

SESSION 1

We Are Joined Together

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: When have you felt most at home with a group of people?

RECAP (PAGE 63): A few years ago, I visited Muir Woods National Monument—known for its beautiful California redwoods. Dwarfing other tree species, redwoods can grow to more than 350 feet tall and can be as wide as 24 feet in diameter.

Yet, as massive as these trees are, redwoods possess remarkably shallow root systems. But the roots overcome their lack of depth by extending outward more than 100 feet from the tree’s base. Each tree’s roots then intertwine with the roots of other redwoods. By joining together, the individual root systems create a forest of trees with staggering strength.

The simple reality is that redwood trees weren’t created to exist in isolation—and neither were we. Just as a redwood tree requires a forest of other redwood trees in order to stand, so also the Christian requires a spiritual family in order to grow. The church—the body of Christ—is that family. Being a part of Christ’s church isn’t an option. Through Jesus, God designed us to live and serve together as His body.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 64. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: When we come to **CHRIST**, we also become a part of the **BODY** of Christ.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #7**, the “**Why Do I Need the Church?**” poster, and give a brief overview of the session titles in this study.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: The apostle Paul wrote to a church he knew well. He spent about three years in Ephesus on his missionary journeys (Acts 20:31). Since the name Ephesus doesn’t appear in some early copies of his book (Ephesians 1:1), some scholars believe Paul wrote a letter to several churches in the area around Ephesus, and the book we have was preserved in Ephesus. Paul, as a church planter, wrote many letters to churches and church leaders (such as Timothy and Titus).



DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **Joined Together**, on page 64, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

Joined Together: How we view the church affects how we interact within the church. Which of the following best represents how you currently view your church? Circle one.

- A. Lecture hall B. Community hub C. Family
D. Organization E. Sanctuary F. Other: _____

RECAP (PAGE 64): The New Testament writers used various metaphors to describe God’s church, such as *flock*, *temple*, *household*, *gathering*, and so forth. But the most frequently used metaphor is *the body*. Through this picture, we learn that each Christ-follower is a member (or part) of the body while Jesus Christ is the head.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item #8**, the “**Ephesians**” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Provide some brief background information on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 1:20-23 on page 64.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 64: **Christ is the head of HIS BODY, the church.**

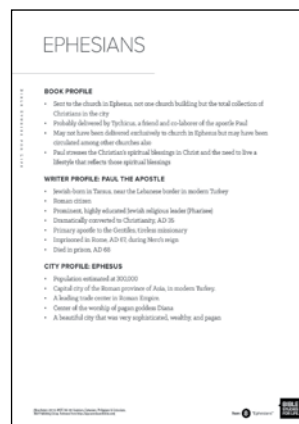
RECAP (PAGE 64): As its head, Jesus holds ultimate authority over the church. His authority isn’t dictatorial, oppressive, arrogant, or abusive—but it’s absolute. Someone might ask, “How is it that Jesus gets absolute authority over the church—and everything else for that matter?” Jesus’ authority was neither received by democratic vote nor granted by a council’s affirmation; His authority has no root in human decision at all. Jesus received His authority as a demonstration of God’s power. In other words, Jesus’ authority is all about who He is as the Son of God.

DISCUSS: How is being a part of a church different from being a part of any other organization? [ALTERNATE: *Why is the body, with Christ as the head, an apt metaphor for the church?*]

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 2:8-10 on page 65.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 65: **Christ brought us into His church by His GRACE.**

RECAP (PAGE 65): In most clubs and organizations, you sign up to become a member. You pay the dues. You attend the meetings. Then, you go to work on the club’s agenda. The Bible



teaches us a radically different method for membership in His body. Membership in the body of Christ isn't about what we do to *get* in. Instead, it's about what *Jesus* has done to *bring* us in.

Why does God save sinners like you and me? We might think it's simply because He loves us. God most certainly loves us, but He saves us for a bigger reason than just to display His love. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (v. 10). God doesn't save us *by our* good works; He saves us *for His* good works. God saves us to show His divine handiwork. Through our redeemed lives, He displays for the world His character, love, and glory. And the local church is the place where He does that best.

DISCUSS: What do these verses teach us about God's grace? [*ALTERNATE: Why is it important for us to know that we are God's workmanship?*]

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 2:19-22 on page 65.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 65: **We are members TOGETHER in God's household, Christ's church.**

RECAP (PAGE 65): God has always had a people. The Old Testament records God calling Israel (the Jews) to Himself. They were God's chosen people among the nations (the Gentiles).

