



# PART 1: INTRODUCTION

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*Perhaps the one thing that defines Christianity and distinguishes it from all other religions and worldviews is the concept of **grace**.*

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Paul began his letter to the Ephesians by exclaiming, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” The depths of grace were inexhaustible to him, and we will spend all eternity coming to grips with its beauty and implications.

Similar to our city, Ephesus was a bustling crossroad of cultures and peoples. Renowned for commerce and trade, it was a melting pot of ethnicities and traditions. It was not only a hub of worldly activities, but also a centre of religious devotion.

The city resonated with the worship of Greek and Roman deities. The goddess Artemis (or Diana) was significant, representing a covenant, as a protector against malevolent spirits and torments of fate. Compared to these religious threads, Paul’s message of new identity and power in Christ was a radical departure.

At the core of his letter to the Ephesians, there was a powerful message of identity formation. It unveiled how the gospel, when understood and embraced, would permeate every aspect of life.

Into this multicultural landscape of Ephesus, unity also emerged as a resounding call. With unity from a shared identity in Christ, the church became the proof of God's wisdom and transforming power to a watching world.

The heartbeat of the book of Ephesians is underpinned by a profound message of grace that not only unites, but also empowers the church to stand firm and change the world.

Grace changes everything.

# GRACE REVEALED

## Context

Paul opened his letter to the Ephesians with a warm greeting and launched straight into a comprehensive account of blessings God gave to his people. It introduces us immediately to the centrality of God's grace – a concept that we will see throughout the whole book.

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### *Icebreaker*

*Think of a time you received a really great gift from someone you respect. What was it? What was your attitude when you used it? How would you have treated the gift differently if you had bought it yourself?*

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## Observation

This passage is dense and highly structured (repetitive), which is great for the practice of 'manuscript discovery'. It means looking at the passage in its original form – usually without headings, paragraphs or verse numbers – and breaking it down to bring out its meaning. Please see the instructions at the end of this study.

## **Meaning**

1. Based on the emphases and repetitions, what have you learned about the nature of these blessings?
2. What are the common themes in Paul's reasons for each gift?
3. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit?

## **Application**

4. What impact does each gift have on our lives now? Which ones do you not recognise enough?
5. According to Paul, God gave us these gifts so that we might be holy and bring praise and glory to God. Do you consider this when recognising God's blessings in your life? How can we glorify God through these blessings?
6. How can we be confident and empowered to share our hope in Christ by recognising the Holy Spirit as a guarantee?

## Instructions

We recommend each person to have the passage on paper or digitally to annotate. Put the whole passage in one slab with plenty of space between the lines to underline or highlight. A word-for-word translation, such as ESV, works well for this.

1. Read the passage together and break it down to main sections (without looking at a bible).
2. Identify these parts in the passage:
  - a. each gift or blessing from God
  - b. the reason why God gave it (“so that...” or “to...”)
  - c. each phrase beginning with “according to...”
  - d. other repeated words or phrases
3. Underline or highlight these parts (preferably in a different colour for each).

You can also discuss what others find and think, or use this practice in personal devotion or future bible studies.

## Example:

### Spiritual Blessings in Christ

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us<sup>[d]</sup> for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known<sup>[d]</sup> to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee<sup>[d]</sup> of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,<sup>[d]</sup> to the praise of his glory.

## **EXPERIENCING GRACE**

### **Context**

Paul called the Ephesian believers 'faithful in Christ Jesus' (verse 1) and praised their faith in Christ and love for one another. These believers were immersed in multiculturalism, diverse beliefs and a culture of wealth – not unlike our own city. Yet, despite these strong influences and pressures, they were still known for being faithful and loving.

1. Does the church portray a faithful and loving image to our culture today? Why or why not?

### **Observation**

2. What did Paul pray the Ephesian church would receive?
3. What connection did Paul make between God's power, Christ' resurrection and his position?

## **Meaning**

4. Why did Paul pray for the Ephesians to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened? What kind of understanding was he referring to?
5. How is our view of Christ' rule and lordship in our lives impacted by recognising the extent of his authority?

## **Application**

6. Paul described the various blessings we are given as believers (verses 13–14). How is our way of living and doing Christ' work changed by growing in wisdom and knowledge of God?
7. Sometimes we compare ourselves against fellow believers in unhelpful ways. How can we instead cultivate a spirit of joy, as well as encouragement for other believers' faith and love, as demonstrated by Paul?
8. Reflect back to the first question – what would need to change for our church to grow in faithfulness and love in our multicultural urban context today?



