

CALVARY BAPTIST
CHURCH *of* SANTA BARBARA

EPHESIANS
THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

SERMON STUDY GUIDE



Ephesians Part 2

Calvary Baptist Church of Santa Barbara
February 5 – April 2, 2017

Study	Passage	Theme	Sermon Date
7.	Ephesians 2:1-7	But God...	February 5
8.	Ephesians 2:8-10	By Grace	February 12
9.	Ephesians 2:11-18	The Church part 1	February 19
10.	Ephesians 2:19-22	The Church part 2	February 26
11.	Ephesians 3:1-6	Mystery of the Gospel	March 5
12.	Ephesians 3:7-13	Manifold Wisdom of God	March 12
13.	Ephesians 3:14-21	Prayer for Spiritual Strength part 1	March 19
14.	Ephesians 3:14-21	Prayer for Spiritual Strength part 2	March 26
15.	Ephesians 4:1-6	Walking in Unity	April 2

These studies have been written to help us study the Scriptures on our own before we hear the sermon on Sunday. The questions are designed to get us thinking deeply about Scripture. You are encouraged to join a Fellowship Group through CBC or meet together with a friend or two to discuss your responses to the questions and your reflections upon the text. The Elders of CBC pray that this will be a rich time of deeply exploring the truths of Scripture, and that by doing so, you will be transformed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus our Lord.

Special thanks to Mark Magruder for writing studies 7, 8, 9, and 10, to Missie Cook for proofreading and editing this document, and to Dan McDavid for the artwork.

SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

Calvin	John Calvin, <i>Commentary on Ephesians</i> , (CCEL, 1999).
ESV	<i>The English Standard Version of the Holy Bible</i> , (Crossway, 2011).
ESVSB	<i>The English Standard Version Study Bible</i> , (Crossway, 2008).
Hendriksen	William Hendriksen, <i>Ephesians</i> , (Baker, 1975).
Hoehner	Harold W. Hoehner, <i>Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary</i> , (Baker Academic, 2002).
Hughes	R. Kent Hughes, <i>Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ</i> , (Crossway, 1990).
Liefeld	Walter L. Liefeld, <i>Ephesians</i> , (InterVarsity, 1997).
Morris	Leon Morris, <i>Expository Reflections on the Epistle to the Ephesians</i> , (Baker, 1994).
NIV	<i>The New International Version of the Holy Bible</i> , (Zondervan, 1984).
O'Brien	Peter T. O'Brien, <i>The Letter to the Ephesians</i> , (Eerdmans, 1999).
Stott	John Stott, <i>The Message of Ephesians</i> , (InterVarsity, 1979).
Wood	A. Skevington Wood, <i>Ephesians in The Expositor's Bible Commentary vol. 11</i> , (Zondervan, 1978).

All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible, unless otherwise noted.

**STUDY SEVEN: EPHESIANS 2:1-7
BUT GOD...**



We are picking up with our study of Ephesians at chapter two. Before moving on to chapter two, let's be reminded of the content of chapter one. In chapter one Paul highlighted some of our spiritual blessings in Christ (verses 3-14), then shifted to thanksgiving and prayer for the church that they may know the greatness of God's power towards them (verses 15-19), and he tops off the chapter with praise to God who raised Christ to be head over all things for the church (verses 20-23).

1. Write out one or two points that stuck out to you as we studied the first chapter of Ephesians together as a church. Why were those things significant?

2. As we transition to chapter, two there is a predominant theme that rings throughout this section. What would you say the theme is and why?

Similar to 1:3-14, chapter 2:1-7 is one long, glorious run-on sentence in the original language. We can sense Paul's excitement. He writes these words inspired by the Holy Spirit, in chains for the gospel, and filled with love for the church.

3. We can often learn a lot from the structure of the text. If you were to break verses 1-7 into two or three headers that summarize the content how would you structure the text?

4. We highlighted this in the last chapter, but Paul says "you were dead" in verse 1 and "among whom we all once lived" in verse 3. Who are "you" and "we"? How are they similar? How are they different?

