

Introducing the Ephesians Sermon Series

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Date: 23 December 2025

Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Of course, lots of people love Ephesians. There are a lot of reasons to love Ephesians, one being that it's really, in many respects, the least reactive book, I think, in the Bible.

Not in the Bible, but a letter, epistle in the New Testament, what I meant to say. It really doesn't feel like Paul is absolutely, clearly shooting down particular problems, which is kind of unusual, actually, for a New Testament epistle.

[2 : 03] And I think because of that, you wind up getting a very full view of what it looks like to be a Christian. Now, that's not to say that there's not some important background knowledge that would be helpful to you about Ephesus and about what was going on there.

So I wanted to take a little bit of time to discuss specifically what was going on in Ephesus, how you should think about Ephesus as we read the book of Ephesians.

I guess the first thing to say is that this will be our second book in a row, a second letter in a row that was written to this particular church, most likely.

We don't know that for certain. But we are fairly confident, I think, from a church history perspective in asserting that John wrote his letter, 1 John, to the church in Ephesus.

And so that's interesting because that would mean that within the last few years, we've done 1 Timothy. I can't actually remember if we did 2 Timothy. We did 1 Timothy, at least, which is also taking place in Ephesus.

[3 : 15] We've done 1 John, written most likely also to the church in Ephesus. And now we're going to do Ephesians.

I think we've actually done Ephesians once before at Providence years ago. I'm not entirely confident on that. I've definitely preached through Ephesians before. All that to say, the city of Ephesus was extraordinarily prominent in the day, in the first century.

It's a coastal town, well known for trade. But also, I think most importantly known for housing one of the wonders of the ancient world, which was the Temple of Diana.

And there was just this sort of unique thing that happens in towns that are, for lack of a better word, religious tourist destinations.

And that is that there becomes an infusion of sort of financial entanglements with religious concerns.

[4 : 26] You know, Ephesus is like in the Bible quite a bit, honestly. You know, you've got Apollos going there with Aquila, meeting with Aquila and Priscilla, being instructed more thoroughly in the way.

And then, of course, I think that's Acts 18. And then Acts 19 and Acts 20, you've got Paul in Ephesus. Paul spends, I think, about two years there, if memory serves. And Acts 20 is one of my favorite passages, because I think it's the best description of what it just means to be a sincere pastor who trusts that the Lord will take care of him.

And not that I measure up to that all the time, but I use Acts 20 a lot to reframe what it means to be a pastor. And then, you know, I love 1 John.

I also really love 1 and 2 Timothy. So there's a lot going on there, you know, all Ephesus-centered. And then you also have, of course, Ephesus is one of the seven churches in Revelation, and it's known for a kind of theological precision, which kind of makes sense, I suppose, because of all the heavy hitters they've had over the years.

But they're also known, unfortunately, for losing their first love. And I think that the first love had something to do with the kind of neighbor love that they were apparently struggling, potentially struggling to engage when John wrote his letter to them.

[5 : 56] You know, you look at 1 John, and I think that the love is, John knows because Jesus told him in John 13, and probably multiple times, like, this is the way that people will know whether a person is a real Christian or not, is whether they have love for their brothers, if they love them as Christ loves them.

And so, you know, John's, we just got done going through John, and we got done seeing kind of this emphatic repetition of, if you really are born again, you're going to love people well.

And then, of course, you know, we find that they're being chastised for not loving well in Ephesians. And I don't think that's a pietistic, you don't love Jesus as much as you used to kind of a thing.

Now, you asked me why I don't think that. I'll just be honest with you. Sometimes I will have done a lot of study on something and formed an opinion, and that opinion's kind of locked in.

If you ever wonder, like, why are old people slow to change? Well, we got to our opinions, hopefully, through work, but I honestly couldn't tell you why I believe that. I just remember studying that passage in Revelation and thinking, I think this is a horizontal love issue.

[7 : 12] Anyway, all that to say, whether I'm right or not, we do see, even at the end of, you know, we just see this emphasis on neighborly love in Ephesians as well.

So if you're going to come up with some problems that maybe give you some sense of what Paul was dealing with when he was helping the Ephesian church, I think one would be stuff related to horizontal love.

And how sure am I on that? I mean, certainly there's a ton of, one of the reasons people love Ephesians is because of all of the practical counsel from chapter four through six.

And almost all of that has to do with neighborly love, by the way. So my one thesis I would present to you is, I suspect this was a church who struggled with neighborly love.