- ▶ God commanded the Jews to obey Him, tell of His greatness, and believe His promises—the greatest of which was the promise of salvation for both Jew and Gentile alike.
- ▶ Because of their faith in Christ, the Gentile believers were brought near and were "no longer foreigners and strangers" (v. 19). Although foreigners and strangers possessed some legal rights, they lacked the full rights of citizenship. Spiritually, the Jews felt superior while the Gentiles felt inferior. But Paul shattered both of these feelings by pointing to the uniting work of the gospel.
- ▶ You and I are modern-day Gentiles. We come from a variety of countries, speak a multitude of languages, and celebrate diverse traditions. Yet, in Christ's church, we share the same citizenship and hail from the same family through Jesus.

DISCUSS: What are some benefits and responsibilities of being a member of God's household? [*ALTERNATE: When have you experienced a sense of togetherness in your church?*]

DISCUSS: How has the church played a significant role in your life?

LIVE IT OUT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Lead your group members in a brief walk around your church grounds. If possible, walk outside for a bit, allowing group members to see the foundation and materials that make up the church building. As you walk together, discuss the question:

“What is it that makes a church a church?” Return to your group’s meeting space before moving on to the “Live It Out” bullet points.

SAY: “How will you embrace your role as a member of Christ’s church? Consider the following applications.”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 66. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer lives this week.

- ▶ **Confess.** In order to adopt a right mind-set of your part in Christ’s church, confess any wrong mind-sets or attitudes you hold (or have previously held) about individuals in your local church.
- ▶ **Submit.** Reread Ephesians 1:20-23, and reflect upon the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Submit your life to His authority and control.
- ▶ **Commit.** If you’re not a member of a local church, pursue membership to begin experiencing the beauty of living “together” in the household of God. This might mean going through a membership class or talking to a pastor. If you’re already a member, commit yourself anew to the covenant and mission of your church.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 66) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 67–70).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[EPHESIANS 1:20]: Paul stressed God’s power in verse 19, and in verse 20 he gave two examples of how God exercised His power in Jesus. First, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection was central to Paul’s preaching and the Christian faith. Second, God placed Jesus “at his right hand,” pointing to Jesus’ enthronement. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended and reigns “in the heavens.” He is both in the presence of God the Father and with His followers.

[VERSES 21-22]: Paul stressed the risen Christ’s power and supremacy in two ways. First, Christ is supreme over every “ruler and authority, power and dominion,” and to “every title given.” Second, Paul noted that the risen Christ is supreme in “this age” and in the one “to come.” Most first-century Christians thought of the church as a local congregation, but here Paul pointed to the universal church, all Christians in all places. Christ is its head, meaning its authority.

[EPHESIANS 2:8]: Paul clarified the nature of our salvation (2:1-10) and the relation of our salvation to our experience in the church. He highlighted that our salvation is based on God’s grace. A traditional description or definition of “grace” is God’s unmerited favor. Grace can’t be earned; grace is God’s gift. But Paul noted both the divine initiative in salvation, God’s grace, and the necessary human response, faith. Here, Paul wasn’t referring to an intellectual comprehension of truths about Jesus, although correct doctrine is important. He stressed faith as trust and commitment. Although our “faith” is essential, Paul emphasized that ultimately salvation is “not from yourselves.”

[VERSE 9]: If you and I could contribute to our salvation, we might be tempted to boast about what we accomplished. But God is the author and source of our salvation. Paul often criticized human works as a way to gain salvation. Often he had in mind Jewish people who insisted that works of the law brought merit. Most readers today don’t have a Jewish background, but Paul’s emphasis on grace is still relevant.

[VERSE 10]: A summary of verses 8-10 would be that we’re saved by grace through faith for good works. Paul emphasized that our good deeds, or works, couldn’t save us (v. 9). But he was equally clear that good deeds should be the natural, normal result of salvation. Paul described believers as God’s workmanship. The Greek word Paul used is the basis for our word *poem*. We don’t create ourselves through our efforts. God created us for a purpose, and we honor God through our good deeds. From God’s perspective, our good deeds are a crucial part of being saved people.

[VERSE 19]: Paul used familiar imagery to illustrate the changed status of Christians. Paul’s readers were “no longer foreigners and strangers.” The racial or ethnic discrimination that separated Jews and Gentiles in the past should be eliminated in the body of Christ. Now, Christians are all “citizens with the saints.” “Saints” referred to all Christians, who were expected to live holy, pure lives.

[VERSES 20-22]: Paul developed the analogy of the church as a building. Although we often think of church as a building, Paul’s readers likely met in house churches. Still, they would understand this figure of speech. A building typically has a foundation. Paul noted the significance of Jesus as the church’s “cornerstone.” Paul liked the organic analogy for the church as a body, but he wanted to stress here that the church is built on faith in Jesus. Just as Christians can be symbolized as parts of a body, so we are components of a building constructed by God. Paul noted believers resemble “a holy temple in the Lord.”



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