5. In verse 2 we see Satan referred to as the prince of the power of the air. What do you think it means to be called the prince of the power of the air? See Job 1:7 and Revelation 16:17 for reference.

6. Describe how we were identified before Christ according to verses 2-3.

7. Read John 8:44. How would you describe our prior state before Christ?

8. According to the text in verses 2-3, what 3 compelling influences directed our lives? (hint: there are two in verse 2 and one in verse 3)

9. Although we know we are free from the bondage of these influences, we can still be tempted by our sin nature. Which of these 3 influences still tempts you the most?

According to the ancient worldview, the “air” formed the immediate sphere between earth and heaven. It was the dwelling place of the evil spirits. We’re told that the Ephesian culture at the time was enthralled with magic, powers, spirits, and the like, so this would be a very relevant reference for them then. It is also relevant for us today, knowing that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and authorities and powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12).

Now that we have the bad news, Paul gives God all the glory for the good news in the gospel. The glorious transition in the ESV in verse 4 says “*But God*, being rich in mercy...” The “but God” should cause us much rejoicing. Note what prompted God to act so freely and mercifully on our behalf: his mercy (verse 4), his great love (verse 4), his rich grace (verses 5, 7, 8) and his kindness toward us in Christ (verse 7).

10. Up to this point in the paragraph (verse 5), no subject or main verb has been mentioned. Now, the subject “God” is introduced and the main verb “made alive” appears in verse 5. Also, the verb “make alive” is synonymous with “to raise.” What does it mean that even while we were dead in our trespasses we were made alive in Christ? See Romans 6:5-8.

11. What is the hope that we have to look forward to in verses 6-7?

12. Read Colossians 3:1-3. How can these verses, along with Ephesians 2:6-7, encourage you this week?

STUDY EIGHT: EPHESIANS 2:8-10
BY GRACE



1. **Read through Ephesians 2:1-7** and make a list of any thoughts and truths that were encouraging to you throughout the study and the sermon last week. Share these with your group as a way to remind everyone where we have been in this chapter thus far.

We come to a short paragraph that has often been called the heart of Paul's gospel because it captures and summarizes some of the great thoughts that he develops in Romans and Galatians. Before we jump into it, let's examine the connection between the previous verses and this section.

Read biblical scholar Peter O'Brien's thoughts as he eloquently sums up verses 1-10 to help refresh your memory on this section:

Paul has just shown that what has happened to believers has been due to the amazingly rich grace of God, the demonstration of which will continue in the ages to come so that all who see it will marvel and praise God. Already in the preceding sentence Paul had interrupted the flow of this thought to assert the salvation which God had provided for the readers was grounded in his grace. This salvation which met the dreadful needs of the human predicament involved delivery from death, wrath, and slavery, described in vv. 1-3. Now in these final verses of the pericope he elaborates on the nature of this salvation, using several key theological terms: grace and faith are significant elements in the believer's union with Christ, while the apostle rejects the notion that their change in status from spiritual death to life and exaltation with Christ is due to any human effort. He concludes by stating that salvation is a call to good works.¹

2. How do verse 7 and verses 8-10 relate to each other?

¹ O'Brien, 173-174.

3. According to this passage what *doesn't* save them? What is the means by which they are saved? What are the reasons God saved them?

4. How are we saved by faith if this is not of our own doing? How do we get faith if, before Christ, “we were dead in our trespasses and sins”? Do we choose him or does he choose us?

5. According to this passage why is our salvation not dependent on our works? What or who does Scripture say we can boast in? List references (feel free to use your concordance in the back of your Bible).

6. In contrast, what can we learn from the Pharisee in Luke 18:11? In what ways do we resemble the Pharisee in our lives?

The word “workmanship” comes from the Greek work *poiema*, from which we derive the English word poem. The literal translation is “that which has been made – a work - a making.” Most scholars believe the best translation in context is “his work of art, his masterpiece.” Meditate on that for a few minutes. We are God’s masterpieces!

