

# IMMEASURABLY MORE ..

## learning from the letter to the Ephesians

*“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! [Eph.3.20f]*

The letter to the Ephesians was almost certainly written towards the end of Paul’s ministry while he was a prisoner in Rome. It represents the mature reflection of a man who had lived and breathed the gospel for long decades: and as such the letter provides a concise and distilled summary of the substance of his message.

It’s a message which had clearly been tested, and proved its mettle, in the face of real hostility, and in the furnace of great cultural diversity: and it’s a message, too, whose fruit in the lives of believers had already been amply demonstrated by the time this letter was written. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that for succeeding generations of believers it has been both a hugely encouraging, and at the same time a powerfully formative book of the Bible.

As we study this letter together, accordingly, both on a Sunday morning and in the Community Groups, may the Lord Himself use it to shape each of our lives at the individual level into the likeness of Christ Himself: and may He also use it to fashion in us, as a local congregation, a fellowship of believers pulsing with the grace of the Spirit of God and portraying in our communal life the glory of the gospel.

The very structure of the letter underlines the essence of that gospel. What God has done for us in Christ (chapters 1-3) is followed by how we then are to live for Him (chapters 4-6): as those who have been freed from the slavery of sin (that’s what the Lord has done for us in Jesus), we now learn to live as free

men and women (that's what we seek to do through the enabling power of God's Spirit).

Enjoy this study and expect to be changed!

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### **No pressure!**

As always there are 7 [sets of] questions in this study: that's more to provide the option, however, of the material being used as a daily study guide. Don't feel any pressure to answer *every* question in your Community Group – almost certainly there won't be the time for that!

### **Priorities!**

You'll know your own group, so use what you'll find most helpful. Key questions for us all as a fellowship this week are probably questions 3, 4 & 6, so do aim to cover at least these in the time that you have.

### **Prayer!**

Do try also to make a point in your Community Group of leaving time for praying together!

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## **1. Acts 18.18-19.41** [week beginning Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January]

*“..the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour”*

On no local church does the spotlight fall more fully in the New Testament than on the church at Ephesus.

We have a full account of the church's origins here in Acts 18-19; there's Paul's letter to the church itself; there's his correspondence to

Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time; there are the letters of John, traditionally understood to have been written from that church context; and there's the letter of the risen Jesus to the church at Ephesus in the book of Revelation.

Before we get in to the actual letter to the Ephesians, however, it's helpful to get some 'context'. Acts narrates very fully how the church at Ephesus came into being, a background which informs to some extent the content of Paul's letter to the church.

**1. Read the whole passage.** The planting of a church in a strategic centre such as Ephesus, had great significance. The circumstances in which it came into being are narrated at great length: and Paul himself stayed longer here than elsewhere.

What excites you as you read through this narrative?

What would you identify as the primary means by which the church was planted in Ephesus?

**2. Read Acts 18.18-28.** Paul's initial, very fleeting visit, to Ephesus was followed by the equally 'preliminary' ministries of three other Christian 'missionaries': Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila.

From what you learn about Apollos in these verses what were his strengths and his weaknesses?

**Read Acts 18.1-3** alongside **19.25-26** and **Rom.16.3-5**. How might the homes of mature believers such as Priscilla and Aquila be similarly used here at Gilcomston?

**3. Read Acts 19.1-7.** The individuals Paul encountered are described as 'disciples', but Paul clearly saw that there was something lacking in their Christian testimony.

Are there things which puzzle you about what happened here – and if so what?

What might have prompted Paul's question (v.2)?

The Holy Spirit is promised to every believer. Would you personally value more teaching on the Holy Spirit? And do you think, more generally, that further and fuller teaching on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit would be of benefit to the congregation here at Gilcomston?

**4. Read Acts 19.8-10.** First in the synagogue for 3 months, and then in the lecture hall for another couple of years, Paul taught the Scriptures about the kingdom of God.

What were core ingredients in Paul's teaching method?

The effect of this teaching ministry is striking (v.10): how would it have come about that the word of the Lord was heard throughout the whole province?

What lessons does this have for us?

5. **Read Acts 19.11-16.** Paul's ministry involved more than simply the spoken word: there was a clear demonstration of the victory of Christ in the healings and exorcisms which took place.

In what sense did the evil spirits 'know' (about) Paul?

Do we place sufficient emphasis on this more *visual* aspect of gospel ministry in today's very 'visually-minded' society?

6. **Read Acts 19.17-20.** Many came to faith in Ephesus from a background steeped in the occult. Their repentance was expressed not only in confession of sin, but in a radical and open renunciation of everything to do with this facet of their former way of life.

Why is repentance expressed in this way so important?

What was it that resulted in the word of the Lord spreading widely and growing in power?

7. **Read Acts 19.21-41.** The impact of the gospel on the city of Ephesus was considerable. Powerful forces soon began to mobilize themselves against the church and the gospel.

What factors come into play in creating such a strong opposition to the gospel? What might be contemporary parallels?

The Lord is not specifically mentioned in these verses, but in what ways can you see Him sovereignly at work?