And how sure am I on that? I don't know. I really don't know how sure I am. If John's letter at 1 John is written to the same church, and you've got revelation and you've got quite a bit of rubber meets the road Christianity in the second half of Ephesians.

[8 : 33] I don't know. I mean, I think, I think there's a pretty decent chance that that was an issue there. But the one that I'm confident in is this religious tourism problem, because there's just lots of biblical data that shows the general reality of this problem.

And it's not, it's obviously a problem in Jerusalem. Jesus chases out the money lenders in the temple, the money changers in the temple. So it's obviously a Jerusalem problem, but it's not just a Jerusalem problem.

It's kind of just an understood problem. It's a Mecca problem. I mean, it's just, it's a Ganges problem. You know, it's just, it's just the way things work with religion.

It's a Rome problem. You know, how many tourism dollars go? This is one of the things that annoys me about Israel. They, they essentially outlaw proselytization. They've rejected Christ, but they'll run commercials on Fox news all day to try to entice well-meaning, sincere Christians into coming and seeing the land where Jesus walked.

And they'll say that like in like, like, yeah, we love Jesus too. It's like, well, I don't think that's true. So this religious tourism thing is a big deal. And it, it, I, as you can imagine, it really messes up the environment.

[9 : 52] Paul has to deal with this, you know, in Ephesus, there's a riot or a near riot because of this particular issue. And, uh, and the way that Christianity was affecting the bottom line of the temple maker, of the, uh, idol makers and so forth.

So I think love's probably an issue, but I know with more certainty that this was a place that attracted, um, peddlers, like it attracted people who wanted to make money with religion.

And, um, that's a really rough place to be, you know, uh, we so happen to be living in a place like that.

America is that too. Anyway, it's, it's become, by the way, I think it's becoming less that, but anyway, yeah. So that's definitely there.

And if you're reading, if you want to read, like kind of develop a, uh, early sensitization to kind of the dynamics that work in the church of Ephesus, you could just go to revelation and the, you know, chapter two, and you can go to reread first John, probably take you about 15 minutes or something.

[11 : 08] And then you could read acts 18 through 20. You could scan through first and second Timothy. There's a lot of data about Ephesus. It was a prominent city.

It made sense to be a focal point of ministry, especially to Gentiles. Although I'm sure there were plenty of Jews that were doing, that were working up there. And, um, if you're wondering, by the way, if you're wondering where it was, people always say this, this place or that place was in modern day Turkey.

And I always think that's funny because I'm not sure how many people really know where modern day Turkey is. But basically if you got in a boat from Ephesus and, uh, you just had to straight West, you'd hit Italy, you'd hit the East coast of Italy.

So that's kind of a orientation for you. That's, that's the mental map I have anyway. The danger of doing podcasts is like people, I could be wrong, you know?

So I try to be a little guarded and careful, especially when I'm just kind of riffing on things. All right. So that's kind of what's going on with Ephesus. It's prominent city. It was absolutely, uh, uh, a pagan stronghold and therefore probably a demonic stronghold.

[12 : 16] It's certainly attracted grifters, platform builders, et cetera. And it probably was a church that struggled with the, the love aspect, the personal care aspect and so forth.

That's that one is, I guess you might say an educated guess. All right. Now for our series, here's how it's going to play out. We're starting this Sunday and it'll be Ephesians one through 11.

And we're talking really about God's eternal decrees. Uh, we will touch on the first two weeks. We'll touch on some of the more controversial elements associated with reform theology, like predestination and free will and so forth.

Those won't be prominent features of the sermons, but they'll be touched upon because, uh, over the first two weeks from, uh, the 28th and the fourth, we'll go from Ephesians one, one all the way to Ephesians two 10.

And we'll handle the first week. Uh, this coming Sunday will be mostly about God's sovereignty. And the, the second, uh, week will be mostly about God's sovereignty in salvation.

[13 : 33] Uh, so that gets us into early January. And then for the rest of January, we, we cover God's revealed, uh, plan through his word, uh, his creating of a new people.

Now we're in Ephesians three, uh, the emphasis of, on love in Ephesians. Now we're, we're still in Ephesians three through February. We're in Ephesians four only, uh, four weeks in Ephesians four, the call to walk in unity, the call to grow, uh, mature through Christ given leaders.

Let me flag those two sermons. So, uh, February, February 1st, uh, devil be preaching February 8th, we are going to talk about our vision as, uh, to build a leadership factory.