7. How does the Greek provide more color around the concept that we are God’s masterpieces? How does that give you hope today?

8. Why and how were we created as believers according to this text? Why does God allow us to do the work when he doesn't need us to do it (and when he could do it a lot better himself)?

9. Why should we rejoice in the fact that God lets us be a part of his heavenly work? See 1 Corinthians 15:54-58 and Titus 3:5-8.

10. Grace is a big focus of this section. Make a list of what we receive by grace in verses 1-10. List at least 5 things in *your* life that were given to you by grace for his glory.

From this section, we can learn that salvation is:

1. Not by works
2. Only by grace
3. Comes only through faith
4. Is in Christ alone

3. What was an Ebenezer moment in your life? When did you see God's faithfulness to you overcome circumstances that couldn't be explained without God's help? Share this with your fellowship group.

4. Who are the "Gentiles in the flesh" referred to in verses 11-12? See Colossians 2:11-14.

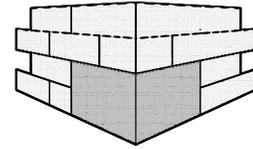
5. How were we/they brought near to Christ when we were previously alienated?

The church tends to relate to the Jewish people as God's chosen people, but I'm willing to bet the majority of us would be considered Gentiles. As you read this passage remember most of us were the group who were hopeless and separated from Christ, alienated from his people. Our great God is so gracious to bring us into the fold and make us all one in Christ.

Many commentators agree that the Gentiles suffered fivefold alienation. They were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. Seems like a pretty grim situation! The division between the Jews and Gentiles was far beyond any of today's racial barriers, nationalism, or iron curtains. The Jews believed the Gentiles were created to fuel the fire of Hell. In fact, it was unlawful to aid a Gentile woman in giving birth, for that would bring another heathen into the world.

6. To what does the dividing wall of hostility refer?

STUDY TEN: EPHESIANS 2:19-22
THE CHURCH PART 2



1. List a few things that stuck out to you from both the sermon and last week's study on Ephesians 2:11-18. How are you hoping to apply these lessons to your life? Share this with your fellowship group.
2. Contrast aliens/strangers with citizens/members. List at least 5 traits of each. Note how you feel when you're a part of each group.
3. A great example from the Old Testament was King David as he foreshadowed what Christ would do for us with Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. Read 1 Samuel 20:42 and 2 Samuel 9. Contrast Mephibosheth's position before and after David sought him out. Also, note how David foreshadowed Christ in this text.
4. In verse 20 we see the phrase "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." To what does this refer? See Jeremiah 31:31-34, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Matthew 16:18.

STUDY ELEVEN: EPHESIANS 3:1-6 THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL



The third chapter of Ephesians marks something of a transition as Paul concludes his discussion on the work of Christ. The next section will take on a tone of exhortation, with Paul instructing his readers about what it means to live in Christ. He closes this section with a second prayer, which is interrupted by a digression on the nature of his ministry to the Gentiles and its relation to the mystery of the gospel.

1. Glance over the first two chapters of Ephesians, making note of dominant themes and common words.
2. Now **Read Ephesians 3:1-6**. Write down any questions, comments, and praises you initially have.

The structure of chapter 3 is potentially confusing. Paul begins to recount a second prayer for the Ephesians, but essentially stops mid-sentence and begins a digression on the nature of his ministry. The repetition of the phrase “for this reason I...” in verses 1 and 14 helps us to identify how this digression fits into the broader passage. Here is a basic outline to help you as you study:

- Verse 1: Introduction to Paul’s second prayer
- Verses 2-13: Digression on Paul’s ministry and the mystery of the gospel
- Verses 14-21: Paul’s second prayer for the Ephesians

As Paul begins this chapter he re-introduces himself to the reader as a *prisoner of Christ*. By the time Ephesians was written, Paul had been in prison for up to five years under Roman governors Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa (see Acts 23-26). The original charge brought against Paul was unfounded but interesting in light of the *mystery* of the gospel. Paul's accusers claimed that he brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple area reserved for the Jews. Now he is a prisoner in Rome under the authority of Nero. He is, however, a *prisoner of Christ*. Such was Paul’s understanding of the sovereignty of God and of his own discipleship.

