

**To the 2018 Legislative Session—
Thank you, Legislators and staff,
for your service to North Carolina!
Thousands pray for you daily thru
our powerful prayer tool,
Pray1Tim2.org.**

Capitol Commission Bible Studies are non-partisan, non-denominational. They meet weekly beginning May 14th.

- **Legislator Only Bible Study** meets Wednesdays at 7:30 AM in the LOB Room 414. Contact Kathy Voss at Sandersonla@ncleg.net
- Legislators, if that time does not work – help us plan an **alternate Bible Study for Legislators** – 11 AM or 1 PM on Wednesdays or make a suggestion. Please email me the time you would commit to attend at brad.harbaugh@capitolcom.org
- **May 29th, June 5th and June 19th Legislators**, you are invited to a relaxing dinner at our home at 7 PM. We have limited seating, so please RSVP at info@capitolcom.org.
- **June 21st is the Legislators and Staff Prayer Breakfast** hosted by Capitol Commission at 7:30 AM in the Legislators Cafeteria.

I pray that these Bible studies will be edifying to you. My sole intent is to serve you and to be a resource to you for pastoral care, counsel and prayer. Please accept my study in the Word of God as evidence of my desire to serve you.
– Rev. Brad Harbaugh, North Carolina State Minister

INTRODUCTION

During this 2018 session, our study in the book of **Ephesians** will continue in Chapter Four. Before we resume, however, let us consider once more the following background to the book of **Ephesians**.

Two men, Tychicus and Onesimus, left Rome in AD 62 carrying three letters. The letters were addressed to Philemon, the church at Colosse and the church at Ephesus.

Ephesus was on the way to Colosse. To get to Colosse, Tychicus and Onesimus would have naturally sailed to

Ephesus and then went east for the Lycus valley along the main Roman road to the Euphrates.

These letters would give key instruction to protect the message of the gospel. These letters would challenge the church to live their faith out loud. It was a hostile time. This decade would end with Rome besieging and destroying Jerusalem. The Roman world did not fully understand the difference between Christianity and Jewish religion.

If the enemy of truth, Satan, had known the ultimate impact of these letters, he would have apprehended these two men and seized the documents. But Satan is not omniscient like God and God, having moved the Apostle Paul to write these letters, did not allow that to happen.

History reveals that these letters would help the weak sect of people known as “like Christs” (or Christians) to ultimately, through their transformed lives, change the entire Roman world. Change, not with sword, but with the powerful truth that a broken person can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

How God wrote and preserved the Bible is often passed over in our reading of it. God used some amazing behind-the-scenes people, faithful to their mission, to accomplish some highly important tasks. These tasks were critical to God’s plan of laying the foundation of this post resurrection age, “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.*”
Ephesians 2:20 (ESV)

Often the things that God asks us to do, such as pray, show compassion and love to others, forgive as God has forgiven us or simply serving others, seem to be small and insignificant. Yet, delivering these letters is proof that no act of service in the will of God is small or insignificant!

God wants to use each believer to carry out his purpose. Consider **Ephesians 2:10**, and the appeals of **Ephesians 4:1** and **4:17**. How do they focus in on being available? Qualified?

EPHESUS: IT’S SIZE, CULTURE AND BELIEFS

Ephesus itself was a large, multi-ethnic center of trade, commerce and culture. In the Greco Roman world of the first century, Ephesus was exceeded in population only by Rome and Alexandria. It was not a dusty little town, with a few camels tied to a hitch-post. Ephesus was like a modern day San Francisco.

Ephesus was pluralistic in every way. Many ethnic and cultural backgrounds were represented. Religious pluralism was entrenched and embraced. Moral beliefs were diverse. Goddess Diana worship promoted a spiritual and cultural feminism. Moral depravity was accepted. The wide-ranging social acceptance was maintained in the name of tolerance and syncretism. As a result, anyone claiming to have “the” right religion, “the” only god, and “the” ultimate truth was bound to face acute rejection and social pressure and persecution.¹

When you read the message of Ephesians, realize it would have been counter cultural because it presented a Triune God. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”* **Ephesians 1:3** *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”* **Ephesians 1:13**

The Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul to write to that culture, *“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* **Ephesians 4:4**

Why would God guide Paul to write and send such a letter to that culture? Consider how it would have been received in that city at that time. **Titus 1:2** tells us *“God does not lie.”* This letter was the truth sent to a culture *“darkened in their understanding.”* **Ephesians 4:17** God cared.

The culture of Ephesus thought truth was situational and subjective. The struggle to believe in absolute truth exists today. But the hypocrisy of believing in “no absolute truth” is quickly revealed when you consider chemistry, math, and science. Are the space program’s plans to go to Mars based upon absolute scientific truth? Does a pharmacist write prescriptions based upon absolute truth? All around us, absolute truth is seen as the practical foundation of a functioning society. Yet, a very popular cultural belief is no absolute truth absolutely! Is truth changed by what people believe or desire? Is truth changed by popular vote?

God’s word, the Bible, is not a book man would write because it does not present mankind as mankind would. Nor is the Bible a book man could write. God wrote the Bible over a span of nearly 2000 years. It’s the world’s best-selling book. (But remember a book not read is just a block of wood!)

The Bible has one central theme from Genesis to

Revelation. The Bible presents an intelligent designer, a personal creator that has built into His creation unchangeable laws and truth. Even the enemy of God was and is aware of absolute truth. This was the whole point of getting Adam and Eve to sin against God. The enemy of God knew the truth of God’s law. The enemy knew one sin would set in motion the domino effect of the fallen world around us today. It is a world filled with racism and violence, missing the value and purpose of life. It is a world struggling to grab hold of truth, yet, determined to make man-god and God *less than who He is.*

Sins’ effect is pointed out in the following passage from the book of **Ephesians**.

Ephesians 2:1–3 (ESV) *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

BUT GOD CARES! In this helpless and hopeless position, God intervened for you and me and the whole world. It is by God’s mercy and grace that a way to be saved from God’s wrath was provided.

Ephesians 2:4-9 (ESV) *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

The Law of God holds every sinner captive. This was the devious plan of God’s enemy, Satan. But God sent God the Son who fulfilled the demands of the Law in His life and paid the debt of your sin by shedding His blood on the cross. The gift of salvation is a pardon from the sentence of the Law. It is a gift of grace received by faith put in the person and work of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Who, to you, is Jesus Christ?

‘Amazing grace how sweet the sound...’ is absolute truth interrupting a blinded culture.

¹ understanding/2012/08/ephesians-introduction-background.html