And the text for that is, uh, Ephesians four, seven through 13. And you can, uh, you can see why we would talk about it there. So we will actually have, we're forcing the Noah's to do some talking on that day.

So, uh, February 8th, uh, will be dove Noah and Noah. I will be out of town. I think that week, uh, I will be in the Philippines, Lord willing, teaching.

[14 : 51] What am I teaching? Oh, Isaiah teaching Isaiah in the Philippines. I'm also going to try to teach first John in the evening. So I'm going to try to teach Isaiah during the day and first John in the evenings.

You know, when I got done, just as an aside, when I got done with first John, that was my first time ever preaching through that book. It is always kind of bothered me a little bit because of the, uh, circular nonlinear rhetorical approaches.

And, um, I would just want to systematize everything, you know, always, I just basically want to turn everything into, you know, categories. One problem with being a synthesizer.

And so it's always an intimidating book for me because it's like, well, I know I can't preach it the way that I would naturally want to. Anyway, all that to say, when I got done with it, I realized I really learned so much about the structure.

I would have done the whole series differently. So I would love to get another swing at that. So I'm going to talk to some of the pastors in the Philippines and ask if I can do some seminars, uh, on first John at one of their churches.

[15 : 56] So that'll be all the way through February. We're in Ephesians four. And then through March, we're in Ephesians five and six talking about marriage and family.

And the last sermon of the series, the week before Christmas or the week before Easter will be about, um, spiritual warfare and being faithful in our witness and so forth.

Now, one feature we're doing that's a little different this time is we're actually giving the kids, um, a memorization challenge. where they will actually be encouraged to memorize a phrase each week through the series.

And maybe we'll even do some way of them citing that and getting some recognition. Maybe even, maybe I'll even give them some money. I don't know, give them something. But, uh, the phrase that we're, the, the, the, the, we're teaching them to memorize.

We want them to memorize these phrases and then wind up with a full understanding, not only of everything that Ephesians is about, but also what really the Christian life is about.

[17 : 00] So here's how that'll work. So the first week we want them to memorize well before the foundation of the world, God purpose to bless us in Christ.

So that's the first week we want them to memorize that sentence well before the foundation of the world, God purpose to bless us in Christ. And then the next week we wanted to memorize this sentence by sheer grace.

He raised us from death and adopted us into his family. So that's week two. I've memorized that. So by now, by, by week two, they'll have the following well before the foundation of the world, God purpose to bless us in Christ by sheer grace.

He raised us from death and adopted us into his family. The third week, this is the sentence. Don't want them to memorize. He revealed this eternal plan through his word.

The next week, creating one new people gathered together as his church. So within the first four weeks of the Ephesians series, we would encourage the kids to have all of the following memorized one sentence at a time for four weeks.

[18 : 12] Well before the foundation of the world got purpose to bless us in Christ. That's week one. By sheer grace, he raised us from death and adopted us into his family. That's week two. He revealed this eternal plan through his word.

That's week three. Creating one new people gathered together as his church. That's week four. So then we go to the next section.

Week five. Rooted and grounded in love. That's an easy week. Rooted and grounded in love. That's all the kids have to remember. The next week, week six, we are called to walk in unity.

Week seven, growing to maturity through Christ given leaders. Week eight, until the whole body works in harmony. So now we've got them really having like two long sentences memorized.

The first chunk, well before the foundation of the world, God purposed to bless us in Christ. By sheer grace, he raised us from death and adopted us into his family. He revealed this eternal plan through his word, creating one new people gathered together as his church.

[19 : 22] That's the first chunk, four weeks. Second chunk, rooted and grounded in love. Week four, week five, we are called to walk in unity, growing to maturity through Christ given leaders, until the whole body works in harmony.

And then the last chunk, week nine, therefore we live new life of holiness. Therefore we live a new life of holiness. Week 10, super easy and wisdom.

Week 11, ordering our homes and marriage. Week 12 and family, super easy. Week 13, honoring Christ in our work.

We're talking about work. And the final week, week 14, standing firm in spiritual battle and bearing faithful witness until all things are made new.

So, if you lead your kids through this, they'll have basically three sentences-ish, you know, they're long sentences, memorized that explain not only the whole book of Ephesians, but also what it basically means to be a Christian.

[20 : 38] So let me read the whole statement to you again. Well before the foundation of the world, God purposed to bless us in Christ. You hear how I'm reading that? To you parents who don't do memory work with your kids, listen to the mind, listen to how I'm doing it.

