

Ephesians Overview

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[0:00] Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We just praise you for it and we praise you that this is the way that you have designed and ordained to speak to us through the word when it's read, but also through the preached word that it is you who's applying it to our hearts.

And so as a vessel, as an instrument used by you, I pray that you'd speak through me and I just pray that the word of God would strike us in a powerful way that we'd be becoming more like Jesus in our hearts.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Before we get going, I just want to start with a bit of an illustration, open up before we read God's word. And there's just a slide that I wanted to put up. I wonder if you've ever heard of Abraham Louis Breguet.

You ever heard of him? No. Do you know what? I hadn't heard of him either until this week. Well, he's actually, he's a famous watchmaker in the 1700s. There might be a picture of some coming up. There's a famous one that he made for Marie Antoinette. You might become a bit more interested in his watches. If you knew, it gets valued at £30 million. But I don't know if you're, maybe you're like me with watches.

[1:21] And you think that a good watch is one that can keep the time. Or maybe you're into watches. You like the mechanics, the detail, the craftsmanship.

Well, lots of people try to copy the Breguet watch, but there is a unique way in which you can tell if the Breguet watch is the real deal or not. Breguet, this famous watchmaker, developed a secret signature etched into the dial on the back.

But it was invisible to the naked eye. It only appears when light hits the dial at a certain angle. So, watches might not be your thing, but like I say, it might become your thing if you ever stumble upon one.

They are worth, if you found one of these, it is worth infinitely more than a factory produced replica. Because this watch, these watches, they have a, they're a masterpiece with the signature on the back that literally is the fingerprints of its creator.

I want you to imagine this, and you've got to go with me on this. I want to imagine that you do stumble across one. One morning, you accidentally leave it on the floor.

[2:39] You go to make a coffee, come back down, and someone has accidentally walked over it, and the dial is smashed into pieces. Imagine how you'd feel looking at your broken antique that was potentially worth millions, costing a fortune to repair, or maybe it is irreplaceable.

Imagine looking down at the pieces fragmented into, you know, the glass dial is now shattered shards. It even pricks you as you attempt to pick it up. The masterpiece that bore the creator's fingerprints is now smashed.

That is a picture of our world. Because creation has the fingerprints of the creator God all over it, and yet it is broken.

It is a smashed up masterpiece, fragmented, disjointed, and that brokenness extends to every part of our created world.

And we are acutely aware of that in our world, aren't we? We see it, and know more acutely, I think, in the way that we relate to one another. Like shards of glass, we are shards of glass type people who have sharp edges that prick one another.

[4:05] Humanity is anything but put together. Aren't there wars? We prayed about them this morning. In the latest being, you know, what's happening in the Middle East, just the evidence that humanity does not see eye to eye, is not united, is not one as God intended it to be.

Close to that home, we also prayed. We see that in the fragmentation, the breakdown of relationships. We see that in society, people who have different political views, ideologies, and perhaps even on social media, the increased polarization between those who don't agree, a wash of hurtful comments intended to put each other down.

And the disunity only increases. But deeper still, we know the shards of glass within our own heart. The internal dialogue we have with ourselves as we as broken people need putting back together again. This week, as I say, we're starting a new series in the book of Ephesians.

And there's lots of themes, multiple themes that it addresses. But I think one of the key areas that it really looks at is the formation or the creation, you might say, of the church, of God's people.

[5:30] And really, how the creation of the church is God bringing order and unity with people into a world that doesn't know how to do that themselves.

You see, the church is actually the living God bringing shards of glass people that should continue to prick one another, but miraculously, he puts them all together again.

He takes the disorder and the chaos of humanity and unites it all back together to be one. And so there's the opportunity within this series to think about the purpose of the church, what it means to be part of it, how each of us is joined, and therefore we're thinking about what that means for us and how we live.

Today, we're doing a grand sweep of the whole letter, an overview to see how that plays out. And I'm hoping that it gives us the direction of travel as we consider God's plan to bring unity out of chaos.

But the real opportunity in this series that I want us to ask is this. What if the church, what if the church, what if it isn't just a club you joined, but it's actually the place where the world finally sees what it looks like for broken shards of glass people to be put back together again?