3. Paul introduces his prayer with the words “for this reason” (verse 1). To what “reason” is he referring?

4. In verse 2 Paul refers to his ministry of the Gospel to the Ephesians as “the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you.” What does Paul mean by referring to his Gospel ministry as “the stewardship?” How might this affect the way you view your ministry?

5. Verse 6 describes for us what Paul calls “the mystery of Christ.” What is the mystery? Why is this mystery so revolutionary to Paul and his audience? Does it have the same impact for us?

In verse 5 Paul says this *mystery* was *not made known* to people in *other generations*. Paul's claim is puzzling insofar as the Old Testament does teach the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. Examine the following verses:

- Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14
- Psalm 2:8; 67
- Isaiah 11:10; 49:6; 60:1-3
- Hosea 1:10
- Joel 2:28-29
- Amos 9:11-15

In Isaiah 49:6 God is speaking to his Servant, the Messiah. He says, “I am not sending you to bless only a tiny nation called Israel. You are going to take my grace to every nation on earth!” We could call this the hidden truth of the Old Testament. God called Abraham to bless him and make him a blessing to every nation on earth. The shocking revelation of the new covenant in Christ is the full inclusion of the Gentiles (the nations) into the people of God.

STUDY TWELVE: EPHESIANS 3:7-13

THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD



The first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians reaches its crescendo in 3:7-13. From the opening of the letter Paul has proclaimed the grace of God, planned before the creation of the world. God chose us and called us to himself before we were born (chapter 1). He made us alive *in Him*, even when we were dead in our sins (chapter 2). He reconciled us into a *new humanity* through Christ (chapter 2). The dividing wall of hostility is broken down in Christ. Reconciled relationships testify to the completed work of Christ.

In chapter 3, Paul rejoices that God has chosen him to preach this *mystery of Christ*.

1. **Read Ephesians 3:1-13.** Circle important words and phrases. Try comparing translations. What questions or observations do you have of verses 7-13? What is unclear? What lessons stand out?

2. Make note of words that relate to “grace” or “gift/giving” in verses 7 and 8. Why do you think Paul uses these words so frequently?

Paul's self-deprecation is both endearing and instructive. After he met the risen Lord, the proud Rabbi (Philippians 3:6) becomes a humble servant/slave of Christ.

- In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul calls himself the *worst* of sinners.
- In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 he calls himself the *least* of the apostles *because I persecuted the church of God*.

Here in Ephesians 3:8 Paul goes so far as to coin a term for himself. The ESV says *I am the very least of all the saints*. Actually Paul takes a superlative, *elachistos*, smallest or least, and turns it into a comparative, *elachistorteros...leaster*. These verses explain the responsibility of this *leaster* saint to proclaim the gospel.

3. According to verse 8 what is the content of Paul's message? What comes to mind when you read the phrase *the unsearchable riches of Christ*?

The Greek word translated *unsearchable* (ESV/NIV) is pregnant with significance. John Stott notes ten different English translations that try to capture the nuance of this word.

unsearchable	inexplorable	untraceable	unfathomable	inexhaustible
illimitable	inscrutable	infinite	incalculable	not to be traced out

Stott concludes, “What is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it.”² It is the picture of a reservoir so deep that soundings cannot reach the bottom of it. No limit can, therefore, be put to its resources.

4. How should this *message* transform our understanding of what Christ has done for us? Do you see the *riches of Christ* as an infinitely deep reservoir? Or are his riches more like a shallow pond? What could help change your perception?