## **SAVED BY GRACE**

### **Context**

The second chapter of Ephesians follows up on the resurrection of Christ (in the first chapter) with a powerfully descriptive visualisation of *our* resurrection in Christ.

We will witness the power of grace by comparing life before Jesus to life now for those in Christ. This passage is rich in expressions – perhaps it is why Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church has been regarded the most majestic epistle by scholars.

### **Observation**

1. According to Paul, how was life before being saved by Jesus and how is life now for a believer? How did he describe us previously and now?
2. Who was Paul referring to by ‘prince of the power of the air’ and ‘spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience’? See also Matthew 9:34, Luke 16:8 and Ephesians 6:12.
3. How is Paul’s reference significant to describe our lives before Jesus?

## **Meaning**

4. Satan is considered the ruler possessing power over this world (John 12:31), yet he is only called a 'prince'. How do we reconcile Satan's power and authority over the world with Jesus' over all creation (Ephesians 1:21–23)?
  
5. The short sentence 'for by grace you have been saved through faith' (verse 8) seems to capture the heart of this passage. How would you describe grace?

## **Application**

As Paul said, salvation is not by our own doing, nor a result of works. It is by God's grace only. Now imagine an alternate universe where salvation can only be achieved by our own work and the repercussions of this model.

6. How would life be different? What would you and others be doing?
  
7. How does salvation through God's grace alone address these problems?

8. We are being saved by God's grace through faith, so that no one may boast.

Have you ever felt inclined to boast? How does it normally happen? How do you tackle this temptation?

9. How can you apply your true identity – as God's workmanship created in

Christ for good works – to your life? How can we encourage each other?

## UNITED BY GRACE

### Context

While the first half of the second chapter of Ephesians addresses humanity's separation from God, the second half also depicts separation within humanity themselves – more specifically the Jews and the Gentiles (or 'the circumcision' and 'the uncircumcision' according to Paul).

There was historically deep hostility between these two groups. The Jews held such contempt for Gentiles that, in one case, it was not lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of need because that was to bring another Gentile into the world.

You may even recall that the teachers of the law refused to answer 'the Samaritan' in response to Jesus' question in his Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Instead, they answered 'the one who had mercy on him', as it was considered improper to acknowledge a Gentile directly.

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### **Icebreaker**

*People disagree and clash over many things – political views, lifestyle choices, pop culture and more. What is one issue in our world now that divides our society?*

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## **Observation**

1. Why are the Old Testament references of 'the commonwealth of Israel' and 'the covenants of promise' (verses 11–12) significant to the Gentiles' spiritual past? See also Exodus 19:5–6.
  
2. Paul described these Gentiles as once 'far off', but now 'brought near'. How has the person and work of Jesus reconciled Jews and Gentiles (verses 13–17)?

## **Meaning**

3. When Paul compared 'the circumcision' and 'the uncircumcision' (verse 11), he emphasised that the distinction was 'made in the flesh by hands'. What does this show about the origin of this hostility?
  
4. In what way are God's people now a holy temple in the Lord (verses 19–22)?

## **Application**

5. What are the common issues within the church that could divide us?
6. Human hostility has existed since the fall of humanity. How should the church show radical unity and reconciliation within a divided society?
7. Reflect back to the icebreaker. How should you navigate a disagreement with other people?

## **THE MYSTERY OF GRACE**

### **Context**

In the previous chapter, Paul reminded the Ephesians of who they had been without Christ and who they became in Christ. In the third chapter of Ephesians, Paul addressed 'the mystery of Christ' that had been 'hidden for ages'.

### **Observation**

1. To whom was the mystery of Christ revealed or withheld (verses 1–5)? And how?
2. What was this mystery? How was it connected to the gospel (verses 6-7)?
3. What were the purposes for this mystery being revealed (verses 7-12)?
4. What were the inworkings and outworkings of spiritual strength from Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (verses 14-21)?

## **Meaning**

5. What did the mystery of the gospel mean for the relationship between Jews and Gentiles of that generation? What does it mean for us today?

## **Application**

6. How did the gospel come to you? Who revealed the mystery of the gospel?
  
7. Paul's mission was to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and bring the mystery of the gospel into the light (verse 8–9). How can we present the gospel as 'unsearchable riches' to those we love?
  
8. Think about your prayers over the last two weeks. How do they compare with Paul's priorities in his prayers for the church?