[6:56] In themselves and as one. With that in mind, I want to turn to the sheet of paper. I'm just going to read the verses out and then we're going to look at the whole book by going through these verses.

So Ephesians 1, 9 to 10. He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the time has reached their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Chapter 2, verse 11. Therefore remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcised, which is done in the body by human hands.

Chapter 2, verse 3. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

3, 13. I ask you therefore not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. Turn it over. Chapter 2, 14.

[8:12] 3, verse 10.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

3, verse 10. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

4, verse 1. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received. Verse 3, same chapter. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

And chapter 6, verse 10. Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Amen. Unity is the original factory setting of humanity.

[9:21] God made people to reflect him. And the triune God exists and always has done with perfect unity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a perfect community with one another.

That word community, it's even in the title of our church, is a fusion of two words, common and unity. We share something in common that brings us together as one.

What is common to us, what we share is a relationship with Jesus Christ, and that is what has brought us together. It unites us. That's why we are a community church, because we're gathered around the Lord Jesus.

God is perfect community. Every member of the Trinity in God, they are in perfect relationship with one another. And so, humanity is made to reflect God.

Made in God's image, it is made to reflect what he is like. Let me recall for you what the living God said at the beginning of creation, Genesis 1. He says, so God created mankind in his own image.

[10:33] In the image of God he created them. Male and female, he created them. Just like the watchmaker had a secret signature in the back of what he'd made, God's original design for creation, his secret signature, was us.

His people. And we are to reflect the same community with one another that points to the everlasting communities between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so, when we read in chapter 1, verse 9 and 10, what we see is that what God is doing in the gospel, in the church, is to restore that unity that was broken.

Look with me again in the verse.

To make it as one under the Lordship of Jesus. That's God's will. That's the mystery. That's the purpose of Christ. The purpose of Jesus is that we should be one.

[11:58] And where will that unity be? Well, it stretches, actually, what we read here, beyond just a people. It is a cosmic unity.

Because it's the whole of the universe. Everything, everything created by God is going to be under the Lordship of Jesus. This is God's grand plan.

And it is bigger than just you or me. It's bigger than our individual lives. The purpose of Jesus' coming was clear. This was the plan. The purpose. The decree of God was to restore the unity that was lost.

To bring back creation. To be sat under Jesus. Everything created under Christ. Verse 22 of that chapter says that everything will be under his feet.

And he will be the head. This is where we see the principle at play. And yet we know that's not the way of the world.

[13:01] We were made to have unity. To be connected. To relate. To live in community with one another. And you know, that is why. That is why the fragmentation and the disunity feel so unnatural.

And feel so painful. Because it means we know, entrenched within us, that there's something wrong when we don't live like that. Because it means we're not living for God's true purpose.

That's where we're going to move to kind of our second point. Which is the poverty of disunity. The poverty of disunity. And throughout Ephesians, we get clues through the whole book.

That this is the people of Ephesus. The church that he's writing to that whole region. This is what they used to be like. You see in verse 11, he's talking to the Gentiles.

That's kind of a Bible word. It means anyone in the day who's not a Jew. So that we're actually, in that we would be Gentiles. Anyone who's not a Jew. That would be, in here, people who are like that.

[14:07] They call them the uncircumcised. And you see what he says.

Formally, you used to be like that. In verse, further on, he says in verse 12, that the Gentiles used to be separate from Christ.

That they were once far away. Okay. Verse 14. We read that there once was a barrier. So then you can turn over with me.

A wall of hostility between Jews and non-Jews. Or Gentiles, if you want to use that word. You think through what that means.

Two groups of people. All made in the image of God. And there is, that were made to represent what God is in the heavenlies.

And there's a separation. There's a wall there. We all remember. It's just after, not too many years after I was born. The Berlin Wall.

[15:09] The physical barrier that kept two groups of people apart. And you saw what happened if anyone tried to cross that wall. They were shot by the German border patrol.

If you have a wall between anyone. Whether it's a physical wall. Or whether there's just a barrier and you can't relate. Or you're at odds or there's feuds.

A common unity. A community is not on the agenda. Neither is a relationship. This is what he's pointing to. This is the way of the world.

That people are at odds with one another. And we get a signpost as to why this fragmentation occurs.

