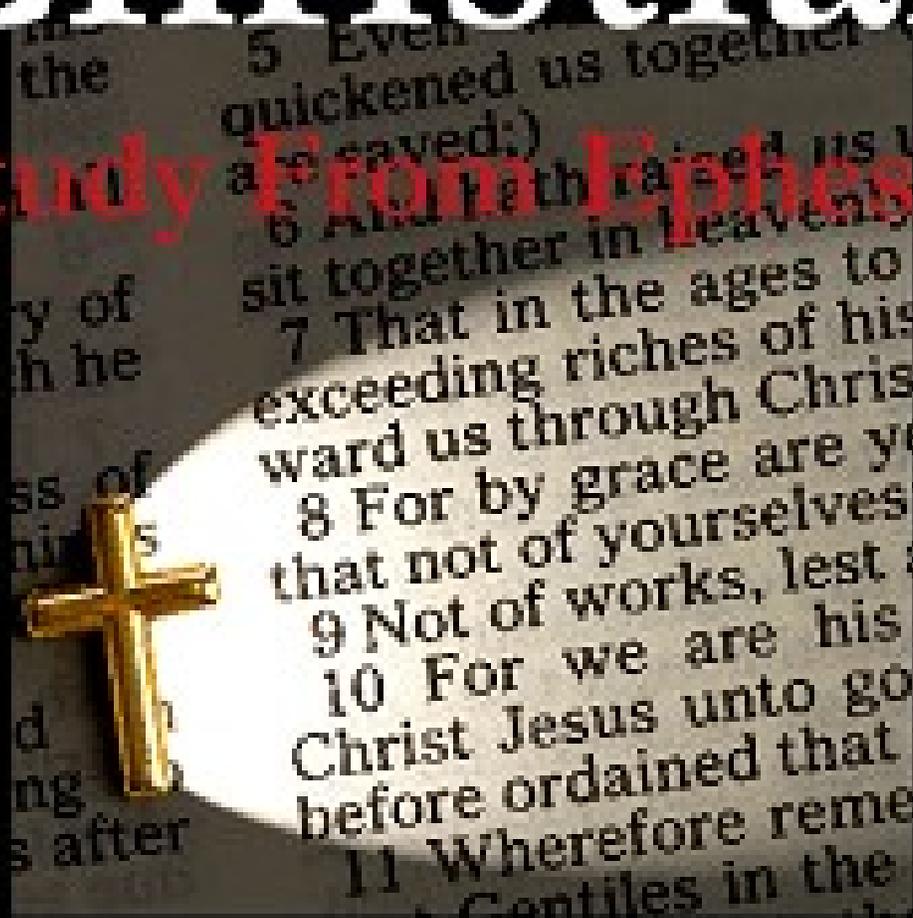


What It Means To Be A
Christian

A Study From Ephesians



Sandra Bivens Smith

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This study is dedicated to my amazing husband Avon without whose encouragement and support this work would never have been finished. Thanks honey.

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Introduction

Introduction

When I became a Christian some 24 years ago, I remember the difficulty I had with just the logistics of it all. I recall that following my conversion, I was basically given three instructions:

- call someone and tell them you are now a Christian
- read the gospel of John
- attend church

That was it. I can still recall how awkward I felt sitting in church, Sunday school, or Bible study just trying to find my way through the Bible. Usually by the time I got to a particular passage, the preacher or teacher had already moved on!

I also remember what it was like for me being around all those “church people.” I was hesitant to speak, afraid that I might say something wrong. There were so many times as a new Christian that I felt confused and uncertain. I expected myself to be “perfect” and when I failed, I questioned whether I was really a Christian at all. Jesus was in my heart but He was not yet integrated into my day-to-day life; how could He be, I barely knew Him. Consequently, early in my walk rather than drawing closer to Christ, I found myself wandering away. By the leading of the Spirit and some wonderful discipleship from a dear friend, I eventually found my way into an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus, but how I regret the time that was wasted simply because I didn’t receive guidance in how to be a Christian.

I pray you will be richly blessed through this study of God’s precious word.

Introduction

Study Helps

- Many of the weekly lessons will give you an opportunity to go deeper into the study. Look for the  for additional study recommendations.
- Unless otherwise noted, all passages quoted and referenced will be from the English Standard Version translation.
- Some lessons will ask you to mark scripture. I encourage you to take the time to do so as it will help you identify key points in the lesson. You will want to have on hand a variety of colors of highlighters and possibly some colored pencils to use for marking.
- Interpret scripture with scripture. Throughout this study, you will find additional scripture references given in parenthesis. You are encouraged to look up the referenced scripture as it will provide context and additional insight for the verse you are studying.
- At the end of each lesson, you will be asked to write down what you learned from the week's study about what it means to be a Christian. Take time to meditate on and record how you can apply to your life what scripture has shown you.
- One of the best things about group study is the opportunity to share with others what the Spirit has spoken to each individual. During your personal study time it can be helpful to note any questions/comments you would like to bring to the group. Space has been provided at the end of each lesson for you to make notes.
- When we study God's word, the enemy will try everything in his power to hinder us. Please keep your group members and study leaders in prayer throughout this study.