The verb Paul uses in verse 9 is *phôtizo* (φωτίζω), which means *to enlighten*. Those without Christ are *darkened in their understanding* (4:18). Paul’s commission, from the beginning, was a call to enlighten the Gentiles. Jesus said to Paul,

I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:17-18)

Stott comments:

We ourselves must always remember in our evangelism that ‘the prince of darkness’ holds men and women in darkness, and that only by a divine enlightenment will their eyes be open to see. Our responsibility is to be faithful in spreading the gospel, since this is the means which God has ordained by which to bring light to those in darkness.³

5. What are your habits of evangelism? Are you *preaching* to your friends (the word simply means *to proclaim*)? How can your fellowship group encourage you and challenge you? Share with your group the name of one person with whom you would like to share the gospel in the next two weeks.

² Stott, 120.

³ Ibid, 121-122.

6. What is the purpose of Paul's responsibility to proclaim the plan of the mystery?
Look closely at verses 10-11.

The word *manifold* in verse 10 means *many colored*, or *very varied*.⁴ Stott remarks:

The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society.⁵

Respond to the following statement by John MacArthur:

The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His wisdom before the angels, who can then offer greater praise to God. The purpose of the universe is to give glory to God, and that will be its ultimate reality after all evil is conquered and destroyed. Even now, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). The church is not an end in itself but a means to an end, the end of glorifying God.

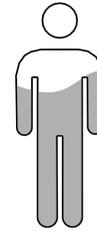
7. What does this tell us about choosing a church?
8. What does it tell us about the priorities of a local church?
9. What *should* this text say to the un-churched Christian?

⁴ Wood, 48.

⁵ Stott, 123.

STUDY THIRTEEN: EPHESIANS 3:14-21

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH PART 1



1. **Read Ephesians 3:14-21.** Write down any questions, comments, and observations you initially have.

Paul has taken us to the *heavenly realms* in these first three chapters of Ephesians. Soon (4:1) he will turn his attention to the practical implications of this lofty exposition on God and his grace. But first he must complete the prayer he began in 3:1 and broke off in 3:2. *For this reason* (3:14) surely has all that has preceded it in mind. The theology of Ephesians builds as the letter progresses.

Read Paul's prayer with the following outline in mind:

Introduction: 3:14-15

Paul's three desires for the Ephesians: 3:16-19

Conclusion: 3:20-21

2. What does this prayer teach about God? Find the doctrine of the trinity in this prayer.
3. When you pray, do you pray trinitarian prayers? How do you approach the three persons of the godhead in prayer?
4. In what ways has Paul's prayer for the Ephesians been answered in your life?

The phrase *every family* is difficult to translate from the Greek text. The word for father is *patria*. It means, *lineage, descent, from a common father, or clan*. Some translations render *pasa* (all) *patria* as *every family* (ESV). In context, however, Paul is drawing attention to the unity of all believers. Hence the NIV reads, *his whole family*.

5. Which translation do you think captures the meaning more accurately? What is Paul's intention in drawing attention to the unity of believers?

6. Paul's prayer, in Greek, has three purpose clauses which seem to build upon one another in verses 16-19. See if you can find these three purposes for the Ephesians. What is the content of Paul's request for the Ephesian church in verses 16-19?

Verse 16-17a: that...

Verse 17b-19a: that...

Verse 19b: that...

In verse 16 Paul is praying for the continued filling of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. The preposition "in"⁶ *suggests the depth of the Spirit's penetration.*⁷ Paul sees a contrast between the *outward man*, which is dying slowly (see 2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:9-10) and the spirit/soul of a man, which is being renewed in the image of Christ.

7. We live in a *youth culture*. Everyone, it seems, wants to *look* like they are 26 years old. How do we, as members of this culture, balance the truly important (pursuing God, holiness, preparing for the next life) with the relatively unimportant (keeping in shape, healthy eating, working on our heart rate, etc.)? Does your life reflect a proper balance in this area? What does a proper balance look like? What changes would you like to make in your life?

The word Paul uses in verse 17 for *to dwell*, means *to settle down*. The word refers to a *permanent residence*. The Christian faith is for keeps. Paul prays to this end.