Turn back to verse 3. We see where the fragmentation occurs. The disunity. It says, All of us also lived among them at one time.

[16:08] Gratifying the cravings of our flesh. And following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest. We were by nature deserving of wrath. We are born into this world.

With a sinful condition. Which at its core is to be self-centered. We crave getting our own way. And the truth is, that you know the answer what we we know that points all the way back is it points back to the first breakdown in relationship it points back to genesis 3 the breakdown in relationship between god and man and then between adam and eve adam blames his wife both of them hide from god the result they're kicked out of eden and disunity and disorder enter our world our nature writes paul is to get our own way to follow what we think is best our desires our thoughts and when what we want clashes with what someone else's desires we get a breakdown in relationship it's exactly what sin is when when we clash with what the best that god wants for us you'll have heard me and maybe say to the kids it's that kind of acronym of s-i-n sin it's when we say shove off god yes i'm in charge no to your rules when everyone demands their own way and it brings mess disorder and chaos and we see the effect of what it does there's clues all the way through that what is going on in this church you look me through those team what does he say to them he says i ask you therefore not to be discouraged the suggestion is they are discouraged they are discouraged they're discouraged about his sufferings but you can and what that has meant and there's people who are siding with paul and people who aren't there's disunity within the church and we don't know what that exactly that looks like we don't get many clues but interpersonal conflicts when two sinners come together are normal and if it doesn't get sorted discouragement lingers two sinners one in their own way and not budging perhaps and as we read this kind of uh there's a suggestion isn't there that we're probably christians who were used to be you know have come from a jewish background who thought differently to those who'd come from a non-jewish background and there's friction and testing it suggests they weren't behaving as one people but as groups with cliques gossiping not living of his people but drifting towards what they used to be like before they met jesus the problems that we see in this ephesian church they're no different than what we see in today's church maybe we've we might experience even in our just small group of people because there are times when we will want one thing and somebody else will want the opposite and if without addressing it without forgiveness and listening and humility without paying attention we can drift towards fallouts and tension and gossip like shards of glass we prick each other because we want to protect our own broken sinners the only way the only way that broken sinners can can move from disunity to the place of togetherness is from the source of unity the source of unity is jesus christ it's it's the only way that's our third point the source of unity look with me we turn turn back over to to a verse the first ones on this first verses on the second page we read for he himself jesus christ is our peace

who's made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier he's destroyed the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside his flesh the law with its commands and regulations and here we read it his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two thus making peace in one body to reconcile both of them to god through the cross by which he put to death their hostility both of them the two groups those who were jews and those who were non-jews were reconciled to god first the wall of hostility is broken down between him and them the chasm is closed it's broken down first between so that we can have a relationship with the living god through jesus christ through his death so that so that in so that in him both jew and non-jew have access to the father through the one spirit and it's not different for either group we just have to remember you know whether whether that those people whether the background is jewish or non-jewish both have the same starting

place and both needed rescuing and so they share something in common having a relationship with god through jesus by the power of the holy spirit it's not different for one group or the other whatever background anyone has whatever their starting place it's irrelevant everyone comes to jesus in the same way jesus takes away sin he takes away the cause of disunity by his death on the cross you know jesus is actually the one smashed like the breguet watch he takes the prick of our sinful shards so that we can be fused back together and become the masterpiece we're all saved by grace through having faith that his death paid for our sins and it's the same for everyone he becomes father jesus becomes lord and savior he doesn't have a different relationship with some over the others there's no hierarchy or special treatment and it means something beautiful really it means something miraculous happens because people who would never normally see eye to eye who would normally hate each other who did hate each other will be worshipping alongside each other in the multitudes before the throne of god the shards of glass people become fused together so there are no rough sharp edges you see how the church is described in chapter 3 verse 10 his intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of god should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places that word for manifold is it's the greek word poly poikilos poly means many like polygon and poly is coloured it means many coloured wisdom or we might translate that as multifaceted but I like that expression a many coloured wisdom you see the miracle really is that the people of god is the most diverse group of people that will ever be seen hostile groups sitting as one family as one body under the lord jesus it is a foretaste of what we read at the beginning everything in heaven and on earth under the lordship of jesus the church is the foretaste of that when that will happen in eternity it's the display of what god is doing it's the glory of god the church is the glory of god it's unity