Background

When we read the Bible, it can be difficult to relate to the characters, the culture, and the times; in the freedom and social climate of our western world, it can be especially challenging. The ways of people who lived in a foreign land thousands of years ago are strange to us. We read the events and tend to think that they are just stories, that the people are only characters in a book. We forget we are reading about the real lives of real people; folks just like you and me.

To help us get our minds set on how Paul's writing relates to our own lives, we are going to start with a brief history lesson on the city of Ephesus and the Apostle Paul. As you read, try to picture the people, places, and events as they might be today.

The Book: Ephesians is one of Paul's four prison letters, the others being Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The letters are so called because they were written by the apostle during his imprisonment in Rome.

The City: Ephesus was an important city of commerce. It was situated near the middle of the western coast of the peninsula of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the highway into Asia from Rome; its ships traded with the ports of Greece, Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Culture: Ephesus was known for its luxury and excesses. Sorcery and magic were very common. Artemis, a goddess from the West, was the chief object of worship. The temple of Artemis was renowned as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It took two hundred and twenty years to build; one hundred and twenty-six, sixty-foot high columns supported its roof. The image of Artemis, which was said to have fallen from heaven, was of wood, forming a striking contrast to the magnificent temple.

The People: The citizenry of Ephesus was composed of both Asians and Greeks. It is known from the writings of Josephus that Jews were established there in considerable numbers.

The Apostle: The apostle Paul first visited Ephesus in his second mission tour (*Acts 18:19-21*), but the visit was very short. In his third tour, he returned to Ephesus and remained there for two years and three months. The unusual length of time spent by him in the city shows how important he felt the city was to the ministry.

The Ministry: When he arrived in Ephesus, Paul began preaching in the synagogue. His reception there was so unfriendly that he left the synagogue and began to preach in the school of Tyrannus. Paul was much more successful among the Gentiles than among the Jews. The power given to Paul to cast out evil spirits was so far above that of the many exorcists and magicians, that many of them became converts to Christ. They gave proof of their sincerity by burning their books and abandoning forever their lucrative business.

Getting Started

- Take some time to think about what you currently believe it means to be a Christian. In the space below, record in detail your thoughts.

Read Acts Chapter 19 to learn more about Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

1. How long did Paul stay in Ephesus?
2. When Paul arrived in Ephesus, from where did he begin teaching?
3. How long did he teach in this location?
4. Why did he stop teaching there?
5. Where did he go after leaving the synagogue?
6. What were some of the major accomplishments of Paul's ministry in Ephesus?

Reflection

Here is one of the miracles of scripture: Whether one is only beginning the journey of faith or has been traveling for a while, the instruction we receive is equally relevant and powerful. Paul wrote – *"I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready"* (1 Corinthians 3:2). The writer of Hebrews says *"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil"*. (Hebrews 5:14). In these verses, we see two distinct stages in the Christian walk. In spite of the different needs, there's not a beginner's version of the Bible for baby Christians and an advanced version for the mature believer; there is only one true Word and it is completely sufficient for the new believer, the seasoned believer, and every believer in between. No matter where you are in your walk with Christ, studying God's Word and applying it to your life will help you grow to become a stronger Christian.

What did you learn from this week's study about what it means to be a Christian?

My Notes

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Who I Am In Christ

Recently I read that Google is rated the number one employer in terms of employee benefits. The company's benefits and perks include such things as on-site medical staff, massage therapists, free haircuts, swimming pools, game rooms, and dry cleaning services, just to name a few. All these benefits are great but you can only get them if you work for Google.

I am telling you this to make a point. Just as you would have to be "joined to Google" (a Google employee) in order to get their benefits, so we must be joined to Christ if we are to receive all the benefits He has for us.

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples the parable of the Vine and the Branches. In the parable are truths that are foundational to our understanding of who we are in Christ – our topic of study this week.

*Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **Abide** in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you, unless you **abide in me**. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever **abides in me** and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not **abide in me** he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you **abide in me**, and my words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. **Abide in my love**. If you keep my commandments, you will **abide in my love**, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and **abide** in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:1-11)*

To become a Christian is to profess by faith Jesus Christ as Savior and LORD. When we do so, we are declared righteous. The righteousness of Christ is imparted to us and we are made right before God. This one-time event is called justification.