8. What do you think it means for Christ to take up *permanent residence* in your life? How does this reality affect the way you live your life?

In verse 18 Paul prays that the Ephesians will grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ. He wants them to enjoy everything God offers his children! The verb *to grasp* means *to seize, to lay hold of*.

⁶ The Greek word *eis* literally means "into."

⁷ Wood, 51.

9. With the above in mind, evaluate your progress in the Christian faith. Do you grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ? What is the evidence of your grasp?

In verse 19 the phrase *filled with all the fullness of God* is difficult to interpret. The word *fullness* comes from the Greek work *pleroma* (πληρωμα). As a verb it has two meanings: *to fill*, or *to complete*. John MacArthur notes:

Fullness means to make full, or fill to the full, and is used many times in the New Testament. It speaks of total dominance. A person filled with rage is totally dominated by hatred. A person filled with happiness is totally dominated by joy. To be filled up to all the fullness of God therefore means to be totally dominated by Him with nothing left of self or any part of the old man. By definition, then, to be filled with God is to be emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self.

10. Of course, no one has ever had *all of God and none of self* on this side of heaven. How then should this prayer in Ephesians 3 inform the way in which we pray this prayer for one another?

What does Paul mean when he says that we *may be filled with all the fullness of God*? These Greek words can be either subjective (God's fullness) or objective (the fullness which God gives). How it is understood makes a tremendous difference as to the meaning of Paul's prayer. John Stott explains:

It is uncertain how this genitive [of God] should be understood. If it is objective, then God's fullness is the abundance of grace which he bestows. If it is subjective, it is the fullness which fills God himself, in other words his perfection. Staggering as the thought may be, the latter seems the more probable because the Greek preposition *eis*, which indicates that we are to be filled not 'with' so much as 'unto' the fullness of God. God's fullness or perfection becomes the standard or level up to which we pray to be filled.⁸

Pray! The conclusion of Paul's prayer (3:20-21) is praise and doxology. Spend time giving glory to the God who is willing and *able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think*. All good prayer culminates in praise.

⁸ Stott, 138.

STUDY FOURTEEN: EPHESIANS 3:14-21

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH PART 2



Paul's great prayer for the church at Ephesus deserves our attention again.

1. **Read Ephesians 3:14-21** and write down any insights that particularly impacted you from last week's study. Write down any new observations or questions.

Paul's posture in prayer — kneeling— is unusual. It is only in this letter that Paul refers to himself kneeling in prayer. Jews generally prayed in a standing position. Scholars hold that kneeling was a Gentile posture of prayer. How interesting, therefore, to find Paul kneeling in prayer at the point in his letter where he is proclaiming the unity of Jew and Gentile. He has adapted his prayer posture to their position.

The decision to kneel during prayer would also reflect an intentional show of submission and reverence.⁹ In almost sequential verses, then, Paul declares both that believers can approach God with confidence (see verse 12) and that he approaches God in a posture of humility (see verse 14).

2. Are these two images in conflict with each other? Why or why not?
3. What is your typical body language during prayer? How does your use of your body during prayer affect your prayer life? What does it say about your relationship with God?
4. This is Paul's second prayer in the epistle. Take a minute to compare it with the first prayer, which is recounted in 1:15-23. What similarities are there between the two? How does this second prayer build upon or diverge from the earlier one?

⁹ O' Brien, 255.

STUDY FIFTEEN: EPHESIANS 4:1-6

WALKING IN UNITY



After three chapters of lofty doctrine, Paul begins to spell out the implications of all the doctrine. He wants the Ephesian church to practice what they have learned. The abrupt turn comes in 4:1. This verse introduces the second half of the letter. Paul writes,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

The word *worthy* in Greek is *axios*. It means *bringing up the other end of the scales*. It's a word picture referring to balanced scales. Paul is saying, "These things (chapters 1-3) are true...now live your lives in balance with the great blessings you have received."

