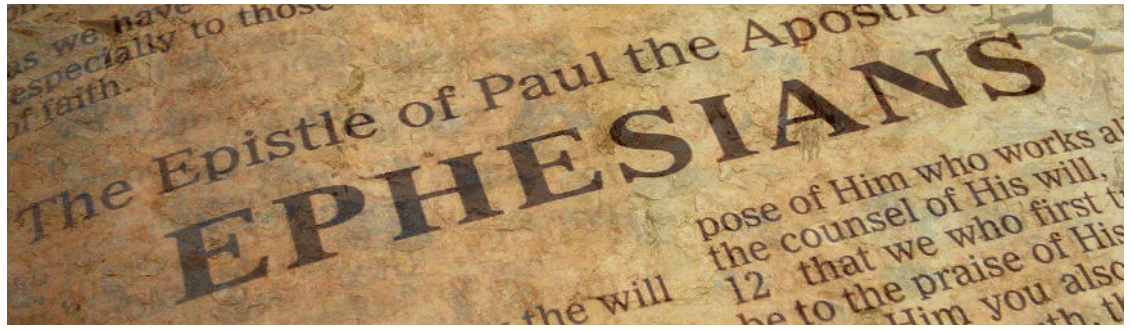


GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 1
WEEK OF SEPT 13



Growth Group Summer 2020

The Hope That Enlightens the Heart

Week 1 – September 13, 2020 - Eph. 1:13-23 (NRSV)

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

The Letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul while he was imprisoned. There has been debate around the audience of this letter, but we do know that it was written to Gentiles. There is even speculation that this letter, unlike other Pauline letters, was a circular letter. If that is the case, then this letter would have moved from church to church. The overarching theme of Ephesians is that all things are gathered together in Christ. In the person of Jesus Christ, we find unity within ourselves, within the church, and within God.

Paul writes that human nature, without Christ, is in a state of disharmony. There are broken relationships everywhere. We are experiencing the battle of good and evil in all of our relationships: human to human, human to God, human to creation, human to self. These battles cannot be overcome by humanity alone. We can only experience restoration of relationships and unity through being united to Jesus Christ.

So how do we experience unity in Christ? Paul says it is through the Church. Throughout this letter, Paul calls on the Church to be the “body of Christ.” In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul describes the characteristics of a true Church: loyalty to Christ and love for humankind. These pillars of the Church are reminiscent of the two greatest commandments given to us by Jesus. We must love God and love neighbor.

In order to do this, we, as the church, must be active in our faith. We must pray for wisdom (sophia). This is a wisdom of the deep things of God. We must use our minds as we approach God. We should pray for a fuller revelation, knowledge, and understanding of God. This will allow us to grow in loyalty to Christ and love for others. And finally, we should be expectant of the hope of Jesus Christ.

All of these things cannot be done alone. We can and should pray for all of these to increase in ourselves, but we were not meant to live out our faith in isolation. The body of Christ is enacted in the Church. Where Christ is the head, the Church is the hands, the feet, the heart. We as a Church are sent out to continue the mission of Jesus. It is in doing this that we experience true unity with Christ. In this we will find harmony in our relationships.



Exploring the Text

Read Eph. 1:13-23 (NRSV)

¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Share about a good experience you had while working with a team. Or, share about a bad team experience. What lessons did you learn?
- 2) Paul spent more time in Ephesus than any other community where he planted a church. As the context mentions, this letter spends a lot of time talking about the concept of unity. How has your experience in church informed your concept of unity?
- 3) Is it easier for you to love God or to love other people?
- 4) What do you think Paul means by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in verse 17? Does this differ from the Holy Spirit?
- 5) In verse 18, Paul talks about the eyes of our heart being opened, so that we might know of the hope that Jesus has called us to. What does Paul mean by that? How do you define hope?
- 6) Is there a place in your life right now where you need to experience the hope of Jesus?
- 7) Share about a time that people of faith, or the church, helped you through a difficult time.
- 8) Pastor Scott ended his sermon by talking about God's plan for us today. God's plan had always included inviting Gentiles into the community of faith, and as a result of that the Ephesians had come to faith in Jesus. What sort of plans do you think God has for you during the rest of 2020? Is there something that you feel like God has been preparing you to do?