Once we have been justified, we are no longer slaves to the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). We become the sons and daughters of The King. We move out of the prison and into the palace. Our ragged clothes are replaced with royal robes. The crown of righteousness is placed on our head, and the scepter of all the power and authority of heaven is given into our hand. We begin our Christian walk and the process of our sanctification.

Getting Started

- **Read John 15:1-11**
 - Highlight each reference to the Father
 - Highlight in a different color each reference to Christ

Who?

1. Answer the following:

How does Jesus describe the Father?

How does Jesus describe Himself?

How does He describe us?

What are the key themes found in these verses?

Word Study

Abide: To remain stable or fixed in a state. To continue in a place.

Parable: A fable or representation of something in real life or nature, from which a moral is drawn for instruction.

Justification: An act of free grace by which God pardons the sinner and accepts him as righteous, on account of the atonement of Christ.

Sanctification: An act of making holy. The act of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified or alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love to God. Growing in divine grace as a result of Christian commitment.

- **Read Ephesians 1:1-14**

- Mark each occurrence of the phrases: *in Him, in Christ, through Christ, in the Beloved*

Just as the branches have the nature of the vine to which they are connected, those of us who are in Christ, the one True Vine, bear His image, His nature.

2. Refer to the passages you marked in Ephesians 1:1-14. List the blessings that have been imparted to those of us who are in Him.

3. Look up the following verses. Record how Jesus is “described” in each of the verses.

Matthew 3:17

Mark 1:24

Luke 9:35

Luke 23:35

John 6:69

Romans 8:17

Colossians 1:13

Titus 3:6

Hebrews 1:2

Revelation 3:7

What?

4. Again, referring to the passages you marked in Ephesians, list the benefits given to those who are in Him.

(Psalms 130:7; Hebrews 9:12)

(Acts 5:31; Acts 10:43; 1John 2:12)

(1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3; James 1:5)

(Acts 20:32; Colossians 3:24; 1 Peter 1:4)

(1 Corinthians 2:10-12; Galatians 1:12; Revelation 1:1)

(1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:5)

(Joel 2:28; Acts 2:33; Galatians 3:14)

Everything we receive from Christ is a free gift. While there is nothing we can do to earn His gifts, we do have a part in the process. *(Romans 11:6)*

How?

We have examined who we are in Christ and what we have in Christ; now let us look at the how.

5. According to Ephesians 1:13, what is the prerequisite for our right relationship with Christ?

6. Our Ephesians passages give us three methods by which we receive the blessings and the benefits of belonging to Christ.

God chose us for adoption, through Christ, according to:

- His _____
Verse 5
- His _____
Verse 7
- His _____
Verse 9

Why?

We are all born sinners (*Romans 3:23*) and deserve none of the blessings the LORD has so graciously given us. In fact, because of our sin and rebellion, the only thing we deserve is death (*Romans 7:5*). BUT GOD is a God of mercy and in His mercy He has given us the right to become His sons and daughters (*John 1:12*).

7. According to Ephesians 1:14, why has God chosen to show such great mercy?

There Is More?

Considering all we have learned about God's great mercy, what more could we ask or hope for? Our God is good; He extends Himself to us beyond mercy to the point of grace. He leaves us with a promise.

8. What is the promise given in Ephesians 1:13-14?

To whom is this promise given?

 **GO Deeper**

Verses 4, 5, and 11 contain what is theologically called "election language."

How do these verses reveal God's complete plan of redemption?

How do these passages relate to the nature of Christ we discussed in questions 1 and 4 of this week's lesson?

(Additional scripture to consider: Isaiah 46:10; Zechariah 6:13; Matthew 25, 34; John 17:24; Acts 2:23; Acts 20:27; Romans 8:29 Romans 9:11-16; Galatians 3:26; 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 2:10-15; Hebrews 6:17)

Reflection

The world promises us so many benefits and pleasures. However, the world's promises are always conditional, always temporal, and they can never truly satisfy. More often than not, the promises the world gives will never be fulfilled.

Unlike the world, not only does God not lie, He cannot lie. When we are in Christ, when we abide in Him, we can be assured that what He promises, He will do.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:17-20)

Do you ever feel like God could not possibly love you? Do your thoughts condemn you with the past and convince you that you can never be good enough for God? You need to know that these thoughts are lies of the enemy. You have before you the proof and the promise of all that you are in Christ. Keep these words close at hand, so that when Satan accuses, you can combat his lies with God's truths.

and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

What did you learn from this week's study about what it means to be a Christian?

(My Notes)