1. **Read Ephesians 4:1-12** with the following outline in mind. Make a few notes as you read. What is Paul up to here? Can you diagram the progression of his thought?
 - I. The foundation of ministry: UNITY (4:1-6)
 - II. The provision for ministry: GIFTS (4:7-11)
 - III. The performers of ministry: PEOPLE (4:12)

The foundation for the ministry of the church is the unity of the church. Jesus' prayer for his church was that it would be a unified church (see John 17:11-22).

Verse 2 includes a recipe of Christian character. We are to be people of humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance. The basis of this character is love.

The first of these words, humility, would have shocked the Ephesians. Paul uses the word *tapeinophrosyne*. It refers to the *crouching submissiveness of a slave* and was regarded as a despicable trait in Greek culture. The King James Version translates the word *lowliness* which may capture the meaning better than modern translations. It is the same word used of Christ in Philippians 2:8! Our calling is to emulate Christ in his humility for the sake of the unity of the church.

2. Ted Turner famously said, "Christianity is a religion for losers." Is he right? How do we differentiate *lowliness* from *wimpiness*?

In verse 3 we are instructed to *maintain* the unity of the *Spirit*. Paul is not speaking of an institutional unity. He is speaking of the inter-connectedness of all believers.

3. How should this understanding of unity in the church affect the way we conduct ourselves in the church?

4. How do the four character qualities of 4:2 help maintain the unity of the church?

Humility Gentleness Patience Bearing with one another in love

5. What would *lowliness* or *humility* look like in our church? Have you seen it at CBC?

Kent Hughes draws out the implications of 4:2:

The truth which radiates from verse 2 is that Christian unity doesn't begin with an external structure, but rather in the attitudes of the heart—*humility* and *mildness* and *patience* and *loving tolerance* of one another. “The unity of the Spirit” (verse 3) takes people who are *so* different and makes them live in soul-satisfying unity. What diversity there is in the average church! Think of all the body types: tall, short, round, thin, muscular, unathletic. Then imagine all the mental types: nervous, calm, mathematical, unmathematical, artistic, musical, other-than-musical, etc., etc. There are huge differences among us! But when the spiritual fruits of humility and patience reign, there is unity. Christian unity in profound diversity brings great glory to God!¹⁰

6. What has been your experience in the church? Have you been through a church fight? If so, were these character qualities evident or absent from the church boxing ring?

7. Would it be possible to have a church fight and still be practicing the *unity of the Spirit*? In other words, could a church *fight fair*?

¹⁰ Hughes, 124.

Respond to the following:

Humility is essential to unity. Pride lurks behind all discord, while the greatest single secret of concord is humility. It is not difficult to prove this in experience. The people we immediately, instinctively like, and find it easy to get on with, are the people who give us the respect we consider we deserve, while the people we immediately, instinctively dislike are those who treat us like dirt. In other words, personal vanity is a key factor in all our relationships. If, however, instead of maneuvering for the respect of others (which is pride) we give them our respect by recognizing their intrinsic God-given worth (which is humility), we shall be promoting harmony in God's new society.¹¹

In 4:3 Paul begins with a word that can be translated, *being eager* or *make haste*. The preservation of God-given unity will take a lot of work, at times, in the body of Christ.

8. In what ways have you shown an eagerness to preserve unity in our church?

The word *gentleness* is the balance to humility. Aristotle defined this virtue as the mean between the excesses of anger and passive resignation. The person who has this quality is not beyond anger, but is angry at the right time. Paul is saying we are not called to be doormats who allow anyone and everyone to trample us for any reason.

9. How would you rate yourself in the areas of gentleness and humility? What has helped you or could help you grow in these areas?

Verses 4-6 contain the theological basis of the church's unity. We are all members of the same family! There is, Paul points out, only *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*.

10. Can you find the trinity in this list?

The word *trinity* refers to the tri-unity of God. God is one (unity) and yet three persons (diversity). Paul grounds our unity in the unity of God himself. As God is one, the church is one. **Pray** for Calvary Baptist Church to be a united body in the Spirit.

¹¹ Stott, 148-149.