under christ the purpose of that you see what that means it means something quite shocking it means that it means that islamic terrorists that have repented will be sitting with christians they murdered it means jewish christians will be sitting with palestinian ones it means russian christians will be worshipping with ukrainians it means the families of murdered relatives will be worshipping with the murderer that's apostle paul's story he murdered the disciples best friend stephen and many more it means victims of abuse will be worshipping with their repentant perpetrators it means the repentant nazi will be worshipping with the jewish christian he gasped one commentator said this the church is god's theatre to the rest of the cosmos when we see it now is a foretaste of what god will do across the whole of creation everything under the lordship of jesus god's people one new man the body of christ that is more united and stable than any political ethnic social difference that might try to drive a wedge in light of that one new man how do we in light of that therefore live today as a people of god because we are one body one people paul insists we need to walk as one we need to live as who we actually are we are one that's where we're going to move to the final point the walk in unity verse 1 and verse 3 of chapter 4 as a prisoner for the lord then i urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received the word for worthy is the word axios it's where we get the word axis from it's like an axis on a weighing scale and so the idea is that the way we live or the way we walk as christians is like balancing on a scale the way we walk should balance our call and we have to live a life that is equal to the calling to our salvation what christ has done so if he's called us to be one we need to walk as one it should balance out on a scale it should match the weight of god's calling us as his children because the lord has brought these shards together we get to live as the new recreated masterpiece and that's what his people are the church is one united people and it means something profound it means you see this is what it means because we're united because we're what it means our faith and how we live is not just about us you see what we do in secret the good and the bad even if we think nobody knows it impacts the whole body because we are one on the negative side it means if you have a resentment even secretly towards another church member it adds a sharp edge that affects the whole church family because we are one which is why

Paul spells out what this looks like in practice verse 3 make every effort make every effort leave no stone unturned I urge you make every effort to keep what the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace make every effort to look as the one body the one people that you actually are if you are one if you have unity then live as a unified people not as a fragmented divided one it applies to the local church but also applies to the church as a whole now at this point I think you hear that and you say man that sounds like a tall order how are we going to do that it sounds kind of impossible doesn't it because we're all sinners we're all going to mess up we're all going to at one point need to forgive one another how is it possible to stay together where naturally there will be times when we butt

heads and rub up against one another well look with me in our final verse finally be strong in the [28:59] Lord and in his mighty power it's not impossible because the Lord strengthens us the church to do this in his mighty power Jesus has united the church to himself and he lives and dwells in us on our own this unity is impossible but we're not on our own and we don't depend on ourselves to maintain it the Lord is our strength when we turn to the Lord he's the one at work in us to maintain that unity between us we can't maintain it on our own but Jesus can because he's the head he's got the strength to keep us together when we turn to him we can't do it on our own we'd stay like shards of glass but Jesus comes and through the gospel puts us together and smooths our edges off and binds us together so we put our trust in his strength in his mighty power to keep that to the discouraged your strength isn't the point the master creator is at work by his strength to bring you together to the divided drop the shards of glass the wall's already down come to him and let him bind you back to one another to reconcile you're reconciled to

God be reconciled to one another we get to walk as this many coloured masterpiece reflecting the multitude the multi coloured masterpiece before the throne in unity with one another this is what God does and it displays the glory of God the wisdom of God to a people watching that is like nothing else let's pray almighty God the wonder of what the gospel what you've done through the good news is just remarkable and I pray that for our church here I pray for unity I pray that naturally there will be times when we might not see eye to eye and naturally we'd want to turn to gossip or division or talking about someone and I just pray that you'd forgive us and I pray that you'd move by the power of your spirit to maintain that bond of peace in your strength that you'd keep us together keep the dialogue open between us that we could have open vulnerable honest humble conversations where we could even express how we feel and have that openness and so I just pray that you'd maintain that in us we know that we can't do this but I thank you for the goodness of the gospel that this is all true because you've taken away the hostility between the relationship that we the non-relationship that we didn't have with you that you've taken that away so we have a perfect relationship with the living God that you're our father we're your children and so help us to live out of that place

I ask for this in the name of Christ Amen Amen Thank you.