This is the way kids learn memory work. So I'll actually tap it out. Well before the foundation of the world, God purposed to bless us in Christ. By sheer grace, he raised us from the death, from death, and adopted us into his family.

I might rewrite that one. That's not quite right. He revealed this eternal plan through his word, creating one new people gathered together as his church, rooted and grounded in love.

We are called to walk in unity, growing to maturity through Christ-given leaders, until the whole body works in harmony. Therefore we live a new life of holiness and wisdom, ordering our homes in marriage, and family, honoring Christ in our work, standing firm in spiritual battle, and bearing faithful witness until all things are made.

So when you teach kids to memorize, it's not really per syllable, but you need to just give them some kind of rhythmic hook to hang their memory on, and they'll memorize anything you want them to.

[22 : 09] They're very, very good at it. So anyway, that's what we'll, and then at the end, they'll have it all, they'll have it all memorized, and we'll figure out a way to incentivize from the church's end, but parents, you should definitely encourage them to do this because, you know, they won't have all this memorized when they get to be your age, but they'll have pieces of it memorized, and what that'll do long term is it will just give them way better, what's the word?

Whenever I say, what's the word? I know it's never going to come. Oh, yeah. They'll have like a fluency. So when they hear preaching or teaching or they read things, some of these words will be buried in their little skulls, and so when they're, you know, 16, 18, 28, whatever, some of this stuff will pop, and it just makes actually the long term encountering God, it's a vocabulary you're teaching them early that has some spiritual meaning to them when they're little, but then it emerges into something more later.

All three of my kids won the Timothy Award in Awana. They did a ton of Bible memory. I don't think they remember most of that stuff, but it's kind of like, you know, it's kind of like giving them raw materials so then whenever they hear sermons, whenever they hear, whenever they read the Bible on their own or whatever, there's just a more familiarity.

So if you're wondering, like, why should I have my kid to memorize something, they won't remember any of it. Yeah, I mean, it's kind of true. They won't remember a lot of it. Like, for instance, I memorized, I don't know how many thousand, you know, I memorized a lot of Greek words.

I don't remember most of the Greek words, but to this day, now this is 30 years ago, I can still go to the Greek New Testament and kind of feel my way through. I'm not fluent by any means, but I can just, you know, having thrown all that into my brain, it's still kind of there.

[24 : 17] Anyway, so yeah, I would encourage if you're a parent listening to this to do that. And I'd be happy if you think it would help me just to help you guys tell me. I'd be happy to do, you know, a podcast every once in a while just telling your kids, hey, this is what's up.

Let's learn this, et cetera. So that's the Ephesians series. It looks like to me that it's 14, 13, 14 weeks, ends right before Easter.

And we'll have just an opportunity as well to just double down on what we think are important issues. They all come from, they all come from the Bible, obviously, but this book in particular.

All right, well, that's long enough. All right, y'all have a wonderful Christmas. And actually, what I'm going to do, what I'm going to try to do is I'm going to try to play you a song that's, you know, only Gen X people would enjoy because it's not politically correct, but it's something I constantly laugh at to this day.

So, give me one second. Let me see if I can figure out how to play this for you guys. I feel like it's important for more and more people to know about this song. So, let me figure it out real quick, see if I can technologically make it happen.

[25 : 37] Okay, I've got it. Are you ready for this? You're going to want to call the whole family around for this, okay? This is Blue Christmas by Elvis, but sung by Porky Pig.

Okay, Blue Christmas by Elvis, but sung by Porky Pig. Peel Christmas We are without you
If you feel so blue Just thinking about you Decorations of red On a green Christmas tree
We won't be the same, dear If you're not here with me And windows will be blue
Snowflakes start falling That's a weird windows If you're blue

Oh, gosh So dumb, but so funny You want one more? Hold on, I found another I have another one I have another go-to One second All right We've got You guys like the band Cake?

[29 : 17] Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash When what to my wondering eyes did appear
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer With a little old driver so lively and quick
I knew in a moment he must be Saint Nick He's going the distance He's going for speed
She's all alone All alone on Christmas Eve Because he's racing and pacing and plodding away
He's merry and laughing and riding on his sleigh He's racing and pacing and plodding away
He sees you when you're sleeping and he knows you're awake He's going the distance
He's going for speed He's going the distance He's going the distance He's going the distance
4 a.m. when you can't get All right, there you go.

All right. Be well. Thank you.