.1-2), a course with imminently practical outcomes.
1. Effort to maintain the unity at the heart of the faith (4.1-6, 13).
 2. Demonstrating humility, gentleness, patience (4.2).
 3. Being people who are truthful; self-controlled; honest; encouraging; not bitter or wrathful; sexually pure; not greedy; not participating in the behaviors associated with darkness (“holy” in 5.3); exemplary in family and work relationships (4.25-6.9).

² In Ephesians 1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10, 15; 4.10; 6.9, 12

³ The adjective ἅγιος, *hagios*; and the verb ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*.

- D. As we move together toward eternal life, we must ask: are we helping one another become more holy?

III. Depend on and Show Grace.

- A. "Grace" is also a big idea in Ephesians.
1. The noun (χάρις; charis) appears twelve times (Eph 1.2, 6-7; 2.5, 7-8; 3.2, 7-8; 4.7, 29; 6.24).
 2. There are also multiple references to God's gifts and acts of giving (Eph 1.17, 22; 2.8; 3.2, 7-8; 16; 4.7-8, 11-12; 6.19).
- B. Most are aware of 2.1-10.
1. We see the need we all have for grace (notice the 1PP pronoun throughout).
 2. We see that without grace, we have no hope of salvation.
 3. We see that we must accept grace on God's terms (faith) to benefit from it.
- C. Paul also said that believers are to be extending grace to one another.
1. The word twice translated "forgive" in 4.32 is the verb χαρίζομαι (*charizomai*) which conveys "the idea of bestowing a favor"⁴ (used 23 times in the New Testament).
 - a) In the parable of the two debtors, it meant to cancel a debt (Luke 7.42).
 - b) God who gave up his Son for us will "graciously give" us all things (Rom 8.32).
 2. Notice that we are to "forgive," extend favor, to one another in the same way that Christ extended favor to us; this ties 4.32 to 2.8-18.
 3. We need to balance our extension of grace against the call to holiness, and should not treat sin lightly or excuse it.
 4. But, we need to think of others in terms of how we want to be treated when the issue is our sin.
 5. How effective will we be in helping one another stay on the right road if we remember that we are sinners who keep needing grace and are gracious to other sinners, too?

Conclusion

1. We've barely begun to explore the lessons Ephesians can teach us as a church family seeking to grow together to experience eternal life. Because of the challenges from our culture, we need to keep studying and seek to learn the lessons from this text and others.
2. As we do, we need to take heart from one of my favorite passages, Ephesians 3.20-21. It calls us to set big goals, strive for excellence, and not settle for mediocrity. It also tells us that we serve a great God who does not leave it up to us. As we become more like him, surrender to him, let his power work in us, we can do "more . . . than all that we ask or think." Press on!

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⁴ Frederick William Danker with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 381.